

Motofuji discusses style in Chikamatsu's Kabuki plays

Japanese Kabuki theater. The name suggests fragile porcelain dolls revolving on a stage. The motions seem rhythmic and never quick, or the grace and style of the play might be broken. Frank Motofuji preserved this image while expanding it to include elements of comedy in his speech Friday entitled "Chikamatsu and His Kabuki Plays."

Chikamatsu was a major Japanese playwright of the seventeenth century, most noted for his work in the puppet theater, Motofuji said. The minority of his work was for the Kabuki or human theater, and according to Motofuji, are not well known.

The Kabuki plays have a set pattern in the work of Chikamatsu, said Motofuji. The first and third acts could come under the heading of history plays, while the second is a comedy. The opening and ending acts are written in the high, formal language of the samurai, but the comedy is in the vernacular of the plebeian classes, he said.

Motofuji told of Chikamatsu's most popular play, in which the heroine was in debt and the hero could not redeem her. The hero entered for the first time in the second act, accompanied by lyrics describing him, he said. He wore paper clothes stained brown by persimmon juice. This, according to Motofuji, was symbolic of his "down and out" position.

The plot continued, when the hero attempted to speak to his lover through a second girl, Motofuji said. The heroine was no longer allowed to talk with him directly because he was an outcast. The second girl, however, did not know that the plans of escape that he spoke of were not meant for her, Motofuji said. The conflict is resolved by a comic tug-of-war between the two girls that is resolved, by the second girl realizing that she is not loved by the hero. The hero is then reinstated in his family, through pity inspired by one of the gods.

Motofuji, a professor

wrote most of his Kabuki plays for the leader actor of his time, Sakata Tofuro. Tofuro had a great concern for the plot of plays and dialogue as originally written according to Motofuji. This was unusual in a time when the actors felt free to change lines when they wanted, he said. He called seventeenth century Kabuki "an actor-dominated theater."

The plays of Chikamatsu were written in the fashion of the age, he said. "That is, they were written by a writer commissioned by a particular theater company to include all actors under contract to the company. This explains the large number of actors, thirty to forty, in his

plays." The actor was assigned a part according to his importance in the company, he said.

The original manuscripts of Chikamatsu's plays have not been preserved, Motofuji said, because they were given orally to the actors instead of in written form.

In concluding, the professor mentioned that Tofuro's style of acting will be carried on by his sons who are now active in the Kabuki. He directed anyone interested to the published manuscripts of Chikamatsu's plays, and "The Actor's Analects," a book containing Tofuro's advice on acting.

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