

Symposium on Traditional Performance: Perspectives from Japan and Southeast Asia

Japan has four well-established traditional theatre genres: Noh, Kyogen, Kabuki and Bunraku. The earliest amongst these genres started as early as the 10th century, even the relatively younger ones started in the early modern period, about 350 years ago.

These traditional Japanese genres have been accorded by UNESCO as world intangible cultural heritage, and have had a relatively stable trajectory of development in contemporary Japan. Still, in our fast-paced digital age, noh, kyogen, kabuki and bunraku are seeing a different kind of audience as well as social and cultural context from a few decades ago.

Among other things, audience members, especially younger ones, are crucial to the survival and development of these traditional theatre genres. Many of these younger audience members, however, are also consumers of contemporary pop culture such as manga and anime. Other than staying in touch with these young audience members via school activities and other forms of media such as TV and newspaper, there are also constant efforts especially on the part of the performers in the traditional genres, in reviving the performance elements and coming up with new works that can relate more to the contemporary culture.

So we see that both the noh theater and kabuki theater have created new plays based on manga and anime. These are not merely attempts to try to win over younger audience members, but also efforts to produce new works in the contemporary time. In the case of Kyogen, a relatively simpler theater that usually only features two to three performers, the kind of renewed effort and energy focuses on reaching out to more audience members, both within and outside of Japan. There are also noh and kyogen performed in English, which greatly facilitates the outreach of the genres to non-Japanese speakers.

Today's first program Associate Professor Lim Beng Choo from the Department of Japanese Studies, NUS, will [interview](#) Mr Shigeyama Doji from the Okura school to discuss the introduction and transmission of Kyogen in contemporary time.

The [second dialogue](#) session is between Dr Helly Minarti, formally from the Jakarta Arts Council and an independent art curator, and Assistant Professor Miguel Escobar Varela from the Theater Studies Program at English Language and Literature Department, NUS. They discuss issues confronted by practitioners and scholars in the pedagogy and politics of performing tradition in Indonesia.

Dr Ghulam-Sawar Yousof from Malaya University [presents](#) the first paper on Malaysian traditional theater performance.

The presentation by Dr Amparo Umali from University of Philippines Diliman [discusses](#) production of a Filipino play that incorporating Japanese Noh style.

Dr Miguel Escobar Varela's [presentation](#) highlights the use of digital technology, an important development in the study of traditional performance, in some of the pioneering projects he has done.