

Contemporary Tradition – Japanese Performance Genre Today

13 – 15 October 2016

National University of Singapore

Session One

Explaining Kabuki: Yesterday and Today

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With the end of the Edo Period and the proliferation of competing forms of entertainment over the course of the twentieth century, the role of kabuki in Japanese performing arts gradually became less central. Increasingly a showcase art with new kinds of audiences – less intimately or frequently connected to the experience of kabuki performance and the conventions of the art – a need arose for explanations that could increase familiarity and thereby facilitate enjoyment and repeat attendance.

Discussions and analyses of kabuki are not, however, a new phenomenon of the modern period. Kabuki-related material fed the publishing industry during much of the Edo Period, supporting fan interest and contributing to financially-successful productions. In this talk, I will examine ways in which kabuki has been presented at different times in its history, with attention to content, format, the goals of the writers and readers, and the place of examination in the history of the art.