

Cultural Performances of Asia: Themes of the Class

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Performance / Cultures / Asia

- What defines "Asia"?
- What is "culture"?
- How does "performance" give us a certain perspective on both?

Image of Bunraku
puppet
theater of Japan
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Final Projects

- choose something that **interests you** (can be from the course materials)
- relate it to the **class themes**
- **think creatively** about how **different examples** provide contrasts / comparisons
- prepare 5-minute presentation (next class)
- paper due last class

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reality, remade as puppet play, remade as a film

Gender as Performance

- **Judith Butler:**

- Gender is a "stylized repetition of acts...which are internally discontinuous [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe to perform in the mode of belief." Quoted in Diamond (1996), p. 4

Examples and Themes

- King of Masks, Balinese Cockfight v. Peking Opera, Takarazuka
- Anime, Hip-Hop/Jazz, comics (Tak, Japan)
- “real” performances to pass vs. otokoyaku, onnagata on stage
- samurai values
- formal v. informal (stage v. street)
- gender, race, sexuality
- universal v. particular; global v. local
- media meanings depend on audience
- transgender passing v. acting part-time
- tradition / modernity

Performance issues

- Identity is conventional, contingent, contested
- Context, interpretation, uses are key
- Globalization is changing, but not eliminating cultural differences

Hal Bolitho

“Myth of the Samurai”

- Bushidô Code “The Way of the Samurai”
 - loyal to masters
 - indifferent to discomfort
 - ignorant of fear
 - casually accepting of death
- In West
 - honor, loyalty, industry, obedience
 - savagery, fanaticism, irrationality

Classical age of Japan (6th-12th c.)

- 710 - 794 Nara
- Heian court in Kyoto 794 - 1185 - political stability & Buddhism
- literacy (*kanji* from China, *kana* by women)
- dueling aesthetics as political power

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see also Totman (1981)
Japan Before Perry

Warring states period (1192 - 1600)

- local warlords (*daimyô*)
- samurai (historical change)
 - small #, stable, elite (early)
 - large #, complex, commoners (late)
- shifting centers of power
 - Kamakura 1192 - 1333
 - late 1200s Mongols invade (fail)
 - Muromachi 1334 - 1573 etc.
- Religion moves to the masses
 - Zen as contrast to worldly temples

Image of Yukio
MISHIMA, 20th c.
novelist, posing as a
samurai removed
for copyright
reasons.

Tokugawa Period (1600 - 1868)

- Shogun rule Edo (Tokyo)
 - TOKUGAWA Ieyasu
- samurai bureaucrats
- rigid class structure
 - samurai, farmers, artisans, merchants
- but power shifts to merchants and rise of mercantile culture

Image of Himeji Castle near Osaka removed for copyright reasons.

Periods of the Samurai (Bolitho):

(1) bully boy period (late 9th century - 1580)

- constant war: over central control, local control, religious supremacy, law and order, vendettas
- approximated the stereotype
- but not a “clearly defined class” - open to anyone with strength, skill with weapon and willingness to fight
- no formal code of ethics at this point

Periods of the Samurai (Bolitho):

(2) samurai bureaucrats (1580 - 1870s)

- 300,000 out of population of 30 million
- a hereditary class that ruled the rest of society
- class differences emerge among samurai (see *Twilight Samurai*)
- Bushidô emerges at this time, e.g., Hagakure is compiled 100 years after peace

To consider

- Given this historical variety, what does it mean to be a “real samurai”?
- Why do you think the theories of “the way of the samurai” emerged 100 years after they stopped fighting?
- Why do the 47 ronin stand for the samurai ideal even though they broke the law of the shogun (I.e., the samurai ruler)?

"Asia"

- Anything that stands for Asia or Asianness
- Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Asian-American, etc.
- Is "Asian" always "non-Western"?
- But in this course, mostly Japan.

Image of Wu Wear, a clothing line by Wu Tang Clan (an American hip-hop group) removed for copyright reasons.

Which is more "Japanese"?

Image of Geisha (lit. "art person")
removed for copyright reasons

Image of Contemporary
photography removed for
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"Culture"

- What is culture?
- Humanist
 - Arts, theater, letters
- Anthropological
 - Meanings and lifeways
- Historical
 - Traditions, institutions

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Cultural anthropology

- Fieldwork
 - Participant-observation
- Ethnography
 - Communicate what it is like to live in another culture
- Theory
 - What does this tell about culture, society, and power
 - Professor Condry's research history . . .

Image of Kohei
Japan removed
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How Japanese is
Japanese hip-hop?

Many examples

- King of Masks

Performance

- popular entertainments
 - speech acts
 - folklore
 - political demonstrations
 - conference behavior
 - rituals
 - medical and religious healing
 - aspects of everyday life
- Elin Diamond (1996)
"Introduction"
Performance and Cultural Politics

To consider

- Geertz, “Balinese Cockfight”

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21G.067J / WGS.608J Cultural Performances of Asia
Fall 2005

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