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| Ichikawa Sadanji II (1880-1940) |
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| Japan's most popular actor in 1910s-1930s who is unique in having contributed to modernist movement in both kabuki and shingeki, Japan’s traditional and modern theatres.  Born Takahashii Eijirō, son of Ichikawa Sadanji I, he first appeared on stage at four and, by eighteen, had the stage names of first Botan and then Koyone and Enshō. When Sadanji I died in 1904, he inherited not only Meiji-za, his father's company and theatre, but an enormous debt. Sadanji I was the last of the Meiji kabuki superstars to die in two years, leaving his son without his fame and skills, tasting the coldness of the kabuki establishment. With the support of Kawakami Otojirō (1864-1911) and particularly Matsui Shōyō (1870-1933), however, he led Meiji-za through the difficulties and became Ichikawa Sadanji II in 1906.  This period witnessed not only the decline of kabuki, but also the rise of shimpa. This, along with his experience with the kabuki establishment, turned his interest to modern theatre as well. In 1906-1907, he travelled in Europe for eight months watching Western masterpieces, taking courses, and observing Western theatre management. Inspired by the discoveries of this trip, he attempted a modernist reform at Meiji-za upon his return. The reform, which included allowing actresses in kabuki and the elimination of the age-old tradition of catering services to spectators in theatre, proved to be too radical to be acceptable. This setback channeled his modernist enthusiasm to a different platform. |
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