Early kabuki dance

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 Trans. Frank Hoff

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 The intriguing question of the sources and origins of dance and theatre forms is worthy of attention. The focus of my interest in this paper is dance in early Kabuki, that is to say, in Kabuki of the period when women performed, usually known as Women's Kabuki. We shall briefly examine some of the elements and traditions which came together in early Kabuki, which will give us some idea of the performance itself. Also of great assistance in our search for the early form of dance in Kabuki is the present survival of a dance tradition in remote villages which is believed to preserve to a significant degree dance which was popular at the end of the sixteenth century and which was incorporated in the dance of early Kabuki.

**Terminology**

 The Japanese expression found principally in use at the end of the nineteenth century as a translation of the English word "dance" was buyo. A Chinese compound, this is made up of the character for mai, a term discussed in detail below, and a second character meaning "to stamp." In time the expression buyo, a compound made up of the Chinese characters for mai and odori, was devised and continues in use as the prevalent translation of "dance." The expression is more fitting than its English counterpart as an inclusive term by which to designate the wide range of dance phenomena found in Japan. Perhaps for that reason it is used today very much as if it had existed in the language from early times. In actuality, however, until the Meiji period (1868-1912), the two components of this expression were not found together in a single compound but were used separately, each designating its own different range of dance types.

**Mai and Odori: Principles and Differences**

 Until the seventeenth century, mai and odori were considered to be quite independent of one another. A distinction can be made first of all in terms of the significant movement associated with each. Circular motion is basic to mai while up-and-down movement, jumping at times, is basic to odori. Another way to characterize the difference is by speaking of their interrelatedness in rituals of possession called kami-gakari. Circular motion undertaken in order to lead a performer into trance, or possession by the god, may be called mai. When the performer becomes ecstatic as the god possesses him, he performs vertical movement, jumping or leaping; these movements while in the state of possession are odori.

 I should like to add here a note on this classification in terms of movement. Sometimes in a dance item or dance genre classified, for instance, as mai, we may find some elements which seem to belong to odori, and vice versa. The classifications are generally based on the predominant movement quality, as well as on other criteria.

 The distinction implied by the use of these two terms may be clarified in yet another way. In odori the dancer himself very often plays a musical instrument or sings; the principal impetus for his movements is the rhythm which he himself provides. Even if a dancer does not play an instrument, the prime source of the energy of his movements seems to arise spontaneously from some inner impulse. The basic source of energy in mai, on the other hand, lies not in the performer himself but is the contribution of other nearby participants; the impetus for mai is their music (hayashi) or storytelling (katari).

 In terms of the music which accompanies each, rhythmic pulsation is central to odori, while melody or the flow of sound is of first importance to mai. Considering still other distinguishing features of odori and mai, we find associated with odori the fact that anyone at all can participate; it is a group activity; there is no need for a special stage or place of performance; the dance is never separated from the earth. In mai a specially qualified performer, or small group, dances; the performance is restricted to a special place. Thus odori has long been a part of the life of the common people; only at a later period did it become a performance type to be enjoyed by spectators. Mai, on the other hand, was from an early time an art to be presented by professionals for the enjoyment of an audience.

**Representative Historical Examples of Odori and Mai**

 Some examples of the odori type of dance prevalent from about the tenth century until the late seventeenth are: Dengaku-odori, in which drums and other percussion instruments called dobachi and binzasara are used; Nembutsu-odori, in which the sho (a metal bowl-shaped instrument struck with a stick) and other percussion instruments are played; Hachi-tataki, one type of Nembutsu-odori, in which the performers play the sasara (a bamboo instrument) and either a gourd or the sho; and Taiko-odori, in which the dancers beat drums as they move. All of these were performed by the common people.

 Various types representative of mai, taken from throughout its long history, can also be enumerated. Bugaku falls into this classification; much of the repertoire of Bugaku was brought from mainland Asia about the seventh or eighth century, or even earlier. Among indigenous dances of the mai type, Kuzu-mai, Kume-mai, Hayato-mai were performed as an offering and testimony of fealty to the Emperor by tribal groups whom he had subjugated. There are records of these dances from the ancient period. Originally performed by the clans or tribes to whom the dances belonged, later they were performed by court officials and eventually became established as a part of the court repertoire. Azuma-asobi, folk songs from the eastern regions (azuma), also were performed at court; dance of the mai type was added to these songs and they are still performed today at annual court ceremonies and at shrines for religious events. We find other dances belonging to the category of mai, performed in aristocratic circles and/or as a part of religious ceremony. These include Kagura-mai (dance of the Bugaku type, performed before a shrine), Miko-mai (a type of Kagura performed by female temple servants), Yamato-mai (of the indigenous repertoire of Bugaku), and Shirabyoshi-mai (in which the dancer sings as she dances to the accompaniment of percussion instruments).

 During Japan's Middle Ages (Kamakura and Muromachi periods, 1192-1573), many types of mai were popular. In Kuse-mai, of which Kowaka-mai is generally considered to be one variety, the performers recite narrative verses as they briefly intersperse movement, usually •tamping. Kuse-mai exerted a distinct influence on No drama; No drama itself also includes a variety of mai dance. Ennen-mai, "dance of long life," incorporated music and dramatic compositions as well as dance. Chigo-mai denotes dance by young boys who acted as servants at temples and in the homes of the aristocracy.

 Each of these types of mai developed at an early period as a performance to be enjoyed by an audience. In these types of mai, we find musicians separate from the dancer, even though in some forms the dancer also sings or chants.

**Furyu Odori: The Confluence of Odori and Mai**

 Kabuki Odori was significantly influenced by a type of folk performance called Furyu Odori, popular especially in Kyoto toward the end of the sixteenth century. Furyu Odori was danced by large numbers of people; the dancers accompanied themselves, chiefly with a variety of percussion instruments. Popular or extemporaneous song also accompanied the dancing. The dancers were sometimes disguised and were always beautifully dressed; the performances also included the use of banners and floats. Upon the creation of these and of the dancers' costumes, a large measure of decorative ingenuity was expended. Furyu Odori was a part of prayers for rain, of Bon celebrations in honor of deceased ancestors, and of other festivals.

 Looking back at our earlier distinction between mai and odori, we realize that Furyu Odori quite clearly belongs to the odori category. However, during the sixteenth century in Japan, a period which is referred to as that of the civil wars, the power and prestige of the lower class were on the increase. This was a time of loosening of restraints, a time of cultural and social mobility. Against such an historical background, both No and Kyogen, formerly performance types associated with the upper class, began to gain popularity in the upper ranks of the newly important city class. This may help to account for the appearance in Furyu Odori of mai elements from No and Kyogen, including songs and decorative elements. In other words, we detect in this period a gradual confluence of the hitherto more separate elements of mai and odori. Put more concretely, it is in this period that we find in Furyu Odori the addition of a few independent musicians playing instruments such as the flute, along with the dancers who themselves play instruments as they dance.

 It is also in this period that we find Furyu Odori performed by a small group of young women who dance to the accompaniment of music characteristic of No, that is to say, the four instruments: a horizontal flute called nokan; a drum which is placed on the floor, called toiko; a smaller hand-drum placed on the musician's right shoulder, called kotsuzumi; and a larger hand-drum placed on the left thigh, called otsuzumi. Furthermore, the dancers perform on the type of stage hitherto reserved for No and Kyogen.

 Though the expression odori continued to be used of this form of dance, several elements which belong to mai were being incorporated: musicians separate from the dancers; select and specially qualified dancers; the use of a stage. A new performing art was born in Japan with this mixture of mai and odori elements. With the incorporation of mai elements, odori became for the first time a performing art in the sense of a dance form which is intended for the enjoyment and appreciation of an audience.

 Returning to our subject of dance in early Kabuki, that is, Kabuki of the period when women performed, we find that the form which preceded Women's Kabuki was called Yay-ako Odori, a repertoire of dances which followed generally the style and spirit of Furyu Odori in its form as a presentational art. The first record of Yayako Odori is dated 1581. It was performed in the largest cities of the period, Kyoto and Nara, sometimes at the residences of the aristocracy or in large shrine or temple grounds. However, since its major appeal was to the lower class, most characteristic were performances in open areas or in dry river beds where large numbers of people could attend. Troupes of performers also went on tour throughout the countryside.

 In 1603 a star performer, Okuni of the province of Izumo, reached the height of her fame. At that time the name of this performance type was changed to Kabuki Odori. The period between the first appearance of records of Yayako Odori and the prohibition of Women's Kabuki in 1629 is about half a century.

 During those fifty years dance and the physical attractions of young women were the centers of interest for the audiences of Kabuki. After the ban against Women's Kabuki, a second ban, this time against Young Men's Kabuki, appeared in 1652. As a result of these two acts of prohibition, the content of Kabuki had to change drastically. Until that time, dramatic elements were not regarded so highly, although the repertoire included comic elements, the art of the saruwaka. In Young Men's Kabuki, various independent minor arts were added, such as acrobatics. However, dance and the physical attractiveness of the performers continued to be prominent aspects of audience enjoyment. But with the prohibition against Young Men's Kabuki, it was no longer possible to rely solely upon the appeal of these elements. In Kabuki's subsequent development, we see the appearance of the special technique of a man costumed as a woman and the need for a dramatic aspect in this form of theatre. As a result, the importance of dance declined.

**Yayako Odori and Ayako-mai**

 What characterized the dance of early Kabuki which we have been discussing? We cannot expect that a dance type whose performance was prohibited more than three hundred years ago will have been preserved intact in Kabuki as it exists today. To some degree it is possible to form an idea of the details of the earlier performance from evidence provided by visual material and the texts of songs from the period, as well as from diaries and accounts written by people who had seen the performance.

 We are fortunate to be able to draw upon yet another source of information to understand a dance type of the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century. Today in the countryside of Japan there are dance forms which are considered to preserve almost exactly the type of dance current at the end of the sixteenth century and recorded then as Yayako Odori. Among these is a dance form called Ayako-mai, found today deep in the often snow-covered mountainous region of Niigata prefecture. It seems that groups of professional performers in the earlier period went from place to place in the countryside to perform. Evidently some of these found their way to villages such as those where Ayako-mai is performed today, and remained for a time, during which they spent considerable effort teaching their dances to the villagers. There is no question of the authenticity of the tradition found today in Niigata prefecture. With the exception of the costumes worn, we can regard this tradition as preserving very nearly the exact mode of performance of the earlier period.

 Ayako-mai is performed by three young women, though sometimes only two dance. Each covers her head with what is called yurai, a form of headgear characteristic of the period of early Kabuki. They dance holding fans. Music for the dance is close to that of No, although gongs are also used.

 Solemn, dignified singing similar to that of No accompanies the dancers' entrance. They enter using a special type of walk (suriashi) characteristic of the mai tradition found in No. After their entrance, they stand facing the audience as the instrumental music begins, together with the slightly more buoyant singing of what is called the "main song" (honka). The dancers accompany the singing with beautiful gestures of their fans. The movements of this section are the essence of the most refined and beautiful choreography of the odori tradition. The "main song" is followed by a still more buoyant and rhythmic instrumental passage. Light, nimble, and with a clear beat, it is accompanied by the singing of syllables which appear to be meaningless (although they may have had meaning which became lost over time). Some of these syllables seem to be used for their percussive effect. The syllables provide a vocal accompaniment for the dance. Vertical movements, with a springy quality (which we earlier noted as characteristic of odori), are found in this passage which is squarely in the odori tradition. This is followed by a section consisting of short songs (kouta). The principal pleasure of this section is to hear the singing of these somewhat erotic popular songs as the dancers perform what may well be some of the most memorable movements of the dance. This is followed by another rhythmic passage of sung syllables without apparent meaning. This pattern of the singing of kouta followed by an instrumental passage is repeated several times. Finally at the conclusion another kouta is sung to signal the dancers' departure from the stage. One by one they leave the stage to the sound of the melody of the flute. Once again they use the slow restrained foot movement, suriashi, characteristic of the mai type of dance, as they exit.

 In short, first the dancers enter with solemn, stylized movements of the mai type; this is followed by the light, easy-going rhythms and beautiful movements of the odori tradition. The dancers employ a variety of fan movements to accompany the erotic popular songs of the day. Finally, at the conclusion, once more the solemn, weighty movements of the mai tradition return.

 In seeing these Ayako-mai dances today, one may easily gain the impression that he can understand how the people of that earlier day may have felt when these dances were seen for the first time. The enthusiasm and excitement which they aroused in audiences must have derived in part from the way in which the solemn mai elements at the beginning and end of each performance so effectively set off the free, unrestricted movements of the odori tradition.

**Later Developments**

 Although odori and mai had existed side by side in a single amalgam for three hundred years, until the late nineteenth century convention allowed the use of only the separate terms, odori and mai. In spite of the many elements of mai which were present in Furyu Odori, Yayako Odori, and Kabuki Odori, these forms were still called odori. This anomaly has been the source of considerable confusion in discussions of the history of dance in Japan.

 Nihon Buyo, the form of dance which is considered to be representative of classical dance in Japan today, had its origins within the world of Kabuki theatre in the latter part of the seventeenth century. However, the larger part of the Nihon Buyo repertoire belongs to developments subsequent to the second half of the eighteenth century. We must remember that there were many significant changes in the forms of dance in Kabuki as it passed from the earliest period into a later stage of development.

 The essence of odori, unlike that of mai, is to seek constantly for something new, since what is novel at first is soon tired of. Novelty lasts so short a time; then the search is on for the newer new and the even more interesting effect. In Women's Kabuki, the performance consisted of one piece after another. First came the appearance.of the "star," the titular founder of Kabuki, Okuni of Izumo. Dressed in a priest's robe, she summoned the ghost of her recently dead, young and handsome lover; after that came the acting of the comic figure, saruwaka. Continuing to develop with influence from other performing arts, Kabuki in a short time brought its various types of performance innovations to perfection.

 In time Women's Kabuki, in this endless search for the splendid, the showy, the erotic, joined hands with the prostitute world. The result was that in the so-odori, a group dance, a large number of beautiful and elegantly costumed courtesans appeared. The newly arrived musical instrument, the shamisen, was soon introduced to the stage. By 1629, because of increasing eroticism and connections with the world of the courtesans, the authorities, in strict enforcement of Confucian codes of behavior, prohibited what was deemed to be an unsavory show.

 The confluence of the mai and odori tradition, realized in the early Kabuki repertoire, became the mainstream of Kabuki and flowed on even after Women's Kabuki was no longer tolerated. The shamisen became a standard instrument in Kabuki. Other musical forms were developed: the newest Edo-style singing with shamisen accompaniment called nagauta, and song or chanting (joruri) from the storytelling traditions (katarimono). Now the desire was for an ever greater level of appreciation for the performance. With that aim in mind, increasingly elements of mai were introduced. Soon there appeared a type of dance called shosagoto which had an important dramatic element. In order for Kabuki Buyo, cherished by the common people, to live and grow, a need was felt to expand the ways in which the odori tradition, nourished by this class, could enlarge its scope and vitality.

 In most dances found in today's repertoire of Kabuki Buyo, that is, Nihon Buyo, there is an odori section called odori-ji. It is a rhythmic passage during which the dancer usually holds a stage property, sometimes a musical instrument. This section is clearly based upon the older odori tradition which has been examined in this presentation.

 Nihon Buyo, as it exists today, owes its beauty to the influence and contributions of many of Japan's performing arts. Our knowledge of the development of Nihon Buyo, knowledge that enables us to more fully appreciate its form and its aesthetic principles, comes not only from historical materials, but also from still living traditions that exist in remote villages, essentially unchanged from a much earlier period. Such traditions further illuminate the historical development, which in turn illuminates the art of Nihon Buyo as we know it today.

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