

Naritasan Shinshoji Temple and the Ichikawa Family Connection

The relationship between the Ichikawa family line of Kabuki actors and Naritasan Shinshoji Temple can be traced back to the Genroku period (1688–1704) of the Edo period (1603–1867), to the first Ichikawa Danjuro (1660–1704). The family continues to maintain its connections to this day by visiting the temple during holidays and to celebrate major life events.

Danjuro I and the stage name “Naritaya”

The famous Kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjuro I's father was born in present-day Hataya, Narita city.

Ichikawa Danjuro I, the first of the Ichikawa school, debuted on stage in 1673 at the age of 14, painting his face in red and black in a heroic performance as the samurai Sakata no Kintoki. Although he quickly gained popularity as an actor, he was troubled because he was childless. So he went to pray at Naritasan Shinshoji Temple for a child and was soon blessed with a son in 1688.

Danjuro I was overjoyed by this miracle, and in 1695 he celebrated by playing the part of Naritasan Shinshoji Temple's revered deity Fudo Myoo on stage. This play was the first of its kind and a great success. He would continue to perform the role many times during his lifetime. The role became a favorite of the Ichikawa family and has since continued to be a part of their *ohako*, or repertoire. This play is said to be the beginning of their school stage name, “Naritaya.”

The heroic dramatism (*aragoto*) of Danjuro I is thought to have instilled a sense of joy and courage in the audience in a way the stage never had never seen before. To many in the audience, the unique red-and-black makeup, and Danjuro's *aragoto* seemed to be like an incarnation of the deity Fudo Myoo. At the climax of the performance, the *mie*, or the moment when an actor strikes a pose staring at the audience, also known as the Fudo *mie*, members of the audience are said to have been cured of their ailments.

The son of Danjuro I, Kyuzo, debuted on stage at the age of 10. With his son, Danjuro I donated a large mirror to Naritasan Shinshoji Temple to express his gratitude for being blessed with a child and for the success of their Kabuki play *Tsumamono Kogen Soga*. The ornamental cabbage crest of Naritasan Shinshoji Temple was worn upon their stage uniform, showing their deep bond with the temple. It is said that many years later, in reference to his predecessor Danjuro I's devotion, Ichikawa V would, in his specialty play *Shibaraku*, utter the following line: “By the great Fudo Myoo of Narita, the ancestral guardian of children bearing...”

Thus, it may be said that the Fudo Myoo of Naritasan Shinshoji Temple is the origin of the Ichikawa line of Kabuki actors. Perhaps it can even be said that it is due to the devotion that gained them the stage name "Naritaya" that Danjuro I performed as well as he did.

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