

The very best of *keisei* heads



The head of a bunraku puppet used for the role of *keisei* (courtesan)

Edo to Meiji period

This head is used for the role of *keisei*, or a beautiful, culturally sophisticated high-ranking courtesan, such as Yugiri, the heroine of a bunraku play “Kuruwa Bunsho.” The face is seductive and conveys the pride and self-confidence of a high-ranking courtesan. The eyelids can be closed, and the hair is gorgeously decorated with combs and hair ornaments such as *kanzashi* and *kōgai*, in a special style called *tate-hyōgo*. The mark branded on the head shows that the owner was Yoshida Tamazō I (1829–1905), a master puppeteer active in the Meiji period. This puppet head was in the collection of Saitō Seijirō, a Western-style painter and researcher on bunraku puppets, who praised the head as “the very best of *keisei* heads.”