UNDERSTANDING THE DEPTH OF JAPANESE CULTURE THROUGH A FUSION PRODUCTION: ADAPTATION OF SHAKESPEARE’S A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM
和洋折衷劇シェークスピアの「真夏の夜の夢」を通して知る日本文化の奥深さ
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Introduction

Books on Japanese culture invariably mention Japanese traditional performing arts such as Kabuki, Noh, and Kyogen, as well as the Japanese concept of spirit as exemplified by Wa 和 or Yugen 幽玄. In some books, these topics are summarized in fewer than from two hundred words to two pages (1); in other books an entire chapter is dedicated to explaining these subjects (2). Many books on traditional performing arts have been published as well. A particularly notable fact is that UNESCO designated Noh and Kyogen, and Kabuki as World Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanities in 2001 and 2005 respectively. These arts are considered salient parts of Japanese Culture even more so than before. Yet very few language textbooks introduce these aspects and related words, as if learners were expected to already know about them or were expected to take a culture class in order to acquire this knowledge (3). In order to fill this gap and to improve students’ linguistic skills, a second year level “Theatre Workshop in Japanese” was offered in the fall of 2008 at Colorado State University (CSU).

The word, Culture has complex meanings. On one occasion, in answer to my question of “what is considered culture?”, about fifty native Japanese speakers listed virtually everything from arts, music and history to food to language to the environment. Culture is still widely perceived as something unique and homogeneous that defines a society or a country. Culture is one of the five C’s of the National Foreign Language Learning Standards (4):

Standard 2.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied.
Standard 2.2 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied.

Also, in the Connections section, culture is mentioned:
Standard 3.2 Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

And under the heading of Comparison:
Standard 4.2 Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the culture studied and their own.

Although her focus was more on culture related to political and ideological
aspects, Kubota (2003) warned that the National Standards tend to view a particular culture as a homogeneous group and overlook the diversity that exists within the culture. Moreover, the Standards’ conceptualization of stereotype may reinforce static and fixed images of the culture by comparing another culture only through one’s own cultural lens that may create a “correct versus incorrect” dichotomy. Thus this may lead to negative reactions or prejudices against the people in the target language. She further states that an implication of this is that once the learners gain accurate detailed information about the target culture from the insider’s perspectives, stereotypes are likely to be eliminated. While gaining accurate detailed information about the target culture may not guarantee the elimination of stereotype, hands-on cultural experience enables one to perceive the target culture from within. The Japanese Theatre Workshop provided the students with such an opportunity.

**Theatre Workshop in Foreign Language**

This 200-level academic course with variable credits (1-3) is a theatre production course that has been offered periodically in different foreign languages by the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at CSU. In the fall of 2004 a Japanese Theatre Workshop was offered resulting in the production of “Kabuki Macbeth” in Japanese. In this theatre workshop, there were six objectives, all of which were intended to provide participating students with cultural knowledge and to enable them to improve their language skills through experiential learning in an environment more conducive to communicative communication than the ordinary classroom. Although referring only to drama activities conducted in the classroom, Kao and O’Neil (1998) state that “this [learning] environment shouldn’t be limited to just language development but upgraded to the level of promoting connections with the society and culture of the target language, thus linking the learners’ experience in drama directly or indirectly to the real world.” Theatre Workshop aims to provide the students with an opportunity to interact for meaning in the target language. My approach to promoting connections with the culture of Japan was twofold: to use the different performance forms and to introduce various cultural aspects through warm-ups, rehearsals and e-mail/verbal communication.

**Theatre Workshop Course Objectives are as follows:**

1. To learn about traditional Japanese performing arts and culture, and to acquire some dramatic presentation skills.
2. To carry out the rehearsal and production process in the target language, using it to communicate for authentic purposes.
3. To perform the play clearly enough that audience members who know the target language will understand much or all of what is happening on stage.
4. To create language materials for use behind-the-scenes, learn new vocabulary (about the theatre and from the play itself), and use the new vocabulary orally during rehearsals and in writing assignments at home.
5. To increase skill and spontaneity in speaking, to improve pronunciation and intonation, and to increase listening comprehension.
6. To reinforce language learning through keeping a reflective journal.

In the fall of 2008, twenty-six students enrolled in a second Japanese Theatre Workshop to perform an adaptation of Shakespeare’s _A Midsummer Night’s Dream_, incorporating _Noh_, _Kyogen_ and _Kabuki_ styles. The cast included one student who was a theatre major and Japanese minor, and one who was a theatre minor and Japanese minor. Twenty students auditioned for the play and twenty roles were cast. The cast was comprised of six second-year students who would have completed approximately 200 hrs of formal instruction by the performance day, five third-year students with 280 hrs, eight fourth-year students with 360 hrs and one who had finished the first year but was not enrolled in a Japanese language class in the fall. Two fourth-year students had studied in Japan for one year.

Scheduled meeting times were twice a week for two and a half hours. Although one semester lasts fifteen weeks, we had only 13 weeks due to the performance dates being before finals week. However, the actual preparation started in April. A production crew was recruited and met regularly once a week for two months. Students were required to keep a journal on their progress, thoughts and reflections.

**Three Phases**

The course was divided into three phases, each of which was designed to tie into the next phase to create a final synthesized production.

The First Phase was a focus on building physical strength (_karadazukuri_). Unlike Western artistic movements, which aim to use the entire body including the upper torso, what is important in Japanese movements, whether in classical dance or martial arts, is to use the _ashi_ (legs) and _koshi_ (lower back). Students who expressed an interest in enrolling in the Theatre Workshop were instructed to do at least thirty squats daily, from spring through summer.

Doing physical exercises and stretching together helped build a sense of teamwork and a budding _shuudan ishiki_ or “group consciousness.” Boyé Lafayette De Mente (1997) explained how this _shuudan ishiki_ was deeply rooted in Japanese culture even after the dramatic changes following the end of World War II in 1945.

The Second Phase was to focus more on skills and forms (_engi o migaku_). Prior to the fall semester, two specialists were invited to campus to conduct _Noh_ and _Kabuki_ workshops: Richard Emmert and Mark Oshima in March and April, respectively. Students as well as the instructor learned _kamae_ (basic position or posture of the body), _suri ashi_ (sliding feet) and some _kata_ (forms). Also, we learned the difference between how men and women walk and their movements and mannerisms.

The Third Phase was the last phase in which the goal was _Wa o tsukuru_ (harmony), to put everything the students had learned and practiced together into a final synthesized production.
Performance

In December of 2008, the students performed three shows and a total of almost 700 people braved the cold weather to attend. We received overwhelming rave reviews and comments.

Kabuki, Noh and Kyōgen and Pedagogical Challenges

Adapting these traditional performing arts into one production was an ambitious and daunting challenge, even if the purpose was not to represent the authentic forms of these arts. Rather it was a humble attempt to acquaint the students and audience with the existence of these three different art forms. A survey showed that of the three forms, Kyōgen was least the familiar among the students; yet, once they learned more about Kyōgen, it quickly gained popularity. However, special care was taken so that the Kyōgen part of the play would not become the type of slapstick comedy that the author Nomura Mansaku used to hate to have people call kyōgen “comedy” (kigeki). It is not simply a comedy although it has elements of humor (Nomura Mansaku, 1997). Kyōgen depicts our daily life where comical acts occur due to human nature. As for Noh, the Noh performers’ movements and accompanying music convey a strong sense of energy and tension that is the result of many years of physical training. (Emmert, 1997) Although the early instruction was to do 30 squats daily, very few students diligently followed this instruction. Consequently, students quickly learned the importance of perseverance ganbaru. Noh performers are all skilled singers, although not in a western sense. Noh singing is more like chanting, and the accompanying music and chorus sections are always live. Noh expresses the darker side of humanity and topics often include demons, ghosts and tragedies. Traditionally, only men perform on the stage. Because of this, we were faced with a predicament for the female characters. One student wrote a comment:

“Voice training-- because I was a prominent Noh character, I felt pressure in the beginning to get everything right. As a woman, I did not have any frame of reference for how my voice should sound and I had to figure out for myself by asking teachers and imitating Todd as best I could. I feel that next time there should be a day set aside for workshops on how to speak properly in each style.”

Whether students should use stylized speech or not was an initial concern. However, the decision was made that students should have refined basic linguistic skills first. Five volunteer native Japanese speakers, including two senior volunteers from Japan, constantly helped the students with their pronunciation and intonation. This selfless act was seen as typical Japanese cultural behavior and the students were able to connect with the behavior by comparing it with their own. As for the debate on stylized speech, as Director, I informed the group that if all members agreed to try stylized speech, then they could attempt to learn it. Another example of a cultural aspect of Japan emerged as group consensus was called for.

It is typical for a child who is born into a kabuki or kyōgen family to perform for
the first time by the age of three or four with much perfection, quite different from an ordinary school play where children’s mistakes are not significant. For such a child, his father or grandfather is his teacher and training is usually very strict. A tradition of carrying on a stage name from generation to generation is highly valued.

Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” lends itself perfectly to an attempt to bring the idea of adapting the three different performing art forms to life. In the play I created three different worlds, each of which was represented by a different art form; yet these worlds were harmonized, creating one whole world. Puck, the mischievous fairy is permeable and goes through these three worlds freely and at the same time connects the story.

Other Cultural Aspects Introduced and/or Experienced During the Course

Listed below are various aspects that were introduced to and/or experienced by the students in the process of creating the play, along with definitions presented in Boyé Lafayette De Mente’s The Japanese Have a Word for It: The Complete Guide to Japanese Thought and Culture.

- **Wa** 和 Harmony
- **Kata** 型 Form
- **Aisatsu** あいさつ Greetings
- **Gaijin** 外人 Foreigner
- **Ganbatte** がんばって Do your best! Hang in!
- **Ki** 気 Chi
- **Hansei** 反省 Reflection
- **Kamatoto** かまとと A person who pretends to be innocent.
- **Ma** 間 Time; Interval
- **Ojigi** お辞儀 Bow
- **Senpai** 先輩 One’s senior
- **Shūdan ishiki** 集団意識 Group consciousness
- **Tenarai** 手習い Hands-on learning
- **Tsuruno hitokoe** 鶴の一声 Voice of authority
- **Uchiage** 打ち上げ Party to celebrate the completion of work
- **Uchiawase** 打ち合わせ To arrange in advance
- **Yūgen** 幽玄 Mystery of esthetic

In addition to the above terms, the concept of *iki ga au* 息が合う was introduced. Attempts were made to further understand these concepts through exercises and rehearsals.

**Music**

Traditional Japanese musical instruments are different from those of the Western
world. The concept of traditional Japanese music is to enjoy a sound that is created just for that moment, as sounds are always different depending on the environment, humidity and season, not to mention the musicians. Also, it is important that the musicians be on the stage so that they can “sense” the actors’ timing and rhythm. The Japanese sense of “harmony” involves putting together fundamentally different elements to create syntheses. My goal here was to create “harmony” using different art forms and music and integrate them into a unified whole.

The Music Director for the play wrote in his paper that “[T]he role of the music is, for a large portion of this performance, similar to what would be seen in traditional Noh theatre. However, it diverges greatly in terms of musical style. I was aware of the concept of "jo ha kyū," or the gradual building of sound through tempo, with an initial silence, followed by a sound to break that silence, and then with an acceleration of sound…Although the musical content of the songs is only vaguely reminiscent of the original theatre, the intricacies such as "jo ha kyū" add a subtle dimension of authenticity.”

While respecting and understanding the traditional concept of “jo ha kyū,” he created music that was suited to the play. He must have taken into account his limitations: lack of authentic instruments not to mention trained musicians to play such instruments. His paper concluded with remarks that admirably expressed the essence of the entire experience. “However, the difficulty of the task made it that much more enjoyable to live up to the challenge, and the final product was extremely rewarding. I was able to incorporate what I knew before, what I learned while writing [the music], and what I came up with on the spot to not only achieve a specific goal, but in the process deepen my understanding of ideas such as the harmony between the actors and the music.”

**Survey Results**

A paper survey was conducted to learn about the psychological and linguistic strategies that the students used to complete their tasks. There was also an on-line survey, which concentrated more on the cultural knowledge of the students. The results showed that the students clearly acknowledged that their understanding of Japanese culture was far better than before, yet at the same time they realized that there was much more to learn.

One student who must have attempted to learn classical dance commented as follows.

“While I feel like we learned a lot during this class, I'm also aware that we only touched the tip of the iceberg compared to true performers.”

Another student commented on his/her general feeling towards Japanese culture.

“There are still aspects of Japanese culture that I have yet to learn about and experience, however, I feel knowledgeable in the area of Japanese theater at the very least.”
Conclusion

Producing a two-hour play in a foreign language requires an enormous amount of work, time, and incredible coordination among the cast and crew. Moreover, students must be highly motivated throughout the semester. However, through the entire experience students will not only improve their linguistic skills but will also gain cultural knowledge which will heighten their sensitivity towards other cultures from more of an insider’s perspective than their own, which would be the second best situation next to studying abroad. The rewards can be overwhelming. When students work together towards the same goal, cumulative energy is created. Using this energy as leverage, they move forward with a positive attitude.

The adaptation of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” truly enabled the students to understand the depth of Japanese culture through a fusion production.

Lastly, here is a comment from one of the students:

“People always tell you about all of the cool experiences that you can have in college, and until I took this class, I didn't really have any of those yet. But after having participated in this course I feel like I have more memories and stories to tell just from that one semester than most of the students at CSU will have to tell of their entire 4+ years here.”
APPENDIX A

LJPN290 Theatre Workshop in Foreign Languages: Japanese Fall 2008

COURSE OUTLINE (tentative)

TR Aylesworth C108

1-3 Credits Office Hours: M12:-12:50, TW2:00-2:50

Instructor/Director: Mako Beecken
Office Telephone: (970) 491-5275
Prerequisite: LJPN105

E-mail: masako.beecken@colostate.edu
Assistant Director: Robert "Bob" Mitchell
E-mail: bobsfyi@gmail.com
Stage Manager: Stephanie Cluff
E-mail: chisei@mindstring.com

Course description: Students will use Japanese throughout the entire process of producing a play (casting; rehearsing; designing sets, costumes, and props; preparing sound and light systems; and publicizing the play). The course will culminate in three to four memorized performances in front of an audience. Actors will receive between one and three credits depending on how many lines they have in the play. Students who are interested in participating but do not wish to perform on stage can work on behind-the-scenes elements (for up to three credits). All participants will also reflect on their experiences in writing.

Students will learn the Japanese traditional performing arts of Noh, Kyogen and Kabuki. The play will be based on Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream and will incorporate Noh, Kyogen and Kabuki styles.

Materials: The script of the play will be a version of a Japanese translation of A Midsummer Night’s Dream modified, abridged and revised by Mako Beecken.

Handouts
Thin notebook for journal entries

References:

Japanese Folk-plays: The Ink-smeared Lady, and Other Kyogen by Yoshie Noguchi, Tokyo, Rutland, Vt., C.E. Tuttle CO. 1960 Call#PL888.S3.1960

Kabuki Yoshida, Chiaki, 1918, Tokyo, Japan Times, 1971. Call # PN 2924.5 K3Y6
Course objectives:

1. To learn about traditional Japanese performing arts and to acquire some dramatic presentation skills.
2. To carry out the rehearsal and production process in the target language, using it to communicate for authentic purposes.
3. To perform the play clearly enough that audience members who know the target language will understand much or all of what is happening on stage.
4. To create language materials for use behind-the-scenes, learn new vocabulary (about the theatre and from the play itself), and use the new vocabulary orally during rehearsals and in writing at home.
5. To increase skill and spontaneity in speaking, improve pronunciation and intonation, and increase listening comprehension.
6. To reinforce language learning through keeping a reflective journal.

Course topics/Weekly schedule: After an intensive rehearsal process (at least two evenings per week for approximately two hours each, depending on the length of the play) for approximately two months, the class will present the play three or four times. The class will also meet once after the performance. There may be workshops for Japanese classical dance and Kyogen on two Saturdays.

Instructional methodology: The course is an intense and interactive workshop, supplemented by class discussion and occasional lectures (for example, on theatre terms, pronunciation techniques, and background of the play/author, kabuki/Noh/Kyogen plays).

Student Responsibilities:

1. Attend class regularly and come PREPARED. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered in the class, and to prepare for the next class. Contact the director.
2. Make the utmost effort in class to interact in Japanese as much as possible with your classmates and the instructor.
3. Submit journal entries by the deadline.
4. Remember that the grades are based on several criteria. Keep track of your performance in each area. Ask the instructor if you have any questions regarding your grades (see Grades on the next page).
5. Be responsible, courteous and PUNCTUAL. Be cooperative and flexible.
6. Both actors and designers should participate in warm-ups.

Policies:

1. Journals are due on the designated date and must be submitted at the end of the class. Your grade for a late journal submission will drop one letter grade for each class period that the journal is late. Quality and completeness of the work will also affect the grade.
Grades: Students will be graded in the following areas:

**Actors**

Reflective journal (one entry per wk) 15%
- Participation/attendance 20%
- Deadlines (memorization) 20%
- Analysis of own performance (video) 10%
- Performance (using rubric) 35%

**Designers**

Reflective/meeting journal (one entry per wk) 15%
- Participation/attendance 20%
- Deadlines (materials ready on time) 20%
- Analysis of individual design 10%
- Performance 35%

(ほうれんそう)

Active class participation is an essential part of becoming proficient in a foreign language. Absence from class will affect your participation grade accordingly.

**Grading participation**

A Comes to class/meetings regularly, participates actively, contributes positively to class.
B Comes to class/meetings regularly, participates willingly, contributes positively to class.
C Sometimes misses class/meetings, participates somewhat, contributes less to class.
D Misses class/meetings often, participates reluctantly, contributes negatively to class.

(Note: There will be something called a 'Strike' Sunday after the last show. Unless there are prior conflicts, all involved with the show need to come and help take apart the set, take down lights, put away costumes, etc. The theater must be completely clear by Sunday night. Missing 'strike' will affect your grade.)

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日誌の書き方

じゅぎょう XX月 XX日

ウォームアップ 発声練習

（例） 一声 二振り 三姿

単語・表現

声 こえ voice
単位 たんい credit

役に立つやくにたつ useful 反省・感想
Acknowledgements

I thank the Toshiba International Foundation for its generous funding to support this production and all my dedicated students and helpers to make this production a success.

NOTES:
(1) Kabuki, Noh, Kyogen, Yugen and Wa are introduced in A Bilingual Handbook on Japanese Culture written by Yoichi Sugiura and John K. Gillespie, Natsume Publisher, 2nd ed. 1999 and in The Japanese Have a Word for It by Boyé Lafayette De Mente, Passport Books, 1997


(4) Standards For Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century


(4) Standards For Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century

References


