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Report on the Intensive Cultural Workshop Series held from 2005 to 2011

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Abstract

This report gives an overview of the workshop series on classical Japanese cultural expressions held in Tunisia and Uzbekistan between 2005 and 2011.

Keywords: Japanese classical arts, dynamic exchange, spatial habitation

要旨

本稿は、2005年から2011年にかけてチュニジアおよびウズベキスタンで開催された、古典的な日本の文化的表現に関する一連のワークショップの様態を報告する。

キーワード：日本の古典芸術、活発な交流、空間居住

1. Objective and rationale

The intensive workshop series on classical Japanese cultural expressions was initiated in response to a desire to render more dynamic and pertinent academic exchange between young researchers of the human and social sciences. The idea being that in enabling a forum for exchange and dialogue through a practical understanding of the cultural expressions of a society, a wider perspective in terms of evolution and modern-day issues would be gained.

Though practical workshops on different cultural expressions are quite commonplace in the performing arts, such workshops often run for several months at a time which would be neither desirable nor practical in an academic environment. It was thought that a form of cultural workshop could however be applied to an academic environment if it were held over a limited but intensive time-frame with a very precise theme.

Moreover, one of the great themes of the human and social sciences is the notion of space and its habitation. Though this is an immense field of study, in the classical arts, certain aspects of space and its habitation have been refined and structured into a condensed expression with a formalized definition that can still be identified today. This is particularly true of the classical arts of Japan as, not only as a result of policies of isolation but also of those aimed at strengthening the feudal nature of society itself, there was a long period where art forms were preserved intact with very little evolution or outside influence.

2. Approach

As to the formula of the workshops themselves, though certain aspects, especially those of a factual or theoretical nature, can be readily apprehended by the mind, for certain others, however, it is only through practical experience that an understanding begins to form. It is often too, in the details, the little things, that seen from outside appear trivial, even irksome, that a culture reveals itself. To understand the 'why' of a certain way of doing things can be the beginning of understanding the 'who'. Why does a Japanese master insist on a floor cloth being wrung out in a specific way? Why must the students themselves clean the floor with a floor cloth rather than with a mop or other equipment? Words of explanation alone cannot give a satisfactory answer, but through a gradual process of physical perception, a different dimension of understanding can be grasped.

3. Workshops held to-date

This series of workshops was initially designed to be held within the framework of research and education exchange projects, such as symposia, special seminars and so on. They were run under various programmes of the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Tsukuba. Though the form and contents of the workshops varied according to the specifics of each venue, the underlying concept of creating a forum for a more dynamic and pertinent form of dialogue between young researchers was maintained.

As stated above, the workshop series adopted a twofold approach, on the one hand intellectual with academic presentations and discussions and on the other practical with actual experience of creative expression in the Japanese classical arts. Furthermore, in order to actualise dynamic exchange between young researchers, not only were they expected to form the participant base, but also, wherever possible, young researchers were encouraged to be part of the workshop leaders and hold working sessions, give presentations and take an active part in the workshop organisation and management.

3.1 Sousse November 2005

Session heads: Akira Tamba, formerly CNRS Paris, composer and musicologist; Yuko Wada, Nasu Global Culture, Head Hanayagi School of Nihon Buyō; Michiko Akiba, Hanayagi School of Nihon Buyō; Osamu Ishizuka, University of Tsukuba, Urasenke School of Tea Ceremony; Vivian Nobes, formerly CIRT Paris, workshop concept and direction. The young researcher was Mohamed Bouri, a Tunisian doctoral student from the Prefectural University of Arts, Okinawa. Mohamed Bouri gave the presentation on Noh theatre and directed the working session on translation as well as interpreting discussions between other session heads and participants.

The first workshop was held in Sousse from 10th to 11th November, 2005, under the framework of the Tunisia-Japan Symposium on Culture, Science and Technology. The workshop ran concurrently with the symposium allowing for a certain interaction between the two events. Workshop participants were graduate students from the Faculty of Arts, University of Sousse and the Institute Bourguiba of Modern Languages, Tunis. The number was limited to thirty participants who were expected to attend the entire two-day series of sessions.

The theme common to all sessions was *jo-ha-kyū* which broadly speaking defines rhythm and progression of the introduction, development and climax of a movement whether it be in music or text, use of space and volume, in action or even simple gesture.

The practical sessions focused on movement and gesture in the Nihon Buyō dance form and in the Japanese tea ceremony. The academic presentations covered the history and form of Noh theatre; the musical structure of Noh, though this also required movement and voice production; the history, philosophy and environment of the tea ceremony which also involved an exercise in Zen and calligraphy. Two working sessions were held concurrently: translation into Arabic of an excerpt from the Noh play *Hagoromo*

and work on a festive dance. Ongoing review and discussion were held throughout the workshop. At the end of the two-day workshop participants performed the dance sequence and gave a recitation of their translated text, this was followed by general review and evaluation. An evening of artistic exchange was held for participants of both the symposium and the workshops with performances of dance from the Hanayagi School of Nihon Buyō, Okinawa-style shamisen by Mohamed Bouri and modern ritual theatre by Fadhel Jaziri and his troupe.

3.2 Tunis 2006

The second workshop series took on a slightly different form and addressed a wider audience. It was the first of a two-part programme held over a period of ten days in mid-July 2006 to celebrate the “50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Tunisia”. The highlight, the second part of the programme, was a double-bill Noh performance for the opening of the 42nd International Arts Festival at the Roman Amphitheatre of Carthage. The performance was in collaboration with the Kanze School of Noh and the National Theatre of Tunisia, with Naohiko Umewaka in the lead role, flute by Jirō Fujita, costumes by Hanae Mori and décor by the Ohara School of Ikebana. The entire ten-day programme was held in collaboration with the various organizations and associations of Japan and Tunisia.

As for the workshop activities, they were held throughout the week preceding the Noh performance with the double theme of change in and exchange between the two cultures of Japan and Tunisia. The event was held in the heart of the historical medina of Tunis in a traditional wayfarers’ inn under renovation for an arts centre. The entire space, both buildings and gardens, was used for the exhibition and activities; the event was taken as a whole with exhibits and workshop activities used in reference one to the other. Exhibits included obi and formal kimono from the Meiji era to modern times and modern fashion items inspired from traditional motifs and techniques by Sayoko Miyajima; a series of fans ranging from large, highly decorated dance fans to simple white fans inscribed in black ink for Japanese chess tournaments; musical instruments and masks used in traditional and modern-style Noh performance; a series of photographs of Tunisian landscapes by cooperative workers from JICA; Japanese floral art works by the Tunis Chapter of the Ohara School of Ikebana; etc. Continuous loop audio-visuals presented: traditional Japanese music by Teruhisa Fukuda and contemporary works for traditional instruments composed by Akira Tamba; a slide show photo-documentary of Showa era Japan by Tsuneko Sasamoto, the first Japanese

female photo-journalist; documentaries on the history of *ikebana* from the Ohara School; Japanese traditional festivals; and so on.

Activities and events were organized throughout the day and visitors and participants could come and go as they pleased. A series of conferences followed by discussion were given in the mornings, as: “My experience of Japanese theatre” by Mohamed Driss, Director of the National Theatre of Tunis; “From Japanese haiku to Tunisian haik” by Salem Labbene, poet; “The situation of women in Japan and Tunisia” by Kiyoko Kusakabe, former Member of the House of Councillors of Japan and Faïza Kefi, Deputy of Tunisia. Practical workshops were held in the afternoons, with: *ikebana* by the Tunis Chapter of the Ohara School of Ikebana; *Nōkan* or Noh flute by Jirō Fujita; Japanese kimono by Tokuko Sakai; Japanese tea ceremony according to the Omote Senge School by Kazunori Tamura; and a demonstration of karate by the Tunisian Association of Traditional Karate. Two cinema showings of Japanese films on the theme of imagination and society were given every evening.

Under the direction of the author of this report, a team of young Tunisian graduate students from the various institutions of higher education in Tunis helped design and set up the exhibition, acted as guides to visitors and workshop participants engaging them in dialogue on the event and its themes. Visitors to the exhibition and the cinema showings were often members of the general public with a steady number of around twelve people per day. Conference and workshop participants, however, were overwhelmingly young researchers or performing artists who had either directly participated in or who had heard of the previous workshops in Sousse, numbering from fifty to more than a hundred participants per session and attending as many sessions as their work or study schedules allowed.

3.3 Tunis 2007

Session heads: Osamu Ishizuka, University of Tsukuba, Urasenke School of Tea Ceremony; Vivian Nobes, formerly CIRT Paris, workshop concept and direction.

The third series of workshops was held in Tunis in August 2007 as part of a month-long summer school to prepare young Tunisian researchers for their study tour in Japan. The participants were for the most part from the various fields of scientific research and were expected to attend the entire course of linguistic study; their participation in the cultural workshops, however, was optional. The intensive workshops were held over a

period of four days and were designed to complement the linguistic study through an appreciation of non-verbal communication in traditional Japanese expression.

The theme chosen, continuing on from the study and composition of *renku*, a form of Japanese poetry, was communication and transformation. The concept of *shin gyō-sō* representing the concrete transformation from ‘formal to semi-formal through to informal’ or the intangible process from ‘the real and inherent to imagination and sensory manipulation through to the abstract and individual interpretation’ was used to illustrate the theme. Sessions explored: the evolution of the tea ceremony, its philosophy and environment; dynamics of form and movement in spatial delimitation through concentration exercises in martial arts and the Shingon School of Buddhism. Participants were given a control movement at the beginning of the workshops and again at the end in order to evaluate their progress. Ongoing review and discussion was held throughout the four-day workshop, and students were asked to submit a written report. An open session on a demonstration of Japanese tea ceremony was held at the end of the workshop series. Though there were no representative young researchers from Japan, the summer school participants were expected to organize and accompany a programme of cultural visits and events on Tunisia for the group from Japan.

3.4 Tashkent 2011

Session heads: Akira Tamba, formerly CNRS Paris, composer and musicologist; Norio Wada, Nasu Global Culture; Yuko Wada, Head Hanayagi School of Nihon Buyō assisted by Mariko Watanabe, Reiko Omori, Fukiko Kikuchi, Hanayagi School of Nihon Buyō; Osamu Ishizuka, University of Tsukuba, Urasenke School of Tea Ceremony; Vivian Nobes, formerly CIRT Paris, workshop concept and direction. The young researcher was Miho Iriyama, Doctoral Program, University of Tsukuba, specialising in Japanese language teaching in Central Asia, she gave a presentation and directed the working session on calligraphy as well as interpreted discussions between other session heads and participants. She was also a very active member in the organisation and preparation of the workshop, acting as coordinator between the Tashkent host and the group from Japan.

The most recent series of workshops was held from March 12th to 13th, 2011 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, under the IFERI Program of the University of Tsukuba. Here again the workshops were designed to complement academic activities, firstly a symposium and more particularly a month-long Japanese language programme at the University of

Tashkent. However, interest from the general public was so great, the host organization, the Japan Centre, asked that the workshops be open to everyone, including the general public, throughout the two days with no obligation to attend every session. Consequently, the format was slightly changed to cater to a larger number of diverse participants.

Though there was no major theme linking the various sessions, each session developed the notion of breath and posture for expression within a given space or interval. The sessions were: Nihon Buyō dance form; Japanese tea ceremony; musical structure in Noh theatre; flute in Noh theatre; Japanese calligraphy. There was a working session on an original musical composition at the National School of Arts specifically for classical singers. A conference-concert on traditional Uzbek music was held for the group from Japan at the Uzbekistan State Conservatory and an artistic exchange morning was held at the Japanese Embassy in Uzbekistan featuring Noh flute and Nihon Buyō dance from Japan, and classical piano pieces and traditional music from Uzbekistan.

4. Evaluation and conclusion

With regards the format of the workshops, certain aspects had to be modified quite early on. The original intent was to hold practical sessions according to Japanese classical practice, i.e. participants were expected to follow the master's movements through immediate observation and action as against a process of pre-explanation and study; although practical sessions were to be followed by discussion and evaluation. However, in a different cultural environment with different attitudes and expectations, not to mention the tight time frame involved, it soon became apparent that neither the master nor the participants were able to understand each other. Therefore, a certain amount of explanation and guidance was integrated into the practical sessions. Furthermore, with regards the overall theme of spatial habitation, again due to the difference in cultural environment, it was evident that participants would need a basic introduction to breathing and posture specific to classical Japanese expression. Once these two points were addressed the practical sessions became more comfortable and more immediately effective.

Certain sessions were designed to be held concurrently, both to give participants a choice of expression and also to create a forum for observation and evaluation between the two groups of participants. However, participants themselves expressed a desire that sessions not be held concurrently. For the Sousse Workshop for instance, participants believed that text production would have benefitted from a deeper

understanding of movement and gesture and similarly that after having learned rhythm through movement participants would have liked to have explored rhythm in text. However, though this is a valid comment, it is still thought that creating an opportunity for peer critical assessment is crucial to further development and study.

The intensive nature of the workshops creates a condensed time and space away from the reality of the everyday world, thus providing a favourable environment for a strong experience of a different cultural understanding. However, the aim of the workshops is not to promote a closed personal experience but academic research and dialogue across cultural expressions instead. It is, therefore, vital that participants be constantly engaged in discussion and assessment throughout the entire workshop period. The workshops where participants were required to give peer assessment or write reports were particularly effective in this respect.

Overall, whether workshops were designed for a single group of participants attending the whole series of sessions or whether for different individuals attending different sessions it would seem, rather surprisingly, that the result was invariably a concentrated effort towards an understanding and application of the given theme. However, it should be noted that the combination of academic presentation and discussion with practical experience of creative expression does give better results in an academic environment where it tends to lead to further discussion and independent activity.

As to the objectives of the workshops, it would seem that the series is creating a forum for dynamic exchange between researchers. Moreover, through the workshop approach, it has become evident that a cultural expression is not the exclusive domain of the referred culture's society, encouraging a more active participation of young researchers. Furthermore, the workshops have been able to create an opportunity not only for practical experience in setting up and realising exhibitions or academic programmes, but also for valuable fieldwork and research to be carried out.

For future projects, the workshop series hopes to be able to further extend the scope of the cultures discussed and to encourage a more active part from the host culture in order to introduce a comparative perspective.