

Selections from NDL collections

## *Rien no aki and Ashi no soyogi*: two books on popular kabuki troupe *Torikuma Shibai*

Risa Ito, Humanities, Maps, Rare Books and Old Materials Division, Reader Services and Collections Department

This article is a translation of the article in Japanese of the same title in *NDL Monthly Bulletin* No. 687, 688 (July/August 2018).



### *Ashi no soyogi*

Edited by 竜田秋錦 (the pronunciation is unknown; presumably Tatsuta Shukin). The identity of the copyist and the date the copy was made are unknown. NDL Call No. 232-276.

\*The above image is a copy of an illustrated advertisement for kabuki performances at the Harukiza Theatre in April of 1885.

A series of kabuki performances at the [Harukiza Theatre](#) in Tokyo's Hongo district created a sensation during the period from May 1885 to March 1886 for a group of performers called *Torikuma Shibai*. Although they performed for less than a year, *Torikuma Shibai* attracted a large audience with a distinctive performance style that distinguished it from those at larger theaters in Tokyo. Adopting the conventions of a performance style common in Kyoto and Osaka, *Torikuma Shibai* produced well-acted plays at surprisingly low prices with experienced actors. The word *Torikuma* derives from the name of a showman in Osaka who initiated this style of performance: Toriya Kumakichi.

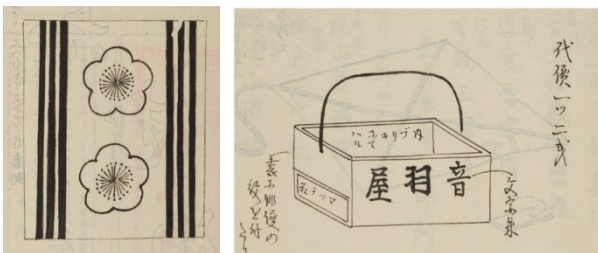
Six reasons why *Torikuma Shibai* attracted a large audience:

- Different plays were produced every month, whereas larger theaters generally kept the same program for longer.

- The price was only 6 sen (about 1,200 yen at today's prices). Most tickets were sold at the door on a first-come, first-served basis. Only box seats were available in advance. Those who came early morning were given a discount coupon, which allowed them to buy tickets for 3 sen at a later date.
- The price of the tickets covered everything, and customers did not have to worry about paying extra for seat mats or other items.
- Unlike other theaters, audiences did not have to visit the *shibai jaya*, a place that charged customers a fee for meals and beverages, to enjoy their time at the theater. Tea was served to the audience free of charge, and customers were welcome to bring their own lunch. Lunch and snacks were also sold at the theater.
- Although customers left their shoes in the foyer before entering the theater, unlike other kabuki theaters, *Torikuma Shibai* cleaned customers' shoes free of charge.

- Female staff took orders from the audience. Tips were unnecessary.

*Rien no aki* is a historical material held in the Rare Books and Old Materials Room of the National Diet Library. It comprises copies of programs, tickets, and other handouts as well as sketches of the tools and equipment used by the *Torikuma Shibai*. It was edited by Tatsuta Shukin, who writes in the preface that the Kyoto-Osaka style *Torikuma Shibai* piqued his curiosity and inspired him to collect everything available, from advertisements to handouts. Thinking these things might be of interest to others in the future, he decided to copy them rather than to throw them away.



#### *Rien no aki*

Edited by Tatsuta Shukin. The identity of the copyist and where the copy was made are unknown. NDL Call No. 205-107.

\* Above are illustrations from *Rien no aki*. Top left: the textile design of the *yukata* (a kind of casual *kimono*) which female ushers called the *oume* wore; top right: a tea set for serving tea to the audience; bottom left: a notice telling that the interlude is 10 minutes long; bottom right: discount information printed on the overleaf of a ticket.

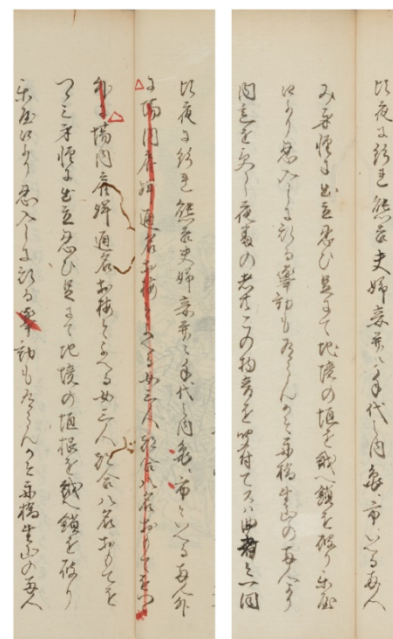
*Rien no aki* has long been famous among researchers of kabuki. The NDL owns another book that looks just like *Rien no aki*, entitled *Ashi no soyogi*. The two copies, though having small differences in the formatting style

such as the arrangement of letters, resemble in the content. The title written on the cover is different, but in both books, the title which first appears in the main text is *Ashi no soyogi*, so this may actually be the proper title.

It can be assumed from the ownership stamps and marginal notes that *Rien no aki* was owned by Kodo Tokuchi (1843-1913), a drama critic of the Meiji era, and Narazaki Kaiun (-1900), a paper merchant in Tsukiji, and *Ashi no soyogi* by Kobayashi Bunshichi (1861-1923), a collector and dealer of *ukiyo-e*.

Both books have some parts where corrections were made in red ink or by attaching another piece of paper. However, almost the same corrections made in one book can be found in the other book as well. This means that, the copyist/copyists intentionally copied the mistaken content from the original source, and then adapted the corrections afterwards.

Curiously enough, in *Rien no aki*, there is a section where a sentence was mistakenly copied twice; while in *Ashi no soyogi*, the same sentence is partially left out, so the written text does not make sense. Although the kind of error made in the two books are different, the copyists have mistakenly copied the same sentence. This fact enables us to imagine that there might have happened to be something wrong with the original book, such as a torn page or disordered handwriting, which disturbed the copyists. In any case, we can deduce that neither *Rien no aki* nor *Ashi no soyogi* is the original copy created by Tatsuta Shukin, but the two copies still are generally of good quality.



Left: An extract from *Rien no aki*. The sentence which was crossed out in red ink appears again in the row right after it.

Right: An extract from *Ashi no soyogi*. The first row in the far right is missing the letter “外” which could be found in the *Rien no aki*, and two entire rows and a few letters after that are also missing.

From the way the errors and corrections that appear in the original material are copied in the two books, we can see how the copyists attempted to create an exact reproduction of the original material. The handwritings of

the two books look somewhat similar, but it remains a mystery how they were created. Numerous possibilities can be conceived: the two books may have been copied by the same person, or by Shukin himself, to keep his own copy at hand. Or, it might be the case that different copyists simply imitated the handwriting. We will just have to wait for the mystery to be solved by researchers in the future.

The reason why a thorough compilation of this kind was created owes to the fact that *Torikuma Shibai*, by providing new and attractive performances with reasonable pricing along with hospitable services, fascinated a great amount of Tokyo citizens of the time. The materials included in these books probably seemed innovative to the eyes of kabuki fans. It may become a pleasant pastime for you to gaze at the pages of this book and imagine how the *Torikuma Shibai* attracted a large-scale audience.

(Translated by Shihoko Yokota)

#### Reference (in Japanese):

- Bunkyo Kyoiku linkai. *Hongoza no jidai (Heisei 8nendo tokubetsuten zuroku)*. Edited by Bunkyo Furusato Rekishikan, 1996, NDL Call No. KD11-J14.
- Kawazoe, Yu. "Seishu matsusaka toriya kumakichi (jo)." *Kabuki: Kenkyu to hihyo*, 27. June 2001, NDL Call No. Z11-1960.
- Hattori, Yukio. "Torikuma shibai no kogyo." *Kabuki no genkyo*. Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2007, NDL Call No. KD86-H134.