

Perspectives

The Japan Foundation London Newsletter

In Gesture and Glance: the Female Role Player in Asian Dance and Theatre

Japan Foundation to bring Quartet of Dancers to London from across the Asian Continent



Golek Lambangsari,
Indonesia



Banabiddha,
India



Dream of the Red
Chamber, China

Across the weekend of February 21st-23rd 2003, the Place Theatre will play host to four leading performers in the ancient theatrical art of female role play: the Japanese call it *onnagata* and the tradition itself is equally precious to the four countries of China, India, Indonesia and Japan. The Japan Foundation is bringing those countries to the UK in the exotic form of Zhao Zhigang from China, a star actor on the Yueju-Yue opera scene; India's Pandit Gopal Dubey, a master in the art of the masked dance of Chhau; Didik Nini Thowok of Indonesia, unique in his exploration of the female role from Java to Bali; and Japan's Gojo Masanosuke, who will be dancing the classical Nihon Buyo but is also devoted to creative modern dance.

The two gala evenings of dance on Friday and Saturday will be complemented by four daytime workshops to be held by each player on Saturday and Sunday. These promise to be both lively and instructive and will offer participants a rare chance to catch an insight into the method of gesture and glance and the essential motivations beneath the disguise.

This remarkable event was staged to great

acclaim in Japan in 2001 and *In Gesture and Glance* represents the British debut. It will go on to tour Paris, Rome, Cairo and Cologne.

Presented in association with Japan Airlines and Asia House.

There will be a lecture on the *Female Role Player in Asian Dance and Theatre* by Professor Drew Gerstle and Dr Alessandra Lopez y Royo on Tuesday 18th February 2003 at 6:30pm at the Japan Foundation Language Centre. Booking essential: tickets £5, available from Asia House. Tel: 020 7499 1287

Performances:

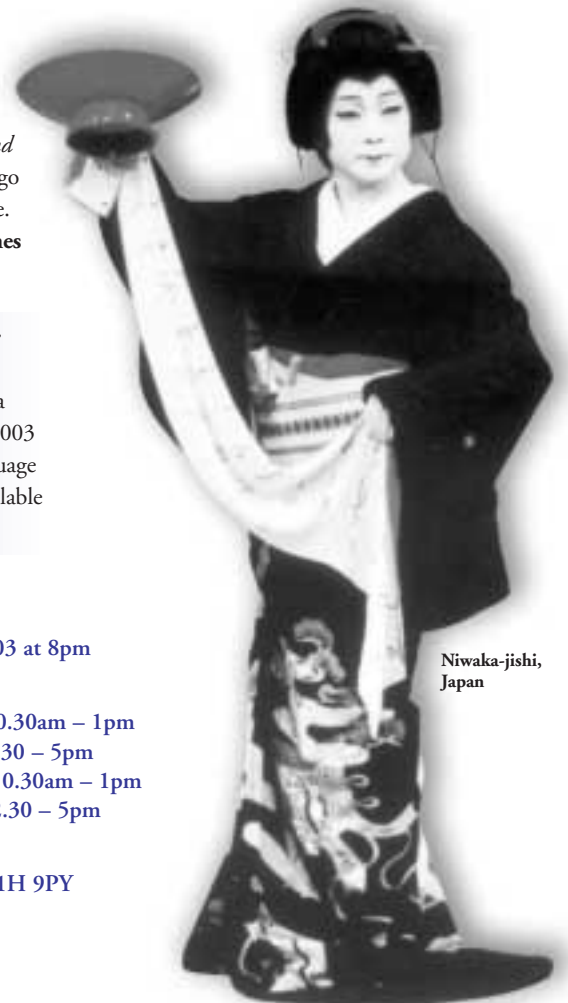
Friday 21st / Saturday 22nd February 2003 at 8pm

Workshops:

Didik Nini Thowok (Indonesia)	Sat 10.30am – 1pm
Pandit Gopal Dubey (India)	Sat 2.30 – 5pm
Zhao Zhigang (China)	Sun 10.30am – 1pm
Gojo Masanosuke (Japan)	Sun 2.30 – 5pm

For details of tickets contact:

The Place, 17 Duke's Road, London WC1H 9PY
Box office: 020 7387 0031



Niwaka-jishi,
Japan

Japanese Society 1904-5

I was a recipient of a Japan Foundation Research Fellowship from August 2001 to July 2002. It gave me the opportunity to access historical materials that are available only in Japan and upon completion, I will have written a book on a social history of the Russo-Japanese war, as well as a number of articles and chapter contributions in various edited volumes and scholarly journals.

Why write yet another book on the Russo-Japanese war? There are a number of excellent studies of the war written by historians from the diplomatic, political, and military perspectives. However, there is a dearth of study of the war from the social and cultural angles. Possibly the post-war obsession with the Second World War has detracted historians from working on the Russo-Japanese war, which is generally regarded as being uncontroversial. Whatever the reasons for its neglect, there is no doubt that this war is a watershed in understanding modern Japan. With the imminent centenary of the war in 2004-5, a critical re-examination of it is in order.

I first became interested in the Russo-Japanese war through reading personal materials written by lower-ranking soldiers. I wanted to know how they felt about sacrificing their lives for the state. I was expecting these personal materials to reveal that the soldiers were highly patriotic and willingly died for the state, just as Lieutenant Sakurai Tadayoshi had wanted to do in his hugely popular personal account of the war, *Human Bullets* published in 1906. After all, that is what the mainstream understanding of Meiji nationalism would lead us to believe. However, what I read revealed a different picture altogether. Then, I began to wonder whether or not the idea of the Japanese as patriotic soldiers was in itself a myth created and perpetuated by the Meiji state for domestic and international consumption. I began to question the basic assumption that Meiji nationalism had penetrated to the grassroots of Japanese society by the time of the Russo-Japanese war. As a result, I became interested in how the state and society interacted with one another. Having a better understanding of the social and cultural context will lead to a more critical understanding of Meiji nationalism and its effects on society. All in all, this is what I hope to achieve in my study – a more complex and subtle portrayal of Japanese society at war in 1904-5.

Dr Shimazu is Lecturer in Japanese History at Birkbeck College, University of London

On Kawara Exhibition

20 November 2002 to 26 January 2003
Ikon Gallery, Birmingham

On Kawara is one of the world's most respected and influential artists, and a comprehensive exhibition of his work is currently showing at Birmingham's Ikon Gallery.

It is a collaboration between Ikon Gallery and Le Consortium, Dijon, with a grant from the Japan Foundation under its Exhibitions Abroad Support Programme. It includes three of his major projects – the *Today Series*, *I am Still Alive* and *One Million Years*.

The *Today Series* of 'date paintings' has absorbed Kawara for many years. These paintings simply declare the date on which they are made. If the painting is not finished by midnight, it is destroyed. They are like gravestones or memorials for the time they were created.

I am Still Alive is another ongoing work in which telegrams are sent by the artist to friends and colleagues with the message 'I am still alive.' The elapse of time between transmission and reception suggests 'I was still alive.' Their constant message and their unadorned quality, corresponds with the sameness of the date paintings.

On Kawara:
Telegrams from the
I am still Alive Series



One Million Years – Past and *One Million Years – Future* are two complementary works charting the passage of time. Each work consists of thousands of pages of year dates written in chronological order, one stretching back to 1969 and the other forwards from 1980. The length of an average human life is here equivalent to a few lines, and human history to a few pages.

There is also an installation in Ikon's Tower consisting solely of the recorded sound of two people reading from *One Million Years – Past* and *One Million Years – Future*.

Contact Jigisha Patel, Ikon Gallery
Tel: 0121 248 0708 E: j.patel@ikon-gallery.co.uk for further information.



'Happy 2000 Shiseido' by Masayoshi Nakajo

Japan Foundation Touring Exhibitions

Now Available For Loan

Following the success of the recent touring exhibitions, "Manga: Short Comics from Modern Japan", and "Painting for Joy", we are delighted to announce two further exhibitions that will be available for loan during 2003.

Discover Japan through Contemporary Posters

Japan is one of only a handful of countries whose poster designers are known the world over.

(Raymond Vezina, Professor at the School of Design, University of Quebec)

A showcase for Japanese graphic talent, this exhibition comprises 75 commercial posters, created during the late 1990s, depicting a wide diversity of style and graphic technique and revealing Japanese contemporary culture as a unique mixture of western and Japanese aesthetic tradition. Artists include Makoto Nakamura, an internationally acclaimed graphic designer, Katsunori Aoki and Ryohei Kojima.

Available from June to August 2003. No hire fee; cost-sharing scheme. Approx 100-200 square metres (negotiable) required.

Counter-Photography: Japan's Artists Today

With 60 superb works, 11 internationally renowned photographers and emerging young artists revel in the spiritual dimension beyond our living world, attempting a redefinition of relationships between individuals and between the individual and society. This is more than a photographic documentary, more than mere reflection of reality as we see it, but an attempt to capture the invisible; something of the essence of life itself. Including works by Hiroshi Sugimoto, and Eiko Hosen, it has toured with much success to other European countries.

Available from September 2003. Tour duration depends on demand. No hire fee; cost sharing scheme. Approx. 65 linear metres (negotiable) required.

Information and catalogue from Junko Takekawa. E: takekawa@japanfoundation.org.uk

Mediums, Puppets and the Human Actor in the Theatres of the East

Dr Poh Sim Plowright

Edwin Mellen Press: 262pp 11 colour illus, bibliog., index. ISBN cloth: 0-7734-7057-3: £69.95; volume 4 in the continuing series, Mellen Studies in Puppetry

Most people have at some time in their lives experienced a magical moment of live theatre, that epiphany-like flash, when we lose ourselves into a communal fantasy and are moved individually by the spiritual power of the moment. Such encounters may be in modern, secular, commercial theatres, or more rarely today in the West, at a festival or religious occasion. Poh Sim Plowright has offered us insights into the role and underlying power of theatre from two distinctive perspectives. The first is that of the vast area of eastern Asia from the Indian/Thai/Malay folk traditions through China and finally to Japan. The second is through a focus on the important role of women – both as protagonist and as medium. Two images from Asian theatre tie the various parts of the book together: the ‘puppet’ and the ‘birdwoman’, as both metaphor and medium. Through a journey across time and space, Plowright shows us how central these two images have been in many different Asian societies, and how these images have been received in the West from early in the twentieth century. She analyses the representation of woman as both caring and willing to sacrifice herself for others, but also as being the source of an awesome and mysterious power of creation, a spiritual and sexual force that gives her access as a medium to other

worlds. The book is an excellent resource for anyone interested in the portrayal of female spiritual power.

Plowright, through her many years of research into Asian theatre, and her hands-on experience of the living traditions, argues persuasively for the centrality of the puppet (and mask) as the medium between communities and the higher (or lower) spiritual worlds. She further makes a case for the puppet as the most important inspiration for the actor’s art. She shows also how theatre was and is integral to community life and how it reflects the most important elements of male/female and family power relations, as well as the community’s relationship to spiritual realms and powers. Her work reaffirms how deep is the human instinctual need to use the stage to reach out and touch the spiritual world, even in the face of governments who try to suppress theatre in their domains.

Professor C Andrew Gerstle
School of Oriental and African Studies

On the occasion of the book’s publication Dr Plowright gave a talk, chaired by Professor Gerstle, on 14th October at the Japan Foundation. For further information on the book, contact Iona Williams, Edwin Mellen Press Tel: 01570 423356



Japanese Degree Courses 2001-2002

A Directory of Japanese Degree Courses in Universities and other Tertiary Education Institutions in the UK

The Japan Foundation and The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation: 234pp.
ISBN: 0-9543163-1-2.
www.dajf.org.uk/about/degree &
www.nihongocentre.org.uk

This comprehensive overview of current Japanese degree courses at universities and other tertiary education institutions in the United Kingdom is an update of the 1996/1997 version. It contains detailed and well-researched entries by individual institutions summarising the current provision of Japanese teaching at degree level in the tertiary sector. It will be valuable not only to potential undergraduates seeking a suitable course but to all those involved in the teaching and study of Japanese.

The basic criterion used for the inclusion of a Japanese course in the report is: “Can the Japanese module/unit be counted as a credit towards an undergraduate or postgraduate degree?” Where institutions meet this criterion, information is given on whether Japanese may be taken as a voluntary extra-curricular elective without contributing to a degree. The report does not include institutions where Japanese is taught as a voluntary extra-curricular elective only, nor Japan-related topics and courses offered by other faculties and their research links with institutions in Japan, nor Japan-related studies and research carried out in other institutions.

The need for study periods in Japan as an integral part of Japanese degree courses and the concomitant difficulties that still remain in funding them is a major area of concern highlighted by the report. It also draws attention to the perennial problem of inadequate resources for postgraduate studies, the acute strains on library and other budgets, and the threat inadequate general funding poses to the continuing existence of many Japanese departments.

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The ‘Angel’ or ‘Heavenly maiden’ in the Noh play *Hagoromo* (Feather Robe)



The ‘Angel’ makes a costume change (monogi) in full view of the audience

“Tobu: Learn Japanese” wins top BIMA Award



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In October the website “Tobu: Learn Japanese”, a language-learning resource created by the BBC Education for Children with Diverse Publications and in partnership with the Japan Foundation London Language Centre, won the top award at the British Interactive Media Awards (BIMA) for ‘Best Broadband Content’. The BIMA event is an annual celebration of creativity and innovation in the industry and attracts a very large entry of projects and resources from both the commercial and public service sectors.

Supported by BT as part of their launch campaign for BT Broadband, the 2002 Awards took place on 3rd October. They are highly prestigious annual awards for the Internet Industry and the judges included 23 of the UK’s leading client, agency, media and government luminaries from the Internet world. Competition was high with no fewer than 275 entries and websites short listed from major retail and media giants including Habitat, Levi Strauss, Microsoft, MTV, Manchester Utd, Channel 4, Nike, Egg, Sainsbury’s and HSBC.

For the first time this year BT also provided a special award for Broadband content, indicating that, while they can promote and encourage broadband access, it is the content creators who attract and retain users.

“Tobu: Learn Japanese”, was nominated in the ‘Education & Training’ category but did not win in that group. Instead, it went one further and triumphed by winning the overall prize, the BT Award for Best Broadband, under which judges looked across all 17 categories (including Education) and selected the one they thought

best exploited the broadband platform.

Funded by the DfES in 2000-2001 and piloted in schools around the UK, the website aims to provide resources via the Internet for Year 7 (11-12 year-old) beginners, using interactive media, such as graphics, animation, quiz activities, sound and video. It is not yet public but is being piloted by teachers and learners in 20 schools. All four language skills are developed, using printable worksheets for writing skills and ‘look / listen and respond’ online speaking activities. Hiragana, supported by audio, is introduced from the outset. Special features to encourage the fast acquisition of script knowledge include a hiragana chart with sound links and pictorial mnemonics specially devised for the project and using animation to illustrate stroke order; a similar katakana chart; and a kanji reference section for the first 35 kanji, also using animation to support the mnemonic feature.

The award is one tremendous fillip for language learning in the UK, especially at this time of debate over its very role and importance in schools. It is also a timely signal of the continuing importance of Japanese language learning in the UK, sending it right to the top of the agenda in 2002. The award will encourage all those who are interested in language learning and is a superb achievement for everyone who was involved with the project, not least those participating pilot schools and independent learners who made time in their curriculum to trial it.

More details, including when the site can be made openly available beyond the pilot schools, from Sally Lewis at our Nihongo Centre.

The higher education sector is facing very real challenges in its efforts to ensure that support for Japanese Studies remains both an institutional and a national priority and the useful statistics and research contained in this report will supply it with the hard evidence it needs to argue the case.

Key findings with 1996 figures in brackets are:

- In 2001/2002 there were 49 (47) institutions teaching Japanese as a credit towards a degree.
- Nine universities now offer accredited modules in Japanese that were not listed in the 1996/1997 Guide: University of Abertay Dundee; Anglia Polytechnic University; University of Wales, Bangor; Birkbeck College; University of the West of England, Bristol; University of Exeter; Leeds Metropolitan University; University of Northumbria at Newcastle and University of Portsmouth.
- Since the 1996/1997 report, a further nine institutions have withdrawn Japanese: University of Stirling, King Alfred’s College of Higher Education, University of Ulster (single/joint honours level); Aston University, Lancaster University, University of Luton and University of Wolverhampton (Japanese as a minor); University of Hertfordshire and Napier University (accredited modules in Japanese).
- 2,629 (2,684) undergraduates were enrolled in 2001/2002 studying Japanese as a credit towards an undergraduate degree at any one time. Of these, some 616 (684) are specialising in Japanese at either single or joint honours. 2,013 (2,000) are non-specialists following subsidiary courses or modules in Japanese.
- Number completing postgraduate taught courses remains unchanged. Number completing Japan-related PhDs has quadrupled from 4 to 16.

Problem areas are:

- The high cost of study periods in Japan, deterring many potential students from applying: number going to Japan as part of undergraduate degrees has fallen by 22%.
- Arranging work placements for students in Japan.
- Lack of adequate funding for postgraduate students.
- Student demand for Japanese remains well below what is considered to be in the national interest.
- The acute shortage of library resources.
- Declining government support for universities as a whole, exacerbating funding problems in maintaining the full staff complement on both the language and non-language sides and, in places, threatening the future existence of the Japanese department itself.

Improving Japanese Reading Skills by E-mail

Our Nihongo Centre has launched a pilot project, “E-Reading”, designed to provide regular reading skills support through distance learning to non-native teachers of Japanese. It will allow them to work at their own pace using a tailor-made e-mail package based on GCSE topics that can be recycled and adapted for use in their own classroom situation. Although the main focus will be on reading, it will also assist

them with grammar and vocabulary. The project began in October and will run until July 2003, beginning in the first year with 14 teachers who are at high beginner/low intermediate level in their Japanese.

For further details about the project contact Miwa Moriwaki, Adviser for Secondary Education at our Nihongo Centre. E: miwa@nihongocentre.org.uk