Chinese Drama Essay, Research Paper

Chinese Drama-

The classical Chinese theater developed during the Yuan dynasty.

Springing from story cycles made familiar by professional storytellers, Yuan plays relied for their appeal on romantic or sentimental plots. During the Ming dynasty the drama utilized the plots of popular novels. Until the 19th century Chinese drama was not spoken; it was a mixture of music and declamation. It is frequently infused with sadness, Often involving the deaths of women Chinese drama was written for a popular audience, and dramatic performances took place in virtually every village.

In the West, Chinese drama has traditionally been regarded as entertainment rather than a serious art form. In Chinese drama no attempt is made at realism, props and scenery are symbolic (for instance, a flag represents an army) the property man is present on stage; characters at times directly address the audience. Often only parts of plays are performed, or scenes are performed in random sequence.

Among the masterpieces of Chinese drama are

The Injustice Suffered by Tou F – Kuan Han-hsaing,

The Western Chamber by Wang Shi-fu,

The Orphan of the House of Chao- Chi Chun-hsaing

(all 12through 15th cent.)

The Peony Pavilion by Tang Hsien-tsu (16th cent.)

The Palace of Long Life by Hung Sheng (17th cent.)

Japanese Drama-

Rakugo is a form of comical storytelling where a Rakugoka creates an imaginary drama though narration and skillful use of articulation and facial expression to show various characters. It uses no scenery or props, except a tenugui (small towel) and a sensu (fan). With a fan, the performers represent objects such as a pipe, chopsticks, spears, sword, and hammers. Tenugui are used to represent books or a wallet.

The word Rakugo is made up of two characters, raku meaning drop or fall and go meaning word Although there are some exceptions, Rakugo stories and with an ochi, or punchline.

The history of storytelling can be traced back to the 1500 s, a period where the Japan was in a feudal state with warring groups invading and betraying each other. The warriors were wise not to sleep deeply or go to sleep to early, due to their fears of assassins. Entertainers called otogishu were hired to keep there master awake by amusing him with episodes and stories of famous warlords. By the early 17th century, Japan was in peace under Tokugawa Shoguns, when the first collection of stories told by the otogishnu, Kigenyokishu, was published and gained popularity.

Professional Entertainers began to appear in the 1670 s when street entertainers gained the town people s interest. Unlike the ongishnu who preformed privately, Street performers performed on street corners, drawing crowd and collecting money before telling the climax of the story. After 40 years, the street entertainers lost their popularity.

An interest in word play and comedy then grew again, and storytellers gradually appeared. Skilled amateur storytellers having jobs such as artisans and doctors were invited to merchant s private banquets to perform. As these amateur storytellers gained popularity, professional storytellers and the first permanent Rakugo Theater opened.

Bunraku is the name commonly used for ningyo-joruri, literally puppets and storytelling. This simple name not only describes a puppet performance, but also alludes to its predecessor. There was a long tradition of travelling storytellers who used biwa as their accompaniment. There were also travelling puppeteers. When these two art forms were joined is not exactly clear, but the beginning of what is now called Bunraku was 1684, when Takemoto Gidayu set up his own theater in Osaka.

Takemoto Gidayu began his career as a narrator under some of the most acclaimed masters of the period in Kyoto. He soon became famous in his own right, and was known for intimite story telling that spoke the hearts of the characters. In 1684 he decided to branch out and form his own theater, and was helped in his effort by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, the greatest playwright in Japanese history, and Takeda Izumo, a famous theater owner and manager.

Until this time, Chikamatu Monzaemon’s work had mostly been in the Kabuki theater, working with Sakata Tojuro, the actor who created the wagoto, or soft style for which Kansai Kabuki became known. Drawn to Bunraku by Gidayu, Chikamatsu worked as a bridge between old-style joruri and Bunraku. While often keeping much of the fantasy of older tales, Chikamatsu’s works are distinct for adding human elements. His drama’s usually revolved around the confucian concepts of the importance of loyalty (to one’s feudal lord, family, etc.) over personal feelings and the tragedy that arises when one blindly follows the precepts.

Chikamatsu’s other great accomplishment was the creation of sewamono , or plays about the merchant class. Greatly received in Osaka, a commercial town, a majority of these sewamono were about shinju, or love suicides. By trying the revolutionary idea of taking a recent event, that of the death of a courtesan and her lover, and dramatizing it into the play Sonezaki Shinju, Chikamatsu captured the imagination of the city. The play spawned not only copies, but influenced others to actually commit double suicide in the hope that their love would live on forever. In contrast to the historical plays mentioned above, here the conflict arose from the characters choosing personal feelings over loyalty.

The death of Chikamatsu and Ki brought the end of an era, but was also the beginning of the golden age of Bunraku. The situation was such that it led one writer to comment that it was like there was no Kabuki. Though this observation must be taken with a grain of salt (Osaka at the time had three thriving Kabuki theaters but only two Bunraku theaters), it shows that the publics interest was captured more by Bunraku, thus indicating that it was the puppet theater in which the bulk of creativity and freshness was concentrated.

This golden period reached its height in the 1740’s. There had been a trend since the death of Chikamatsu and Ki no Kaion to have plays written by a group of playwrights. At the beginning of this period, the 1730’s, these groups were led by Namiki Sosuke at the Toyotake-za and Bun Kodo at the Takemoto-za. In 1745, though, Namiki Sosuke moved to the Takemoto-za and along with Takeda Izumo and Miyoshi Shoroku, they produced what are considered to be the three greatest classics in both Bunraku and Kabuki: Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami, Yoshitsune Sembonzakura and Kanadehon Chushingura, along with a number of plays still performed regularly today. What is Kabuki?

“Kabuki” is a type of acting based on the arts of singing and dancing. It will thus be seen that Kabuki is not acting, pure and simple; it is basically different from Western drama. In Kabuki the play, singing and dancing, occurs during the course of the development of a story characterized by dramatic elements, and the whole performance is executed as a highly refined art. To be exact the Kabuki may be described as a play more like a revue than a drama, in the European sense – a play in which a classical story is enlivened with spectacular scenes.

The Kabuki is a classical play for the masses and rich in artistic qualities. It naturally follows that the Kabuki is presented in large theatres, and not, as with modern plays of the West, in a small theatre intended to serve the sole purpose of art for its own sake.

A spectator of a Kabuki play should forget modern common sense, scientific analysis, logical reasoning, and rational examination – all for the nonce. One might as well climb a tree in quest of fish as to expect logic and rationality in a Kabuki play. In this sense the Kabuki is decidedly not to be classed with modern drama, which is entirely based on the story structure, but with music, dancing, painting, and sculpture of the classical type. The life of the present-day Japanese is only scantily represented in a Kabuki play.

The Kabuki was first created by an actress by the name of Okuni who lived in Izumo about four centuries ago. In its original form the Kabuki was not a play, but a type of primitive dance called Nenbutu Odori, or “prayer dance.”

Shortly afterward, male actors monopolized the drama, and features of the Noh, a classical play of music and dance, were incorporated into the Kabuki. The present stage of development has been attained through the efforts of male players alone. The earliest period of the Kabuki, when it consisted of dancing only by female players, was of short duration. After the cast came to be made up entirely by male players, the Kabuki play was designed to tell a story and it was enriched in its contents. The foundation of the present-day Kabuki was thus laid in those early days.

Because of the all-male cast the best-looking actors naturally come to take the roles of female characters. Even today there are no actresses in a Kabuki play and it remains untouched by modernism. Male players, who are far superior to the actresses of present-day Japan, take all parts.