

Imperial Prize and Japan Academy Prize to:

Akira OMOTE
 Professor Emeritus, Hosei University

for “Historical Studies of the Noh Theatre”

***Outline of the work:***

Dr. Akira Omote, a renowned scholar of medieval Japanese literature specializing in the Noh theatre, is particularly distinguished for two recent publications: *Yamato sarugaku-shi sankyū* (‘Exploring the history of Yamato sarugaku’; 2005) and *Kanzeryū-shi sankyū* (‘Exploring the history of the Kanze school’; 2008). The former is made up of three parts, the third of which overlaps significantly with the latter in terms of content, so the following outline examines the first two parts.

The first of the two papers that make up the first part, “*Tōnomine no sarugaku*” (“*Sarugaku* at Tōnomine”), throws light on the performance of *sarugaku*, Noh’s predecessor, at the Tōnomine shrine-temple complex close to Sakurai in modern Nara prefecture, from pre-Zeami days to the early decades of the pre-modern period (i. e. thirteenth to seventeenth centuries). It clarifies the nature of performances given by members of the Yamato *sarugaku* troupes at Tōnomine, which involved Noh plays with realistic military costumes and equipment, variant versions of the old play “*Okina*,” and competitive performances of new plays. Omote also presents evidence for the extensive performance of *sarugaku* at New-Year religious festivities. He hypothesizes that performances of *sarugaku* at Tōnomine continued to retain older features of the art after its reworking by Zeami in the fifteenth century.

The second paper, “*Takigi-sarugaku no hensen*” (“Historical changes in *takigi-sarugaku*”), elucidates elements of historical change in the performance of *takigi-sarugaku* (*sarugaku* in firelight) at religious observances at the Nara temple-shrine complex of Kasuga and Kōfuku-ji, where members of the four Yamato *sarugaku za* (troupes) were obliged to perform annually. During the fourteenth century, these performances were part of the Shuni-e ceremony celebrated in the second month, but they later became independent of it, with the performances staged for entertainment rather than religious purposes.

The second part, “*Yamato sarugaku no ‘osa’ no seikaku no hensen*” (“Changes in the nature of authority figures in Yamato *sarugaku*”), represents a significant advance in historical studies of Noh. Omote clarifies the changing roles played by authority figures known by the terms *osa* (‘elder’), *tayū* (‘lead performer’), *gon-no-kami* (‘chief attendant’), and *nen’yo* (‘yearly supervisor’), leading to conclusions that will require a substantial rewriting of the history of Noh. It was long thought that *tayū* such as Kan’ami (Kannami) and Zeami were the leaders of the four *za* (troupes) that made up Yamato *sarugaku*, namely the Yūzaki, Tobi, Sakado, and Enman’i troupes. Omote’s exhaustive examination of relevant source material shows that the *tayū* were in fact leaders of groups of Noh performers that were distinct from groups of *Okina-sarugaku* performers, which were led by other men with the title *osa*. The *Okina-sarugaku* groups, whose art was a conservative one of blessings and congratulations performed in a ritual context, were gradually overwhelmed by the entertainment-centered groups of Noh performers. These groups developed into performing schools that later came to be called by the stage names of their leaders: Kanze, Hōshō, Konparu, and Kongō. Omote’s painstaking examination of source materials and broad knowledge of the history of Noh as a whole have made possible an epoch-

making study that opens up new horizons in the field.

Kanzeryū-shi sankyū is a detailed historical study of the development of the Kanze school, from its fourteenth-century beginnings to the present. The first section, “*Kan’ami-den saiken*” (“A reexamination of the biography of Kan’ami”), refutes earlier theories about the founder of the school. Omote establishes that he was not born in Iga province, and did not found the Yūzaki troupe; rather, he was born in Yamada in Yamato province, and joined the troupe when it was already established. He also provides definitive studies of the origins of all pieces traditionally attributed to Kan’ami. The second section, “*Muromachi jidai no Kanze tayū Kanze-za*” (“The Kanze troupe and its lead performers in the Muromachi period”), is a largely biographical study of members of the Kanze school from Zeami to 8th-generation Sakon Motohisa, covering the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A notable finding includes the establishment of Kanze Kojirō Nobumitsu’s year of birth as 1450, which casts doubt on the common attribution of the Noh play “*Ataka*” to his authorship. Omote shows that Nobumitsu was an *ōtsuzumi* (hip drum) player, and appears to have never played stage roles as either *shite* or *waki* (primary and secondary actor). The third section, “*Edo jidai no Kanze tayū Kanze-za*” (“The Kanze troupe and its lead performers in the Edo period”), makes careful use of documents and records preserved by the head Kanze family, as well as records of large-scale public performances, to put together a vivid account of the fortunes of the Kanze school since the early seventeenth century. Of special note are studies of the relationships between the Kanze troupe and famous historical figures such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, and of the fate of actors during the turmoil following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Omote presents us with a well-documented and fascinating cultural history.

Both publications demonstrate Omote’s concern for a proper understanding of the contents of original documents and records, as well as a profound reading of theoretical treatises such as *Fūshi kaden* (“Transmitting the flower through effects and attitudes”) and *Sarugaku dangi* (“Conversations on *sarugaku*”). His arguments are set out logically and convincingly. His discoveries bring many new perspectives to historical studies of the Noh theatre, and are of major importance not only for research in literary and theatrical history, but also for future scholarly work in the wider field of Japanese cultural studies.