



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

De gemaskerde krijger : de menpō in de 16e en 17e eeuw
Verberk, B.J.M.

Citation

Verberk, B. J. M. (2016, September 6). *De gemaskerde krijger : de menpō in de 16e en 17e eeuw*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/42750>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/42750>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/42750> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Verberk, B.J.M.

Title: De gemaskerde krijger : de menpō in de 16e en 17e eeuw

Issue Date: 2016-09-06

Summary

In this research Japanese armor masks are analyzed within the context of the Japanese mask culture. Essentially armor masks have a protective function and are, within the Japanese mask culture, the only masks which are not used for theater, dance or religious processions. The roots of *menpō* or “armor masks with facial features” are unknown, therefore, I have approached the subject from the existing Japanese mask disciplines.

My study shows that, in particular, *nō* masks have been of much greater influence on the development of *menpō* than previously understood. The first evidence is provided by the obvious fascination of the warrior class for *nōgaku*. The passion and the manner in which the great warlords of the Azuchi-Momoyama period studied and even practiced *nō*, is remarkable. Great names such as Oda Nobunaga (織田 信 長, 1534-1582) and Imagawa Yoshimoto (今 川 義 元, 1519-1560) were known to have recited passages of *nō* pieces at key moments during military campaigns.

The *Shinchō Kōki* (信 長 公 紀), the chronicles of Oda Nobunaga compiled by Ōta Gyūichi (太 田 牛 一, 1527-1613) is a valuable contemporary source in which the passion for *nō* by the warrior class of the time becomes obvious⁴⁸¹. It describes how Nobunaga and his followers were inspired by the *nō* theatre, including in their personal clothing. If these elite samurai copied elements from the *nō* theatre in their personal styles it is definitely not unthinkable that they also took inspiration from the same source when they designed their armor. The great enthusiasm for *nōgaku* of the *daimyō* in

⁴⁸¹ See chapter 2.

the generations after Nobunaga and the patronage they gave to the art, support this theory. Several contemporary sources⁴⁸² show that Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣秀吉, 1536-1598) was a passionate practitioner and patron of *nōgaku* as well.

Programs of *nō* performances found in various archives, including the family archives of the Kanze, illustrate how many high-ranking members of nobility participated in theatrical performances themselves. Here the performance which Taikō Hideyoshi presented to the emperor is of particular significance, as it becomes clear that the military nobility used *nō* to distinguish themselves culturally from the court in Kyōto. When in the Edo period the music of *nōgaku* was officially designated as the court music for the shogunate, *nō* performing became more ritualized and codified⁴⁸³. It was officially banned for everyone who didn't belong to the nobility to attend *nō*. *Nō* was a part of the cultural development of the samurai elite, in the Edo period this was reflected in both armor and sword mounts of the samurai class.

In order to determine where the roots of the *menpō* lie, I paid particular attention to the origin and the period in which these objects first developed. The first *menpō*, emerged in the course of the 16th century. To further prove that the origin of *menpō* lie in *nōgaku* I have consulted several sources. One of the oldest works in which *menpō* are discussed is the 18th century source, the *Chūkokatchū seisakuben* (中古甲冑製作弁) by Sakakibara Kōzan (榊原香山, 1734-1798?). Kōzan criticized the samurai of his day, saying they

⁴⁸² See chapter 2.

⁴⁸³ Keene, p.46.

viewed armor as a status symbol, and pleaded for the study and the return of 16th century style of armor. Despite the strong competition among armorers and the dominant market position of the Myōchin during this part of the Edo period Kōzan was able to maintain a critical view of armorers and their clients. One of the more relevant comments by Kōzan concerns the names of the *menpō* in his time. He notes that the term *ressei* and *ryūbu* notably used by the Myōchin and that these terms, (supposedly) were invented by the armor makers themselves⁴⁸⁴. It is therefore most likely that the armorers of the 17th and 18th centuries – in particular the Myōchin – named the masks themselves. If we take the *ressei* type *menpō* into consideration then we know that this type existed in the 16th century. Presumably there were also other names in use for the 16th century *ressei* mask.

In the absence of reliable and relevant contemporary, 16th century sources to support the thesis, empirical research was necessary. In this research I have gathered as much data as possible from a selection of 16th and early 17th century *menpō* and directly compared it with similar data from *nō* masks. However, the difficulty with one-to-one comparisons of dance masks with 16th century *menpō* is that *menpō* are half masks in which the portion above the nose has been omitted (*me no shita bō*). As for the data of the dance masks I have included all the elements that are also present on the analyzed *menpō*. The shape of the nose, and the number of wrinkles (*shiwa*) on the bridge of the nose are of importance. The research data shows that this feature is more common on some masks than on others. Furthermore, given the number of *shiwa* at the nose and cheekbone, and the presence of facial hair, mustache (*kuchihige*) and beard (*agohige*). In addition, attention was

⁴⁸⁴ Sakakibara Kōzan, *Chūko katchū seisakuben*, cited in H. Russell Robinson, p.69 after T. Wakameda.

also paid to the number of teeth, the *shiwa* around the corners of the mouth, on the shape of the chin or whether or not the chin protrudes. More than 20 confirmed Momoyama or early Edo- pieces were analyzed and compared to data of over twenty *nō* masks of various types. The outcome of this comparative study clearly shows that the *nō* mask of the *akujō* type is strikingly similar to the 16th century *ressei-men*.

A further important element in this study is the practice of copying within the Japanese tradition. The first *nō* masks derived from older dance masks in particular from *bugaku*. It is understood that there is an important relation between *nō* masks and the first *bugaku* masks. When, from the 9th century onwards Japan became increasingly less influenced culturally and politically by mainland Asia a unique style for Japan emerged. The Buddhist sculptures of the Kamakura period in particular are excellent examples of this development. These images are exceptionally expressive and exude far more realism than their predecessors.

The research also shows that the style and construction of *bugaku* dance masks was largely influenced by the Japanese 'Kamakura' style that was strongly connected to the samurai. It is not surprising that the features of *bugaku* masks show great similarity with the Buddhist sculptures, since the sculptors (*bussshi*) were also often the sculptors for *bugaku* masks⁴⁸⁵.

In the Muromachi- and Edo periods mask carving became an individual discipline. Separate groups and families who were active in making *nō* masks arose: the Echizendeme, Ōnodeme and Ōmiiseki. These groups

⁴⁸⁵ Nishikawa, p.161.

specialized in copying the existing pieces⁴⁸⁶.

The styles of the *nō* masks which developed in the Muromachi period took a very dominant position from the Azuchi-Momoyama period, mainly because of the custom of copying masterpieces. Remarkably, the copied pieces were just as highly valued as the originals. Deme Zekan (出目是閑, 1526? - 1616), the head of the Ōmiiseki family was celebrated for its excellent replicas of ancient masks, which Toyotomi Hideyoshi rewarded him the title "tenkaichi" or "the best in the country"⁴⁸⁷.

The fact that warlords like Hideyoshi were involved in the manufacture of *nō* masks and recognized good copies of masterworks, indicates that they were probably also influenced by the popular style of the 16th century *nō* masks in developing *menpō*. I was able to determine the following six functions of *menpō*:

1. Distinctive function
2. The function of status symbol
3. Protective function
4. Aesthetic function
5. Spiritual function (medium to ancestor worship)
6. Fearsome function

For the distinctive function (1) I have examined 16th and 17th century *kassenzu*, paintings depicting battles. These images often give a realistic interpretation of the composition of armies and the armor and weapons used

⁴⁸⁶ Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Nō-men Sōsaku to Utsushi*, p.2.

⁴⁸⁷ Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Nō-men Sōsaku to Utsushi* p.1.

within a samurai army. The almost complete absence of *menpō* in these particular images is remarkable. The *Nagashino Kassenzu Byōbu* shows two *menpō*, they serve as ornamental standards carried by the helmet bearers for Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu. A later 18th century copy of the same screen also depicts Honda Tadakatsu (本多忠勝, 1548-1610) wearing a *menpō*⁴⁸⁸. The main conclusion here is that *menpō* in the 16th century were already exclusive attributes which were used solely by high ranking samurai in order to distinguish themselves from their subjects.

The function of status symbol (2) quickly became clear in a quote in which Oda Nobunaga receives a falcon and an armor from *shōgun* Ashikaga Yoshiaki (足利義昭, 1537-1597) and says: “there was no greater honor than this”⁴⁸⁹. Among the high ranking samurai, armor appears frequently as diplomatic gifts as well as to foreign powers, both prior to the *sakoku* period and during the opening of Japan in the second half of the 19th century.

The increased popularity of castles as status symbols and the use of lavish materials also had its impact on armor. The *Meiko Zukan* (名甲図鑑) from the 18th century states price estimates. The amounts mentioned in this work suggest that high quality *menpō* were luxury goods reserved for a select few only. It should be noted that many of the estimates in the *Meiko Zukan* - a work compiled by the Myōchin - were artificially inflated by the Myōchin themselves. Nevertheless, we can say that the amounts, even though they are exaggerated, do give an idea of the luxury status of these objects.

⁴⁸⁸ Iida, p.193.

⁴⁸⁹ Ōta Gyūichi, *Shinchō kōki*, translated by J.P. Lamers en J.S.A. Elisonas. Leiden- Boston: Brill 2011, p.125.

The protective function (3) of *menpō* is most relevant in the 16th century. Kōzan stressed that although the armor may have a distinctive function and can act as a status symbol for the higher ranks, one should always remember that armor is essentially intended to protect. Therefore the first *menpō* emerged with the development of the *tōseigusoku*⁴⁹⁰. Many parts of the *tōseigusoku* appeared with the introduction of the musket in the 16th century. While no written proof exists, it is conceivable that the protection against firearms was the initial motivation to develop *menpō*. The detachable nose piece that became standardized in the Edo period is an indication that the sengoku samurai regarded *menpō* without nosepieces user friendly and thus we can assume that initially it must have been developed for practical use.

The aesthetic function (4) of *menpō*. As far back as the Heian period armor intended for high ranking warriors had a clear aesthetic component. The use of different color cords for the bindings of classic armor made striking patterns that were well matched.

In the field of *tōseigusoku* armors as well, aesthetics was an important factor in which *nōgaku* played a significant role. Opulent armor for example was decorated with the same type of exclusive textiles as the *nō* robes (*nō-shōzoku*). Another noteworthy development is the influence of the tea ceremony on the aesthetics of armor. The ideal of *sabi*, the rustic beauty that comes with the age of certain objects is expressed through rich rust patina, *sabiji*, which was applied to many *menpō* of the Edo period.

The tradition of the 16th century Kanō painters was embraced by the

⁴⁹⁰ See chapter 1.

samurai and influenced the subjects depicted on sword mounts and armor. In the Edo period numerous types of *menpō*, inspired by subjects from painting, appear. Due to the strong competition between the armorers in the Edo period, forging techniques had developed to a very high standard, here is where the aesthetic function of the masks became dominant.

With regard to the spiritual function (5) of armor masks it becomes clear that *menpō* are an important element in honoring ancestral *kami*. The spiritual function of Japanese armor lies both in the world of the Shintō religion and Buddhism. Whereas many auspicious symbols in armor can be found in the Buddhist context, some armor masks are designed in the shape of the wrathful protective deities of Buddhism. In Shintō spirit or *kami* might well be connected to objects such as masks, therefore good masks are traditionally revered and preserved in temples. For that reason *menpō* were honored as part of an armor and could help visualize the ancestral *kami*.

When reviewing the fearsome function of *menpō* (6), I discussed the *ressei* type of *menpō*, in the Sengoku period specifically chosen by warriors. The empirical data in chapter 3.3 illustrates that the *ressei*-masks are directly derived from the *akujō* mask of *nōgaku*. In the Edo period, a great diversity of types of *menpō* emerged, many of which had a fearsome appearance. We may also conclude that in the Edo period, various mask types were designed from both *nō* and *kyōgen* masks.

In chapter four, the influence of Western armor on *menpō* is discussed. 16th century European armor had clear and distinctive features. Much like the samurai of this period, the Renaissance aristocracy applied mythology and

historical symbolism in the design of their armor⁴⁹¹. The helmet visors of the European armor reveal some remarkable similarities with *menpō* of the late 16th century and the Edo period. An interesting detail is that the first armor masks with facial features may not have occurred earlier than the first contacts with Westerners in 1543. In the second half of the 16th century the Japanese warlords were introduced to European armor⁴⁹². In this context the so-called heroic style may have influenced the Japanese *kawari kabuto* and *menpō* as well.

In chapter five we have already seen that there are parallels between symbolism on armor and the Japanese sword. Particularly in the Edo period there are clear similarities in subject matter and the *nō* theater is frequently used as a subject on Japanese sword mounts.

This research is devoted to the roots of *menpō* and contains some important conclusions. The most important conclusion is the fact that the origin of the 16th century *menpō* lie in the *nō* mask of the *akujō* type. It also shows us that the influence of *nōgaku* on the development of armor masks is not to be underestimated. We now know that the names we use today for the *menpō* are often inventions of the armorers of the 17th and 18th centuries. Sometimes these names are both accurate and authentic, especially if these masks have their origin in the Edo period.

The 16th century *ressei* masks have so many similarities with the *akujō* mask that it would probably be appropriate to call them *akujō-men* instead of

⁴⁹¹ Capwell, p.101.

⁴⁹² Ikeda Hiroshi “Nanban-style gusoku armor”, in: Morihiro, Ogawa, *Art of the Samurai*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009, p.68.

ressei-men. Iida for example places almost all masks with goatee beard in the *okina*-category. However, this is incorrect because Okina is a good-natured character. Most of the *menpō* with goatee beards however, fall within the category of 'ferocious masks' and should, according to the theory of this study, be categorized within the *akujō* classification.

This study shows that the *ryūbu* mask probably has its origins in the *nō* mask of the *chū-jō* type. The term *ryūbu* as the term *ressei* supposedly is an invention of the 18th century Myōchin, here too *chū-jō*-men would be a more suitable term in my opinion. The diversity and the connections with existing mask disciplines, especially *nō* masks, shows us that the Japanese armor masks form an integral part within the Japanese mask culture. Hopefully, this study provides new insights into the approach of form, function and meaning of the Japanese armor masks which deserve great recognition and appreciation within the Japanese art history.