

National Diet Library Newsletter

No. 197, December 2014

Inside of the Nakamura-za Theater in Edo



Inside of the Nakamura-za Theater in Edo

Artist: Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769-1825)

Publisher: Moriya Jihei

Published in 1817

Large-sized, *nishiki-e* (wood-block color print, 39x27cm), a set of three sheets

Owned by the National Diet Library

Drawn in a perspective called *uki-e* style, this triptych (picture spreading over three sheets) *nishiki-e* depicts the inside of the Nakamura-za Kabuki Theater in Sakai-cho, Edo (now Nihonbashi-Ningyo-cho, Tokyo). The audience fills all the seating areas including the upper-class, two-level balcony seats on either side, the box seats in the pit in front of the stage, and the "*rakandai*" budget seats behind the stage. Another triptych depicting the façade of the theater links with the roof at the bottom of this print, which means that this work actually consists of six sheets in total. All six sheets are available in the [National Diet Library Digital Collections](#).

Ahead of the Ichimura-za and the Morita-za, the Nakamura-za was established early in the Edo period as a pioneer of the "Edo San-za," the three officially licensed kabuki theaters that obtained hereditary performance rights. The play on stage is "Soga-mono," the annual auspicious program for January of the Edo San-za, and focuses on the story of the two Soga brothers who avenged their father. This *nishiki-e* illustrates the scene in which for the first time Soga Juro and Soga Goro on the *hanamichi* walkway face their old enemy Kudo Suketsune on the main stage. The characters are shown as star kabuki actors of the period, including Matsumoto Koshiro V, Onoe Kikugoro III, and Ichikawa Danjuro VII.

Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769-1825) specialized in portraits of actors and beautiful women. He was also an excellent teacher and the leader of the Utagawa school of ukiyo-e artists, developing it to the forefront of the ukiyo-e world.

Note:

- All six sheets are available in the [National Diet Library Digital Collections](#).

Related article of the NDL Newsletter on the same material:

- [Selections from the NDL Collection *Nakamura Naigai no Zu \(in Sanshibai no Zu\)*](#) (No. 114, June 2000)