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From *Ataka* to *Kanjinchō*: Adaptation of Text and Performance in a Nineteenth-Century Nō-Derived Kabuki Play

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Nō techniques and play borrowings provided important infusions into kabuki throughout its history, but in the nineteenth century, a genre of kabuki plays in close imitation of nō or kyōgen was added to the kabuki repertoire. The genre came to be called *matsubamemono*, meaning “[nō/kyōgen-derived kabuki] plays [performed] on a stage with a pine painted on the back wall” or “pine-board plays.”¹ These plays are the focus of this article, in which I first introduce the genre and its place in kabuki history, and then discuss its most famous example, the play *Kanjinchō* (Hattori 17–40; *Meisaku kabuki zenshū* 181–197; Brandon, *The Subscription List* 205–236). Many *matsubamemono* are derived from fourth-category *genzaimono* nō plays. *Kanjinchō* is one such example, based on the *genzaimono Ataka*. Analysis of *Kanjinchō* will focus on the methods used to transform *Ataka* into *Kanjinchō*, methods that were used in other nō-to-kabuki *matsubamemono* adaptations and that resulted in a sophisticated amalgam of nō and kabuki techniques, borrowings and newly-created sections and passages. In addition, through an examination of the role of Benkei in performances by three great modern actors, I will briefly consider different ways of playing Benkei and how different interpretations affect our engagement with Benkei’s heroism, grandeur, and humanity.

Kabuki and nō

The earliest staged kabuki performances in the seventeenth century, a medley of skits and dances that were often of an erotic nature, were played on the nō stage. Over the next two hundred years, kabuki playhouses became a feature of urban life, and the stage itself developed from its nō beginnings into a physical environment that suited the new art form as it evolved: from small roofed nō stage to large, open rectangular stage; from stage-right nō bridgeway (*hashigakari*) to elevated walkway through the house (*hanamichi*); from typically bare stage to typically decoratively-set stage. Especially over the course of the eighteenth century, the stage and methods of staging came to look much like what they are today, though at the turn of the twentieth century stage size increased and non-stage theatre spaces, such as audience seating and backstage rooms, were altered to conform with European models.

At its inception in the early seventeenth century kabuki was both shocking in its novelties, and at the same time, clearly related to its antecedents, especially nō. Beyond the use of the physical stage, it leaned on nō in a variety of ways. The “two arts” of nō, dance and chant, developed into the foundational arts of the kabuki actor’s training and performance: stylized, dance-influenced movement and special attention to

¹ *Matsubamemono* include plays adapted from both nō and kyōgen, although this essay focuses on those from nō, particularly *Ataka*. Yokomichi Mario gives a full description of the genre and sub-categories (“*Matsubamemono ni tsuite*” 21–25).

methods of vocal delivery. The alternation of *nō* and *kyōgen* on a *nō* program became the alternation between dance numbers and short skits in early kabuki, which in the Genroku Period (1688–1704) developed into dance pieces, termed *shosagoto*, and spoken dramas. During this time, actors began to use masks in dramatic ways beyond their functions in *nō*. Gunji Masakatsu discusses examples of early kabuki actors wearing masks, but taking them off at critical dramatic moments, for example, to reveal themselves and take revenge on an enemy (Gunji 160), showing early evidence of the defining structural and dramatic emphasis in kabuki on disguise and revelation, as well as the thematic importance of revenge.

From the end of the seventeenth century, *shosagoto* derived from *nō* were especially popular, as first developed by the *onnagata* (an actor specializing in female roles) Segawa Kikunōjō I (1693–1749) and then the great eighteenth-century *onnagata* Nakamura Tomijūrō I (1719–1786). Tomijūrō performed several *nō*-derived dance plays to great acclaim. In 1748, he played the lion in a play derived from the *nō* *Shakkyō*, and in 1753 he played the title role in *Musume Dōjōji* much as this staple of kabuki programs would be played thereafter.²

Nō was influential to early kabuki in many ways, but the recorded comments of late-seventeenth to early-eighteenth century actors make clear that the reliance on *nō* was gradually changing from kabuki's earliest days. The following recorded recollection from pioneering Genroku-period *onnagata* Yoshizawa Ayame (1673–1729, father of Nakamura Tomijūrō I) makes the point: Ayame had a patron who was skilled at *nō*, hence Ayame was urged to take advantage of the opportunity to study *nō* with him. However, his patron refused to teach him, explaining that the study of *nō* would distract him from his kabuki training and would have a bad effect on his acting in non-dance-based plays. "Why? Because your dramatic acting will lose rigor, and gradually you'll prefer to perform only in *shosagoto*." (Shuzui 26–27). Ayame explained that the value of this advice was proven by the later relative successes of himself and another actor named Yoshida. Yoshida was once considered the superior of the two, but "Yoshida practiced a little *nō* under a man named Hokkokuya and often tried his luck with *shosagoto* based on *nō* plays. I, on the other hand, endeavored exclusively, with crushing devotion, over pieces requiring dramatic acting. As a result, I made a name for myself, while Yoshida couldn't find any more acting partners and quit the profession" (Shuzui 27).

This evidence that an eighteenth-century kabuki actor was less likely than his seventeenth-century forbears to consider the study of *nō* as beneficial to developing his art, points to the fact that kabuki was by then securely formed and had its own characteristic methods to fill an actor's training and performances. Kabuki had also gained in cultural prominence and increasingly intermixed with other important forms of cultural expression, such as fiction (increasingly telling stories that were also performed on stage, and often illustrated with actor likenesses in portraying central characters), and salon-like social exchange devoted to particular practices such as poetry-writing (such gatherings were typically composed of men with different professional backgrounds, including kabuki actors).

While kabuki was mostly considered the townsmen's theatre and *nō* was closely associated with the ruling class of the Edo Period, townsmen also had opportunities to experience *nō* directly in several ways. Celebratory performances on Edo castle grounds for higher-placed male townsmen (*machi-iri nō*) and performances for raising funds (*kanjin nō*) that drew large mixed crowds, were produced throughout the period. So too were so-called "practice *nō*" (*keiko nō*), non-official performances by professionals to augment their income, and "street-corner *nō*" (*tsuji nō*) (Matsuzaki 183–185; Groemer). As Matsuzaki Hitoshi points out, general exposure to *nō* is attested by the commercial publications, such as chant books, that were available for *nō* study and practice, and interest in *nō* was also sufficient to encourage the inclusion of the *nō* and *kyōgen* plays-within-plays or *nō* parodies that kabuki playwrights occasionally inserted in long dramas for audience enjoyment (Matsuzaki 185–191).

² Early *shosagoto* plays, developed by late-seventeenth to early-eighteenth century *onnagata* actors, were fully danced pieces based on *nō* plays such as *Shakkyō* and *Dōjōji*. When *tachiyaku* actors (actors specializing in male roles) began to perform *shosagoto* in the late eighteenth century, they combined danced sections and acted sections in what are termed *buyōgeki*, dance-dramas. *Kanjinchō* is a play based in *nō* and created as a *buyōgeki* for a *tachiyaku* actor.

Matsubamemono

Around the late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century, the new genre of kabuki plays known as *matsubamemono* came to be performed on a stage set in imitation of the *nō* stage. A pine painted on the back wall of a mostly bare stage with two side *nō*-style entrances—the *agemaku* (stage-right entrance curtain) and the *kirido* (stage-left sliding door entrance)—recreated the physical space and atmosphere of the *nō* stage for kabuki and gave name to the genre. In fact, the imitation *nō* stage for *nō*/kyōgen-derived plays was pioneered in 1840 with *Kanjinchō*. Technically then, *Kanjinchō* was the first *matsubamemono*, although the term did not gain currency until the Meiji period.

Behind the defining, unmistakable spatial references associated with the advent of this new genre of Meiji Period (1868–1912) adaptations of *nō* or kyōgen plays were many social, political, and cultural factors that greatly affected the social status of kabuki actors and the cultural position of kabuki as an art. As explained, throughout the Edo Period (1603–1868), *nō* was the most prestigious performing art, due to its association with the ruling elite, and in contrast, audiences for kabuki were primarily of the townsmen classes. Kabuki actors and producers were generally stringently controlled by the government, both in terms of play material and in their personal conduct.

Meiji Period reforms led to the promotion of kabuki as a respectable art, not for the sake of individual actors, but as an elite-driven national effort. With their direct references and borrowings from *nō*, *matsubamemono* particularly contributed to this effort, as the high-culture associations and generally restrained qualities of *nō* (versus the decidedly unrestrained nature of Edo-period kabuki) were seen as raising the dignity of kabuki to an art that could represent the country with pride, especially in relation to Euro-American performing arts. One of the most important actors responsible for the creation and performance of *matsubamemono* was Danjūrō IX (1838–1903), the great Meiji-period actor who was a central participant in Meiji activities for theatrical “reform.”

Most *nō* plays have two acts (*ba*), divided by an interlude (*ai-kyōgen*) that in most cases serves the functional purposes of narrative exposition and off-stage preparation time for the second act. Plays are constructed through an ordered series of functional sections, termed *shōdan*, that present and organize material according to the *jo-ha-kyū* pacing principle of many Japanese arts. From stately start (*jo*), to increasing intensity in tempo and development (*ha*), to relatively short and energetic finale (*kyū*), *nō* plays convey their existential, spiritual, lyrical, dramatic, and atmospheric qualities and messages through a strong structural and rhythmic framework, much like the organization of movements in the standard forms of classical Western music (concerto, sonata, symphony).

Zeami, the seminal figure in the development of *nō*—actor, playwright, troupe leader, and practical theorist—wrote a dedicated treatise on playwriting called *Sandō* (“Three Courses,” 1423) (Hare 150–164).³ In this treatise, Zeami outlines a three-step process for creating *nō* plays: choose the “seed,” that is, pre-existing source material for story and characters; organize the source material according to *nō* play structure requirements; and compose the play through a mix of borrowed poetry and newly-written lines together with the accompanying music. Seed material could be as minimal as a poem and as full as a complete narrative taken from earlier literature, legend, mythology, or history. Here is Zeami’s summary introduction to the treatise:

First, then, we proceed along three courses, the Seed, the Structure, and the Writing: (1) Understand the Seed of the play; (2) Lay out the Structure of the play; and (3) Write the play. Get a firm grasp on the Seed as it appears in its original source; arrange the Structure in five sections according to the three principles of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū*; then write out the play, pulling the text together and setting the melody (Hare 151).

³ “Three Courses” is Tom Hare’s translation.

Kabuki playwrights also relied on pre-existing material as the starting point for plays. Stories that similarly began in literature, legend, mythology, or history, but that were often already adapted and filtered through other performing arts such as *nō* or later the puppet theatre, formed core material for kabuki plots. The source layers, including an original version and its subsequent treatments, are implied in the word kabuki playwrights used as their equivalent for Zeami's first "course": instead of "seed," they spoke of a *sekai*, literally, a world. Playwriting, as codified during the latter half of the eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth, began with the choice of a *sekai* and then proceeded with the kabuki equivalents of structuring and writing (Saltzman-Li 43–74).

Before *matsubamemono*, *nō* borrowings in kabuki plays were mostly evident in story material and/or the incorporation of specific *nō shōdan*. For example, well-known *utai* or *shimai* (*nō* chant, *nō* dance) that were regularly practiced by amateurs and thus likely to provide pleasure to audience members who recognized them, could be worked into a play (Furuido 11). Furuido Hideo points to examples where sections of more than one *nō* play were integrated into the composition of a single kabuki play (Furuido 13).⁴ Actor Bandō Mitsugorō IX (1929–1999) and actors before him likened kabuki to a "carry-all" (*zudabukuro*), a sack containing many elements, including aspects of *nō*, that could be adapted to fit the art and reach an audience (Bandō Mitsugorō 25).⁵ *Matsubamemono*, however, borrow the *nō* play more or less whole, typically keeping the two-part structure and generally adapting the source play as a *shosagoto*, a play meant to highlight an actor's dancing skills. Both Danjūrō IX and Onoe Kikugorō V (1844–1903), the other seminal actor associated with *matsubamemono*, were strong dancers, an important factor in the genre's development and in the composition of *matsubamemono* plays.⁶

In turning *nō* into *matsubamemono*, kabuki playwrights and actors retained many aspects of *nō* while weaving in kabuki elements. Together, they gave form to the new genre: *nō* movement, voice, instrumental music, costuming, and stage⁷ combined with kabuki acting and vocal techniques, dance, and musical forms, especially the lyrical *nagauta* style of samisen-accompanied narrative chanting that originated in the mid-eighteenth century. At this moment of intense change in Japanese and kabuki history, a text of both dramatic and literary qualities became essential. Kawatake Mokuami (1816–1893), the last great Edo-period kabuki playwright, was instrumental in making the transition into the new era, writing many successful *matsubamemono* that were famous for their theatricality and their rhythmical, polished writing.

⁴ See also Paul Griffith's discussion of the *nō* sources for *Musume Dōjōji* (Brandon and Leiter 283).

⁵ Several centuries earlier, actor Sakata Tōjūrō (1646–1709) used a similar metaphor of a beggar's bag (*kojikibukuro*). He is quoted as saying, "The actor's art [relies on] a beggar's bag [of experiences and observation]" (*yakusha no gei wa kojikibukuro ni te*.) Tōjūrō's idea is that a beggar takes whatever he can get his hands on for either present or future use, and similarly, an actor must study everything he encounters for possible benefit to his acting (Shuzui 41).

⁶ *Matsubamemono* debuted by Danjūrō IX and Kikugorō V were among their most beloved and successful plays, as well as for the succeeding generations of actors carrying their stage names. Playwrights worked with actors in creating plays to match their talents, and conversely great plays came into existence because of the skills of the actors for whom they were created. The history of the dance play *Musume Dōjōji*, for example, must be written with the names of the two great *onnagata* mentioned earlier, Segawa Kikunōjō I and Nakamura Tomijūrō I, as well as others who followed them. Toita Kōji addresses these two actors in relation to *Musume Dōjōji* (3–4).

⁷ Yokomichi Mario makes a distinction between *nō* and *kyōgen*-derived kabuki plays that are performed on the spare pine-backed stage (*matsubamemono*) and those that are performed on a "non-pine-backed" stage with other kabuki sets (*ōdogu*), pointing out that the latter type, for example *Momijigari* (1887), have a less *nō*-like atmosphere. Yokomichi provides a diagram to show the 26 most produced *nō* and *kyōgen*-derived kabuki plays according to the kind of stage set on which they were performed and according to pre-1900 or 1900–1945 production dates. A most interesting result is his demonstration that, of these 26 plays, adapted *kyōgen* were always performed on the pine-backed stage (pre-1900 and up to 1945), whereas *nō*-adapted plays were performed on both types of stage pre-1900, but never on the pine-backed stage in the post-1900 period ("Matsubamemono ni tsuite" 26–28).

Most of the *nō* plays that were chosen for the creation of *matsubamemono* were from the content-rich fourth and fifth categories of *nō*. In comparison with the stately deities of the first category and the ghosts and poetic figures of the second and third categories, fourth and fifth category plays offer relatively lively characters with dramatic stories to tell. Fourth-category *genzaimono* *nō* were the most common and adaptable choice for transformation into *matsubamemono*. As other articles in this journal issue explore, *genzaimono* emphasize plot and human relationships, and they thus provided kabuki playwrights with active characters who express a range of human emotion, the kind of characters on which kabuki thrives and on which the careers of kabuki actors depend.

The *nō* plays *Mochizuki* and *Ataka* are both fourth-category *genzaimono* plays that are not only strong on plot, but are also among the most dramatically-exciting, peopled, and this-worldly of *nō* plays.⁸ Mokuami turned *Mochizuki* into a *matsubamemono* of lasting acclaim in 1882, rewriting an earlier kabuki treatment of the *nō* and adding *nagauta* narrative music.⁹ Ichikawa Danjūrō VII (1791–1859) turned *Ataka* into *Kanjinchō* in 1840, and *Kanjinchō* then garnered renewed fame with Danjūrō IX's version during the Meiji Period. Actions in each of these two plays are guided by a primary principle: revenge in *Mochizuki* and loyalty in *Ataka*. The strength of a single aim or virtue and the qualities required of main characters to achieve them, is another reason why these fourth-category *nō* made good source plays for *matsubamemono*, giving actors a focus around which to display their talents.

Just as individual *nō* plays have been enjoyed in part for how they contribute to the variety and pacing offered by a program of thoughtfully juxtaposed plays, so too did *matsubamemono* have their purpose in a kabuki program and their appropriate placement for enjoyment. Meiji kabuki programs were typically composed in four parts, two long multi-act plays and two short one-act plays, in a long-short-long-short arrangement, as follows: *ichibanme* (first play, multi-act play usually based in the historical past and focused on the samurai class), *naka maku* (middle piece, a one-act play inserted between the *ichibanme* and the next long play), *nibanme* (second play, multi-act play usually set in present time and circumstances and focused on the townsmen class), and *ōgiri* (finale, a one-act dance piece, intended to give a lively ending to the day's program.) *Matsubamemono* were usually performed for the *naka maku*, but sometimes as the *ōgiri*, especially if the *matsubamemono* in question was based on a demon *nō* play that could provide the desired excitement for concluding a program (which is also one function for demon *nō* on a five-play *nō* program) (Brandon and Leiter 32).

Kanjinchō

Through adaptation of *nō* plays, the elite position of *nō* leant kabuki actors the opportunity to raise their standing, whether for personal or national purposes, especially during periods of political turmoil and cultural reform. In homage to his ancestor Danjūrō I (1660–1704), Danjūrō VII was the first to see the opportunity to elevate his personal prestige, as well as that of his family line of actors, by performing a *nō* play, *Ataka*, as a kabuki play, *Kanjinchō*.¹⁰ Danjūrō VII's *Kanjinchō* appealed to the wealthy townsmen of the Tenpō Era (1830–1844) and their interest in *nō* as a mark of prestige. It also appealed to Danjūrō VII's audacious nature and his

⁸ Thus, *Mochizuki* was on the program for the *nō* performances given in 1879 for former U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant, which led to Grant's consequential praise of *nō*. *Kanjinchō* was also performed for foreign visitors. For example, top Meiji actors Ichikawa Danjūrō IX, Onoe Kikugorō V, Ichikawa Sadanji I, and Nakamura Fikusuke IV gave a special performance for foreign dignitaries in November 1886 with *Kanjinchō* on the program (Toyotaka 225).

⁹ In 1872, a kabuki play based on the *nō* *Mochizuki* used Tokiwazu music (another narrative style of music used in kabuki) and was in other ways a precursor to the enduring 1882 version (Nojima 302).

¹⁰ Danjūrō VII's original *Kanjinchō* was a memorial production to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the first Danjūrō almost two centuries earlier, but like many such congratulatory productions that followed, it was really about celebrating the Danjūrō line and its longevity. In support of this objective, all roles for the premier were taken by actors connected to Danjūrō, either relatives or disciples. The principal roles were: Benkei, Ebizō V (Danjūrō VII, known at the time of the premier as Ebizō); Togashi, Ichikawa Kuzō II; Yoshitsune, Danjūrō VIII. Note: While Danjūrō VII was known at that time as Ebizō V, I will consistently call him Danjūrō VII for easy recognition.

daring challenges to a status system that generally placed actors in a low position, and also placed kabuki actors at a disadvantage in relation to nō actors. Danjūrō's fame and talent brought him riches and power until he was banned from Edo (modern-day Tokyo) two years after the premier of *Kanjinchō*, during the draconian Tenpō Reforms (1841–1843).¹¹ These economic and social reforms greatly affected the entertainment industry, and Danjūrō was a conspicuous target as the most high-living kabuki star, and the most obvious one to punish in order to reassert sumptuary and other restrictions placed on actors.

With *Kanjinchō*, Danjūrō VII innovated in the use of the pine back wall, nō instrumental music, and nō or nō-like costuming, as well as in adapting the full nō play structure and content rather than the partial borrowing that had previously been typical. With playwright Namiki Gohei III (1789–1855), and music by Kineya Rokurō IV, Danjūrō put great effort into creating the play. Much collaborative attention was given to rewriting the nō and adapting its staging, often in secret planning meetings at Danjūrō's home.¹² For its 1840 premier, *Kanjinchō* was already placed as a *naka maku* between a first play and a second play that was then followed by a finale (Ihara 412).

In most of the nineteenth century, only an actor of Danjūrō VII's stature and confidence could have managed such a complex social and political, not to mention artistic, task as the creation of *Kanjinchō*. The late nineteenth-century heyday of *matsubamemono* was, like the 1840s of Danjūrō VII's time, also a period of reform, but one managed in a less punitive and more concerted way. In the theatre world, the idea of the nation's good underlay the promotion of actors' careers. *Matsubamemono* became an established new genre of plays by answering to both national goals and individual career needs. By the end of the nineteenth century, nō adaptations were facilitated by the great changes in circumstances, patronage, and reputation attending kabuki, and Danjūrō IX, the fifth son of Danjūrō VII, performed his father's play under new conditions as kabuki gained ascendancy vis-à-vis nō:

It is said that the seventh Danjūrō, when he played *Kanjinchō*, virtually had to kneel down and beg costumes from the Sekioka, a family of wardrobe masters. After the Restoration the Sekioka lost their patron and had to sell their treasures, and the ninth Danjūrō bought a number of robes which he subsequently used on the stage. Danjūrō also received robes from Yamanouchi Yōdō when he played *Kanjinchō* at the Morita-za in 1872, and the costumes he used in *Ninin Shōjō* (*Two Sprites*) at the Kawarazaki-za in 1874 he had bought from the Yamanouchi family" (Toyotaka 230).

Kanjinchō has not only been the most performed *matsubamemono*, but also one of kabuki's most performed pieces overall.¹³ This position is largely due to the popularity of the actors who have been associated with it and to the situations in which it has been staged. It was on the program for the first performances of kabuki presented to the Emperor and the Imperial family in 1887,¹⁴ and it has been on the programs since of many memorial performances and performances celebrating newly-recognized attainment in an actor's career.¹⁵

¹¹ He thrived, nonetheless, during banishment in Kyoto and Osaka.

¹² Ihara Toshiro gives information on the preparation of the play and its performance (412–413).

¹³ According to records compiled and printed in the program notes for a January 2017 performance of *Kanjinchō* at the Osaka Shōchiku Theatre, there were 198 productions of *Kanjinchō* at major Shōchiku theatres between 1945 and 2017 (Osaka Shōchiku Theatre Publicity Division 85–89).

¹⁴ The script was revised for this performance, and the author page of a printed version (reproduced in Kawatake, *Mokuami* 51) lists Mokuami as playwright (instead of Namiki Gohei III) together with two Meiji literary luminaries, Fukuchi Ōchi (1841–1906) and Suematsu Kenchō (1855–1920) as assistants. Kawatake Toshio conjectures that the names of these three famous men were prominently printed in order to give luster to this very important and serious occasion (*Mokuami* 51–52). Interestingly, in 1840, the twenty-five-year-old rising playwright Mokuami (then called Katsu Genzō, or simply Genzō) worked at the Kawarazaki Theatre when the fifty-year-old, top-of-his-game Danjūrō VII was preparing *Kanjinchō*, and the two interacted at that time (Kawatake, *Mokuami* 61–65).

Creating *Kanjinchō*

Since his late-twelfth-century exploits, the warrior-monk Saitō Musashibō Benkei, hero of both *Ataka* and *Kanjinchō*, has been known much more by his legendary actions and attributes than for his historical presence. An unwavering loyalty to his master Yoshitsune, his large actions, strength, and prodigious capacities, have all been celebrated and enjoyed in a range of performing and visual arts. Benkei has figured frequently as a character in kabuki, and Danjūrō VII had many precedents to consider in creating *Kanjinchō*. He deliberately looked back to the time of his earliest ancestors' performances in planning the role of Benkei, even while modeling the play closely on *Ataka*.¹⁶ In order, and with reference to some of the borrowed *nō shōdan*, the structure/content of both *Ataka* and *Kanjinchō* includes the following: the self-introduction (*nanori*) upon the entrance of Togashi (*waki*) followed by the chanted lyrical travel description (*michiyuki*) to bring in Benkei (*shite*) and the Yoshitsune party; verbal exchanges between Togashi and Benkei (*mondō*) before and after the scroll reading (*yomimono*);¹⁷ recognition of Yoshitsune leading Benkei to beat him; the face-off between the retainers and soldiers; Togashi's permission to pass through the barrier; Benkei's apology to Yoshitsune (*mondō*); Benkei drinking wine and dancing (*otokomai*) for Togashi; exit.

While specific sections of *Ataka*'s text and music were directly incorporated into *Kanjinchō*, four significant methods of adaptation that led to the transformation can be understood as standard ways in which *nō* plays were turned into *matsubamemono*: stage and staging adaptation, music composition, text adaptation, and addition of standard kabuki acting techniques.

I. Stage and staging adaptation.

The imitation of the *nō* stage includes the pine tree at the back, the stage cleared of sets, an added stage-left *kirido* entrance/exit (the doorway used by the chorus in *nō*), and an added stage-right *agemaku* entrance/exit curtain that, on a *nō* stage, marks the far end of the *hashigakari* bridgeway. Conventionally, major characters in kabuki use the elevated house walkway, the *hanamichi*, to enter and exit, and they often pause for important lines and action at its seven/three position, a position approximately seven-tenths of the way from the entry at the back of the house to the stage. In *Kanjinchō*, Togashi uses the imitation *nō*-stage *agemaku* and the imitation *nō*-stage *kirido* for his entrances and exits.¹⁸ The entrances and exits of Benkei, Yoshitsune and the four retainers occur via the *hanamichi*. By having Yoshitsune's party use the *hanamichi*, the importance of Benkei (the star role), Yoshitsune, and their entourage is signaled.¹⁹

Benkei's final exit in *Ataka* is very dramatic. As he finishes a lively dance for Togashi, he indicates that the rest of his party should leave before him. Yoshitsune and the retainers stand aside, thus indicating that they have gone on ahead. When it is Benkei's turn to hurry away, the urgency of his exit is described energetically by the chorus. In *Kanjinchō*, Benkei sends Yoshitsune and the retainers

¹⁵ The measure of *Kanjinchō*'s importance may also be taken by how it has gotten actors in trouble: Ichikawa Ennosuke I (1855–1922), a disciple of Danjūrō IX, was disinherited from the Ichikawa family when, in 1873, he played Benkei in *Kanjinchō* without Danjūrō's permission. He was finally forgiven and reinstated in 1890 (and even played Benkei in 1905 as part of a memorial program for Danjūrō, who had died in 1903.) Kabuki's famous Meiji-period female kabuki actor, Ichikawa Kume-hachi (1846?–1913), a Danjūrō disciple during a short-lived attempt to integrate women into mainstage kabuki, made the same mistake in 1891. She played Benkei in *Kanjinchō* without Danjūrō's permission and was similarly expelled until the mid-nineties.

¹⁶ In the second month of 1702, actor/playwright Danjūrō I was the first to write and play the role of Benkei in the play *Hoshiawase jūnidan*. This play was the earliest inspiration for Danjūrō VII's creation of *Kanjinchō*. Imaoka Kentarō quotes from the stage announcement (*kōjō*) at the 1840 opening production of *Kanjinchō*, which explains that a variety of old written materials, presumably related to earlier plays, were consulted in creating *Kanjinchō* (Torigoe et al. 73).

¹⁷ See footnote 26 for a discussion of the *yomimono* and the *mondō* that follows it.

¹⁸ He first enters through the *agemaku*, but the choice for his second entrance varies according to the actor.

¹⁹ It should be noted that a role of Togashi's importance would normally merit *hanamachi* entrances and exits.

off down the *hanamachi*. He is left alone, first bidding farewell to Togashi and then performing an *aragoto* exit called *tobi-roppō*,²⁰ arms and legs flying in all directions as he exits down the *hanamachi* to catch up with his party and continue their escape. The *hanamachi* exits take the tension of *Ataka*'s final narrated scene and add characteristic kabuki physical expression—in actor movements and in the use of acting space—to transform an exciting *nō* finale into a spectacular kabuki scene.

II. Music composition.

The *matsubamemono* soundscape includes *nō* instruments,²¹ shamisen (the three-stringed instrument used for Edo-period theatre and popular music), *geza* music (backstage kabuki music used for specific effects), and chanters singing in forms of accompanied sung narration original to kabuki. Sometimes the *nō* elements and the kabuki elements are heard in combination and sometimes separately, yielding a sophisticated hybrid musical language that can support the variety of moods and action of the drama. The melody *katashagiri*, played only on the *nō* flute and taiko drum, always begins the performance of a *matsubamemono*, calling attention to the play's origins. Generally, when *nō* instruments and melodies are played alone, they add a solemn atmosphere and a reminder of the *nō* source.

Let us consider the following sequence: Togashi's dignified first entrance is accompanied by *nō* flute. Following introductory lines by Togashi and his soldiers, additional *nō* instruments and calls are heard as he and the soldiers move across the stage to be seated. At this point, we first hear the accompanied sung narration style known as *nagauta*. *Utaigakari* (*nō*-style singing without shamisen, but with *nō* drums and calls) begins a narration of Yoshitsune's escape from his pursuers, with the addition of another kabuki style of shamisen-accompanied sung narration called *ōzatsuma*. This accompanied singing is followed by an instrumental piece with shamisen and *nō* drums, called *yose no aikata* (melody of approach) that is meant to create the feeling of tension as Yoshitsune, Benkei and the four retainers approach the barrier. The pace and intensity have picked up; the mood has moved from stately *nō* to kabuki-style excitement and expectation. Later, when Benkei tearfully begs Yoshitsune's forgiveness for having struck him, Yoshitsune famously gestures compassion by extending his hand. During these moments, shamisen and a single voice plaintively support the grave exchange.

Another instructive example of musical arrangement comes at the end of the play. *Nō* musicians and a group of *nagauta* chanters and shamisen players vibrantly accompany Benkei's drunken dance (*otokomai*). The dance is first accompanied only by *nō* instruments and calls, drawing attention to its source in *Ataka*. Then the shamisen comes in, and finally the chanters join as the pace and energy increase into a kabuki-style dance.²²

III. Text adaptation.

From the point of view of language, three primary techniques important to the *Ataka* to *Kanjinchō* transformation may be isolated. Altogether, language is employed more dramatically and less lyrically than in *nō*, but the playwright must make choices regarding what to cut and what to add in order to create a heightened drama appropriate to kabuki, while retaining elements of the *nō* play that communicate its atmosphere and qualities. The first and second techniques below show the greatest changes from *nō* practice, while the third shows a clear affinity.

First, textually poetic *nō shōdan* are often skipped altogether, condensed, or otherwise altered. Let us compare the *shōdan* sequence of *shidai-sashi-ageuta-ageuta* that comes after the introductory sections in *Ataka*, with the comparable passages in *Kanjinchō*. The exact lines of the *shidai* (Yokomichi and Omote 169)—including the characteristic *nō* textual practice of repeating the first twelve syllables—are

²⁰ "Bounding [*tobi*] in six directions [*roppō*]." The "six directions" are the four cardinal directions plus up to the sky and down to the earth. *Roppō* were once used for *hanamachi* entrances but mostly came to be a form of exit. *Aragoto* is an acting style associated with the Danjūrō line of actors, and with young, impudent, forceful, superhero-type male characters.

²¹ The *kan* (*nō* flute), *ko-tsuzumi* (shoulder drum), *ō-tsuzumi* (lap drum), and *taiko* (stick drum.).

²² Yokomichi discusses this dance ("Matsubamemono ni tsuite" 31–32).

chanted in *Kanjinchō* just after Togashi and the soldiers have established themselves on stage (Hattori 20). The *sashi* section from *Ataka* (Yokomichi and Omote 169–170; Nishino 134), which comprises part of the lyrical *michiyuki* travel description, is not taken over into *Kanjinchō*. However, the *ageuta* that follows the missing *sashi* (Yokomichi and Omote 170) is incorporated, but without the repetition of the first twelve syllables (Hattori 20). Two classical poems are woven into the second *ageuta* (Yokomichi and Omote 170), an important method, as discussed, of *nō* playwriting.²³ This section has been maintained in *Kanjinchō*—where it is sung during the initial *hanamichi* entrance—although with some alterations (Hattori 20).²⁴ Thus, while *Kanjinchō* contains lyrical sections, some of the poetic *shōdan* or lines from *Ataka* were not taken over, resulting in a relative emphasis on action over lyrical mood consistent with the nature of kabuki.

Second, conversations are added or extended, between principal characters or lesser characters, heightening the drama through increased verbal interaction. For example, Togashi and Benkei exchange more lines in *Kanjinchō* than in *Ataka* during the important moments surrounding the scene when Benkei beats Yoshitsune (Hattori 32–34). A description of an amorous entanglement in Benkei's past is also featured (Hattori 37).²⁵ Finally, a famous and demanding section of *Kanjinchō*, the *yamabushi mondō* ("dialogue" or Q&A on mountain priests), consists of a long exchange between Togashi and Benkei. In this section of *Kanjinchō*, which occurs just after Benkei has read aloud (*yomiage*) from the fake subscription scroll of the play's title (*kanjinchō*), Togashi questions Benkei on his knowledge of Buddhist doctrine and practice. In the standard version of *Ataka*, we find a sequence of four *shōdan* forming the full scene centering on the scroll reading: *mondō* (dialogue), *yomimono* (the reading), *uta* (sung section with congruent text syllables and rhythm), *mondō* (dialogue). The final *mondō* of the *nō* play was elaborated in *Kanjinchō* into this long discussion on Buddhist doctrine. Togashi tests Benkei's Buddhist knowledge, raising and maintaining tension around the possibility that Benkei's deception will fail. This scene adds drama and excitement to the play as Togashi's questions become more challenging and rapid-fire.²⁶

²³ The first poem is by Semimaru (early Heian Period) from the imperial poetry collection *Gosen Wakashū* (951; Miscellaneous 1, no. 1089) on barrier checkpoints, and the second poem is by Mibu no Oto (early Heian Period) from the first imperial poetry collection, *Kokin Wakashū* (early 10th c; Travel, no. 413) on the capital being lost from view. The topics of each poem relate to the situation in *Ataka*, and thus the borrowings strengthen the *nō* play in theme and mood.

²⁴ The barrier checkpoint poem is incorporated in full in *Ataka*, with lines two and three repeated and an alteration to the end of the last line. In *Kanjinchō*, the lines are not repeated, but the final line change is maintained. Only part of the Mibu no Oto poem is incorporated into *Ataka* through paraphrase, and it is repeated. In *Kanjinchō*, the diction is altered and the line is not repeated.

²⁵ In Edo-period plays, romantic relationships are frequent additions that renew old, reusable story lines, often through the introduction of new characters and new plot twists.

²⁶ The *Ataka* scroll reading is performed by Benkei, although there seem to have been alternate practices. In the Kanze school, Benkei and the retainers apparently once performed the reading together, and the current practice of having Benkei read alone was considered a *kogaki* (variant) known as *kanjinchō*. This *kogaki* is now standard practice in Kanze performances of *Ataka*, but it is still labeled as a *kogaki* (Yokomichi, *Nō ni mo enshutsu ga aru* 196). In Kanze texts, the performance of the scroll reading can be indicated for "shite and retainers" (*shite tachishū*) (Yokomichi and Omote 176) or it can be marked with *ji* (short for *jiutai*, chorus) or *dō* (in this case, it may be short for *yamabushi ichidō*, the group of mountain priests, that is, Yoshitsune's retainers), although "in current practice, it is standard for only the *shite* to chant" (Yokomichi and Omote 176, footnote 5). In the Nishino edition, also Kanze school, the scroll reading is marked with *dō* (138). Much confusion has arisen over these labels, leading some scholars to suggest, erroneously, group recitation as the Kanze norm. In the Kongō school, there is a *kogaki* called *mondō no narai*. According to Diego Pellecchia, in this *kogaki*, a shortened *notto* section is followed by the *mondō* between Togashi and Benkei, who exchange lines while sitting on stools. The scroll reading then follows. (Pellecchia, personal communication.) [This footnote continues on the next page.]

Third, lines at heightened emotional moments or during significant dance sections are given to the *nagauta* chanters rather than delivery by the actors, much as the *nō* chorus often takes over the *shite*'s lines at intense points in the play when the *shite* expresses himself physically through dance movement. During Benkei's dances, the text is delivered by the chanters. This leaves the actor to express himself through physical movement, supported by the chanters' lyrics and singing.

Another kind of textual modification occurs with the use of the kabuki technique known as *watarizerifu* (divided dialogue), where a group of characters indicate a shared reaction or shared thoughts by having each in turn utter a line, followed by the full group delivering a final line in unison. This technique is used several times in *Kanjinchō*. For example, just after Togashi's introductory speech, his three soldiers perform *watarizerifu* (Hattori 19). At the same point in *Ataka*, there is only a short exchange between Togashi and his sword-bearer (Yokomichi and Omote 169; Nishino 133–134). There are other examples of *watarizerifu* spoken by the four retainers in Yoshitsune's party (for example, Hattori 21) or Togashi's soldiers (for example, Hattori 23–24).

IV. Addition of standard kabuki acting techniques.

Kanjinchō contains several *mie*, the stop-action poses taken by important characters at climactic moments of emotion and action. Benkei performs three famous, named *aragoto*-style *mie* (each appears in other plays as well). Dramatically, they communicate the intensity of the character's feelings about the trying situation in which he finds himself. Their incorporation into *Kanjinchō* also serves to highlight the high level of attainment of the actor playing Benkei, as these *mie* are reserved for important *aragoto* roles. The Fudō *mie* (*Fudō no mie* – fig. 1) follows Benkei's reading of the scroll; the Genroku *mie* (*Genroku no mie* – fig. 2) follows the *yamabushi mondō*; and the Stone-throwing *mie* (*Ishinage no mie* – fig. 3) follows a mime-dance performed by Benkei that is accompanied by the chanters' lyrical narration of Yoshitsune's escape (Hattori 36).²⁷ This concentration of famous *aragoto*-style *mie* is a special feature of *Kanjinchō*.

Nō kogaki for this scene may help us better understand the creation and specific sources of *Kanjinchō*, especially the *yamabushi mondō* that follows the scroll reading. While the *yamabushi mondō* is typically described as wholly new to *Kanjinchō*—in other words, a scene that does not exist in *Ataka*—nevertheless its existence may possibly be sourced to the Kongō *kogaki*. After describing it as a new addition to the kabuki play, Yokomichi then brings up the Kongō *kogaki*, writing that "... the Kongō school has the *yamabushi mondō* [as a *kogaki*], but it's almost never performed, and even if it were, it would probably add little of value" ("*Matsubamemono ni tsuite*" 29). While Yokomichi plays down this *kogaki* in terms of modern significance within Kongō performance practice, it may have been performed more often in Danjūrō VII's time. Helen Parker cites a 1991 interview with Nakamura Matzō, in which he "... maintains that Danjūrō VII succeeded in gaining an opportunity to observe *nō* rehearsals of the Kongō school informally [and used what he learned for his kabuki]" (119, footnote 63). In the introduction to his 1972 translation of *Kanjinchō*, James Brandon explains the source of the *yamabushi mondō* vaguely, but also indicates a specific inspiration: "... it was added by Danjuro [sic] VII after he witnessed an immensely successful recitation of the scene by a well-known professional storyteller" (*The Subscription List*, 207). Pellecchia considers the *yamabushi mondō* of *Kanjinchō* as "similar, yet of much expanded content [in comparison with the Kongō *kogaki*]" (Pellecchia, personal communication). If Danjūrō VII was indeed influenced by the Kongō school in creating *Kanjinchō*, it is tantalizing to consider a chicken-and-egg question first raised by Monica Bethe in conversation with Pellecchia and myself: did Danjūrō simply elaborate on what he learned of Kongō practice, or was the Kongō *kogaki* added after Danjūrō had created *Kanjinchō*? (Bethe and Pellecchia, personal communication.)

²⁷ Fudō is the protective Buddhist deity who fiercely guards the gates of hell, and who is associated with the Danjūrō acting line. The *Genroku mie* is named for the Genroku Period, when this *mie* was first performed. *Kanjinchō* provides the most famous example of the forceful "stone-throwing *mie*."



Figure 1. Fudō *mie*. Print by Toyohara Kunichika (1835–1900), 1879. Danjūrō IX as Benkei. For this *mie*, the actor, sitting or usually standing, projects Fudō's fierce quality and holds Fudō's emblematic sword and rope, the latter often replaced by a rosary. In *Kanjinchō*, it is always a rosary, and the scroll substitutes for the sword. Waseda University Theatre Museum, 201–0971, "Musashibō Benkei, Ichikawa Danjūrō"



Figure 2. Genroku *mie*. Print by Hasegawa Sadanobu III (1881–1963), 1941. Benkei from *Kanjinchō*. Grasping the scroll and rosary, the actor takes an impressively large physical stance. His arms and body are oriented towards the center-right, and his left foot and head towards the left. Waseda University Theatre Museum, 201–0626, "Kabuki jūhachiban [The eighteen kabuki plays]: Kanjinchō, Benkei"



Figure 3. Stone-throwing *mie*. Print by Yamamoto Hisashi (1905–?). Matsumoto Kōshirō IX as Benkei. The actor's right hand appears as if having just thrown a stone, while the left hand holds out the fan that he has just used for his mime-dance. Kōshirō VII performed this *mie* by kneeling on his left knee and stamping out with his right foot; the Danjūrō method is to stand and look slightly down to the right at the height of the pose.

Waseda University Theatre Museum, 201–0410, “Benkei, Matsumoto Kōshirō”



Figure 4. *Sujiguma*. Print by Ueno Tadamasa (1904–1970), 1940s.

In earlier interpretations, Benkei roles were made-up in this type of strong *kumadori* make-up known as *sujiguma* (a style of *kumadori* that boldly outlines and highlights facial contours); later, particularly in 20th-century interpretations of Benkei in *Kanjinchō*, the make-up is much less exaggerated.

Waseda University Theatre Museum, 201–0244, “*Kumadori jūhachiban* [Kumadori of the eighteen plays]: *Sujiguma*; Ichikawa Danjūrō I sōshi [founded by Ichikawa Danjūrō I], Danjūrō [nandaime] kufū [illustrated here: a method of one of the Danjūrōs]”



Figure 5. Matsumoto Kōshirō VII as Benkei. Print by Ota Masamitsu (1892–1975), 1949.
Waseda University Theatre Museum, 201–0345, “*Shōwa butai sugata* [Actors of the Shōwa stage], no. 5:
Benkei, Matsumoto Kōshirō VII”

Mie are meant to express psychological states, and actors also express psychological reactions in more subtle ways. One technique is indicated in scripts simply with the word *omoiire*, which might be translated as “express emotion.” Unlike the fixed performance of a *mie*, *omoiire* are meant to be performed according to the actor’s own devising.²⁸ Among other examples in *Kanjinchō*, *omoiire* are liberally indicated when Benkei reacts to Togashi’s request that he read the scroll, and also when Togashi tries to look over Benkei’s shoulder to examine the scroll (Hattori 25).²⁹

As one more kabuki acting technique to consider, there is a prominent example of *tachimawari* in *Kanjinchō*. *Tachimawari* are kabuki’s choreographed fight scenes, highlights of group acting involving highly-skilled acrobatic maneuvers with a tight degree of coordination among the performers. In the confrontation scene in *Ataka* between Yoshitsune’s followers and Togashi’s followers, the men advance on each other, group against group, with their respective leaders holding them back from disaster. This scene is one of *nō*’s most dramatic, with its multiple characters and high level of action. In *Kanjinchō*, the scene is played out similarly between Benkei and the retainers on the one side, and Togashi and his soldiers on the other. The two groups face each other center stage with their leaders in front. As Togashi’s side advances a step, Benkei’s side moves back a step. After a few such coordinated

²⁸ An actor may perform a given instance according to how his teacher or predecessor did it, but there is no exact expectation, whereas *mie* are passed down with a prescribed sequence of movements and final held pose.

²⁹ An *omoiire* might be performed by more than one character at the same time. Also, while usually indicated in scripts only with the single word *omoiire*, more direction might be given. An example encompassing both of these possibilities occurs during the scene containing both Yoshitsune’s gesture of forgiveness to Benkei (for the beating) and the four retainers’ verbal support of Benkei (expressed through the *watarizerifu* technique). There we find, “*Omoiire* by all showing despair.” (Hattori 36.)

movements, the retainers and soldiers move aside, and Benkei advances on Togashi, step by step, leaving the latter where he stood at the start of the confrontation. In keeping with its *nō* roots, this example of *tachimawari* from *Kanjinchō* is much more subdued than most kabuki *tachimawari* scenes. The steps forward or backward are slow, in unison, and without the individual spectacular acrobatics that typically characterize such scenes. However, the scene achieves a *matsubamemono* transformation of *Ataka*'s effects of tension and drama through a muted, but certain technique of kabuki production.

The above four areas of adaptation all lead to an increase in dramatic impact appropriate to kabuki. Most importantly, while the changes highlight the nobility of the character Benkei, they also show him as very human, evincing fear, panic, blind devotion, bravado, and joie-de-vivre. As a result, *Kanjinchō*'s Benkei is arguably kabuki's greatest role for an actor of lead male roles who is also a great dancer. Danjūrō VII was a highly versatile actor. The role allowed him to show his many skills, including dancing and acting in the Danjūrō *aragoto* style, a style meant to convey the strength, brashness, bombast, and ultimately good-guy nature of young save-the-day heroes.

Kanjinchō is one of the *aragoto* plays that Danjūrō VII included in the *Kabuki jūhachiban* ("The Eighteen Kabuki Plays"), the collection of plays he put together to define the legacy of his family line and represent its best. Fundamental to performing *aragoto* roles are the magnificent costumes and *kumadori* make-up (*kumadori* follows facial contours or highlights parts of the face with colored make-up, symbolizing aspects of a character's nature). Fig. 4 illustrates a style of *kumadori* for *aragoto* roles such as Benkei. The bold and exaggerated red and black lines seen in the print amplify the character/actor's special magnificence and grandeur. Since the time of Danjūrō I, who devised the earliest versions of *aragoto*-style make-up, actors playing Benkei have created his nature and presence on stage, in part, by enhancing his qualities of wild single-mindedness through facial make-up. Through the generations, actors have added their own interpretive mark on Benkei roles, including alterations to the make-up, but they always maintained the *aragoto* quality.³⁰ The same has been true for Benkei's costume, as well as the costumes for the play's other characters: in the Danjūrō VII productions, the four retainers accompanying Benkei and Yoshitsune were costumed in *karusan* (men's formal divided skirt [*hakama*] in the style of Portuguese pantaloons), and the barrier soldiers wore military outfits. Given the currents of Meiji Period theatre, however, Danjūrō IX costumed the four retainers in the standard *hakama* common to *nō* and the soldiers wore *kyōgen* costumes.³¹

Not only costuming, but in other ways, too, the role has evolved in relation to changing times through the interpretations of its greatest actors. Danjūrō IX revised some of the acting created by Danjūrō VII and passed his interpretation to his disciple Matsumoto Kōshirō VII (1870–1949). Kōshirō VII played the role around 1,800 times, giving it his own mark (fig. 5). In his introduction to a printed script of *Kanjinchō*, kabuki scholar Yamamoto Jirō quotes a Meiji view that, "Danjūrō VII's Benkei was a Benkei of valour; Danjūrō IX's Benkei was a Benkei of wisdom." (*Meisaku kabuki zenshū* 183.) Yamamoto points out that this evaluation is perhaps based in the fact that the earlier Danjūrō's portrayal was relatively full of *aragoto* elements, versus the greater *nō* influence in Danjūrō IX's

³⁰ The February 1956 cover of the magazine *Engetikai* (*The World of Kabuki*) shows a print of *Kanjinchō*'s Benkei in the "old" *aragoto*-style make-up (*Engetikai* cover) similar to what we see in fig. 4. Itō Nobuo illustrates the "old-style Benkei" make-up and four later make-up styles for Benkei (15–16) and further discusses Benkei styles in detail (97–103). Note that the make-up on the 20th-century actors in figs 2, 3, and 5 appears greatly reduced. The 19th-century image of Danjūrō IX in fig. 1 shows more make-up than in figs 2, 3, and 5, particularly on the sides of the face and chin. Even so, the make-up in fig. 1 appears subtle in comparison with fig. 4. These are not stage photos, and the marked differences may be attributable in part to the print artists or print conditions, but nevertheless, we can consider these images as indications or reflections of the changes begun in the Meiji Period regarding a more toned-down Benkei.

³¹ Toita (5) and Yamamoto Jirō (*Meisaku kabuki zenshū* 183) further discuss these costume differences.

portrayal, especially the more he performed the role.³² As with kabuki in general, interpretations associated with specific actors solidified over the course of the twentieth century into the expected ways to play the role, and one now refers to the Danjūrō (IX) or Kōshirō (VII) *kata* (acting patterns or sequences) in performing Benkei.³³ In spite of the fact that significant reinterpretations are now unlikely, the play is performed constantly, leading Mitsugorō IX to pun its name from *Ataka no seki* (the barrier at Ataka) into “Mataka no seki” (“not that barrier (at Ataka) again!”) (Bandō Mitsugorō 26).

While following the *nō* structure and text, and representing *nō* visually and aurally, from the audience point of view *Kanjinchō* is exciting for its essential kabuki-ness, having been thoroughly turned into a series of highlight moments in the kabuki fashion that showcase the star actors and their talents.³⁴ In fact, one reason for its significance and popularity is how packed it is with a variety of highlight scenes: scenes of visual excitement (*midokoro*; for example, Benkei’s dances), aural impressiveness (*kikidokoro*; as when Benkei reads the subscription list), and gestural meaning (*shidokoro*; as when Yoshitsune extends his hand to Benkei). Compared with plays that are focused primarily on dance (for example, *Musume Dōjōji* is a series of dance numbers, and plays derived from the *nō Shakkyō* focus on the lion dance), *Kanjinchō* was created as a dance-drama, a mix of dramatic highlights and demanding dance scenes, together with stirring instrumental interludes.

Performing Benkei

In conclusion, I will examine performances of Benkei by three actors and consider the differences in the portrayals. While playwrights (in collaboration with actors) and musicians create the opportunities, the actors are responsible for how an audience understands Benkei’s qualities. Comparisons of Benkei scenes, as observed in three recorded performances by Ichikawa Danjūrō XII (1946–2013; recorded in 1997), Matsumoto Kōshirō VII (recorded in 1943), and Matsumoto Kōshirō IX (b. 1942; recorded in 2009), are offered here to illustrate significant approaches.³⁵

In general, if we compare the performance of Kōshirō VII to that of Danjūrō XII, the latter’s delivery is slower, more measured, more chant-like, and his body movement more contained and stylized than that of Kōshirō. In terms of voice production, Danjūrō keeps a steady pace and pitch level more or less throughout, whether he is talking to Yoshitsune privately, intoning the non-existent official subscription list, or imitating tipsiness tempered by a wary watch on those who would harm his lord. Kōshirō, on the other hand, varies his voice in reaction to the different levels of tension in the situation, and gives a sense of the great differences between a private conversation and a public reading that puts everything at stake.

While Danjūrō keeps closer to a mask-like use of his face, in line with *matsubamemono* roots in *nō*, Kōshirō’s face registers reactions and emotions through a range of visible expression. Kōshirō’s large physical movements are varied in enacting states of readiness, adaption to crises, or the different ideas behind the mime-dances he performs. When Yoshitsune extends his hand in forgiveness to a miserable Benkei after the scene in which Benkei is forced to beat him, Benkei is overwhelmed with gratitude.

³² For example, Danjūrō IX lengthened Benkei’s dance for Togashi by incorporating the Kanze School *mai* (dance), thereby increasing the *nō* elements and atmosphere in *Kanjinchō*. (*Meisaku kabuki zenshū* 185.)

³³ There have been exceptions. In January 1964, Bandō Tsurunosuke performed Benkei under the direction of Takechi Tetsuji (1912–1988, known for his controversial Takechi Kabuki), who aimed for a pre-Danjūrō IX style of *Kanjinchō*. “Tsurunosuke played Benkei wearing a costume similar to the one that had been worn until 1868; he also introduced a number of rarely seen *kata*, which gave a welcome freshness to *kabuki*’s most frequently produced play. [Takechi also introduced some nontraditional casting of *kyōgen* actors and other kinds of entertainment professionals.] In Danjūrō’s eyes, Tsurunosuke and Takechi had sullied the play by their approach.” (Leiter 326.)

³⁴ As many scholars have pointed out (for example, see Yokomichi, “Matsubamemono ni tsuite” 29), *Ataka* is unusual as a *nō* in having several dramatic high points of its own, and it thus provided a good basis for *Kanjinchō*’s excitement.

³⁵ Please see the bibliography for information on these recordings. Access to them will make this discussion more useful, but I have tried to be as clear as possible with regard to my overall points on the different interpretations.

The Kōshirō reaction is explosive. We feel the shock and power that the unexpected magnitude of Yoshitsune's gesture has on Benkei, as well as the wild, unpremeditated nature that defined Benkei from his first legendary encounter with Yoshitsune. We forget everything else for a minute and focus in on Benkei and Yoshitsune's bond in a scene that feels bracketed within the terrible circumstances. On the other hand, while Danjūrō's Benkei conveys astonishment and gratitude, he also holds himself more carefully in check, demonstrating extreme guardedness. For this Benkei, current victory is foremost, and he is ever-vigilant of the looming danger. He also gives the impression of being altogether aware and weighted down by the longer doomed trajectory for his party. The eventual demise of the group seems to pervade the mood in a way not experienced through Kōshirō's interpretation. The impact of the two approaches is remarkably different.

If we compare the two performances overall, Kōshirō's wider range of physical movement and speech registers has the effect of highlighting Benkei's humanity, calling up great empathy from us, the audience. For Danjūrō, strength in form is given precedence over Kōshirō's more expressive and varied gestural acting, and the effect is to foreground the social values Benkei upholds and call up a more abstract or symbolic character. Kōshirō's grandson, Kōshirō IX, is overall less vigorous and more stylized in his portrayal than his grandfather, and somewhat closer to Danjūrō XII in his manner of movement and use of facial expression. Like Danjūrō, he offers a more formal approach in movement and vocal delivery. In relation to the Danjūrō style, Kōshirō VII's Benkei lives and breathes as a human being pushing at the limits of an impossible situation, rather than as a superhero for whom limits don't exist. As consummate artists, each of these actors engages us, but they show us different versions of Benkei founded on different ideas of what must be going on in Benkei's mind and how they imagine he would turn those thoughts into action.

Benkei performs for sympathy. There is never a question of convincing Togashi and his soldiers that the party of men are real mountain priests; the game is up, and the only hope is one more round. Thus, everything that Benkei does and says is truly on the level of performance. His performance must affect Togashi to the extent that Togashi is willing to sacrifice his own life (by letting the fake priests go) out of admiration for Benkei's supreme adherence to the principle of loyalty and his unquestioned devotion to his superior.

Above all, *Kanjinchō* is an opportunity for great acting, which is always kabuki's *raison d'être*, and the focus on loyalty is the vehicle for both Benkei's success and theatrical achievement. To accomplish their goals, Benkei and the actor portraying him must act and dance, express deep emotion, dissemble while being true, and show both grace and power. Along with Togashi, the audience, too, must be convinced and carried by Benkei's performance, whether through the rhythms of Danjūrō's acting or the finely-tuned and varied responses of Kōshirō's style. Both have their power, and both have contributed to the lasting fascination, appreciation, and love for this play.

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