



INTRODUCTION

Japan boasts the greatest variety of mask types in the world, a distinction which it partly owes to the custom of honouring and preserving masks in the country's numerous temples and shrines. Traditionally, masks have mainly been used in a religious context in Japan. It is recorded in the *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀)¹ that the classical *gigaku* (伎楽) was introduced in Japan via China and Korea in the year 612 CE,² and was one of the oldest masked dance forms in Japan.³ These dances were performed in temple sites and constituted a Buddhist dance ritual. A new form of masked religious dance, *bugaku* (舞楽), emerged in the 9th century. This dance form drew on a combination of older dances imported from the Asian mainland. Various Chinese and Korean elements deriving from *bugaku* were adapted to Japanese taste, leading to a new style unique to Japan. This was also true for the many masks that were used in *bugaku*. Whereas *gigaku* masks were still largely copies of masks that originated in China or Korea, *bugaku* masks were distinctive of Japan. *Bugaku* was an extremely popular dance at the Japanese court in the Heian period and continues to be performed to this very day. In the successive periods, when the warrior class (*bushi*) rose to power in Japan, a masked performing art emerged that appealed to the interest of the warriors, *nōgaku* (能楽). From the 14th century, when this art form came under the patronage of the Ashika *bakufu*,⁴ *nōgaku* has become associated with the cultural development of the *samurai* elite. The masks used in *nōgaku*, *nō* and *kyōgen-men* are the most sophisticated masks of Japanese mask culture. The major warlords and 'unifiers' of Japan in the Age of Warring States, Oda Nobunaga (織田 信長, 1534-1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣秀吉, 1536-1598) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (徳川家康, 1542-1616) were all great admirers of *nōgaku*. It was in this same period that the armour mask, *katchū-men* (甲冑面), underwent an important development. *Katchū-men* are the only masks within Japanese mask culture not primarily used for theatre, religious dances or processions. This may be the reason why they rarely feature in the existing scholarly literature on Japanese masks. The culture of *katchū-men* is a very rich one, however, and may justly be considered a discipline in its own right within Japanese mask culture.

There are various definitions of the word mask. Theatrical masks can be defined as objects held in front of the face which are intended to make the wearer unrecognizable, or alternatively to make him resemble something or someone else. In the 16th century the Japanese armour mask developed into a mask with similar characteristics. The armour masks worn prior to this period were mainly geared to practical uses and did not possess the facial features characteristic of theatrical masks. The development of facial features in armour masks coincided with the rise of *tōsei gusoku* (当世具足), or the 'modern armour' which inevitably emerged in the Age of Warring States in response to new methods of warfare.⁵

Various historical sources offer different names for the same types of masks. In this introduction, the term *katchū-men* is used as an umbrella term,⁶ basi-

cally to cover all forms of facial protection that may form part of an armour. This introduction will furthermore focus on armour masks *with* facial features, especially the *menoshita-bō* and *sōmen* and in some cases also the *hanbō*. The comprehensive term for these three types of masks is *menpō*, which will be used here to refer to armour masks with facial features.

Where the designs and shapes of the first *menpō* originally came from is unknown. Sometimes the design of a *menpō* can be clearly identified and names were devised for them in the Edo period, though this was by no means always the case. On other occasions these names also appear to have been misapplied to already existing masks due to ignorance, which has led to considerable confusion.⁷

Japanese mask makers who produce theatrical masks virtually always work from a so-called model mask or *honmen* (本面) and this was probably no different for *katchū-men*. A single basic model eventually came to set the standard. Although several varieties developed in the course of the centuries, the basic elements can still be traced to the original design. It is known that some *honmen* of *nō* masks (*nō-men*) were to a considerable degree modelled on previously existing masks, such as *bugaku* masks (*bugaku-men*). It is therefore not unthinkable that in the evolution of *menpō*, masks from other disciplines may have served as a model.

Written sources from the second half of the 16th century that pay attention to *menpō* are scarce, while those sources that do discuss *menpō* date from at least a century and a half after their original creation. To be able to establish how great the influence of *nōgaku* on the *menpō* really was, it is necessary to examine the period in which these masks came into existence. Contemporary biographical sources on their patrons, the *samurai* elite, can offer insight into the fashions of the time and the degree to which *nōgaku* played a role in the lives of the warriors. In this introduction the main focus is on the great warlords (*daimyō*) of the latter half of the 16th century, when chronicles and registers were regularly being compiled that narrated events in the life of a prominent warlord. Memorable historical facts were recorded and described in several sources, which makes the available information on major historical figures relatively reliable. The presence of censorship and the possibility of a flattering rather than a realistic representation of some events are, of course, factors that always need to be taken into account. In this case, too, the age-old principle that history is often written by the powers that be holds true.

THE SAMURAI

The origins of the *samurai* go back to the early years of the Heian period (794-1185).⁸ The abolition of military service by Emperor Kanmu (桓武天皇, 737-806) in 792 was a major factor in the rise of the *samurai* class. The old system of conscription had relied on local army units, but now militia were deployed instead.⁹ This so-called *kondei* system (健児) made use of all kinds of bands of

professional local warriors from families belonging to the lower administrative echelons. These warriors or *samurai*¹⁰ served the court nobility in a military sense, but were also employed to levy taxes from the population.¹¹

The Heian period was marked by increasing independence from China, a country which had set the standard for Japan until then. Many aspects of life acquired a distinctively Japanese flavour, which was also true for the military arena with its swords and armours. Already in these early stages of *samurai* culture, a warrior's armour did not only serve to protect, it was also a symbol of dignity. Armours were of great importance to the *samurai* both materially and spiritually and were frequently gifted to temples as a result.

In the 12th century the samurai class had risen to such prominence that the numerous warrior groups that were spread across the country were able to raise large armies. The Hōgen war of 1156 provided the *samurai* with the opportunity to actually seize power. This war involved a conflict of power between the ex-emperor Sutoku (崇徳天皇, 1119-1164) and the ruling emperor Go-Shirakawa (後白河天皇, 1127-1192). Sutoku was supported by Minamoto no Tameyoshi (源 為義, 1096-1156), while Go-Shirakawa could count on Taira no Kiyomori (平 清盛, 1118-1181).¹² The emperor Go-Shirakawa's faction was victorious, which led to increasing political power for Taira no Kiyomori. He next defeated Minamoto no Yoshitomo in the Heiji war of 1160, which eventually caused the Genpei war to erupt, in which the Taira and the Minamoto clashed several times.

The Genpei wars were finally settled at the Battle of Dan no Ura of 1185, a naval battle which spelt the downfall of the Taira. Minamoto no Yoritomo (源頼朝, 1147-1199), the leader of the Minamoto, now took control. Unlike Taira no Kiyomori, however, who had consistently looked for power in court circles, Yoritomo regarded the warriors as a major source of power. He had himself appointed military leader (*Sei Taishōgun*, 征夷大將軍) and formed the first military government to rule over Japan, in 1192. He established himself in Kamakura, a location in the east of Japan which was remote from the court influences of the capital.

In the second half of the 13th century Japan was faced with two attempted invasions by the Mongols under Kubilai Khan. Although the Mongol threat was repelled on both occasions, the invasions had far-reaching consequences for Japan's political stability. The *bakufu* had been forced to keep his vassals at the ready for more than thirteen years and the expenses had been great. The leader of the ruling Hōjō clan was unable to compensate all of his vassal warriors, and some of them revolted with the authorization of the emperor Go-Daigo (後醍醐天皇, 1288-1339). In the end, though, Go-Daigo clashed with the warriors, and it was army leader Ashikaga Takauji (足利尊氏, 1305-1358) who seized power.

The Ashikaga shogunate officially lasted until 1573, though in actual fact it soon lost control of the country due to the growing power of the individual warlords, who began administering their own territories. This instability led



to a period of civil war in the middle of the 15th century, the so-called Age of Warring States (*Sengoku jidai*), when the strongest man carried the day.

The Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573-1615) saw the first attempts to unite Japan under a single leader again. In the second half of the 16th century, when the provinces were still locked in total war, a number of warlords managed to seize control. Oda Nobunaga eventually gained the upper hand, aspiring to unite all the separate domains and consolidate power in Japan under his authority.

In spite of his successful military campaigns and dominant politics, Nobunaga never managed to fulfil his dream of unifying Japan. In 1582 he was betrayed by one of his own generals, Akechi Mitsuhide (明智 光秀, 1528-1582). During his campaign against the Mōri clan, Nobunaga had put his generals Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Akechi Mitsuhide in charge of the armies that were supposed to defeat the Mōri. When Hideyoshi came up against the Mōri near Takamatsu in the province of Bitchū in 1582 he asked for Nobunaga's help, who responded to the call and left from Azuchi to personally assume supreme command. As Nobunaga was spending the night in the Honnō-ji temple in Kyōto with a small band of followers, he was attacked by Akechi Mitsuhide and lost his life.¹³ When Toyotomi Hideyoshi was told about Akechi Mitsuhide's betrayal one day later, he took the lead, determined as he was to avenge Nobunaga and capture Mitsuhide. He sent his army back in the direction of the Kansai, where Mitsuhide was defeated in the Battle of Yamazaki. Mitsuhide was killed as he was trying to escape – his plan to usurp power utterly defeated.¹⁴ Hideyoshi for his part saw his chance and managed to assume power through careful political manoeuvring. He carried on where Nobunaga had been forced to stop and finally united all the *daimyō* under his rule in 1590. Hideyoshi had himself appointed *kanpaku*, imperial regent, in 1585, which legitimised his authority.¹⁵

When Hideyoshi died of natural causes in 1598, the matter of his succession was of crucial importance. Hideyoshi himself had wished to entrust the regency of his son Toyotomi Hideyori (豊臣 秀頼, 1593-1615) to some of his loyal generals until his son, who was still a minor, would be old enough to succeed him. Two of these generals, Tokugawa Ieyasu and Ishida Mitsunari, had both succeeded in forming major coalitions shortly after Hideyoshi's death. In 1600 they clashed with each other as they headed two large armies in the Battle of Sekigahara.

After heavy fighting Tokugawa Ieyasu's coalition carried the day, though not entirely on its own strength, as the general had been able to win only with the support of other *daimyō* who had joined him without being formally under his command. The deciding factor in the battle had been the defection of Kobayakawa Hideaki (小早川 秀秋, 1577-1602), who abandoned Mitsunari to join Ieyasu. The latter was a master strategist and had managed to gain the allegiance of the most allies. The *daimyō* who had remained loyal to Mitsunari were largely expropriated and their confiscated fiefs were then transferred to

Ieyasu's allies and vassals.¹⁶ After Ieyasu had settled with the Mōri and the Shimazu, the chief clans to have pledged allegiance to Mitsunari, there were no further obstacles to have himself appointed *shōgun*. Ieyasu did not establish his government in the Kansai region but in Kantō, the seat of power of the first *shōgun*, Yoritomo.

The first half of the 17th century still witnessed some scattered revolts that plagued the Tokugawa, but after that time the *bakufu* was in complete control of the country with hardly any serious threats to its stability until the second half of the 19th century. Living in peaceful times, there were more and more *samurai* in the second half of the 17th century who had never seen action on the battlefield, so that they could no longer distinguish themselves this way. The *samurai* now had to look for other ways to show their prowess, and warriors began challenging each other to boost their status, leading to an upsurge in private duels. Without the need for warfare, there was now also more room to engage in cultural interests and activities, including philosophy and the arts.

NŌ AND THE SAMURAI

Nō is the oldest, still performed, theatrical art in the world. *Nō* was included in the UNESCO list of immaterial cultural heritage as *Nōgaku theatre* in 2008. *Nōgaku* refers to *nō* and its sister art *Kyōgen*, the farces that served as intermezzi between *nō* plays. The sophisticated form of *nō* theatre as we can appreciate it today in Japan, has evolved throughout the centuries and is inextricably linked to the *samurai* culture. The orchestral music of *nō* became the official musical form of expression of the *samurai* class in the 17th century. Before this art form became associated with the *samurai*, it was a mix of various forms of theatrical entertainment incorporating elements of dance, acrobatics, juggling and magic. Known as *sarugaku*, it acquired a more solemn form towards the end of the 13th century when it had largely shed its comical character.¹⁷ Dramatic and religious elements were added and more plays came to be written for this genre. There was a similar art form in existence at the time, *dengaku*, which strongly competed with *sarugaku*. In fact, *dengaku* was so popular that the expression 'dengaku disease' was coined.¹⁸ This art form attracted passionate admirers from all levels of society, from high to low, such as the distinguished Hōjō Takatoki (北条高時, 1303-1333) and the Ashikaga *shōgun* Takauji (足利尊氏, 1305-1358).¹⁹ In the second half of the 14th century the then seventeen-year-old *shōgun* Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (足利 義満, 1358-1408) attended a *sarugaku* performance by the actor Kanami (観阿弥, 1333-1384) and his son Zeami (世阿弥, 1363-1443) at a *shintō* temple in Kyōto. Yoshimitsu was so impressed by Kanami's art, and especially that of his son Zeami, that he decided to become a patron of their art form. Kanami, who was the leader of the Yūzaki company,²⁰ had already begun introducing improvements and writing new plays before Yoshimitsu became *shōgun*, so the company was now given the opportunity to write stylized plays for a literary

audience. Zeami especially had a great impact on the evolution of *sarugaku*. It is during this period that the term *nō*, meaning ‘talent’, came into use.²¹ From the time Yoshimitsu acted as patron, *nō* came to be embraced more and more by the warrior class, and high-ranking *samurai* began to engage in performing *nō*.²² As the centuries progressed, *nō* turned into an exclusive art form that was strictly reserved for the *samurai* elite. In the Edo period it thus became increasingly difficult for ordinary citizens to attend certain *nō* performances.²³

From the 15th century, *nō* was toned down more and more, especially during the Tokugawa period from 1600 onwards, when the movements became slower, the plays longer and the acting was increasingly ritualized. *Nō* theatre features a single protagonist (*shite*) and one or two secondary characters (*waki*).

From the end of the 14th century, four schools of protagonists were active in *nō*, the Kanze-ryū, Hōshō-ryū, Konparu-ryū and Kongō-ryū. The Kita-ryū arose in the Edo period. The three still active schools for the supporting roles are the Takayasu-ryū, Fukuō-ryū and the Hōshō-ryū.

Apart from the Ashikagas in the 14th and 15th centuries, the most prestigious *daimyō*, Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, were ardent admirers and practitioners of the art. To enable the reader to get a clear impression of the influence of *nōgaku* on the *samurai* elite, a survey of the development of *nōgaku* during the reigns of the successive rulers of the Ashikaga *bakufu* is now presented.

THE ASHIKAGAS AND NŌ

Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu played a vital role in the evolution of *sarugaku* into *nōgaku*. *Nōgaku* has been associated with the shogunate ever since Yoshimitsu positioned himself as a patron of this art. Yoshimitsu was the grandson of Ashikaga Takauji (足利尊氏, 1305-1358), the first *shōgun* of the Ashikaga *bakufu*. The performance at Imakumano in 1374²⁴ was a turning point in the development of *sarugaku*. As was already mentioned, the seventeen-year-old Yoshimitsu decided to become a patron of this form of theatre after having watched Zeami perform. In spite of his young age, Yoshimitsu took an extraordinary interest in literature, art and music. He went on to become skilled in several arts, was a gifted *tanka* poet and studied Chinese poetry and Zen Buddhism. Like the emperor, the Ashikagas resided in the capital Kyōto, so that the Ashikaga warrior elite easily absorbed the culture of the imperial court.

Nōgaku was the ultimate art that enabled the warrior elite of the early Muromachi period to preserve the cultural traditions and aesthetics existing at the imperial court by means of their patronage.²⁵ Zeami did not only develop and refine the tradition of *nōgaku*, he was also an important link between the court and the warrior class in terms of cultural transmission. It is an interesting circumstance that Zeami, who came from the lowest echelons of society, namely the class of actors and entertainers, still managed to

produce the most sophisticated and outstanding literature of his age. He was well versed in *waka* and *renga*, art forms associated with the court.²⁶ Varley suggests in his article “Cultural life of the warrior elite”²⁷ that Zeami became familiar with the courtly arts through his contacts with the court and especially through his association with the poet and imperial regent Nijō Yoshimoto (二条 良基, 1320-1388), a scion of the Fujiwara family.²⁸ Zeami’s connection with the imperial court and the high arts must have made *nō* theatre as it had largely been developed by Zeami especially attractive to the warrior elite, which was constantly looking to refine itself culturally.

NOBUNAGA AND NŌ

Oda Nobunaga was a great lover of the arts. He was a collector and a patron of various art forms, such as the tea ceremony. The castle he had built near Azuchi was more than a defensive structure, it was also an expression of power due to its imposing grandeur. Nobunaga must have had a keen eye for aesthetics, but he was also a practical man. He is known to have worn Western attire now and then and allegedly incorporated Western armour parts in his own armour which he had obtained from Spaniards and Portuguese. The helmet bowls and cuirasses made in the West were not only exotic and exclusive, they also offered excellent protection against fire arms. Often they were standard elements of European musketeer’s armours such as the Spanish morion and the musketeer’s cuirass.

Nobunaga also favoured the theatrical arts. The *Shinchō kōki* (信長公記) chronicle compiled by a follower of Nobunaga, Ōta Gyūichi (太田牛一, 1527-1613), covers numerous aspects of the life of Nobunaga from 1568 until his death in 1582. The *Shinchō kōki* is a valuable contemporary source which does not only afford insight into the events of Oda Nobunaga’s life, but also describes in great detail the cultural activities of the warrior elite in the Momoyama period.

Ōta Gyūichi provided several examples of the fascination which *nōgaku* held for Nobunaga. It is also clear from the *Shinchō kōki* that *nōgaku* was of inestimable value for the culture of the warrior elite in the Momoyama period. A fine example is the way in which the Battle of Okehazama is recorded in this chronicle. In this particular battle, Oda Nobunaga successfully defeated Imagawa Yoshimoto (今川 義元, 1519-1560) in a surprise attack. Imagawa’s defeat led to a collaboration between Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first major step towards the unification of Japan in the 16th century. The



ASHIKAGA YOSHIMISTU
(足利 義満, 1358-1408)

*Shinchō kōki*²⁹ describes the preparations for the Battle of Okehazama which demonstrates the close ties between *nōgaku* and the warrior elite of the Sengoku period.

It appears from this passage that both Oda Nobunaga and Imagawa Yoshimoto recited parts from *nō* plays at crucial moments in their military campaign. Nobunaga recited from Atsumori as follows when he was about to launch the attack:

人間五十年 下天の内をくらぶれば 夢幻のごとくなり。一度生を得て滅せぬ者のあるべきか ³⁰

The life of a man of 50 years under the sky
is nothing compared to the age of this world.
Life is but a fleeting dream, an illusion –
Is there anything that lasts forever?

It is not entirely irrelevant to note that although the *Shinchō kōki* describes this passage as *nō*, it appears not to derive entirely from *nō* in the version as supposedly sung by Nobunaga. Presumably he recited Atsumori’s *kōwakamai* version (幸若舞). *Kōwaka* is a sister art of *nō* with a predominantly military colouring, and the two art forms are easy to compare.

The *kōwaka* which was so popular in the Sengoku period was gradually forgotten in the time of peace during the Edo period. It was perceived as a provincial art form especially by the urban *bushi* and went into rapid decline after the Genroku period (1688-1704).³¹ Nevertheless, in view of the close ties between *kōwaka* and *nō*, *kōwaka* may be considered part of *nō* culture both in the spirit of the times and in this particular context.

According to the previously cited passage from the *Shinchō kōki*, Yoshimoto was also to have recited *nō*. Like Nobunaga, he did so at key moments in his military campaign. The first time was after his troops had successfully taken the fortresses Washizu and Marune, the second time in a moment of euphoria when he considered himself invincible. *Nō* was not only a theatrical art for the elitist *samurai*, it apparently even played a role within the major battles of Japanese history. *Nō* was additionally staged as entertainment in the context of politics and diplomacy. The following passage from the *Shinchō kōki* describes the members of a select audience attending a *nō* programme to celebrate the successful completion of works on the shogunal residence. The passage aptly reflects the importance of *nō* within the world of the elite:

Present were
Lord Anenokōji Chūnagon, provincial governor of Hida,
Lord Kitabatake no Chūjō [Tomofusa], provincial governor of Ise,
Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu of Mikawa,
Lord Hatakeyama [Akitaka],

Lord Isshiki [Yoshimichi],
Miyoshi Sakyō no Daibu,
Matsunaga Danjō,

and all the important persons of the regency lineage and the rest of the high nobility, together with everybody who was anybody in the home provinces and the neighboring provinces. It was a magnificent spectacle. Here the shogun said that Lord Nobunaga ought to be promoted to official rank, but Nobunaga declined the offer and did not accept. Graciously, the shogun poured Nobunaga’s cup according to the *sangon* ceremony – the ultimate of honors.³²

What is striking in the chronicles dealing with Oda Nobunaga is that there are always *nō* performances at various crucial moments. In the above-mentioned passage it was the successful completion of activities relating to the shogunal residence. Here the performance may be interpreted as a celebration, but it was also used to confer official appointments and settle other matters of weight. Looking at the guest list, the conclusion is that the performance was attended by the most distinguished and powerful persons in the country. Already in Nobunaga’s period therefore, *nō* was an art which was highly appreciated by the elite and could hold its own with the ceremonial dances at court. As *nō* was ceremony, entertainment, diplomacy and ritual rolled into one, it is not surprising that inspiration was drawn from *nōgaku* in Nobunaga’s days.

Here, too, the *Shinchō kōki* has relevant information to offer, such as in the detailed description of the cavalcade organized by Nobunaga in Kyōto:

And a temporary palace was constructed on Nobunaga’s orders outside the roofed mud wall flanking the East Gate of the imperial residence; although the most ad hoc of structures, it was encrusted with gold and silver. Toward it proceeded from the Seiryōden the emperor and the imperial nobles, ranking ministers, and courtiers permitted access to the inner palace—all of them in oh, what gorgeous outfits! The fragrance of their clothes purified the surroundings and perfumed the air. Safeguarding the imperial residence on all four sides, the houses of the important personages of the regency lineage and the rest of the high nobility stand in tight rows; so Nobunaga had stands raised for these nobles to the left and right of His Majesty’s temporary palace, a fitting gesture. How perfect a ceremony, how beautiful a spectacle! No pen and no words could adequately describe the magnificence of this event.³³

This passage is followed by dozens of descriptions of the participants in the parade. The seventh group is described as follows:

Seventh group: Sekian, costumed as the Old Lady of the Mountain, and the rest of Nobunaga’s clerics, that is, Chōan, Chōun, and Yūkan, leading the way for Nobunaga.³⁴

Takai Sekian, Nobunaga’s principal secretary,³⁵ was here dressed as the ‘Old Lady of the Yamanba Mountain’, in other words as the protagonist of the *nō* play ‘Yamanba’.³⁶ As is clear from the passage cited, Nobunaga, who is described in detail, was preceded by a train of men. The following is a description of Nobunaga’s headgear in the *Shinchō kōki*:

Nobunaga’s headdress was a Chinese cap of dignity (*tōkamuri*). Flowers were stuck in the back. It was just like the costume of the lead actor in the Noh play *Takasago*. “As I break a bough off a plum tree and fasten it in my hair, / The springtime snow falls on my garments.” Surely that was the intended meaning.³⁷

It is clear from this passage that it was not unusual to be inspired by *nōgaku* in one’s personal outfit. Both Nobunaga and his principal secretary incorporated clear references to *nō* in their personal attire. It is certainly not implausible, therefore, that the design of a personal armour was influenced by elements from *nōgaku*.

HIDEYOSHI AND NŌ

Being of humble origin, Toyotomi Hideyoshi was determined to prove to the elite that he was nevertheless a cultured man, and the study of *nōgaku* was very suitable for this purpose. Hideyoshi memorized various roles and took part in several *nōgaku* performances. In 1593, as he was staying in Kyūshū pending the invasion of Korea, he learnt fifteen *nōgaku* roles by heart in fifty days, which he later performed with great self-confidence.³⁸

Hideyoshi, who was probably influenced by the priest and *nō* performer Shimotsuma Shōshin (下間少進, 1551-1616), practised *nō* in the style of the Komparu school. Shimotsuma had been a confidant of Oda Nobunaga and had been connected with the Hongan-ji temple in Kyōto. Shōshin had studied *nō* under Konparu Dayu Gyūren (金春大夫笈蓮, d.1583) and was also a mask maker, a *nōmen shi* (能面師).³⁹

The following passage, quoted from Erika de Poorter’s ‘Toyotomi Hideyoshi en het *nō*-theater’ aptly conveys the passion and dedication with which Hideyoshi studied *nō*. On 6 April 1593 he wrote to his wife in Ōsaka:

I have learnt ten *nō* plays. *Matsukaze*, *Oimatsu*, *Miwa*, *Bashō*, *Kureha*, *Teika*, *Tōru*, *Kakitsubata*, *Tamura*, [*Eguchi*]. Ten in all. I did my utmost on these *nō* plays, but I want to learn even more.⁴⁰

De Poorter continues with the following appraisal from one of Hideyoshi’s warriors, who wrote to an acquaintance in the capital Kyōto ten days later:

The Taikō (=Hideyoshi) practises *nō* and has already learnt ten complete plays. He looks very distinctive and is indescribably magnificent. So far he has rehearsed *Kureha*, *Oimatsu*, *Miwa*, *Bashō*, *Teika*, *Matsukaze*, *Tōru*, *Tamura*, *Kakitsubata*, *Eguchi*. Once back in the capital, he intends to perform *nō* at the Imperial Palace.⁴¹

De Poorter also explores what drove the aged general to memorize so many *nō* roles, as he had been advised against it due to his advanced age.⁴² She rightly notes that nowadays it would be impossible for a layman to memorize ten *nō* plays in fifty days. One of the reasons why Hideyoshi managed to achieve this feat, is because the *nō* of the 16th century was far less elaborate and sophisticated than it is today.⁴³ It must simply have been easier to learn them by heart. As with Nobunaga, we see that *nōgaku* was performed at key events in Hideyoshi’s life. It is known that he ordered a large-scale *nōgaku* programme to be performed a few days after the birth of his son, Hideyori, on which occasion he summoned the leaders of the four *nō* schools.⁴⁴ After he had been appointed *kanpaku*, Hideyoshi also commissioned a number of *nō* and *kyōgen* performances.⁴⁵

When Hideyoshi eventually returned from Kyūshū in 1593 he continued his study of *nō* and even resolved to perform *nō* himself at court. In the tenth month of that same year he organised a gala performance at the imperial palace in Kyōto lasting no less than three days.⁴⁶

It is clear from the accompanying programme⁴⁷ that the warrior nobility often played *nō* instruments and were skilled in performing the lead roles. *Nōgaku* was as much a favourite pastime of the warrior nobility as the tea ceremony (*Cha no yu*, 茶の湯). It is striking to notice that the members of the prominent warrior families took part in the programme. During these *nō* performances at the imperial court, for instance, Nobunaga’s grandson Oda Hidenobu (織田 秀信, 1580-1605) performed next to Hideyoshi as *tsure* (accompanying character) in the play *Kōtei*,⁴⁸ while Nobunaga’s second son Oda Jōshin (Nobukatsu; 織田 信雄, 1558-1630) played the lead roles of Yamanba and Momijigari on the final day of this three-day event.⁴⁹ Hideyoshi’s vassals, Tokugawa Ieyasu, Tokugawa Hidetada (徳川 秀忠, 1579-1632), Mōri Terumoto (毛利 輝元, 1553-1625), Hosokawa Yūsai (細川 幽斎, 1534-1610), Maeda Toshiie (前田 利家, 1583-1599) and Maede Gen’i (前田 玄以, 1539-1602), also took an active part in the programme, playing instruments or even performing lead or supporting roles.⁵⁰

TOKUGAWA AND NŌ

During Hideyoshi’s rule, *nō* plays were hardly ever performed before the people. As a form of entertainment, it became more and more the exclusive

province of the elite. The low-born Toyotomi Hideyoshi realised only too well that if he had been able to rise from the fairly modest position of sandal bearer to Oda Nobunaga to become the most powerful man of Japan, it might also be possible for others to climb the social ladder. It was under Hideyoshi, accordingly, that more and more rules were implemented to strengthen the divide between the people and the elite. Hideyoshi issued a number of edicts that imposed severe restrictions on the people. Anyone who had not managed to attain *samurai* status by that point in time would now never be able to rise to that position. Hideyoshi whole-heartedly embraced *nōgaku* and made the art more exclusive through his patronage. After Hideyoshi's death, power shifted to the Tokugawas and the *nō* schools focused their attention on the new Tokugawa shogunate. When Tokugawa Ieyasu's new castle in Edo had been completed in 1606, the Kanze and the Komparu hurried to the capital to perform before the *shōgun*. The Kongō and Hōshō could not lag behind and in 1608 all four schools gave performances at the castle of Edo.⁵¹ Chosen as the official music for the shogunate by the Tokugawas, *nōgaku* became increasingly ritualised and codified in the Edo period.⁵² Major performances had to be carried out without a flaw, and the actor who did not perform his part to perfection risked heavy punishment. He might be banished or even forced to perform ritual suicide.⁵³ At the other side of the spectrum, the best actors received various privileges. They were well rewarded and some of them were even given *samurai* status,⁵⁴ which is remarkable as actors found themselves on the lower rungs of the social ladder. As has been noticed earlier, the edicts issued by Hideyoshi had made it extremely difficult for anyone from the lower social classes to obtain *samurai* status in the Tokugawa period. That it was still open to some *nō* actors says a lot about the status of *nōgaku* among the *samurai* class. To the Tokugawas, the value of *nō* was comparable to the ritual *bugaku* dances at the imperial court. The New Year performances especially were very important, as a successful performance was believed to have a positive effect on the country's economy and prosperity.⁵⁵ The famous actors were liberally paid after a successful performance and they sometimes even managed to garner larger income than most of the *samurai*. Actors, as well as merchants, were forbidden to display luxury and wealth in their private lives in the Edo period.⁵⁶

What is striking is the emphasis that was put on the importance of performing well and preserving the *nō* traditions as passed down from generation to generation. Obviously, great value was attached to the continuation of the various schools. In fact, around the year 1619 permission was even given to establish a new school, the so-called Kita school, in addition to the already established schools of the Kanze, Komparu, Hōshō and Kongō.⁵⁷ The founder of this school was Kita Shichidayū (喜多七大夫 1586-1653), one of the most celebrated actors of the early Edo period. Shichidayū had served under Hideyoshi and had fought in the Siege of Ōsaka⁵⁸ against the Tokugawas. His fame as an actor, however, was such that Tokugawa Hidetada, the second

Tokugawa *shōgun*, pardoned his earlier antagonism, and Shichidayū became the most popular actor at the court of the *shōgun*.⁵⁹ His popularity even rose to such a height that other schools were placed under his aegis.⁶⁰ This, too, is revealing about the role occupied by *nōgaku* within the world of the *samurai*. A strict division was effected between the various schools and all aspects of the art were rigidly codified. This was also the case for the costumes and the masks.⁶¹

THE FUNCTIONS OF MENPŌ

To throw light on the evolution of *menpō* and the possible role of other mask disciplines in its development, the functions of the *menpō* will now be considered. For the *samurai* of the Muromachi period, an era marked by wars and battlefields, the armour was a means to distinguish themselves from their subjects. It was a status symbol that made them look fearsome on the battlefield and also enabled them to demonstrate their power and wealth. At the same time armour was meant for actual combat, providing an identity which allowed the *samurai* to succumb with dignity *in extremis*. Many warlords were accordingly buried in the armour they had worn when they died.

In view of the importance attached to the armour by the *samurai* elite and the distinctively individual character of such battle gear, it is not difficult to imagine that a warrior would assemble his armour with great care. Armour masks became an integral part of an armour from the middle of the 16th century and often formed an aesthetically defined part of battle gear. Armour masks can be said to have six separate functions:

- Distinctive function
- Status symbol function
- Protective function
- Aesthetic function
- Spiritual function (as a means of ancestor worship)
- Deterrent function

DISTINCTIVE FUNCTION

Screens and other artefacts depicting battle fields (*kassenzu* 合戦図) occasionally feature armour masks. These *kassenzu* are often very detailed and the scenes appear to be true to life. The 16th-century and early 17th-century screens depicting *kassenzu* are probably the most reliable visual source of information on what battles will have looked like. Various scenes were represented by means of strategically placed cloud formations. Often the names of prominent *samurai* were added, and such scenes offer a good insight into the composition of the armies and the manner of warfare. *Kassenzu* are also of great importance to the research into armours and weapons because they are realistically rendered. The first depictions of armour masks of the *menoshita-bō* type are to be found on screens from the late Muromachi period, although

the masks were as yet little used at this time. The face mask, as part of the armour that was displayed in the private quarters of *daimyō* and other high-ranking *samurai*, appears to have been an exclusive object that only the affluent *samurai* could afford. One of the clearest depictions of *menpō* from this period is found on a screen commemorating the Battle of Nagashino (*Nagashino kassenzu byōbu* 長篠合戦図屏風).⁶² We see Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu riding their horses without any headgear. Their retainers carry a battle standard topped by a helmet, in Nobunaga’s case in the shape of a western helmet, while Ieyasu’s helmet was a Japanese helmet, a *hoshi kabuto*. A half mask (*menoshita-bō* 目の下頬) is attached underneath both helmets. That a helmet with a mask was displayed to the enemy on the battlefield in this way may suggest its purpose was identification and also to serve as a status symbol for the ranks. The screen portraying the Battle of Nagashino also features the illustrious Tokugawa general Honda ‘Heihachiro’ Tadakatsu (本多忠勝, 1548- 1610), who is here shown wearing a black *menoshita-bō*.⁶³ This screen immediately makes clear the situation on the battlefield. Honda’s battle gear clearly distinguishes him from his subjects, whom he leads into battle in his impressive black armour.⁶⁴ Honda already had an excellent reputation in his lifetime. He fought in all of Ieyasu’s major battles and was acclaimed as a very capable general by the great warlords of the *Sengoku* period, including Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi. That only these three great commanders are depicted wearing a *menoshita-bō* on the *Nagashino kassenzu* suggests that these masks were reserved for *samurai* of the highest rank.⁶⁵ There were relatively few armour makers left in the Muromachi period who still mastered the high-relief embossing technique necessary to make a good mask. At the same time the many great wars fought at the time led to a rising demand in helmets and cuirasses that offered basic protection. A good-quality armour mask, especially the *menoshita-bō*, must have been a luxury object which only the most prosperous *samurai* could afford to distinguish themselves. When the Edo period ushered Japan into an era of prolonged peace and the demand for practical armours dropped accordingly, competition amongst armour makers rose, and they turned to spectacular embossing to demonstrate their skills. From that time on, the *menoshita-bō* became more common.

STATUS SYMBOL FUNCTION

The second round of saké was served by Ōdachi Iyo no Kami. At this time the three envoys mentioned above delivered another message to Nobunaga, and he made his obeisance before the shogun. Yoshiaki graciously filled Nobunaga’s cup according to the sangon ceremony, and Nobunaga received a hawk and a cuirass as presents from the shogun. There could be no honor greater than this.⁶⁶

This passage in the *Shinchō kōki* tells us Nobunaga was presented with a hawk and a cuirass by Ashikaga Yoshiaki (足利義昭, 1537-1597). Apparently there was no greater honour than receiving such a gift, which indicates that the armour must have enjoyed a very high status as a present.

It is known that armours were frequently offered as gifts at the very highest level. It was a common custom in the Momoyama period, when the powerful warlords Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu succeeded in unifying Japan.

Armours of the affluent *samurai* were decorated with rich materials. In the case of the *menpō*, the quality of the embossing mainly determined its value. Among the luxury materials used for a *menpō* were: moustaches of yak hair, gilding on the teeth, high-quality lacquer work and sophisticated leather finishing for the *suga* (throat guard), gilded ornaments and luxury silk.

An important indication of the value of *menpō* in the Edo period is offered by the *Meikō zukan*,⁶⁷ which occasionally lists valuations.⁶⁸ Here, too, it must be borne in mind that the valuations for the leading Myōchin masters were artificially pushed up by the Myōchin themselves. Nevertheless, the valuations certainly indicate that *menpō* were precious objects and that only few were able to afford good-quality facial armour.⁶⁹

PROTECTIVE FUNCTION

The function of armour is to protect from arrows and bullets as well as to impart the maximum of freedom in action. Some nevertheless look upon it as a mere ornament and favour enrichments of gold and silver, with gold brocade for the linings. Nara iron, too, is in great demand.

Too much stress cannot be laid on the fact that armour is a thing to be used in war. Still, even here differences in rank must be indicated and it must not be forgotten that the adornment of armour is the subject of one of the branches of etiquette.⁷⁰

Sakakibara Kōzan emphasizes that an armour was originally meant to be worn on the battlefield, and this is also true for the *menpō*. The major difference between a theatrical mask and a *menpō* is actually the protective role of the armour mask as part of a warrior’s gear. Although only few masks were actually worn, *menpō* were always made of metal or leather, materials that offer protection. Every *menpō* was fitted out with a throat guard (*suga*), or at the very least had small holes at the bottom of the mask to fasten the *suga*. Kōzan also writes that the removable nose piece offered the warrior the greatest convenience.⁷¹ Masks of the *menoshita-bō* type had a detachable nose piece, so that the mask could also serve as a *hanbō* on the battle field. Masks of the *hanbō* type, therefore, provided the greatest protection, covering also the cheeks and jaws, while they were at the same time very suitable for securing the helmet cords. The *suga* also protected the throat very efficiently. The *kassenzu* de-

Although high-quality armours were once again made towards the end of the Edo period to serve in the various upheavals that coincided with the opening of Japan, the majority of the armours produced in the peaceful Edo period is characteristically sumptuous.

Not only the great warlords of today but warriors of every class are concerned with beauty, wearing colorfully woven and embroidered fine silks (*ryōrakinshū*) The warriors also decorate themselves according to their status, making up their appearance, and spending all their pay on clothing. It is a peaceful time now, so they put their arrows away in quivers, and swords in boxes to devote themselves solely to worldly pleasures. It is just amazing to hear of and see these beautiful robes everywhere. Such things were unheard of before.⁷²

In the development towards the *tōsei gusoku* or new armour, a great deal of attention was lavished on design. The classical standard was more and more abandoned and the *tōsei gusoku* could in principle take on any conceivable shape. It is in this period that the armour mask became increasingly important. Masks gave the finishing touch to an armour and formed an essential aesthetic element when an armour was displayed in the private quarters of a *samurai*.

From the Heian period it became customary to donate swords and armours to temples, whether *shintō* or Buddhist, where prayers were offered for the success and prosperity of a clan. Both swords and armours were awarded this spiritual function. The *katchū-men*, being an essential part of an armour, was no exception.



samurai household were an essential part of *samurai* culture. Maintaining the family honour and increasing the family status through their deeds was a matter of principle to many *samurai*, and the individual was subordinate to the family in this respect. In Japanese religious experience, the deceased are still a vital part of the family and play a role in the prosperity of the household. The blending of Japanese native religion with Buddhism resulted in various rituals meant to propitiate the ancestors and to accompany them in their journey through the various stages they were to encounter after death. As Buddhism came to be practised side by side with *shintō*, a number of interesting contrasts arose in this respect. It was assumed that deceased ancestors became ancestral *kami* or spirits. In Japanese Buddhism, however, the deceased are assessed by the ten judges of the Buddhist hell and are reborn in one of the six realms, with Buddhahood and enlightenment as the ultimate goal. The practice of venerating the spirit of a deceased ancestor in a shrine is here clearly at odds with the idea of reincarnation. It is known that the worship of armours and swords fitted into the *shintō* context because these objects were offered to shrines (*shintō* temples). The rituals involving death, on the other hand, virtually always find their basis in Buddhism. The armours themselves were decorated with both Buddhist and *shintō* elements. That Buddhist elements were added to an armour indicates that the *samurai* regarded the spirituality and customs of Buddhism as positive and useful. Buddhist elements on armours include sutras or parts of them, applied in gold lacquer on the breastplate, helmet crests (*maedate*) in the form of sutras or other Buddhist

writings and elements from Buddhist mythology or images of gods from the Buddhist pantheon. Early armours feature many of the elements that are also familiar from sword culture. The dragon guarding the jewel of the Buddha, for instance, was an especially popular symbol that was commonly used.

The armours of powerful leaders in particular must have carried great spiritual importance, as was also the case with the swords of the great warlords.

During the *sakoku* period⁷³ it was forbidden to export certain goods, including swords and armours. According to van Overmeer Fisscher, the export ban on weapons had to do with:

...religious notions of the Japanese, and the esteem they have for their Camis and brave forbears, and ... to prevent the export of their precious steel.

He continues:

...they entertain the superstitious belief that bravery is attached to the weapons themselves, and that this bravery would pass from their country together with the weapon.⁷⁴

Fisscher's observation confirms that the Japanese in the Edo period attached extra spiritual significance to armour.

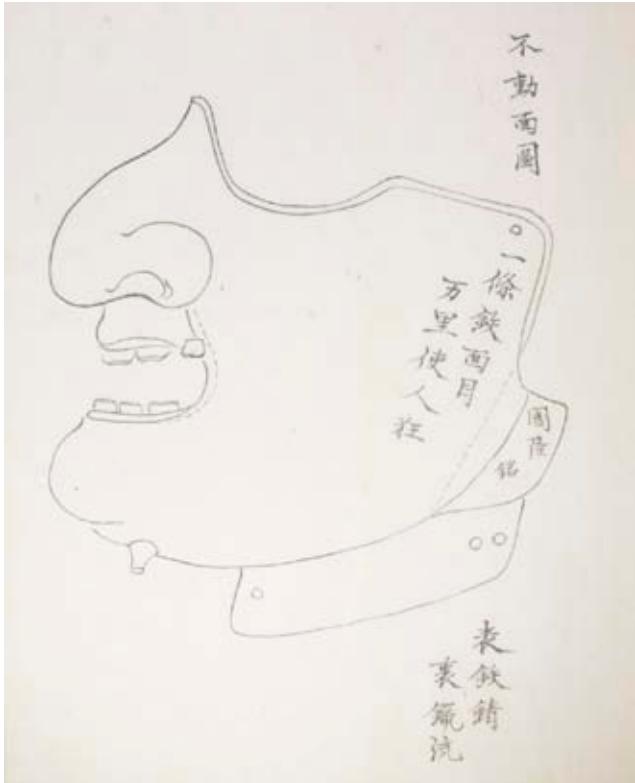
DETERRENT FUNCTION

Masks of the *ressei-bō* type were extremely popular with the warrior elite in the second half of the 16th century. By far the larger part of all *menpō* dating from the late Muromachi period and Momoyama period belong to this type, which is characterised by a fierce expression and sharp lines, and often has facial hair.

According to Iida, these aggressive-looking *ressei* masks were so numerous because they were of great use on the battlefield. Warriors entering the battlefield as it were acquired the qualities represented by their mask, and it was the purpose of this mask to resemble an aggressive and terrifying person.⁷⁵

Warriors deliberately chose a mask with a terrifying appearance, which explains the high survival rate of masks of the *ressei* type. The fierce expression was meant to daunt the enemy on the battlefield. At this point it is necessary to consider the inspiration for the *ressei* type of mask. As there are no sources available that discuss their origin, it is necessary to classify the outward features of the masks and to compare them with other forms of Japanese masks and images that may have influenced the *ressei-men*.

As the *ressei* mask originated in the 16th century, it follows that it should first be compared with contemporary examples. It turns out there exists a strong relationship between the *akujō* mask of *nō* plays and the *ressei-men* of the Momoyama period and the early Edo period.⁷⁶ *Akujō* is a mask used for the roles of very powerful and grim older men and is designed to look terrifying. This *nō* mask has veins that angrily stand out on the forehead. The eyebrows are aggressively shaped and the eyes radiate strength and fierceness. The *ressei* version of the *menpō* lacks the upper part, as *menpō* are half masks. The nose and muscles around the cheekbones, however, are shaped exactly like those of *akujō*, having the same curves and sharp folds that are suggestive of aggression and strength. That the warlords preferred this mask as part of their armour is understandable. *Akujō* expresses intimidating aggression and supernatural strength, qualities that served a warlord from the Age of Warring States, a time when might was right. The armour was the ultimate means to demonstrate these terrifying qualities, while the image of a powerful and terrifying warlord also boosted the morale of the troops in battle.



MEIKŌ ZUKAN FUKAN, JO ANSEEUW COLLECTION
A DRAWING OF A FUDŌ MASK FROM THE MEIKŌ ZUKAN. FUDŌ MYŌŌ (不動明王) IS ONE OF THE POWERFUL AND FIERCE PROTECTIVE GODS OF BUDDHISM. THE DESCRIPTION STATES THAT A LOOK AT THIS MARTIAL FACE SCARES MEN AROUND. THIS ILLUSTRATES THE DETERRENT FUNCTION OF ARMOUR MASKS WELL