

Chikamatsu
monezamon's play,
sonezaki shinjuu
essay



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Chikamatsu Monezamon is Japan's most noted playwright, who while being a prolific writer, also pioneered kabuki theatre. The first of Chikamatsu's shinjuu or love-suicide plays, *Sonezaki Shinjuu* (The Love-Suicides at Sonezaki) focuses on the love of protagonists Tokubei, a 25-year-old soy shop worker, and Ohatsu, a 19-year-old courtesan, and eventual suicides as a result of the villainous Kueheji (Chikamatsu 39). While not his most famous work, it is upheld as a classic example of a shinjuu play and any designer wishing to costume for Ohatsu would need to familiarize himself with the characteristics of this particular genre and the traditional garb of an onnagata actor.

Additionally, one must consider the restrictions placed on kabuki costumes during the Edo era with their effects on color and pattern and the specific requirements for Ohatsu's costume as detailed in the script. Kabuki is most well-known for historical and dance plays involving characters of the privileged, upper class and beyond – nobles, samurais, gods – with the elaborate costumes needed to denote their social class. Shinjuu plays however belong to the third category of kabuki plays, *sawemono*, which deals exclusively with domestic and every-day characters. *Sawemono* characters such as Ohatsu and Tokubei are outcasts from society and remain so throughout the play (Grestle 12). This means that unlike the rich costumes characteristically of the historical plays, the protagonists of love-suicide stories would dress in the style of the day (Cavaye 80) with simpler costumes (Corts); expressed through fewer layers in the kimono (Kuritz 112). Additionally, a shinjuu play is composed of only one *dan* (an act) and three

maki (a scene) and thus does not take up the traditional twenty-four hours called for by kabuki performances (Grestle 114).

Andrew Grestle summarizes this in saying “ they are known for being a single, complete unit which maintains an even tone throughout the performance” (114). For a designer, this means there are at most three opportunities between scenes for costume changes and the number of costumes should be carefully considered as to not disrupt the “ even tone” of the performance. A final aspect of shinjuu plays which is universal throughout kabuki theatre is that of costume changes. Changes can occur onstage through the aid of a kouken (stage-hand) using one of two techniques - hikinuku or bukkaeri (Kuritz 113; Fig. 1). With these techniques the kouken will use remove the currently visible costume by pulling on a series of small threads, exposing the next costume underneath.

In order to affect these techniques, a designer must layer all costume changes on top of another and have them sewn together with basting thread (Japan Arts Council). Fig. 1. Shows use of the hikinuku technique in a performance of the play, Sagi Mumsume (HashizoTV).

This necessitates that all costumes for Ohatsu must already be worn by the actor at the start of the performance; further requiring a costume designer to consider the bulk and weight of the fabric and again the number of costumes for the character overall. One of the most basic factors a designer must consider is that Ohatsu, a female role, would traditionally be played by a male (Japan National Tourism Organization) - such male actors and their roles are referred to as an onnagata (Kuritz 101). To be specific, within the

onnagata category Ohatsu belongs to the mise-jjoro class – a term for low-level, common courtesans (Gerstle 167). All onnagata have a standard dress (Fig.

2) – a kimono, a corresponding belt (obi), a wig (katsura), and a fan (ougi) – (Spencer). Fig. 2. A sketch of a traditional onnagata costume (Japan National Tourism Organization). Fig 3.

An onnagata in a multi-layer kimono with fan (Onnagata in costume). A kimono is a robe-like wrap which runs from the shoulders to the floor (Mezur 143). It should cover the entire body and have wide, loose fitting sleeves which can also denote age – the younger the character, the more loosely fitted the sleeves become (Cavaye 80). This should be taken into consideration with Ohatsu's age of nineteen and whether the designer wishes her to be portrayed as innocent and young or mature and old. On the sleeves of a kimono are geometric patterns and when wrapped there should be two body panels visible of the same design (Mezur 143). Historically, the crest or a symbol of the acting troupe could also be used as a subtle pattern (Spencer).

Furthermore, kimonos all have differing amounts of layers (Fig. 3) in which each layer of fabric would be attached to the main outer garment so only the hem shows (Spencer). Specifically, for mise-jjoro characters, one of these layers or the lining of the kimono should be red to denote a courtesan (Spencer). Fig. 4.

Diagram of the front and back of a kimono (Kimono Diagram). The katsura is also a very specific ornamentation. Each wig consists of individual strands of <https://assignbuster.com/chikamatsu-monezamons-play-sonezaki-shinjuu-essay/>

hair attached to a copper base which has to be redressed before each performance less it loses its form (Cavaye 81). It may be further adorned with flowers and ribbons and underneath should be placed a habutae – a type of cap used to contain an actor's own hair (Spencer). As for the obi, it functions only as a decorative belt for the kimono and itself must be held together with stiff interface material and fasteners (Marshall 104). During the Edo era, a female obi, such as what Ohatsu would wear, was standardized at the dimensions of 360 cm by 26.

8 cm (Wiltshire 89) and became well-known for its broad width. There is also a specific knot idiosyncratic of onnagata characters called the darari-musubi (Fig. 5; Fig. 6) which is characterized by its length and two tails (Yamanaka 38-39).

Fig. 5. Drawing of the traditional darari-musubi knot for tying a Japanese obi (Yamanaka 38). Fig. 6. Picture of two women in kimonos with the dararai-musubi knot shown from the back (“Dararai obi”).

As previously stated, onnagata roles were played by males; although there was a push for females on the stage once Japan was occupied by the United States in the 19th century this never gained prominence. This gender issue makes the kimono even more important to a costumer if the actor for Ohatsu is casted per tradition. As it is a garment worn by males, females, and children the amorphous rope makes the actor's true sex less apparent (Mezur 142). In order to make actors even more asexual, padding is placed under the kimono at the midriff to eliminate any curves or anomalies in an actor's figure (143). The goal should be to make the kimono hang straight up

and down reflecting Ruth Shaver's analyze that " Japanese have always looked at the straight figure as the epitome of beauty" (143).

The padding has a practical benefit as well since it keeps the obi from riding up from the hips (143). Additionally, the way a designer chooses the kimono to be wrapped is indicative of gender. For example, actors playing young males must have their kimono's wrapped in manner so there is a deep neckline in the front and back of the robe. For onnagata roles, the kimono must be wrapped very tightly around the legs without any loss fabric (143).

Like the sumptuary laws of Elizabethan theatre, the Edo era government placed restrictions on what colors and cloth actors could wear when portraying nobility (Corts). These restrictions soon became an integral part of kabuki clothing and were maintained passed the law's reversal. Being denied the use of gold and silk cloth, social position and characterization was expressed in costumes primarily through designs printed on the outer kimono (Spencer). Swirling, intricate geometric designs were for the upper class, sword related motifs for the warrior males, and sensuous designs were used for courtesans like Ohatsu.

This is not to say that color and cloth are not a factor in kabuki costumes. Purple was used to symbolize nobility, blue and black suggest villainy, death, and evil intentions, green shows the supernatural, and red was the overall positive color which could demonstrate passion, heroism, and righteousness (Hibi). As such, a costumer should pay close attention to the sentiments and dialogue between Ohatsu and Tokubei as they transition from blissful love to death so as not to choose an inappropriate color scheme. This has been

general information for the how the theatre form and type of character which Ohatsu belongs to informs the designer; however there are specific aspects of her costuming stated in the script unique to the role. In the first scene as translated by David Keene, the narrator states " bitter tears soak her handkerchief" (Chikamatsu 41).

In this instance, Chikamatsu most likely intended a tenegui to be used by Ohatsu which is a handcloth that at times can double as a head scarf - a possible route for the designer (Spencer). The narrator further states that " Ohatsu rushes barefoot to them" and in the Keene translation, Keene himself adds the footnote that " in her agitation she fails to slip on her geta" (Chikamatsu 46) - a geta being a traditional form of Japanese footwear which resembles a sandal and are made of wood (Spencer). Next in the second scene, the narrator describes how Ohatsu " hides him [Tokubei] under the train of her mantle" (Chikamatsu 48). This mantle could simply be a reference to her kimono or an indication that the character should be wearing an additional rope over top of the garment, in either case, the costumer must pay particular attention that Ohatsu's costume is large enough to for the actor of Tokubei to be hidden within it. There is also a reference to an ougi which solidifies the fact that the character should be carrying one when the narrator describes how " Ohatsu in desperation attaches her fan to a palm-leaf broom and tries to fan the light out" (51). The most telling costuming reference however occurs when Ohatsu leaves the brothel to commit suicide with Tokubei.

At this point the narrator says " Ohatsu is dressed for death, a black cloak dark as the ways of love thrown over kimono of spotless white" (51) which <https://assignbuster.com/chikamatsu-monezamons-play-sonezaki-shinjuu-essay/>

provides a clear indication to the color and outer garments necessary in the scene. It should be further mentioned that in the third scene Ohatsu “removes her tear-stained outer robe” (55). The description “tear-stained” could prompt a designer to show a change in the physical state of the “black cloak” from the previous scene. Meanwhile, the fact that Ohatsu is removing an article of clothing during the scene requires the costumer to prepare for the before mentioned, kikinuku technique. During the dress rehearsals called the so-keiko (Grestle 23), the costumer should pay close attention to ensure that these script requirements have been met and that the costumes do not hamper the necessary actions, something best ensured by consulting the director about blocking before costume construction.

Kabuki theatre is an intensely visual and emotionally rich theatre form, known for elaborate and beautiful costumes. To then properly costume for a kabuki play, particularly for Chikamatsu's character Ohatsu, a designer must be aware of the characteristics of the shinjuu genre, an onnagata's traditional clothing, the restrictions placed on kabuki costumes with their impact on color and pattern, and requirements of the script. While Sonazaki Shinjuu, is relatively short, a large range of emotions are covered from despair to happiness in death and if a designer takes the above factors into consideration, the garments themselves might even embody this depth.