Senda Koreya (1904-1994)

Actor, translator, critic, director, and prominent leader of modernist movement in shingeki, Japan's modern theatre, Senda is best known as the foremost proponent of Brecht in postwar Japan.

Born Itō Kunio, he was blessed with a liberal family environment and, among his brothers, a stage artist and a dancer. In 1922, he helped with the making of stage properties for Hijikata Yoshi's private theatre. In 1923, while a student of German at Waseda University, he was mistaken for a Korean and almost killed following the Great Kanto Earthquake. This awoke his political consciousness thus his professional name alluding to the incident. When the Tsukiji Shōgekijō (Tsukiji Little Theatre) was launched in 1924, he acted in its first production, an Expressionist piece. However, unsatisfied with Expressionism and influenced by Marxism, he left the Tsukiji in 1926 and joined Trunk Theatre, a proletarian troupe later renamed Zen'ei-za that produced Anatoly Lunacharsky’s *The Liberated Don Quixote*, which he co-translated.

From April 1927 to November 1931, he visited Germany where he joined companies under German Workers Theatre Association as an actor and a stage properties staff. In Germany, he learned the importance of workers amateur theatre in proletarian movement, introduced Japanese proletarian literature by his own translation and represented Japan in international workers' conferences. In 1929, he joined the German Communist Party. Soon after returning to Japan, he became the leader of the Japan Proletarian Theatre League following the round-up of its officers in April 1932 due to the infiltration of a spy into the Japanese Community Party. Thereafter proletarian theatre faced more challenges, not only from the increasing government suppression, including the official termination of all proletarian theatre organizations in 1934, but also from the ultra-left policies of the Japanese Communist Party itself, which dismissed as petite bourgeois Senda's attempts at a cross-genre theatre united front modeled on German proletarian theatre movement.

Senda was arrested in July 1933 and again in August 1940 for violation of the Peace Preservation Law, but both times released upon committing pretended political apostasy. In 1944, he co-founded Haiyū-za (Actors' Theatre), which developed into a major force in postwar Japanese theatre during the occupation. Senda created its affiliated Theatre Research Institute and Acting School, materializing his vision from the Zen'ei-za days of a performance-research-training system. Haiyū-za's Acting School, for which he wrote a textbook based on Stanislavski-style realism, sent 623 top-level artists to Japan's theatre, film, and TV industries. He also played a vital role in 1946 in creating the Association of New Theater Personnel (Shin Engekijin Kyōkai), an organization similar to the united front he envisioned in the 1930s. Moreover, he supported workers’ amateur theatre as an essential partner of progressive theatre movement.

Under his leadership, Haiyū-za completed a 300-seat theatre in 1954 with contributions exclusively from its members, an unprecedented achievement in shingeki history. In mid-1960s, his academic approach to shingeki was blamed for losing audience and he was replaced as the top of Haiyū-za, resulting in the closing of Haiyū-za’s Theatre Research Institute and Acting School. Senda’s artistic ideals were restored in Haiyū-za in 1969 thanks to the support of his young disciples. These very disciples, however, rebelled against him in 1971 for his dismissal of the angura theatre leading to the resignation of some key members from Haiyū-za. On the other hand, from 1950s to 1960s, Senda translated five volumes of plays by Brecht and directed three Brecht pieces. His introduction to, and critique of, Brecht’s theory of the alienation effect was eye-opening to Japanese theatre artists. Nevertheless, Senda’s avant-garde was confined to the framework of rationalism and a Marxist world view, which is why his open-mindedness could not bring him to accept angura theatre until very late in his life. Senda died in 1994.

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