Cultural Performances of Asia: Themes of the Class

Image of Crazy-A removed for copyright reasons.
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 removed for copyright reasons.
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

Image of Double Suicide removed for copyright reasons.

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

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
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.
Which is more "Japanese"?

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

Image of Contemporary photography removed for copyright reasons
"Culture"

• What is culture?

• Humanist
  – Arts, theater, letters

• Anthropological
  – Meanings and lifeways

• Historical
  – Traditions, institutions
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 for copyright reasons.

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”