

National Diet Library Newsletter

No. 196, October 2014

Haiyū gakuya sugoroku: pleasure of taking a virtual backstage tour

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This article is a translation of the article in Japanese of the same title in NDL Monthly Bulletin No. 639 (June 2014).



<< Haiyū gakuya sugoroku >>
Artist: ICHIJUSAI Kunisada
Publisher: EBIYA Rinnosuke
Published: 1863

1 sheet, Size: 49.2×107.2cm

Printed in *Gakuya Butai Sugoroku* [NDL call no.: Kibetsu 8-3-2-4]

*Owned by the Rare Books and Old Materials Room,
Available in the [National Diet Library Digital Collections](#)

Sugoroku is a Japanese board game similar to the Game of Life. Haiyū gakuya sugoroku (lit. Actors backstage board game) is woodblock print depicting backstage at a Kabuki theater, and that is also a sugoroku game. Judging by the faces in the pictures, these appear to be scenes of the dressing rooms at the Ichimura-za, a major kabuki theater in Edo (later Tokyo) from around 1862, although there are some discrepancies to be found in the details. No one knows what play it was.

The game starts in the bottom-right corner. A player rolls the dice and move his piece to any of the following rooms: Sakusha beya (lit. the playwright's room), Hayashi beya (lit. a room for the musicians seated on a platform in a kabuki play), or Todori-za (lit. a room for the actor who manages everything backstage). You can also see the Chakuto ban (lit. the in-out board) on which actors check in with a pin when they arrive at the theater), Nikai bashigo (lit. the stairway to the second floor) and Yuba (lit. bath). This print depicts

KAWATAKE Shinshichi (later Mokuami), one of the greatest kabuki dramatists in history, chatting in the Sakusha beya (Detail one).

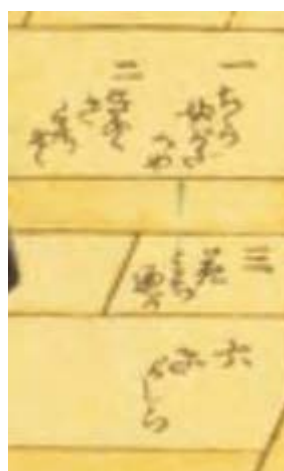


<<Detail one>>

There are also places such as Zagashira beya (lit. the room for the leading actor in the troupe), Tate onnagata beya (lit. the room for the star onnagata (actors who play female roles)) and Kodogu beya (lit. prop room). The position of these rooms in the two floors seems to reflect the reality of Edo-era theaters, where actor were allocated rooms on a floor based on their rank in the theater hierarchy.

E-sugoroku (lit. picture sugoroku) appeared in the Edo period and became a popular subject for woodblock printing. E-sugoroku generally falls into one of two categories: Mawari (round tour) -sugoroku and Tobi (flying) –sugoroku. In mawari-sugoroku, the players basically move their pieces from the start position along the route to the goal, following the instructions where they land and sometimes jumping back or ahead, as indicated. This is generally what Japanese people think of when they hear the word sugoroku.

In Tobi-sugoroku, on the other hand, the player "flies" from place to place, following the instructions given at his current location. For example, roll a "six" and move up your piece to the Zagashira beya, roll a "three" and go back to the start, etc. An example of these instructions is given in Detail two.



<<Detail two>>

If the player rolls a number for which no instructions are given, he must stay where he is until his next turn.

"Haiyū gakuya sugoroku" is a kind of Tobi-sugoroku. You will encounter each actor while they are relaxing, putting on their makeup for the performance, or having a run-through backstage. Your pieces move freely on the board according to the whimsy of the dice. In addition, people of the time enjoyed these portraits of famous actors and might even have collected them, just as we collect photos of celebrities nowadays.

This print provides a glimpse into a world backstage, where usually no visitors were allowed. Although some theaters have recently started to offer backstage tours for fans who want to see the backstage area, it is still rare to gain entrance to the rooms backstage.

Kabuki fans have not changed much between then and now. The more familiar they get with the kabuki, the more they want to see actors out of costume and in everyday clothes, especially when they are backstage, where the general public cannot enter. How do kabuki actors spend their time backstage? This sugoroku woodblock print seeks to satisfy such curiosity. Given this perspective, sugoroku is not just a curio but something that answers simple, common curiosities.

You might want to see "Oatari gakuya sugoroku" (lit. Backstage at a hit play board game) published in 1865 (Artist: TOYOHARA Kunichika, publisher: IZUTSU-YA Shōkichi), which also depicts the backstage of a theater. In the "Oatari gakuya sugoroku," the guide to the next square is an actor's name and you will find in the squares words of actors in the backstage written in small print. If "Haiyū gakuya sugoroku" mainly focuses on the vibrant atmosphere of the whole kabuki backstage, "Oatari gakuya sugoroku" puts star actors in the spotlight, making it fun for the player to search for his or her favorites. Although the National Diet Library does not possess a copy of this work, a digital image is available at the [Image Database of the Special Collection at the Metropolitan Central Library](#) and other library database such as the [Database for Theater Research of the Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University](#). Why don't you compare it with "Haiyū gakuya sugoroku"?

Related articles from the National Diet Library Newsletter:

- [Obiya Ocho Sanze Monogatari: the Ghost Story of the Edo Period](#) (No. 174, August 2010)
- [Sanjuroku-ban tsuzuki yakusha juni-tsuki - Shogatsu Nichomachi nenrei no zu \(New Year's Greetings in Nichomachi, from the Twelve Months of Kabuki Actors series\)](#) (No. 176, December 2010/February 2011)
- [Chunori sugoroku-kabuki actors flying in the air](#) (No. 183, June 2012)
- [Digital exhibition "The Landmarks of Edo in Color Woodblock Prints"](#) (No. 194, June 2014)

Related contents on the National Diet Library website:

- Kaleidoscope of Books (12) "[Trips, Characters and Customs on Paper - Japanese Board Game Sugoroku of the Edo era](#)" (in Japanese)