Dojoji : a woman and a bell

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The Mythic Situation

A woman is deeply drawn to a large temple bell. She is pulled to it irresistibly. She overcomes all that hinders her approach, whatever obstacles lie in her way, for when she is close to the bell she has power. This situation can be filled out: the woman becomes a snake or dragon. Passion has made her such. The reason (and this could be a later version) the woman, or the snake, is drawn to the bell is because a man she desires lies beneath. He crouches there hiding from her, The very next moment the flaming tongue of her passion will reach out to fuse bell and love object into one glowing molten mass.

Other details of the basic situation had been filled out by the time of its earliest written version. The woman falls in love with a priest who is making a pilgrimage. He has taken a vow of celibacy during this period and so to avoid her flees to a nearby temple and is given sanctuary there by monks who hide him beneath its large heavy bell. The woman's frustrated passion makes her into a monster of some kind—a dragon or firebreathing serpent—who destroys the bell and the object of her desire. In one version her monster form is later subdued through the power of prayer; in another she is returned to human shape and thus redeemed.

As a situation used for dance in Japan the story can be filled out, as just noted, with narrative detail, or remain close to a native folk belief that the sound of a bell is a doorway which leads to ecstasy (Misumi 1968:91). The bell in the various plays and dances based upon this situation may give the woman other means of transcendence besides sexual fulfillment: money or transformation into another identity. It may open the way to hell or through it she may pass to purgation. What is shared, it seems to me, having seen the dance performed in several traditions, is longing. This may be the half-resigned, ha If-resisting tug toward the bell, present on the stage as a large stage property, or perhaps just suggested by the single strand of a cord, as in the jiuta-mai dance on this theme. This longing may be an intense, entirely concentrated fixation, as in the Yamabushi Kagura version. It may be expressed by an increasingly complex rhythmic pattern, unique to the No "Dojoji," which culminates in the famous leap of the dancer up and into the bell, timed to coincide exactly—through the help of stage assistants who lower it precipitously on cue—with the bell's plummeting fall to the stage floor. In the most commonly performed Kabuki version, "Kyoganoko musume Dojoji" (Uojoji and the Maiden"), characterized by a lack of concentrated plot focus, we sense a cumulative restatement of concern for the visual stage presence. By focusing a languid yet mounting energy upon the bell, the dancer can, in a sense, unify discrete parts of the dance, which are really quite different from one another.

**The Dojoji Story As a Theme For Dance**

The germ of the Dojoji story has been tentatively traced back to ancient India or to the Korean peninsula, though elements suggest an earlier period of matriarchal society within Japan itself, when the sexual initiative came from the female. The earliest recorded version of the story appears in 1041 in a collection of tales which mix secular elements with a religious message, the Daini-honkoku hokekyo kenki (Marvelous Stones About the Lotus Sutra in Japan). This story, entitled "The Evil Woman of the District of Muro in the Province of Kii" (present day Wakayama prefecture), is summarized in Appendix A. The Hokekyo kenki version contains the name, Dojoji, of the temple in the province of Kii, but there is no mention of the priest's name nor that of the woman. A related version appears in the recorded history of the Temple Dojoji, which is probably a work of the late Muromachi period (1338-1573). In this version the date 928 is given for the incident. The priest is described as coming from Oshu in northern Japan and he stops at the home of Kiyotsugu Shoji in the village of Masago in the district of Muro. We note the accretion of specific temporal and geographic identification as the myth merges into history (Honda 1970:35).

The incident narrated in these antecedents is the background of what was used in the No "Dojoji." The dramatist (the play is attributed to Kanze Kojiro Nobumitsu, 1435-1516) has converted the story material to his own use by characteristically setting it within No's unique dramatic perspective: passion is a thing of the past which is remembered at the play's climax. The No play, then, takes place long after the event; the soul of the woman has come back to the temple in the guise of an itinerant dancer.

There are differences too between the story found in earlier narrative works and what is recounted in the No "Dojoji" by the subsidiary character, the waki (See Appendix B). In the earlier narratives the heroine is a widow whose passion is aroused by a first meeting with a young pilgrim who stops by chance at her home. In the No play we have a young girl who falls in love for the first time with someone well known to her father. In the earlier story the woman closets herself after discovering the deceit of her young visitor, who fails to come back to her on his return trip as promised. She transforms herself into a serpent before beginning the pursuit. In the story told by the waki, the heroine pursues the pilgrim in human form until she reaches the Hidaka River; here the frustration of not being able to cross causes her to turn into a serpent and in this shape she is able to swim across.

Perhaps these alterations arose earlier in an intermediate oral tradition which no longer survives, but they are recorded in the wakis tale for the first time. It is tempting to attribute to the No dramatist himself the softening of the story situation from an account of the punishment of a widow's lust to that of the extraordinary fate of a young girl frustrated in first love.

Dance related to the basic Dojoji situation is found in other repertoires besides that of No. It is a contribution of Japanese scholars of the modem period such as Misumi Haruo (1968) to expand the perspective upon certain dance types (for example, Shakkyo-mono or lion dances) by including items from traditions on the periphery, so to speak, of theatre dance. Often the consideration of dances in countryside repertoires as well as from Okinawa widens the overview within which to place an historical development which culminates in Kabuki. The variety, diversity, and richness revealed by extending our view to include these dances suggest that a study of the Dojoji type may be of help to Western dance scholars as well, who wish to understand how a theme may continue to create dances within a single cultural area over a long period of time, under differing historical conditions, and in widely scattered locations.

The dance created by the Okinawan Tamagusuku Chokun, who lived between 1684 and 1734, deserves a place alongside the better known No and Kabuki versions in the canon of Dojoji pieces. Chokun, who composed the Okinawan Kumi-odori version, "Shushin kane-iri" ("Obsession to Enter the Bell"), visited mainland Japan five times before he wrote this dance-play. The assumption has been that he learned of the story in this way. However, the story material had been introduced to Okinawa from Japan even before Chokun produced his Kumi-odori version (Mis-umi 1968:79). It was brought to the islands by yamabushi ascetics when they were spreading the faith of the god Gongen of Kumano. This sect was active in mainland Japan as well. It was through their efforts that the related dance-play "Kanemaki" ("Entwining the Bell") found a place in the repertoires of some thirty performance groups in northeastern Japan where versions of it are still performed today.

The version of the story behind both the Yamabushi Kagura and the Okinawan dances reflects a separate tradition from that of the No play. Misumi (1968:90-91) advances the hypothesis that the prototype of the former versions is the story of a woman—any woman—who seeks to gain Buddhahood, ordinarily denied to women. She wanders as a pilgrim from temple to temple. She has an overpowering desire to strike a temple bell because of the state of spiritual ecstasy associated with its sound in the folk imagination, and in order to do so, violates an interdiction against the presence of women. As punishment she is transformed into a serpent. In other words, if a woman violates one of many taboos against her sex in male-oriented yamabushi society if she suffers the consequences but is eventually saved by the religious power of a yamabiishi ascetic. In this form the dance was an effective piece of religious propaganda. This simple theme may have been unrelated to the Dojoji legend until the author of the No play consolidated the two. Its prevalence throughout Japan, however, is in fact the proper background against which to understand the development of various Kabuki dances. If one had only the No "Dojoji" story in mind, then the freedom found in the Kabuki treatment would seem quite surprising.

**Background of the Dojoji Theme in Kabuki**

The earliest recorded Kabuki dance on the Dojoji theme dates back to the 1670's; others were popular in the Genroku period (1688-1703). In 1731 "Keisei Dojoji" ("Dojoji and the Courtesan") was performed by the dancer-actor Segawa Kikunojo (1693-1749). Kikunojo's performance, also called "Muken no kane shin-Dojoji" ("Hell's Bell of Wealth, the New Dojoji"), was the culmination, as its title suggests, of a long tradition of plays and dances on the story (Asagawa 1963:144). His performance prepared the way for what a second great dancer was to do some twenty years later. The performance in 1753 by Nakamura Tomijuro (1719-1786) consolidated the genre and established the elements of his interpretation as a norm for what we still find performed as "Kyoganoko musume Dojoji" on the Kabuki stage today.

Dojoji, then, is the name of a dance type in the Kabuki and Kabuki-related repertoires, though in jiuta-mai, for example, it is known by a different name, "Kanegamisaki" ("Bell Promontory"). Historical examples of this dance type, referred to as Dojoji-mono, are abundantly documented through both written and visual material. During the period 1731-1867 alone, there were fifty-two productions of a Dojoji-mono (Kokonoe 1929:95-107).

Something should be said about the historical conditions within which Dojoji dances developed as part of the Kabuki dance tradition in the eighteenth century. Both Kikunojo and Tomijuro were onnagata actors, that is, they were men who specialized in performing women's roles. Innovation in Kabuki dance style in the period between 1715 and 1767 was characterized by great onnagata dances. Other factors may have contributed to the selection of the Dojoji theme for what was to become one of the pivotal dances of the period and indeed of the entire history of Kabuki, but the choice of a story about a woman was preconditioned by the popularity of onnagata in dance of that period. Not only were Kikunojo and Tomijuro onnagata, they lived by its older ideal of behavior: women off the stage as well as on. As boys, before the real beginning of their careers as actor-dancers, both had been male prostitutes.

In the middle of the eighteenth century dance was presented as a section of a larger dialogue play. An effort was made to identify the dramatic characters of the dance proper with those of the day-long play, though in a sense it was a separate affair from what preceded and followed it. Later the independent dance item appeared, the so-called dramatic dance, geki-buyo or kyogen buyo. Its appearance coincided with major changes in dance style and the development of new types of theatrical music. Nagauta shamisen music, used in the 1731 and 1753 performances of "Dojoji," still accompanies the dance today. Features which differentiate nagauta from other types of theatrical shamisen music include the voice quality of the reciter-singers, the style of shamisen accompaniment, and the nature of the sung text.

Dance in early Kabuki, that is in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, was performed to the accompaniment of song of a type called kouta (short song) which developed toward the end of Japan's Middle Ages (Hoff 1978). The repertoires of early Kabuki troupes were made up of dances performed to sequences of short songs interspersed with refrains. These songs in sequence may have slight connection with one another or none at all, though there is usually some kind of overriding theme which may give its name to the sequence. Later in the Genroku period the michiyuki or travel song was the poetic form which emerged as the major vehicle for the great onnagata of the day.

In the nagauta "Dojoji" the use of song as an accompaniment to dance still retained the loose sense of structuring found in the sequence-making from this earlier phase in the history of Kabuki dance. As a matter of fact, the associational process seen at work in ordering images and ideas in such a sequence appears to be the outgrowth of a deeply rooted aspect of the Japanese sensibility, related also to other poetic processes of sequence-making. Examples are renga and haikai, the major poetic innovations of the Japanese Middle Ages. It is important to grasp the implication of this fact in attempting to characterize the story or theme of Dojoji as performed in Kabuki. The dancer's, and his audience's, sense of the pleasure to be taken in following a loosely sequenced set of songs, rather than a straightforward narrative plot, was preconditioned by an older tradition of dance to song (Hoff 1976-77). In other words, the nagauta text is disjointed and loosely integrated. It is not a strongly plot-oriented verbal structure.

Another factor in the historical background of the eighteenth-century Kabuki "Dojoji" which tended in the same direction, that is, away from a single clearly articulated plot, is the relationship between the Kabuki dances and the No play "Dojoji." The Kabuki dances are indebted to the No play, which provided the basic ideas for the structure and some of the spectacle; it also provided the actual words of a portion of the sung text. A comparison with another No play, "Kanemaki," no longer performed but a fuller and earlier version of the story from which the popular No "Dojoji" was somewhat abbreviated (see Appendix C), shows how Nobumitsu structured his "Dojoji" to emphasize variety and spectacle rather than single-hearted intensity and emotional or psychological depth. There may be some justification in the criticism of Nobumitsu's "undra-matic" way of building plays, though this is the very quality which recommended his "Dojoji" to the makers of innumerable Kabuki dances on the theme. In both the No and the various Kabuki versions, what happens on the stage is not closely motivated but is loosely structured and unabashedly spectacular.

**Kikunojo's "Muken no kane shin-Dojoji"**

An entirely new realm of the spectacular became possible with the Kabuki custom of mixing and/or conflating plot material in order to give traditional stories an unusual twist or weird association which, at first catching audiences off guard, delighted and then convinced them of some underlying logic or relevance to the contemporary scene. That is what Kikunojo did in his "Mu-ken no kane shin-Dojoji," He renewed the Dojoji legend by combining it with another also related to a bell. Further he associated eternal suffering in hell, a part of the second legend, with the sensual craving, fulfillment, and agony of the contemporary courtesan (Inoura 1963:1359-1372). He made a modem "Dojoji" which is what he called his dance.

The theme of mitken no kane (hell's bell of wealth) appeared for the first time in Kabuki, it is said, in 1689 in the dialogue play "Keisei sayo no Nakayama" ("The Courtesan and Night at Nakayama"). There was a folk belief that if a person struck the temple bell of Nakayama in Enshu (the western portion of present day Shizuoka prefecture), he would gain untold wealth but in return would one day have to suffer the torments of hell. This theme provided material for a Kabuki play in which both the great actors Yoshizawa Ayame (1673-1729) and Mizuki Tatsunosuke (1673-1745) appeared. "Keisei muken no kane" ("The Courtesan and Hell's Bell of Wealth"), a version of the theme performed in 1728 with Kikunojo taking the part of the courtesan, was very popular. In the autumn of 1730 this actor went from Kyoto to Edo where in the first month of the following year he took the role of another courtesan in a play called "Keisei fukubiki Nagoya" ("The Courtesan Pulling Wealth for Nagoya"). At the beginning of the next month he added the dance item "Muken no kane." His role in this was a great success. On the third day of the third month of that same year Kikunojo staged the dance "Muken no kane shin-Dojoji" as the third act of this same play.

The dance "Muken no kane shin-Dojoji" fitted within the play in this way: the courtesan Katsuragi, played by Kikunojo, wishes to make her lover Nagoya Sanza wealthy. She goes to the distant temple of Nakayama where she prays. In return for the riches which she gains for him by striking the temple bell, she herself must suffer in the lower part of hell, called muken, "Muken no kane shin-Dojoji" shows her as the ghost of the courtesan visiting the temple. The structure of the dance (summarized in Appendix D) begins with the ghost of Katsuragi traveling to the temple; she dances; she goes under the bell; the priests make their prayers; the bell rises and the spirit of the courtesan appears and performs a danced account, first of her love, and then of her punishment in hell. The general acclaim which greeted the performance could well be explained by the novelty, suggested in the title, of a dance ostensibly of the older Dojoji type, but actually incorporating elements of the currently popular stage version of the muken no kane theme: the heroine is the courtesan Katsuragi, the place not the province of Kii but the temple Nakayama of Enshu.

But for us (as for its first audience, one suspects), the astounding aspect of the production must be the contrivance by which the rising bell of the Dojoji legend reveals, not the serpent-demon of the story, but a courtesan of the contemporary world of the early eighteenth century. She dances to an account of the languid verbal exchange between patron and courtesan at the pleasure quarters, then the madness of love and its torments which are simultaneously the flames of hell. And this for its eighteenth-century audiences was the "modern 'Dojoji/ " the renewal of the older Dojoji legend at the hands of a dancer who himself had known the passions and agonies of the institutionalized and ephemeral sensual life of the day.

It is intriguing to speculate whether their personal experience as homosexual lovers may not have been one factor to fix the interest of the great dancer-choreographers in eighteenth-century Japan upon a version of the Dojoji myth where a woman's lust becomes a snake and seeks out a male love object hidden within a bell. Quite clearly they did rework this theme into various shapes including the strange and haunting permutation just described. And if one hesitates to admit variations such as this to the realm of "authentic" Dojoji myth—whose most popular form at an earlier time may have been that of a woman who seeks ecstasy or freedom within the sound of a bell—then the voice of Claude Levi-Strauss has called out in vain that "myth consists of all its versions."

Appendix A

**Abridgement of the 129th tale of the Dainihonkoku hokekyo kenki**

iltased on the version found in Honda 1970:31-33)

A young man and his older companion, both pilgrims traveling to Kumano, stop for the night at a house in the Muro district of the province of Kii. The owner, a widow, falls in love with the young man. She goes into his bedroom that very night and tries to make love. He M'luses but she will not desist. He promises to stop again on his return and let her have what »he wants. The widow makes preparations, counting the days before he will return—but in v.iin. She learns after a while from other pilgrims that the two have already gone homeward by another way. Angry, she closets herself in her room. She neither cries nor makes any other sound until she is transformed into a serpent five fathoms long. She pursues the two pilgrims. They seek shelter at the temple Dojoji. They explain their predicament and after consultation the temple priests hide the young man under a bell before closing the door to the building in ivhich it is housed. The serpent circles two or three times around the building then, finding the door, raps several hundred times at the door with its tail. Breaking in at last, it winds itself around the bell and beats for two or three hours against its stem. Then with bloody tears welling from its eyes, it leaves the building, raises its head, extends its forked tongue and moves off in the direction from which it had come. When the temple priests go in to see the bell, they find that it has been burned to nothing from the serpent's venom; only a few wisps of smoke curl up. That is all that is left. They cannot go near it. They extinguish the fire but lind no sign of the remains of the young man—just a few smoldering embers.

Several days later in the dream of one of the priests of the temple appears a serpent. It claims to be the young man they had hidden under the bell. He says that the wicked woman subdued him and forced him to become her husband. He asks their prayers for salvation. He asks the dreamer to write out a passage of the Lotus Sutra and offer it for the salvation of the two serpents; without the marvelous efficacy of this prayer, he continues, the two serpents can find no freedom from their affliction. He leaves. The dreamer awakes, enlists the aid of other priests in the temple, copies out the surra and offers prayers for the repose of the two serpents. That evening he has another dream: a priest and a woman appear; they have joyous expressions on their faces. "Thanks to you our visit to Dojoji was not in vain. You have saved us." The dream went on to say that the woman was reborn in Toriten and the man in Tosotsu-ten. Both disappeared from the dreamer's sight and rose high into heaven.

Appendix B

**The story told by the waki in the No play "Dojoji"**

(Found in Omote and Yokomichi 1963:11, 139-140)

At one time in this place was a person called Manago no Shoji. He had one daughter. Also at that time there was a yamabushi from Oku who made a yearly pilgrimage to Kumano. He always stopped there. Shoji loved his daughter a great deal and playing a game with her said: "The traveling priest will be your husband. Call him that." She was young and took this to heart. As she grew up all she could think of was her future husband. The pilgrim came again one day and stopped at Shoji's place. The girl, when it was late at night and everything was quiet, went to the pilgrim's room. "How much longer will you keep me at a distance this way? Make rne your own quickly." The priest was alarmed to hear this and said the first thing that came to mind to avoid her. Then he slipped away into the night and kept on running until he arrived at this temple.

Because he implored us to do so, we lowered the temple bell and hid him under it since there was no other place to conceal him. Next the girl comes pursuing him, since she was determined not to let him get away. It just so happened that at that very moment the waters of the Hidaka River were unnaturally swollen. The girl ran this way and that, first up the river, then down the stream. Her anxiety and passion transformed her into a poisonous serpent. In this way she easily got across the river and came to our temple. She looked first this way, then that, before realizing that there was something strange about the bell, which had been lowered. She took the stem of the bell into her mouth, wrapped herself seven times around it. Flames came from her mouth. She struck with her tail. On the spot the bell fused into a molten mass. Then she took up the yamabushi and killed him. What a terrifying story this is.

Appendix C

**The structure of the No "Dojoji With indications of sections unique to "Kanemaki"**

(Translation of "Kosei" ("Structure"] in Omote and Yokomichi 1963:11, 129)

1. Entrance of waki (main priest of Dojoji).

2. Aikyogen (a workman at the temple) puts up the bell and announces that women are

forbidden to come to the temple during the services.

3. Waki gives a brief description of the service for the bell. Found in "Kanemaki" only.

4. Entrance of the mae-jite (a Shirabyoshi dancer, actually the spirit of the woman of the story). Journey to Dojoji.

5. Discussion among mae-jite, aikyogen, and waki-tsure (priests of the temple). The mae-jite requests that she be allowed to worship the bell. (A somewhat longer version is found in this section of "Kanemaki.")

6. Discussion between mae-jite and aikyogen (in "Kanemaki" it is the waki and waki-tsure who engage in a longer mondo with the mae-jite). The woman is allowed to enter.

7. A song which precedes the mae-jite's dance.

8. The katari-mai (narrative dance) of the mae-jite. Story of the events surrounding the founding of Dojoji. In "Kanemaki" only.

9. The dance of the mae-jite (ranbyoshi, kyu no mai).

10. The mae-jite disappears within the bell.

11. Aikyogen's surprise when the bell suddenly falls.

12. The story told by the waki (see Appendix B).

13. The waki offers prayers. The bell rises. The nochi-jite, now a demon-woman, comes out.

14. The combat between nochi-jite and waki. The priest through his prayers is victorious.

Appendix D

**The structure of several Kabuki "Dojoji" dances**

(cf. Kokonoe 1929:25, 28-29, 30, 61-62)

A. "Keisei Dojoji" (or "Muken no kane shin-Dojoji"), 1731.

1. Michiyuki The journey to the temple

2. Mai The dance

3. Kane-iri

4. Gyoja no inori

5. Keisei no joji

6. Jigoku no seme

B. "Momochidori musume Dojoji" ("One Hundred Plover Maiden Dojoji"), 1744

1. Michiyuki The journey

2. Mai The dance

3. Kakko no mai Dance with a small drum

4. Te-odori Dance with hand gestures

5. Shakkyo Lion's dance

6. Jatai Serpent

C. "Hitokanade genzai Dojoji" ("A playing of Contemporary Dojoji"), 1749.

1. Michiyuki The journey

2. Mai The dance

3. Shiki no odori Dance of the seasons

4. Kane-iri Going under the bell

5. Jatai Serpent

D. "Kyoganoko musume Dojoji," 1753.

1. Michiyuki D. "Kyoganoko musume

2. Ranbyöshi (Sequence of stamping in a complex rhythmic pattern)

3. Ogi no odori Dance with a fan

4. Te-odori Dance with hand gestures

5. Mari-uta Ball dance

6. Hanagasa odori Dance with flowery hats

7. Tenugui odori Dance with a scarf

8. Kakko no mai Dance with a small drum

9. Te-odori Dance with hand gestures

10. Suzudaiko Dance with tambourine

11. Kane-iri Going under the bell

12. Inori The priests' prayers

13. Jatai Serpent

14. Oshimodoshi Subdual of the serpent

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