

土師権左衛門

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Actor Ichikawa Kodanji IV as Naosuke Gonbei

Utagawa Kunisada (Utagawa Toyokuni III)

Not on display

Title/Description: Actor Ichikawa Kodanji IV as Naosuke Gonbei

Artist/Maker: Utagawa Kunisada (Utagawa Toyokuni III) (Artist)

Born: 1854 - 1854 8/1854

Object Type: Graphics

Materials: Ink, Paper

Technique: Woodcut

Measurements: Support and imageh.360 x w. 245 mm

Inscription: Censor's seal

Accession Number: 41451

Historic Period: Edo period (AD 1600-1868)

Production Place: Asia, East Asia, Japan

School/Style: Utagawa School

Catering to the public's insatiable demand for actor prints, publishers in Edo (present-day Tokyo) and Osaka issued thousands of designs in connection with each new kabuki production. Kabuki is an actor-centred theatre, and these prints were instrumental in promoting the actor's celebrity status. Kabuki actors were the erotic heroes of Edo's population of merchants, artisans and servants. Dedicated fans would spend the whole day at the kabuki theatre enjoying a full programme of integrated music, dance and drama.

Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865) and his publisher Izutsuya Shōkichi, issued this coloured woodblock print to publicise a kabuki-theatre production starring actors Ichikawa Kodanji IV as Naosuke Gonbei and Arashi Rikan III as the Packhorse Driver (Mago) Dōhachi. The central sheet (missing from the collection) depicts actor Bandō Shūka I performing the female role of Hitomaru Oroku. [1] The scene is set beside an embankment and involves a scuffle between Mago Dōhachi and Naosuke Gonbei over a drawstring pouch. Kunisada has captured a frozen moment of heightened drama, when all three actors simultaneously pause to strike a choreographed pose (J. *mie*).

Born in Edo, Ichikawa Kodanji IV (1812-1866) made his first stage appearance aged 9 years old and

became a pupil of the great Ichikawa Danjūrō VII (Ichikawa Ebizō V) at 17. He received the title Ichikawa Kodanji IV in 1844. Kodanji IV was famous for his quick costume changes (J. *hayagawari*), and later found success developing and performing the lead roles in Kawatake Mokuami's darkly realistic domestic dramas (J. *kizewamono*). [2]

In the role of Naosuke Gonbei, Kodanji is stood next to a wooden signpost with both hands clasped behind his back. His upper body is rotated 180 degrees to the right so that it is possible to see the full width of the actor's back, above front-facing feet, knees and thighs. Kunisada enlarges the bulk of the actor by twisting the actor's body into an exaggerated and impossible pose.

Hunched over, Kodanji's black clothing and *tenugui* cloth frame the actor's face. A sword is tucked into his belt, signifying that he is performing the role of a low-ranking samurai. The oversized, ceremonial polearm lying at his feet finds a use when a scuffle erupts between Mago Dōhachi and Naosuke Gonbei.

The scene is from a play titled *Azuma kudari gojūsan tsugi* (五十三番), which roughly translates as 'Fifty-three Stations to the Eastern Provinces'. This is a reference to the Tōkaidō or Eastern Coastal Road, which connected the cities of Kyoto in the west and Edo in the east. Azuma was equated with Edo. The wooden signpost in the print reveals that the drama is set by the Ōi River 大井川 in Shizuoka prefecture.

The play was performed at the Kowarazaki Theatre from the 26th day of the 7th lunar month of 1854 (Kaei 7). [3] The date seal on the print indicates government-appointed censors approved the design in the 8th lunar month of 1854 (8th month, Tiger year). Text on the print boasts that the kabuki actors are performing to a packed house (*ōiri kanō* 大入り). The play was already attracting large audiences when this print was issued.

Artists made kabuki actors identifiable by using an economy of line to capture the star's facial features, or 'likeness' (J. *nigao*). Kodanji's *nigao* shows the actor with a long, oval face, a rounded chin and a crease beneath his lower lip. The actor has straight eyebrows that tilt upwards at the sides of the face. The eyebrows are animated by two circular marks that suggest a bulging brow. Kodanji's eyes are shown with a single eyelid crease and sometimes with a crease beneath each eye. The actor's long, slightly hooked nose has a pointed tip, and his downward curving lips are shown to have a small, well-defined bow. [4]

The viewer can enjoy the subtle colour variation of water, horizon and sky that results from gradation printing (J. *bokashi-zuri*). The jet-black of the actor's clothing may have been produced by using a thickened ink or over-printing. These eye-catching techniques made the print more desirable to potential customers.

It is possible to identify the title of the play from the combination of date seal and actor's *nigao*. Fortunately, kabuki performances are well documented by woodblock-printed playbills (J. *banzuke*) that have been digitally archived. These can be used to confirm the identity of actors, and reveal information relating to a play's title, full cast, date, and theatre that staged the production. [5]

An identical complete triptych can be found at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (object number: 11.44151a-c). [6]

[1] The actors in this print were identified by Kurahashi Masae for Ritsumeikan University's Art Research Centre Ukiyo-e Database, in partnership with The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2006-2008).

[2] Samuel L. Leiter, ed., *New Kabuki Encyclopedia: A Revised Adaption of 'Kabuki Jiten'* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 194.

[3] A large single sheet playbill (J. *tsuji banzuke*) for this production is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (object number: 11.28070), and can be viewed at:

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/225480> [accessed 10 May 2020]

[4] The *nigao* of Ichikawa Kodanji is pictured in Tsubouchi Hakase Kinen Engeki Hakubutsukan, Waseda Daigaku, ed., *Yakusha-e kenkyū shiryō 1, Zōho kokon haiyū nigao taizen, Engeki hakubutsukan yakusha-e kenkyūkai hen* (Tokyo: Tsubouchi Hakase Kinen Engeki Hakubutsukan, Waseda Daigaku, 1998), no. 51, p. 140.

[5] Picture book playbill, Art Research Center Collection, Ritsumeikan University, object number: arcBK03-0048-06.

<https://www.dh-jac.net/db1/ban/results-thum.php?f1=arcBK03-0048-06&f46=1&enter=portal>

[accessed 7 May 2020]

[6] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, object number: 11.44151a-c.

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/486657/actors-ichikawa-kodanji-iv-as-naosuke-gonbei-r-bando-shu?jsessionid=C2472230E9B55526877970230DA0AFAB?ctx=4967522f-eff4-4f22-b268-a0c71acbd200&idx=0> [accessed 6 May 2020]

Further Reading

Samuel L. Leiter, ed., *New Kabuki Encyclopedia: A Revised Adaption of 'Kabuki Jiten'* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1997)

Tsubouchi Hakase Kinen Engeki Hakubutsukan, Waseda Daigaku, ed., *Yakusha-e kenkyū shiryō 1, Zōho kokon haiyū nigao taizen, Engeki hakubutsukan yakusha-e kenkyūkai hen* (Tokyo: Tsubouchi Hakase Kinen Engeki Hakubutsukan, Waseda Daigaku, 1998)

Provenance

Bequest of Professor Frank Thistlethwaite. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 2003.
