

ABSTRACT

The habilitation dissertation “*The Okuni sōshi manuscripts as testimony of a point of fracture*” by Ivan Rumánek identifies a “point of fracture” in the development of classical Japanese theatre, which is the transition from *nō* to kabuki. *Nō* was the classical theatrical genre while kabuki was yet to appear as a novel theatrical genre in early 1600s. The latter entered an ambience in which the established form was *nōgaku* – the comprehensive term for the lyrical *nō* drama and its co-genre, the farcical *kyōgen*. The manuscripts called *Okuni sōshi* are the only surviving material dating from a period in any way near the historical performances of the female dancer Izumo no Okuni. Her productions are generally accepted as the starting point for kabuki which represented a new current in the Japanese theatre. Okuni’s early form of kabuki is termed *Okuni kabuki*. The study analyses *Okuni sōshi*, both its textual and pictorial aspects and demonstrates how the point of fracture between *nō*(*gaku*) and kabuki can be observed within the texts and in the images.

The dissertation concretely demonstrates that one of the texts from the *Okuni kabuki* group, the “Kyōdai play” in the manuscript *Kuni Jo-kabuki Ekotoba*, representing the earliest extant kabuki libretto, opens with the traditional *nō* structure of *shōdan* parts, after which, at one point, it turns into something new – the early kabuki. This can be viewed as the real point of fracture between *nō* and kabuki. The second *Okuni sōshi* text called *Kabuki no Saushi* reflects to a great extent the Kyōdai libretto with various modifications which, the author argues, might partly be due to the different character of the *Kabuki no Saushi* – rather than a libretto, it is a prose –perhaps even a story-telling text- depicting early kabuki performances.

Furthermore, the study tries to identify figures of the kabuki skits, depicted in the texts and pictures, with what we know about the set-up of Okuni’s actor troupe. It also addresses the dilemma between Okuni-the-actress and Okuni-the-kabuki-figure, reflected also in the similar duality of Okuni’s lover Nagoya Sanza. Having a ghost of a dead person (*revenant*) appear on the stage, in the best of the tradition of *mugen nō* (dreams and specters plays), and uniting this apparition with humour, resulted in a novel and seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of “*mugen* humour” which the study regards as epitomy of a unique combination of novelty and traditionality in early kabuki.