

**Support for Theater Culture by the Private Company as Seen in the History
of Japanese Contemporary Drama**
-With a focus on the example of Osaka Gas-

FY2021 Mécénat Associate

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Introduction

When looking at corporate mécénat activities in Japan, there are relatively few examples of such activities in the field of drama compared to the two major art forms of music and fine arts. One of the main reasons I can conceive of is that drama itself is a new genre in Japan, either as an art form that people are familiar with, as a professional field, or as a subject of research. Learning about drama in schools and specialized departments has only recently begun in the field of education, and the number of such schools and departments is still few compared to those for music and fine arts.

Another reason that comes to mind is that drama is an art form that requires a special "venue" for people to gather, where there are seats for the audience, a stage for the actors to perform, and a place to rehearse for a certain period of time, and because it is an art form that requires these elements, it is very difficult for outside groups to provide such a venue. Naturally, in order for drama to provide such a "venue" in society, it must have support from the outside. Therefore, the provision of buildings such as drama has been a major part of the corporate mécénat of theatrical productions, but due to circumstances such as the inevitable aging of these buildings and the fact that the nature of the "venue" required by the theater has changed dramatically with the development of the theater, many have closed or changed their roles to commercial stages or movie theaters. Although only a few of the theaters built by corporations are still active today as venues for contemporary drama, there have been many attempts to provide theaters in the past.

In addition to the physical infrastructure that is the theater, there are several other elements of drama that require outside support. One such example is the formation of "recognition" such as awards and criticism, which are indispensable for the promotion of any field of art. Moreover, just because a work receives recognition does not necessarily mean that it will be given the opportunity to be performed or shown again. In European countries with rich theater culture, such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, public theaters that are scattered throughout each region are the basic unit of theater world as a product of the formation of modern civil society, and these theaters generally adopt a repertory system in which all the plays to be performed that year are announced at the beginning of the season and these plays are performed repeatedly throughout the year. The repertory system is based on the idea that once a play is created, it is accumulated as an asset, and cases in which "a play is not given a chance to be performed again" are less likely to occur when compared to Japan.

To summarize the above, in order for Japanese contemporary drama to continue and develop, it must be given a "venue" to be performed, "recognition" to be positioned within society, and a "next opportunity" in order to sustain itself. Not blessed with public funding compared to the West and lacking a solid foundation of public theaters, Japanese contemporary drama has developed with a uniqueness and novelty not seen in any other country, but has always needed new support in order to move forward. Under such circumstances, contrary to the general perception that corporate mécénat activities in the drama are rare, it is in fact the private company that has offered a helping hand to the drama in key areas.

In the Chapter 1 of this thesis, as background, I will first unravel the history of Japanese contemporary

drama since the 1960s, focusing on the places where it has been developed. The theater culture in the Kansai region is discussed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 2, I will provide an overview of examples of corporate mécénat activities in the field of drama in Japan. Based on the above, I will introduce the three initiatives of the mécénat activities of Osaka Gas Co., Ltd. in Chapter 3. The aim of this thesis is to clarify how the efforts of Osaka Gas Co., Ltd. are positioned in the history of Japanese contemporary drama and what significance they have in the field of theater, while at the same time trying to answer the question, "What are the needs of drama in Japan and how can companies respond to those needs?"

1. History of Japanese Contemporary Drama

1.1. Prehistory of contemporary drama and 1960s underground theater

When talking about Japanese contemporary drama, the emergence of the "small theater movement and underground theater" in the 1960s is generally considered to be the starting point. The modernization of Japanese theater began in 1888 with the "shinpa" (new school) movement, a theatrical movement that considered kabuki to be part of the "kyuha" (old school) and aimed to create a new form of theater. From the 1900s onward, the drama-centered "shingeki" (new drama) style emerged as the antithesis of kabuki (old drama) and the new school, patterned after the modern drama of the late 19th-century Europe. In 1924, Tsukiji Little Theater was established by Yoshi Hijikata and Kaoru Osanai, where new plays, mainly translated drama from Western drama, were performed. The shingeki era continued until the postwar period with the inception of the Bungakuza and the Haiyuza, and in 1955, the Shingeki Drama Award, the predecessor of the Kishida Kunio Drama Award, was established.

In the 1960s, young theater artists who carried the anti-establishment spirit of the Anpo protests revolted against the Western-centered, intellectual-class-oriented shingeki style and founded the "small theater movement," or "underground theater". The year 1967 can be considered the start of underground theater in Japan, when the "Tenjo Sajiki" (Experimental Laboratory of Theatre) was established by Shuji Terayama, and Juro Kara's theater company, "Jokyo Gekijo" (Situation Theatre) staged its first red tent performance "Koshimaki-Osen (Tsukibue): Giri Ninjo Irohanihoheto Hen" at the Hanazono Shrine in Shinjuku.

A major characteristic of underground theater is the practice of theater that is not confined to a building called a theater, as typified by Juro Kara's red tent troupe, mobile theater with Makoto Sato's black tent, and Shuji Terayama's street theater. In the 2000s, Rimini Protokoll from Germany and Port B led by Akira Takayama from Japan began to perform outdoor theater or plays called "touring performances" in outdoor public spaces, but the outdoor drama of Japan's underground generation was the pioneer of this movement.

As symbolized by the clashes with the police during the performances, Kara and Terayama's outdoor plays were performed with a certain aggression and significance as an anti-establishment movement. On the other hand, confronted with the crucial problem of "lacking the space for rehearsal and performance," a number of theater companies have converted non-theater spaces into theaters as a result

of their ingenious efforts. The "Jiyu Gekijo" (Free Theater) which was founded in 1966 by Kazuyoshi Kushida, Makoto Sato, Ren Saito, Hideko Yoshida, and others, was converted from the basement of a glass store in Roppongi to a theater called the "Underground Theater Jiyu Gekijo" and made it their home base. Tadashi Suzuki's "Waseda Shogekijo Drama-kan Theater," which started out as a student theater troupe at Waseda University, used the second floor of the Mon Cheri Coffee Shop located on the Waseda University Nanmon-dori as the theater of the same name¹. In addition to outdoor theater, Kara's Jokyo Gekijo also used the jazz cafe "Shinjuku Pit Inn" and other venues to stage its productions. Shogo Ota's "Tenkei Gekijo," which was known for its silent drama, converted a room in a wooden apartment in Akasaka to create a small theater, the "Tenkei Gekijo Kobo" (Akasaka Kobo). In addition, the "Gendaijin Gekijo" (Modern People's Theater), which was founded by Yukio Ninagawa and Kunio Shimizu in 1968, put on nighttime drama performances at the Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka in Shinjuku after the movie theater closed for business.

Based on the above, it can be said that small theater drama in Japan started out with a student movement-like spirit to go out into the open and involve people in rebelling against the existing system, but also with a lack of theaters suitable for the performance of new plays. Once the 1970s began, the situation changed drastically.

1.2. The small theater boom and theatre construction rush in the 1970s and 1980s

During the 1970s, playwrights of the underground generation continued to be active, and in 1970 and 1971, two of the standard-bearers of tent theater, Juro Kara and Makoto Sato, won the Kishida Kunio Drama Award in successive years. Tadashi Suzuki of the Waseda Shogekijo Drama-kan Theater also relocated his base to Toga-mura in Toyama Prefecture in 1976 after a stint at Iwanami Hall, where he began his activities as part of SCOT (Suzuki Company of Toga). His theatrical activities in collaboration with the village, such as renovating a Gassho-style house (house with a thatched and steeply slanting roof) into a theater, attracted attention from around the world.

On the other hand, the plays of Kohei Tsuka came into the public spotlight as the second generation of small theater plays, and the small theater plays of the 1970s were dominated by ironic, laugh-out-loud comedies (Senda 1995: 160). The theatrical company "Tsuka Kohei Office" mainly performed at VAN99HALL, a small theater established in Aoyama by the men's apparel brand VAN JACKET, and became the featured theatrical company at Kinokuniya Hall from 1976. Kinokuniya Hall opened in 1964, but until the arrival of Tsuka, it had been exclusively a theater for shingeki.

In 1976, after Tsuka was recruited by Kinokuniya Hall, VAN99HALL held an open application for new affiliated theatrical companies, and this is where "Yume No Yumin Sha" led by Hideki Noda was discovered. VAN99HALL would close its doors in 1978, but like Tsuka before him, Noda expanded his

¹ The site has now been renamed as the "Waseda Shogekijo Drama-kan Theater" run by Waseda University.

activities to Kinokuniya Hall in 1981. The emergence of a kind of pecking order of theaters at this time can be attributed to the arrival of a new generation of theater companies competing with each other, as well as the birth of theaters of various sizes. Hiroshi Takahagi, who was in charge of direction etc. at Yume No Yumin Sha, recalls the following.

The energy that overflowed in the 1960s and 1970s in search of a space where plays could be performed was summarized in ""Shogekijo Sugoroku"" (small theater backgammon). It refers on the success story of a small theater company beginning with performances in small spaces and then moving up to perform at the Honda Theatre and Kinokuniya Hall as ""Agari"" (meaning reaching to a goal." (Takahagi 2010: 72)

At the same time, Takeshi Kawamura's "Daisan Erotica" (The Third Erotica, 1980) and Shoji Kokami's "Daisan Butai" (The Third Stage, 1981), along with Noda and other female playwrights mentioned below, were hailed as the "third generation" of small theater drama, sparking a "small-theater boom". The second and third generation of small theater dramas are described as more entertaining than the first underground generation. The changes that took place were not only in the style of the works, but as Takahagi mentioned, may also have been reflected in the attitude of the consuming audience, who watched the trajectory of the new theatrical companies as they rose from small venues to larger theaters.

The 1980s was also an era marked by female playwrights. With Hana Kino's all-female troupe "Gekidan Aoi Tori" (1974) leading the way, theater groups such as Eriko Watanabe's (Eri Watanabe) "Gekidan 300 (Sanjumaru)" (1980), Ai Nagai and Shizuka Oishi's "Nitoshu" (1981), Koharu Kisaragi's "NOISE" (1982), and Rio Kishida's "Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan" (1984) continued to rise.

From the 1970s to the 1980s, many multi-purpose private theaters and municipal public halls were built for children's plays, musicals, music concerts, opera, ballet, and other performances in addition to small theater dramas. In addition, driven by the bubble economy, there was a wave of theaters constructed by corporations. As I will discuss the details in the next chapter, the Shibuya and Aoyama areas in particular became cultural centers, with the birth of theaters funded by Seibu and Tokyu, including Spiral Hall (1985) and the Aoyama Theatre and Aoyama Round Theatre (1985), both of which were attached to the Kodomo no Shiro (Children's Castle).

In private theaters, theater groups consisting of the "Suzunari" (1981), "Honda Gekijo" (1982), and "Ekimae Gekijo" (1984), built by former film actor Kazuo Honda with his private funds in Shimokitazawa, became a hub for small theater drama, and with the subsequent establishment of theaters such as the "OFF OFF Theater" (1993), "Geki Shogekijo" (1997), "Shogekijo Rakuen" (2007), "Theater 711" (2009), and "Shogekijo B1" (2014), a theater district was created in Shimokitazawa. "Shinjuku Theater Tops" (1985), also run by the same Honda Theater Group, was also known as a launching pad for seasonal theater troupes. The "Komaba Agora Theater," which is known as the theater for Oriza Hirata's "Seinendan," was also established in 1983 along the Keio Inokashira Line, the same line that

runs through Shimokitazawa.

As such, the style of small theater drama itself underwent a transformation from the 1970s to the 1980s, and the increase in the number of theaters, especially in areas where youth culture took root, changed the face of small theater from a radical and intellectual movement to a popular and urban culture.

However, with the collapse of the bubble economy, the theatrical world also began to sink. In 1985, Shogo Ota's Tenkei Gekijo performed the monumental "Chi no Eki" (The Earth Station), which transformed a huge cave at the ruins of the Oya Stone Mine in Tochigi Prefecture into a theatrical space. Just three years later, Ota said, "Entertainment now obsesses over popularity at the expense of true artistry, leading to a destruction of art." (Partially omitted) We need to build a more different ship and set out on our own," (Nishido 2006: 222) and disbanded the Tenkei Gekijo.

In 1986, organized by Dentsu, sponsored by Fuji Television Network and Nippon Broadcasting System, and supported by NTT and three other companies, Hideki Noda, at the height of his popularity, staged his Stonehenge trilogy consisting of "Byakuya no Valkyrie" (Valkyrie of the Midnight Sun), "Suisei no Siegfried" (A Messenger from the Comet), and "Valhalla Johatsu" (Valhalla Evaporation) in succession over a 10-hour performance at 1st Gymnasium at the Yoyogi National Stadium, drawing a total number of 25,000 audience members (Senda 1995: 201-2). However, six years later, in 1992, Noda dissolved Yume No Yumin Sha.

After indicating the word "entertainment" as a key word to describe the theater of the 1980s, Kojin Nishido describes the differences from the theater of the 1960s as follows.

Although this word (author's note: "entertainment") originally meant to "entertain" or "bring enjoyment" to others, the theater, which had been recognized as "intellectual entertainment," was transformed into "entertainment as consumption" in Japanese society during the 1980s. This ties in with "subcultures" such as anime and manga. In the 1960s, the term "counterculture" was used, but this was transformed into a "subculture" circulating within a narrow framework with a "shift toward minor situations". (Nishido 2003: 18-19)

Despite the theater's rise to prominence in the form of a small theater boom, Ota stated that "the arts have been destroyed," while Noda sensed discomfort in the frenzy of the masses. The next goal for the drama, which had transformed itself from a counterculture to a subculture, was to establish its position as part of the mainstream culture.

1.3. 1990s onwards: Public theater and festivals

Around 1990, the theater industry entered a period of stagnation, symbolized by the bursting of the bubble economy and the dissolution of the Tenkei Gekijo and Yume No Yumin Sha. It was during this time that Oriza Hirata's advocacy of contemporary colloquial theater ushered in a paradigm shift toward a new style of theater. Playwrights from around the same generation as Hirata dismantled the strong

theatrical language and exaggerated gestures used in small theater drama, and continued to search for a language and body that responded to the life-size everyday sensations of the common people.

On the other hand, Ota and other playwrights of the underground generation who expressed their disappointment with drama at the end of the 1990s chose the public theater as, in Ota's words, "a different ship" to board next. When seen from an environmental and institutional perspective, Japanese drama since the 1990s can be characterized by two categories, public theaters and festivals.

Many public halls by local governments had already been created, as mentioned in the previous section. However, public theaters and community theaters are not necessarily associated with each other equally. Yasuo Ito points out that the Western concept of "public theater" was formed in accordance with modern civil society and the nation-state, and does not fit the current situation in Japan, and explains "publicness" as applicable to contemporary Japanese public theater from the following two points.

The first is the creation of performing arts in the sense that the performing arts respond to the needs of the society of the time (in modern times, "civil society"), in other words, the public nature of the performing arts themselves, the drama, and the second is the public nature in terms of access, in that the results of the performing arts can be widely enjoyed by civil society. (Ito 2010: 13)

To put it simple, a public theater is "a theater that is open to the public, where creation takes place with the public (not limited to drama lovers) in mind," as opposed to a private space such as the basement of a glass store or a room in an apartment, which I mentioned in the first section. Also, in order to be a public creative center, it is important to have not only the function of training theater creators, but also outreach functions such as education, research, and cultural transmission in cooperation with the outside community.

In 1990, Art Tower Mito, with its resident theater company ACM (Acting Company Mito) and the ACM Theatre, and the Shonandai Cultural Center, which also houses the Civic Theater, were established. Tadashi Suzuki was appointed artistic director of the ACM Theater, and Shogo Ota was appointed artistic director of the Civic Theater. This was followed by the Aichi Prefectural Art Theater (1992), Sainokuni Saitama Arts Theater (1994), Setagaya Public Theatre (1997), Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC; also in 1997), "Ryutopia" Niigata City Performing Arts Center (1998), Kani City Cultural Creation Center (2002), Kitakyushu Performing Arts Center (2003), Matsumoto Performing Arts Centre (2004), Hyogo Performing Arts Center (2005), and others. Yukio Ninagawa was appointed artistic director of the Saitama Arts Foundation, which manages the Sainokuni Saitama Arts Theater, Makoto Sato of the Black Tent Theater was appointed artistic director of the Setagaya Public Theatre, and Tadashi Suzuki was appointed artistic general director of SPAC.

In 1997, the New National Theatre, complete with opera, ballet, contemporary dance, and drama departments, opened to great anticipation. In addition, theaters that could be called "public small

theaters" such as Kichijoji Theater (2005), Sengawa Theater (2008), and Za-Koenji (2009) were established. Makoto Sato served as the first artistic director of Za-Koenji. Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre, which opened in 1990, has developed into a theater open to the public while maintaining the spirit of small theater drama since Hideki Noda was appointed artistic advisor in 2008 (and artistic director the following year) and Hiroshi Takahagi was appointed deputy director.

As a major event that changed the Japanese drama scene along with public theaters, international performing arts festivals began to be held starting around 1990. The first international theater festival held in Japan was the "Toga Festival '82- First International Theater Festival" in 1982 organized by Tadashi Suzuki of Toga Village, with the participation of 11 theater companies from 6 countries. In addition to the annual Toga Festival, Suzuki also served as artistic director of the "Mitsui Festival Tokyo," an international performing arts festival held every other year from 1988 to 1996. International theater festivals that have followed in their footsteps include "Festival/Tokyo" (commonly known as F/T), which was inaugurated in 1988 as the "Tokyo Festival," "TPAM," which was launched in 1995 as the "Tokyo Performing Arts Market" (renamed YPAM: Yokohama Performing Arts Meeting in 2021), and "Fujinokuni ⇄ World Theater Festival" (2011-present, formerly the Shizuoka Spring Arts Festival). Other performance festivals focusing on dance and installation art in the broadest sense include "KYOTO EXPERIMENT" (2010~), "Dance New Air" (2014~, formerly Dance Biennale Tokyo), and "KYOTO STEAM World Cultural Exchange Festival" (2019~). Furthermore, some arts festivals, such as the "Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale" (2000~) and the "Aichi Triennale" (2010~), provide performing arts programs. Many international (performing) arts festivals bring together expressive arts that transcend the boundaries of genres such as drama, dance, performance art, video, and installation art. Along with these trends, leading Japanese playwrights such as Oriza Hirata and Toshiki Okada became eager to engage in international co-productions, and international exchanges such as invitations to visit foreign countries became more active. To sum it up, the transcendence of national borders and genres is one of the key points in the development of drama from the 1990s to the present.

Looking back again at the trends since the 1960s, it is clear that Japanese contemporary drama has followed a path from a counterculture (1960s) to a popular subculture (1970s and 1980s), and then to a public mainstream culture (1990s onward) that is unrestricted by any boundaries.

2. Corporate Support for Theater in Japan

2.1. Birth of Western-style theater and multi-purpose halls

As seen in the previous chapter, Japanese contemporary drama began in the 1960s with tent performances, outdoor theater, and private spaces such as basements and coffee shops, and in the 1970s and 1980s, it actively associated itself within the confines of the theater. Unlike in Europe, where there was a basis of public theaters, Japanese contemporary drama has been dominated by individual playwrights, who have been searching for a venue to perform their plays. Just as Japanese contemporary drama itself has experienced a history of exploration, the private companies that provide theaters have

also approached the theater in a state of exploration.

On the other hand, if we take into consideration commercial dramas and multipurpose halls, theater construction is an important part of the prehistory of corporate mécénat activities in Japan. As an event that symbolizes this, the founding of the Takarazuka Revue in 1914 by Hankyu Railway president Ichizo Kobayashi is regarded as a pioneering event in corporate mécénat activities in Japan. Japan experienced a rush to build theaters and multipurpose halls from the 1950s to the 1960s by railroad companies, newspaper companies, department stores, and broadcasting stations, with railroad companies occupying the most important position (Kobayashi 2010: 99). In addition to the Takarazuka Revue, a pioneer in this field was the Imperial Theatre, which was established in 1911 as Japan's first large-scale Western-style theater. The Imperial Theatre, which is now run by Toho, was operated by Sanyo Railway's management team, including Keinosuke Nishino, at the time of its opening. In 1926, the Asahi Kaikan was constructed by the Osaka Asahi Shimbun, and in 1927, the Mitsukoshi Theater, a pioneer of department store theaters, was built. The major theaters and multipurpose halls that were subsequently built by corporations in the 1950s and 1960s are listed below.

- 1952 - Sankei Hall (Osaka)
- 1953 - Yamaha Hall, Dai-Ichi Seimei Hall
- 1954 - Toyoko Hall
- 1955 - Sankei Hall (Otemachi), NHK Hall
- 1957 - Yomiuri Hall, Meitetsu Hall
- 1961 - Yasuda Seimei Hall
- 1963 - Nissay Theater

2.2. Contemporary Drama Theater

As mentioned in Section 2 of Chapter 1, from the 1970s to the 1980s, a series of theaters were created in conjunction with the small theater boom, and many of them were operated by corporations. In particular, 1985, a year in which the bubble period was approaching, saw the birth of a succession of theaters sponsored by corporate mécénat activities, including Spiral Hall, Benisan Pit, Ogimachi Museum Square in Osaka, and the Kintetsu Theater and Kintetsu Small Theater. The following theaters were constructed by companies during this period for theatrical productions.

- 1972 - VAN99HALL: VAN JACKET
- 1973 - Seibu Theater (renamed PARCO Theater in 1985): Saison Group
- 1978 - Ginza Hakuinkan Theater: Hakuinkan Co., Ltd.
- 1985 - Spiral Hall: Wacoal Corp.
 - Benisan Pit: Benisan Co., Ltd.
 - Ogimachi Museum Square: Osaka Gas Co., Ltd.

Kintetsu Theater / Kintetsu Small Theater: Kintetsu Railway Co., Ltd.

1987 - Ginza Saison Theater (Le Theatre Ginza from 2000): Saison Group

1989 - Theatre Cocoon, Orchard Hall: Tokyu Group

1988 - The Globe Tokyo (Tokyo Panasonic Globe): Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd.
(sponsored until 2002)

Shitamachi Karaza: Saison Group

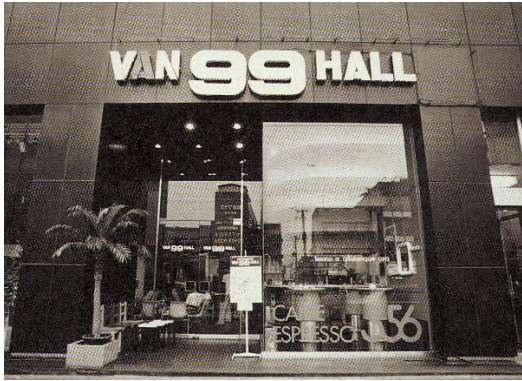
Shin-Kobe Oriental Gekijo: Daiei Group

To provide some additional information on some theaters, VAN99HALL, mentioned in Section 2 of Chapter 1 as a hub for the activities of Kohei Tsuka and Hideki Noda, was conceived and established by Kensuke Ishizu of VAN JACKET, a men's apparel brand that was at the forefront of youth fashion at the time. To add a touch of wit, there were 99 seats in the theater, and the admission fee was an unbelievably low 99 yen per seat.

The Seibu Theater, which opened in 1973, was part of the "Saison culture" developed by Seiji Tsutsumi's Saison Group. The artistic and cultural activities conducted by the Saison Group boast a scale "so large that it is impossible to distinguish between investments in their core business and cultural investments" (Kato 2018: 93), and play a significant role in the promotion of arts and culture in Japan². The Seibu Theater opened one month prior to the opening of the main Shibuya PARCO building, and it had aspects of a sales strategy for Shibuya PARCO (Yui 1991: 199). While the theater stages a wide range of events, from music concerts to rakugo (traditional Japanese comic storytelling), and its theatrical lineup is heavily tinged with commercial drama, it is also a theater with a broad base, having opened as the home of the experimental "Abe Kobo Studio". One of the unique features of the PARCO Theater is that it is not operated as a rental theater and has no artistic director, but instead of that, all performances are produced independently by PARCO Co., Ltd. and sent to regional theaters and other theaters in Tokyo as "PARCO PRODUCE" works.

Spiral, a cultural complex in Aoyama that opened in 1985 with the theater Spiral Hall, was built by the clothing manufacturer Wacoal Corp. Spiral is operated by Wacoal Art Center, which was established by Wacoal as an affiliate company upon its opening, and has evolved from a corporate mécénat of Wacoal to the main business of Wacoal Art Center Co., Ltd.

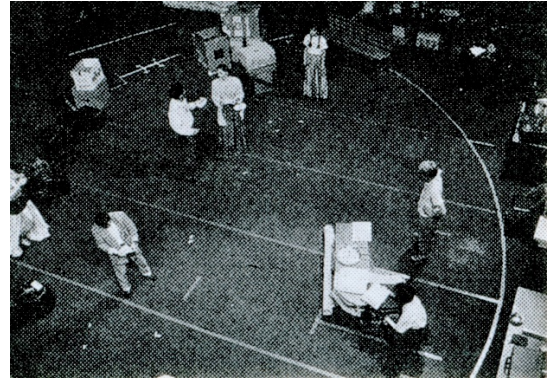
² The Saison Foundation, which was established in 1987 by Seiji Tsutsumi, focuses on subsidizing performing arts such as theater and contemporary dance.



VAN99HALL

Source: OMOHARAREAL

(<https://omoharareal.com/navi/review/detail/2050>)



Benisan Pit

Source: "Mécénat White Paper 1993," page 206

The Benisan Pit, which opened in 1985, was a facility converted by the dyeing company Benisan from the site of its own factory into a rental rehearsal space and small theater. Despite being an old building in downtown Tokyo, it attracted attention as a small theater where prominent figures such as Bando Tamasaburo performed, and was patronized by Yukio Ninagawa's Ninagawa Studio and Ai Nagai's Nitosha. It won the Mécénat Award in 1992, but closed in 2009 due to the deterioration of the building. Looking at it from a corporate perspective, the challenging aspect of mécénat activities targeting theater is not necessarily the preference for high-quality, highly functional venues, but rather the need to provide spaces that match the unique atmosphere of Japan's small theater drama. In that sense, the Benisan Pit and Ogimachi Museum Square, which will be discussed in the next chapter, are successful examples where the demand from those who create theater and the supply from companies match, and the environment also stimulates creativity.

2.3. Support through acquisition of naming rights

The acquisition of naming rights is one method of corporate support for theaters that has emerged since the 2000s. Naming rights are an agreement whereby a company names a facility after its company name or product and pays the facility for such naming rights. This method has been used since the 1970s at baseball stadiums in the U.S., and the first example seen in Japan was "Ajinomoto Stadium," for which Ajinomoto Co., Inc. acquired the naming rights for Tokyo Stadium in 2003. Later, naming rights would increase mainly for professional sports stadiums, but they have also been widely adopted for theaters, museums, multipurpose halls, and other cultural facilities, becoming an important source of funding for arts and cultural centers. The acquisition of naming rights for theaters is an effective model case in that it enables the private company to provide financial support for public theaters while respecting the autonomy of the theaters as is.

A major example of a company acquiring naming rights for a theater is the "ROHM Theatre Kyoto"

(Kyoto Kaikan), operated by ROHM Co., Ltd, which is engaged in mécénat activities in the field of music. The exceptionally large contract, worth 5.25 billion yen over 50 years starting in 2016, is considered a typical example of corporate naming rights acquisition, not limited to cultural facilities or those in Japan. In addition, the Hyogo Performing Arts Center has sold the naming rights for its Main Hall, Medium Hall, and Small Hall to Kobe Steel, Ltd. (2008~), Hankyu Corporation (2009~), and Kobe College Foundation (2008~), respectively. A more recent example of a contract is the Tokyo Tatemono Brillia Hall (Toshima Arts Culture Theater, 2019~).

3. Mécénat activities of Osaka Gas

In this chapter, I will introduce the mécénat activities of Osaka Gas Co., Ltd. which has been continuously supporting theatrical productions since 1985. The description is based on interviews with the company conducted by the author as outlined below.

Implementation date: October 21, 2021

Location: Osaka Gas Co., Ltd.

Speaker: Mr. Hiroshi Yamanoh, Regional Co-Creation Team, Business Infrastructure Department, Network Company

Attendees: Hirokazu Nakamura and Kako Tanaka, Community Planning Team, Business Infrastructure Department, Network Company

Osaka Gas Co., Ltd. ran the Ogimachi Museum Square (OMS) cultural complex from 1985 to 2003, and has sponsored the "OMS Drama Award" from 1994 to the present. Furthermore, as a recent attempt, radio drama, reading plays and town-walking theater were planned. In this chapter, I would like to take a step-by-step look at the above activities, starting from their inception with the creation of Ogimachi Museum Square.

3.1. Ogimachi Museum Square and small theater drama in Kansai

In 1985, Osaka Gas renovated the Osaka Gas Kita Branch Building in Kita-ku, Osaka City, and opened the Ogimachi Museum Square (hereinafter referred to as OMS), a cultural complex. It was originally planned to be operated tentatively for three years as a utilization of idle land. The facility consisted of a multipurpose space, a mini-theater, a café-restaurant, a general store, and a gallery, and the "Forum," a multipurpose space converted from a warehouse, was used for theater performances and events, and eventually became known as the mecca for small theater drama in the Kansai region.



Exterior view of the Ogimachi Museum Square

Photo provided by: Osaka Gas Co., Ltd.

As a backdrop to the thriving OMS, the Kansai theater scene began to link up with the Tokyo theater trend in the 1970s (Nishido 2003: 52). It was in 1970 that Ishinha, a leading Kansai theater company, was founded by Yukichi Matsumoto, followed by other theater companies such as Michiza Sho Gekijo, Gekidan Mankaiza, and Gekidan Hanzai TomonoKai, all of which were established in the 1970s. From the 1970s to the 1980s, theater groups in Kansai, like those in Tokyo, formed a theater culture characterized by the words "student theater," "small theater," and "outdoor theater". The Kyoto University Seibu Kodo, Shimanouchi Shogekijo (Shimanouchi Church Chapel), and Osaka's Tennoji field band shell were well-known bases for such Kansai theatrical productions. The theater groups that emerged from universities include Osaka University's Daini Gekijo, Kyoto University's Sotobakomachi, Osaka University of Arts' Minami Kawachi Banzai Ichiza, Gekidan☆Shinkansen, Gekidan Taiyozoku, and Doshisha University's Gekidan M.O.P. (Kuki 2016: 20-21). In addition, Dumb Type, which created a sensation both in Japan and abroad as an up-and-coming group of performance artists, was established at Kyoto City University of Arts³.

When discussing Kansai theater, the existence of several public theaters cannot be ignored. As

³ They are known as a cross-genre performance art group that merges dialogue, dance, media art, sound art in their productions. Teiji Furuhashi, a key member and director of the production, incorporated his awareness of issues of sexual and racial minorities into the work as someone who was HIV-positive. For his most famous work, "S/N" (1992), he held a talk session called "Seminar Show for S/N" at Mumonkan in Kyoto and Shonandai Cultural Center in the year following its premiere in conjunction with the performance, attracting attention from the audience of small theater drama.

mentioned above, the number of local public halls began to increase in the 1970s, but in the Kansai region, in particular, public theaters focusing on theater began to emerge in the 1970s, ahead of the rush to build public theaters in the 1990s. At the forefront of these is the Ashiya Shimin Center Luna Hall, which opened in 1970. In addition, the Amagasaki Youth Creative Theater of Hyogo Prefecture, also known as the Piccolo Theater, which opened in 1978, later became a pioneering example of a creative public theater with its own theater school and resident theatrical company. In 1985, the Suita City Cultural Hall May Theater was established, and in 1988, the Itami Municipal Theater Hall (commonly known as AI Hall), which "specializes in contemporary drama," was opened.



Ashiya Shimin Center Luna Hall

Source: Ashiya City website

(https://www.city.itami.lg.jp/SISETU_KIKAN/BUNKA/1392090579573.html)

(<https://www.city.ashiya.lg.jp/kouminkan/guide.html>)



Itami Municipal Theater Hall (Ai Hall)

Source: Itami City website

As for theaters constructed by corporations, the Orange Room (now HEP HALL), which was built in 1979 in the commercial facility Hankyu Five (Umeda Hankyu Kaikan, now HEP FIVE), became a base for Kansai student theaters such as the above-mentioned Gekidan Sotoba Komachi, Gekidan☆Shinkansen, and Planet Pistaccio. OMS inherited the role of the Orange Room after the withdrawal of capital by Hankyu (Nishido 2017: 128).

OMS was more than just a rental space, it was a facility that established close relationships with the playwrights and theater companies that used it, thanks in part to the skills of producer Takashi Tsumura. In addition to becoming the home of Minami Kawachi Banzai Ichiza and Gekidan☆Shinkansen, the theater also discovered and introduced young theater companies such as Masataka Matsuda's "Jiku Gekijo," Toshiro Suzue's "HachijiHan," Shigefumi Fukatsu's "Toenkai," and Masahiro Iwasaki's "Taiyozoku" (Nishido 2003: 53). It also led to exchanges with theater companies in Tokyo and provided an opportunity for theater companies in both regions to come and go between each other. The approach by OMS to develop theatrical talent, introduce it to the public, and promote exchanges with others was one of the first to fulfill the ideal of a creative public theater, even though it is a private company.

OMS regrettably closed down in 2003 due to the deterioration of the building, but the OMS Drama

Award, which will be discussed in the next section, continued to be presented thereafter. Takashi Tsumura, who supported the small theater drama in Kansai as a producer, contributed his knowledge to the establishment of the Kitakyushu Performing Arts Center, and was appointed its director in 2003. Osaka Gas Business Create Co., Ltd., which was involved in the operation of OMS, has also used its expertise to assume management of the Kobe Art Village Center (commonly known as KAVC), which opened in 1996.

3.2. Management of the OMS Drama Award

The OMS Drama Award was established in 1994 as part of OMS's 10th anniversary project while Ogimachi Museum Square was still operating. The purpose of the award is to "discover new playwrights who will lead the next generation" and to "stimulate playwrights in the middle of their careers"⁴. Playwrights living or working in the six prefectures of the Kansai region are eligible for selection if they have written a new play and the play was first performed between January and December of the year prior to the call⁵. However, measures were taken for the 28th edition to allow entries that had not yet been staged in consideration of the impact caused by COVID-19, and actually both of the award-winning works had not yet been performed at that time: the Grand Prize for Aya Yamamoto's "Hana wo Tsumu Hito" (A person who picks flower) and the Honorable Mention for Natsuki Yamamura's "Sono Momo wa Chi no Aji ga Suru" (The peach tastes like blood). One Grand Prize winner and one Honorable Mention winner will be selected, and each will receive a cash prize (Grand Prize: 300,000 yen, Honorable Mention: 100,000 yen), and if the Grand Prize winning work is to be performed again by the end of March of the year following the year of the award, a separate 500,000 yen subsidy will be given for the repeat performance. The award-winning works will be published in book form as "OMS Drama Award" along with reviews and texts of the selection process. Although the open application is limited to the Kansai region, the contest attracts around 50 entries every year. Osaka Gas Co., Ltd.'s management of the OMS Drama Award was awarded the 2011 Mécénat Award in the Grand Prize category and the Engeki Tomoshihi Award.

While hosting events was the main focus of the OMS 10th anniversary commemorative project, the drama award was chosen for one of the projects against the backdrop that, despite the fact that talent was being discovered one after another in small theaters such as OMS, Ai Hall, and Kyoto's Artspace Mumonkan (now Atelier Gekiken), Kansai theater professionals were not getting sufficient opportunity for recognition at that time (Kotoba no Gekijo 2014: 85). In 1985, Kansai's first drama award, the "Teatro in Cabin" (originally named "Cabin '85 Drama Award"), was created, but was discontinued in 1992. People at OMS also had a desire for the project to be "not a one-time event, but something that would

⁴ From materials provided at the time of the interviews

⁵ From the application guidelines on the OMS Drama Award homepage;

<https://network.osakagas.co.jp/effort/oms/index.html#terms> (last viewed on March 9, 2022)

continue in the future."⁶



4th OMS Produced "Koko kara wa Toi Kuni" (A Country Far from Here)

Photo: Masahiko Yakou

Photo provided by: Osaka Gas Co., Ltd.



7th OMS Produced "Shinryuha"

Photo: Masahiko Yakou

Photo provided by: Osaka Gas Co., Ltd.

Although the Grand Prize winning work now receive 500,000 yen in support of subsequent performances of their works, they were promised to be performed as "OMS Produced" productions until

⁶ From the interview content

2002, when the 7th edition of the program was held. The OMS-produced performances were an attempt to encourage the Drama Award-winning playwrights further beyond the award, but was discontinued following the 7th performance in 2002, prior to the closing of the OMS. "Produced performances was a valuable site for training writers, directors, and actors" (Kotoba no Gekijo 2014: 92).

Here, I would like to turn to other Drama Awards in Japan. The "Kishida Kunio Drama Award" sponsored by Hakusuisha Publishing is the most prestigious drama award in Japan, and is also known as the "Akutagawa Prize of theatrical world." Although it was founded as a drama award for shingeki (new drama) and carried the name "Shingeki" until it was renamed in 1979, playwrights of underground theater have frequently received the award, including Minoru Betsuyaku in 1968, Juro Kara in 1970, Makoto Sato in 1971, and Shogo Ota in 1978, and in the 1980s the third generation of small-theater playwrights were prominent recipients of the award. Many prominent playwrights have received this award, and it is considered a gateway to success among playwrights. A high percentage of the award winners have been playwrights who were based in Tokyo. Under such circumstances, at the 40th Kishida Kunio Drama Award, both Masataka Matsuda, winner of the 1st OMS Drama Award Grand Prize, and Toshiro Suzue, winner of the 2nd OMS Drama Award Grand Prize, were selected to receive the award at the same time. This event was described as a great achievement for theater in the Kansai region and made it known that the standard of the OMS Drama Award was extremely high, even by national standards (OMS to Sono Jidai 2003: 39).

Other major drama award and prizes given for works and playwrights are listed in the table below. Since one of the features of the OMS Drama Award is its support for repeat performances, in addition to the basic information, a column on whether or not the award-winning play is supported in its performance was included for comparison purposes. The information is current as of January 2022. An overview of each award is provided on their respective websites, and the sources are listed together in the reference materials at the end of this paper. Since this was before the "Kansai Engeki Grand Award" was inaugurated, it is based on the contents of the announcement of the establishment of the prize⁷.

Award name	Year of establishment	Sponsored by	Selection type	Works eligible for selection	Support for award-winning productions
Kishida Kunio Drama Award	1955	Hakusuisha Publishing Co., Ltd.	Nominated	Works that have been published in magazines or in book form during the year	-
Kinokuniya Theatre Awards	1966	Kinokuniya Company Ltd.	Nominated	Works performed in Tokyo during the year	-
Yomiuri Theater Awards (Best Play, Best Director Award)	1992	The Yomiuri Shimbun	Nominated	Works performed during the year	-

⁷ From the Kansai Engei website; <https://k-engeki.net/about> (last viewed on March 9, 2022)

OMS Drama Award	1994	Osaka Gas Hakusuisha Publishing	Open application	New works written by playwrights living or active in the Kansai region that were premiered during the year	500,000 yen to support a repeat performance of the Grand Prize winning work (if performed by the end of March of the following year)
Japan Playwrights Association's New Playwright's Award	1995	Japan Playwrights Association	Open application	Works written during the past year that have not been published in a book or magazine	-
Tsuruya Namboku Drama Award	1998	Kobun Foundation	Nominated	New plays performed during the year	-
AAF Drama Award	2000	Aichi Prefectural Art Theater	Open application	New works and previously published/performed works	Performed as a production of the Aichi Prefectural Art Theater
"Nihon No Geki (Japanese Drama)" Award Grand Prize	2010	Association of Japanese Theatre Companies	Open application	Unpublished/unperformed plays	Staged as a sponsored performance by the Association of Japanese Theatre Companies
Hokkaido Drama Award	2014	Hokkaido Arts Foundation	Open application	New works and previously published/performed works	The play that the Grand Prize winning work will be produced by the Hokkaido Arts Foundation and performed in Sapporo City
Kansai Engeki Grand Award	2022	"Kansai Engeki Grand Award" Executive Committee	Nominated	The "Best Stage of the Year" (Best Play) is selected from theater companies in the Kansai region and performances produced by Kansai-based companies, as well as performances in the six prefectures of the Kansai region.	Support for repeat performances of the 10 award-winning productions through reduced or exempted cooperating theaters and multiple cooperating theaters for repeat performances

[Chart] Major Japanese drama awards and awards for staged productions and playwrights (prepared in January 2022)

From the chart, it can be seen that the OMS Drama Award is a pioneer in the field of playwriting awards with a view to re-performing award-winning works. The commitment to the performance of award-winning works has rather been a feature of the Drama Award and Best Play since the 2000s.

Among other features, in the final selection process for the OMS Drama Award, passionate critiques of theatrical productions unfold. The entire process is included in the annual publication "OMS Drama Award" and is also available in PDF format on their website⁸. These discussions are then continued through to the launch, where the selection committee members give detailed advice to the playwrights

⁸ https://network.osakagas.co.jp/effort/oms/topics/1299235_48943.html (last viewed on March 9, 2022)

and talk about production, and often the ideas expressed at these discussions actually come to fruition when the play is performed again. Furthermore, by having the new playwrights, who are the applicants, and the veteran playwrights on the selection committee talk with each other, it seems that the awareness of how a playwright should be is passed along from generation to generation⁹. In addition to providing funds to support repeat performances, the OMS Drama Award is unique in that it helps to ensure that "a play does not end up being just a play" by allowing theater professionals to engage in lively discussions. The nature of the OMS Drama Award, which is not pretentious but uncompromising in its creation, certainly carries on the spirit of the time when the OMS was run, when young playwrights developed close relationships with veteran playwrights and senior producers.

3.3. Radio drama, reading plays and town-walking theater

With the loss of OMS as a theater and OMS-produced performances, it no longer became possible to bring the Drama Award-winning playwrights together with other theater professionals. TV stations and publishing companies can ask a playwright to write a script directly as part of the work of the company itself, energy companies are limited in what they can do. Of course, continuing to manage the drama awards alone is an exceptional contribution as a corporate mécénat activity, but Osaka Gas has continued to search for ways to support the talents it has encountered through the awards, and has embarked on two new projects. One is "histoire," a drama series in which readings written by playwrights are broadcast on the radio and presented as reading play performances. Another is "town-walking theater," which examines a new approach to theater.

The outline of the "histoire" project is as follows.

"histoire" is a drama series based on real people and real incidents that occurred in the Kansai region, presented by Osaka Gas. Writers selected as finalists for the OMS Drama Award write dramas and perform readings at places associated with their characters for the purpose of fostering playwrights in the Kansai region and discovering, developing, and passing on stories that lie dormant in the area.¹⁰

Ten episodes have been created so far since 2010, when production began, and have been performed as reading plays. Furthermore, episodes 1 (broadcast in 2011) through 7 were broadcast as radio dramas on Mainichi Broadcasting System (MBS RADIO). As an exception, the 10th episode of Shu Toro's "Minato de Kamome ga Yasunderu Hi wa ne, Chiho-chan" (2019), which is about Japan's first female maritime pilot, was performed as a play rather than a reading on board a cruise ship. The performance venues for the reading plays are chosen in locations associated with the characters, as for example, in

⁹ From the interview content

¹⁰ From materials provided at the time of the interviews

episode 9 of Megumi Takahashi's (Kokuryodan) "Yukima no Kusa" (2018), which features Sen no Rikyu as the main character, the reading takes place at the Sakai Plaza of Rikyu and Akiko.



histoire episode 6

Miyoshi Nagayoshi: Reading play "Roshu no Hito"

Photo provided by: Osaka Gas Co., Ltd.



histoire episode 10



histoire extra episode

"Minato de Kamome ga Yasunderu Hi wa ne, Chihochan" Town-walking theater "Wasureji no Ashita"

Performance flyer provided by: Osaka Gas Co., Ltd. Photo provided by: Osaka Gas Co., Ltd.

"Histoire" was proposed with the idea of giving playwrights the opportunity to not only write the works they want to write, but also to grow as professional creators by receiving "work orders" from outside companies. The person in charge of this project said that he felt that compared to Tokyo, it was more difficult for playwrights who had been recognized by the drama award for their plays to be approached by the media for work in the Kansai region¹¹. This project, which encourages collaboration with radio stations and local communities, can be seen as an opportunity to encourage playwrights to go one step beyond the drama awards.

While a repeat performance of the reading play was performed, in March 2021, Osaka Gas presented "Wasureji no Ashita (A forgotten tomorrow)," written and directed by Megumi Takahashi, as the first of a new series of "town-walking theater" plays. In "Wasureji no Ashita," which depicts the life of Akiko Yosano, the audience is taken on a tour of the places associated with her while watching the performances of four actors who play the characters surrounding her¹². As it is considered an extra episode of "histoire," it can be said to be an adaptation of "histoire" in that the script is based on a real person, and the audience visits places related to that person.

Since the 2000s, theatrical production that steps out of the theater and outdoors, such as town-walking theater, has become an international trend. As mentioned in Section 1 of Chapter 1, the outdoor theater of the underground generation pioneered this trend. Rimini Protokoll of Germany and Port B led by Akira Takayama of Japan developed a style of "touring performance" in which "the audience is made to walk (or ride) through the city"¹³. In addition, Norimizu Ameya's "The Shape of Me" (2010) and the mobile play "Lindbergh's Flight" (2016) by the performing arts group Gecko Parade are similar examples.

Interestingly, Mr. Yamanoh, the originator of Osaka Gas' "town-walking theater," was not specifically aware of the aforementioned trend. In considering what Osaka Gas can do for theater as a corporate mécénat activity without having a theater, it was apparent that this idea was the result of returning once again to the fundamental question of "what is the stage and what is fiction?"¹⁴

The series of mécénat activities of Osaka Gas can be broadly divided into three different types of work, the management of theaters, the organization of drama awards, and the proposal of new plays that give playwrights opportunities to create their works. However, since the opening of OMS, it can be said that its goal has consistently been "to protect and nurture the talent within society that is capable of producing works of art."

¹¹ From the interview content

¹² From materials provided at the time of the interviews

¹³ Other works include "Tokyo/Olympics" (2007), "Sunshine 62" (2008), "Kein Licht II" (2012), the "Heterotopia Series" that began with "Tokyo Heterotopia" (2013) and has been performed in various countries, and the "New Tokyo School Excursion Project" series (2017~).

¹⁴ From the interview content

Conclusion

In this thesis, I outlined the role of corporate mécénat activities in the history of Japanese contemporary drama, and through the example of Osaka Gas Co., Ltd., I examined how private companies have been able to be involved in the world of Japanese theater.

In Chapter 1, I looked chronologically at the history of contemporary drama, starting with the underground theater of the 1960s. Following the 1960s, when outdoor spaces and other non-theatrical venues tended to be the places where performances were held, in the 1970s and 1980s, as a reaction to this trend, small and medium-sized private theaters were built one after another to accommodate small theater drama. The construction of theaters by corporations peaked around the mid-1980s. The theater construction rush that was evident in the Aoyama area and Shimokitazawa coincides with the trend of the transformation of theater from a 60's-like counterculture to a subculture, as it became associated with the culture of urban youth. Feeling a sense of crisis over the state of theater consumed as entertainment, theater artists in the 1990s found a way to make use of public theaters, where continuous creation takes place in connection with society. Simultaneously, the increase in the number of international theater festivals and international co-productions has made borderless, public art, unrestricted by nationality or established genres, one of the benchmarks to which contemporary drama can aspire.

In Chapter 2, I pointed out the prewar ties between theaters and corporations in Japan, and discussed several examples of theaters built by corporations in the 1970s and 1980s. From the 2000s, a form of support called "naming rights acquisition," in which a company acquires the name to be attached to a theater and pays a contractual fee to the theater, was also seen, in which the company is not involved in the creation of the theater.

While the majority of corporate mécénat activities in a "venue" of theater involve support for theaters, the mécénat activities of Osaka Gas represent an interesting model case, as the company has been involved in the field of theater since 1985, while changing the form of its support. In Chapter 3, I introduced Osaka Gas's mécénat activities in three forms, which include the management of cultural complexes, the holding of drama awards, and the planning of plays not restricted to theaters, along with the contents of the interviews. As a result, it became clear that Ogimachi Museum Square, a cultural complex that opened in 1985, was not only a hub for small theater drama in the Kansai region, but also had elements that anticipated the functions of later creative public theaters, such as producing theater troupes, fostering new artists, and stimulating inter-regional exchange.

Also, the OMS Drama Award, which was established in 1995 to recognize theater in the Kansai region, encouraging the staging of the Grand Prize winning work while OMS was open, and after it closed, it provided funds to support repeat performances of such award-winning works. Specific commitments to staging and repeat performances for Japanese Drama Award and Best Play were hardly seen until the 2000s, and here again, the stance of the OMS was slightly ahead of its time. The stance of offering subsequent work to the Drama Award-winning playwrights has been consistent in the newly embarked

upon attempts in recent years in the form of radio drama, reading plays, and town-walking theater.

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, theater is always seeking a "venue" to perform, "recognition" to be positioned in society, and a "next opportunity" in order to sustain itself. The series of mécénat activities conducted by Osaka Gas can be described as a comprehensive effort to provide a "venue" in the form of Ogimachi Museum Square, "recognition" in the form of drama awards, and a "next opportunity" for writers to spread their wings in the form of reading plays and town-walking theater.

Particularly now that the fate of the theater is in dire straits, with performances being cancelled and tours being cancelled in the wake of COVID-19, the urgent need to sustain the theater is to ensure that opportunities for productions to be created do not cease. As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, the immediate and practical thing that companies can do to help the theater survive is to provide a venue and funding for productions to be created. Through this investigation of efforts by Osaka Gas, another outlook has been added here. That is, "to increase the intensity of the work by connecting the playwrights with society, and to increase the viability of the work and the playwrights themselves in society." This kind of continued support should also lead to the demand from society for theater as an art form that responds to society.

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