

Madame Hanako (1868-1945):

The geisha who became an actress on the early 20th century European stage

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要 約

20世紀初頭、ヨーロッパ18カ国と米国を巡演して大人気を博し、彫刻家ロダンのモデルともなった日本女優マダム・ハナコこと太田花子の一座の実態は、あまり明らかにされていない。本稿においては、20年もの長きに渡って公演を打ち続け、ヨーロッパやロシアの芸術家にも影響を与えた花子の活動を紹介したい。

花子こと太田ひさは、1868年、愛知県の農家の長女として生まれた。家庭の事情から養女に出されるが、のち養父が姿を消してしまったため、生活に困った養母によって、旅芝居の一座に子役として貸し出され、やがて芸者となる。2度の結婚に破れ、生きる道に困った花子を選んだのが、コペンハーゲンで開かれる博覧会に芸人として参加することであった。1902年、花子が34歳の時のことである。

この博覧会終了後、花子はドイツ人の興業師に、ロンドン在住の芸人を集めた集団に女優として参加しないかと誘われ、その一座に加わる。公演の成功に自信を持った花子たちは、やがて英国に渡る。そして1905年、ロンドンのサヴォイ劇場で公演中、川上音二郎・貞奴一座（貞奴も花子と同じ元芸者で特にパリで大成功をおさめた）をヨーロッパ演劇界に紹介した女性興行師ロイ・フラーに出会う。当時『The Hara-Kiri』という景清ものの芝居で阿古屋役を演じていた花子に注目したフラーは、彼女を座長にすることを条件に、一座の売出しを引き受ける。こうして「花子一座」が誕生し、フラーのプロモーションの下に、ヨーロッパ中を打って廻ることになった。

花子一座が演じたのは、『The Hara-Kiri』の他『A Geisha's Revenge』という仇討物や『A Martyr』という心中物、舞踊を中心とした『Hidari Jingorō's Kyo-doll』などであった。『The Hara-Kiri』という芝居の主役は景清であり、男性が中心の舞台になっていた。これが、フラーが一座の売出しを引き受けてから、様子を変える。以降の舞台はすべて女性—花子—が中心となったのである。このフラーのねらいは当たった。花子が主役になって以降、一座の舞台は大ヒットするのである。

花子一座の興行で最も話題を呼んだのは、芝居中の花子の自害シーンであった。そのシーンに感銘を受けたロダンは、彼女をモデルにして53点もの作品を生み出している。そうした死の場面を売りにした悲劇のみならず、やがてフラーが書いた『Otake』という喜劇も花子一座の重要なレパートリーとなる。『Otake』は、おたけという名前の女中が、女主人の留守中に彼女の衣装や化粧道具を勝手に使って女主人に成りすます芝居である。さらに、ロンドンで知り合った生田葵山による、皿屋敷を下敷きにした悲劇『Ki-Musume』も、のち花子一座の主要レパートリーとなった。1914年、ロンドンのアンパサダーズ劇場でロングランとなったのも、この2作品『Otake』『Ki-Musume』である。その大成功によって、花子は一躍英国の著名俳優の仲間入りをし、以降、アンパサダーズ劇場の支配人チャールズ・コ克蘭をエージェントとし、まさに「国際女優・マダム花子」として、自らの一座以外の舞台でも活躍するようになるのである。

そのようにヨーロッパの演劇界で大成功をおさめた花子であったが、彼女の活躍に対して日本演劇界は冷やかであった。新劇の演出家、小山内薫がその代表的な例である。1913年、演劇研究のためロシアを訪れた時、小山内はモスクワ芸術座の著名演出家スタニスラフスキーから年越しパーティーに招待された。その場で花子について聞かれた小山内は（花子のことを知っていたにもかかわらず）、そんな名は聞いたこともないと答える。もし小山内がスタニスラフスキーになぜ花子に興味があるのか尋ねれば、当時のヨーロッパやロシアの演劇界の傾向をつぶさに理解することができたであろう。しかし、小山内は「元芸者」である花子を誇ることができなかったのである。

そのような日本演劇人の反応をよそに、ヨーロッパでの花子の人気は高まっていき、第一次世界大戦時には、ロンドンに避難していた同盟国の一流俳優たちと共演するようになる。『Odds and Ends』というレビューではイギリス水兵の役を演じ、観客に大いに愛された。傷病兵のためのチャリティー公演などにも積極的に参加し、『The Masque of War and Peace』という戦争の状況を描いた芝居ではその名も「日本」という役で、当代一流の女優たちと共演している。花子は日本演劇を世界に知らしめただけでなく、日本自体を代表するような役目をも立派に果たしたといえよう。

本 文

Despite winning huge popularity in the West in the early 20th century, the actress and ex-geisha Hanako and her company have never been well known in Japan. The fact that Hanako was able to captivate a substantial European audience performing Japanese drama over a period of nearly twenty years

(1902-21) makes her an important figure in the introduction of Japanese theatre to the West. She also influenced famous Western and Russian artists. In his book *Nihon no sakka* (Japanese novelists) Donald Keene expressed his surprise about Japanese drama scholars' ignorance of

Hanako.¹ Therefore in this paper, I am going to clarify her achievements.

1. Hanako's background

According to the book *Rodin to Hanako*, written by Sawada Suketarō, Hanako, whose real name was Ohta Hisa, was born in Aichi prefecture in Japan on the 15th of April 1868.² Her personal history is quite complicated. Although her parents were still living and well-off, they gave Hanako away for adoption. Unfortunately, her foster father then ran away because of debts, and she had to work as a child actor in several touring companies of female kabuki actors.

Eventually Hanako left the touring companies and, at the age of sixteen, became a geisha when her foster mother sold her. The experience of being a geisha is important, as it means that Hanako must have learnt several Japanese musical instruments such as the shamisen, in addition to traditional Japanese dance and *gidayū* chanting. These skills are the same as the fundamental training for professional kabuki actors and were what helped Hanako to perform abroad.

Several years later Hanako was released from her contract as a geisha by her marriage to a building contractor. However, she still felt unfulfilled and described her married life as follows:

'My life will carry on like this, won't it? I will spend my whole life with a husband who is twenty years older than I without any love, won't I? This man has redeemed my body but he cannot redeem my soul. I am unsatisfied. I miss something.' This kind of thought arose in my mind day and night.³

Hanako's life experiences were not unusual for the time, and many women who were living similar lives to Hanako might have nursed the same thoughts. However, what was unusual was that Hanako did not suffer for long. She fell in love with the son of a pawnbroker and divorced the building contractor to marry him. This kind of affair, in which a married woman left her husband for a new man, was rare in this period.

However, Hanako was then deserted by the pawnbroker's son and had to seek a means of supporting herself. If she had been a typical Japanese woman of those days, she would have simply become a geisha again.

However, she chose something different and joined a group which was going to take part

in a cultural exhibition in Copenhagen. In her autobiographical essay 'Geisha de yōkō shi joyū de kaeru made no nijū nen' (The twenty years when I left Japan as a geisha and returned as an actress) Hanako relates:

If I had not met the pawnbroker's son at that time, I would never have known Europe nor how large the world was. I may have ended my life as a shamisen player in the countryside with a dark, lonely and warped mind, without realizing the fact that one can start an enterprise admirably just through one's own effort and can also obtain wealth and honour.⁴

Thus Hanako, at least in retrospect, always tried to live positively despite suffering all sorts of misfortunes. This vitality may have lain at the heart of her attractiveness and performance skills.

2. The blossoming of Hanako's acting career

Hanako's performing career started, in effect, in 1902, when she went to Copenhagen to participate in a cultural exhibition with some other Japanese entertainers. At first, Hanako performed mainly Japanese dances alongside two other geishas.

Afterwards, she was asked to join another company of Japanese performers by a German producer and made her debut as an actress in Dusseldorf. The company went on to perform all over Germany. When their contract expired in 1904, the members of the company went to Britain and Loie Fuller (1862-1928), a famous producer, offered them a contract.

Fuller had earlier introduced Kawakami Otojirō and Sadayakko's company to the entertainment world in Europe. If Hanako had not met Fuller, her success might not have been possible. What is noteworthy is that Fuller promoted Hanako to a central position. Why did Fuller decide to make Hanako the star?

Firstly, she must have remembered the great popularity of Sadayakko only a few years earlier, and felt that the key to success was to have another star actress like her. Secondly, Fuller might have observed Hanako's talent. Thirdly, she must have had a sense that the trend was moving towards actresses gaining more attention.

In his article entitled 'Hanako' in *New Japan*, Vol. 14, Donald Keene surmises the reason why Hanako was able to win popularity in foreign countries in the following quotation:

Hanako's extraordinary success on the European

stage was a curious by-product of the rage for great actresses that swept Europe and America during the early years of the century. Bernhardt, Duse, Réjane and others drew impassioned audiences not only at home but in countries where their languages were not readily understood.⁵

Therefore, it might be said that the timing was right for a foreign actress to rise to the top of the theatrical world in Europe. Westerners' interest in Japanese theatre was also continuing to grow. Hanako fitted in with the demands of the times perfectly. After signing a contract with Fuller, the company became Hanako's in reality as well as in name, and performed all over Europe, Russia and the USA.

3. The plays performed by Hanako's company

When Loie Fuller found Hanako, she was performing the role of the geisha Akoya in a play about the famous warrior Taira no Kagekiyo entitled 'Hara-Kiri'. Akoya was not the main role. But after Fuller undertook the promotion of the company, Hanako began to play the leading parts.

The company performed several plays entitled *A Geisha's Revenge*, *A Martyr* and *Hidari Jingorō's Kyo-doll* as well as others. Hanako was expected to show specialities such as Japanese dance and musical performances and, more than anything else, she was expected to 'die' on stage.

However, it was not just tragedies which Hanako's company performed. A comedy entitled *Otake* was an important repertory of the troupe. This is a play about a maid called Otake who pretends to be her mistress. The play was written by Loie Fuller.

Hanako's company had another important repertory entitled *Ki-Musume* (A Japanese Virgin) written by Ikuta Kizan (1876-1945) who was a disciple of Iwaya Sazanami (1870-1933). Hanako came to know Kizan while both were staying in London.

Ki-Musume is based on the Japanese legend *Sarayashiki* (House of plates) which is about a girl who is wrongly accused of damaging a precious plate. *Otake* and *Ki-Musume* sustained a long run at the Ambassadors Theatre in London from 1914 to 1916. Thus, Hanako made Japanese theatre popular in the West and she also influenced famous Western and Russian artists such as Auguste Rodin, Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vsevolod Meyerhold.

4. The reputation of Hanako

Hanako was the only Japanese woman to pose

for Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) and she was certainly an important model. Rodin first saw Hanako's performances in Marseille in 1906. Reminiscing about the encounter with Rodin, Hanako relates:

After I performed one act and got back to the dressing room, a manager said, 'Hanako. Monsieur Rodin says that he would like to meet you. He has just seen the scene in which you kill yourself by stabbing your throat and was deeply impressed. He wants to make a sculpture of you [...] Here he is now. Greet him.' To my shame, I must confess that this was the first time I had ever heard the name of Monsieur Rodin. After a few moments he appeared with an assistant. He had a shaggy beard and was filthy-looking. I greeted him respectfully. He gave me a bouquet. We parted then on that occasion.⁶

Rodin subsequently invited Hanako to his studio and made more than fifty sculptures of her. Even today, people can see some of them at the Rodin Museum in Paris or the Niigata City Art Museum in Japan.

In fact, not only Rodin but also many artists around the world, and especially Russian directors, showed strong interest in Hanako and her performances. Hanako's company toured Russia in 1909, 1910 and from 1912 to 1913. Hanako had an impact on Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), who was trying to find an alternative to the naturalistic illusionary theatre style.

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938), who developed an important acting theory still relevant today, also took an interest. He invited Hanako to the Actor's School of the Moscow Art Theatre and asked her to give a demonstration. In her reminiscences about the performances in Russia, entitled 'Kizoku to joyū to no akushu: Rosia kōgyō no omoide (An actress shakes hands with a noblewoman: The reminiscences of performances in Russia)', Hanako explains:

Firstly, I showed them how I would use a dagger to take my own life if playing a young woman in traditional Japanese theatre. [...] Then I demonstrated how I would take my own life if playing an older lady as well. [...] Secondly, I showed them the expression of laughter. I learned how to laugh when I was a child actor practicing *gidayū*, and I performed it as I used to. Finally, I demonstrated the expression of anger

and the expression of grief. [...] When I finished, the whole audience gave me a standing ovation. 'Bravo' was shouted again and again. Mrs Chekhov rose from her seat and offered me her hand. What a lucky person I was! It seems that I had passed a test of art which I had had to take in front of the artists of the Moscow Art Theatre. I felt keenly that I owed my success in this task entirely to the art of my Japanese predecessors.⁷

It is clear that the techniques which Hanako demonstrated to the members of the Moscow Art Theatre were acquired during her experiences as a child actor with female kabuki performers and her training as a geisha. She was well aware that she owed her skills to the kabuki tradition.

However, contrary to the Western and Russian artists' interest in her, the Japanese theatre's reaction to Hanako was rather cold. The case of the director of 'new theatre' (*shingeki*), Osanai Kaoru (1881-1928), is a good example.

When Osanai visited Russia to study drama in 1913, he was invited by Stanislavsky to a New Year party. However, when [Elena Pavlovna] Muratova, a veteran actress of the Moscow Art Theatre, talked to him about Sadayakko, Osanai could not understand 'why such a splendid actress was impressed by the likes of a Japanese actress'⁸. Stanislavsky was listening to their conversation and then asked Osanai his opinion about both Sadayakko and Hanako. Osanai describes the situation as follows:

[Stanislavsky] said 'I have not seen Sadayakko's performance yet. How is it?' I replied 'She is not an artist!' in a fierce tone of voice as Mrs Muratowa happened to be absent at that moment. However I did not have the courage to say any more when Mr Stanislavsky then asked 'Why?' Concerning this subject, there is no 'Why' for us. [...] Moreover, he next questioned me about Hanako. I felt exasperated. I felt that I had to bear all the shame of Japan on my shoulders alone. I blushed. I just said, 'I have never heard such a name in Japan.' while breaking into a cold sweat. However, Mr Stanislavsky looked as if he could not believe me. I have no idea what I should have done.⁹

Perhaps, the reason why Osanai could not talk about Sadayakko and Hanako was due to an inferiority complex, but he should at least have asked Stanislavsky the reasons why he paid

attention to Hanako. If Osanai had analyzed the Russian director's interest in Japanese theatre, he would have been able to grasp the trends of Western and Russian theatre at that time.

That is to say, it was a moment when there was a shift away from Naturalism to Symbolism and Expressionism. Russian directors were seeking new methods of expression. During this process, Hanako's performances certainly gave some ideas to them. However, Osanai could not accept the fact that a geisha was important.

5. Hanako's achievements

Despite the lack of acknowledgement of her achievements by the Japanese theatre world, Hanako went on to perform with great Western actresses on even terms.

During the First World War, many actors and actresses from countries allied to Britain took refuge in London, and audiences were able to see performances with a markedly international character. The revue *Odds and Ends* at the Ambassadors Theatre was one such performance. According to *The play pictorial* Vol. xxvii, No. 165, Hanako appeared in the revue *Odds and Ends* playing the role of a British sailor 'Jack', who rescues a Japanese girl from villains.

It seems that she proved herself a good match for international actors and actresses and was loved not only by the producer of the Ambassadors Theatre Charles Cochran but also by British audiences. Cochran paid her the same as the leading actress and also worked as her agent.

Hanako recounted how she also joined charity performances in aid of injured soldiers.¹⁰ According to the programme of one such performance, Hanako played the role of 'Japan' in *The Masque of War and Peace* at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1915, appearing on stage together with the first-class actresses of those days, such as Lady Tree [Helen Maud Holt]¹¹ (1863-1937) and Madame [Gabrielle-Charlotte Réju] Réjane¹² (1857-1920). It seems that she performed an important role by literally representing Japan. In her autobiographical essay, Hanako relates:

Thanks to the prestige of Japan, we enjoy the favour of British audiences. As soon as I arrived back in Tokyo, I went to the Imperial Palace and bowed my head. I could not repress my tears. No one, except a person who wanders from place to place in foreign countries like me, would be able to understand my feelings. Whenever I

perform for foreign audiences, I strongly feel my roots. The magnificent Imperial Palace and the Rising-Sun flag are in my mind and cheer me up.¹³

As a Japanese actress performing in foreign countries, Hanako therefore not only made Japanese theatre popular but also fulfilled the role of private diplomat. She understood her position and realised she owed her success to her experiences as a geisha and as a child actor. It was her trust in her art and her pride as a Japanese actress which enabled Hanako to perform for nearly twenty years in the West.

Donald Keene concluded his essay 'Hanako' by saying 'Hanako must have been a great woman' and I think I can finish my paper by saying 'she was a great woman'. Hanako was a great woman and a great actress.

Notes

1. Donald Keene, *Nihon no sakka*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Sha, 1990 (first ed. 1972), p. 17.
2. Sawada Suketarō, *Rodin to Hanako*, Nagoya: Chūnichichi Shuppansha, 1996, p. 19.
3. Hanako 1917a, p. 90.
4. Hanako 1917a, p. 91.
5. Donald Keene, 'Hanako', *New Japan*, Vol. 14, 1962, p.

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6. Hanako 1917a, p. 97.
7. Hanako 1917b, p. 28.
8. Osanai Kaoru, 'Rosia no toshikoshi', *Osanai Kaoru zenshū* 6, Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1975, p. 525.
9. Ibid., pp. 525-526.
10. Hanako 1917a, p. 103.
11. The wife of the British actor-manager Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1853-1917).
12. One of the most popular French actresses of comedy in Paris during the 1890s and 1900s.
13. Hanako 1917a, p. 103.

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