

Technologies and Resources For The Study of Japanese Puppetry --

人形浄瑠璃 *Ningyō Jōruri*

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If theatre is considered the great synthetic art form, bringing together verbal text, visual media, sound, and bodily practice, puppetry is the epitome of this concept of theatre. In puppetry the very manipulation of the various media in bringing to life the story seems to be main presentation to an audience. In the professional Japanese puppet theatre, *ningyō jōruri*—also commonly known by the troupe name “Bunraku” (文楽)—the synthesis of performing practices has been taken to an extreme. With three, visually present, puppeteers for each doll, costumes, wigs, and make up for all the puppet characters, elaborate sets manipulated by numerous stage hands, an on-stage narrator accompanied by a shamisen instrumentalist, as well as off-stage musicians and sound effect performers, *ningyō jōruri* presents the audience with a simultaneous variety of performances. And all this is only within the theatre performance; the literary history of the form has produced some of the richest plays of Japanese and world theatre.

The synthetic richness of the theatre creates a demanding environment for the study of this tradition, and yet those demands are also opportunities for multi-media approaches to the art. In this presentation I will try to outline a few specific opportunities, and practical tasks, involved in creating digital technologies such as databases of media and information, as well as display and interactive mechanisms, to open up the performing traditions of the puppet theatre. I would like to explore the resources that might be available for such work in the short term of the next three to five years.

At the Singapore workshop I will first introduce and consider the possibilities of two collections of Bunraku materials. These are the Barbara Curtis Adachi Collection at Columbia University's C.V. Starr East Asian Library (<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/eimages/eastasian/bunraku/>) and the online performance record database and introduction to Bunraku at the Japan Arts Council's 「文化デジタルライブラリー」 (“Digital library of culture”) Web site (<http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/>). These two collections and their apparati are well-known to some of you, but unknown to others. I hope that as I sketch out the possible connections with GloPAD and JPARC, we can discuss together how both the materials and the infrastructure of the institutions may be accessible.

After considering the models of Bunraku study resources available through the Japan Arts Council site, I would like to explore several possible digital technologies that could be built as part of a JPARC site. These are an interactive 3-D model of the physical theatre (along the line of the current 3-D noh stage model we have¹), an interactive, multilingual program built off the scanned image of a performance's program, and a searchable and multi-media annotated narrator's script for a single scene of a play. All these should be extendable, either simply acting as prototype models that could be copied with other contents, or, better yet, as objects that could be added to, or “versioned up,” by such others as a researcher working on a “translation” project or a class of students and their teacher building extensions as a class project.

The interest in performance histories and the institutional contexts of performance traditions has drawn us to the use of different media to read historical performing arts. Non-textual, or extra-textual, studies seem particularly potent for the study of puppet traditions. In fact, the study or appreciation of Japanese puppet theatre has always included what we might call multi-media approaches, particularly in the print culture of the Edo period. We should moderate our at times blind enthusiasm for new technologies with more

consideration of the historical “multi-media” approaches to this, and other, performing arts. I will come back to this point at the end of my presentation with a look at how we might “digitally translate” some of the 18th and 19th century publications on the puppet theatre and kabuki. The electronic text of Shikitei Sanba’s *Shibai kinmou zui* (式亭三馬 『劇場訓蒙図彙』 1803) that the Japan Arts Council has produced and made available online is a model for this type of project. See <http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/ebook01/mainmenu.html>

ⁱ <http://libdev.library.cornell.edu/glopad/images/glopad/two/nohvrml.wrl> [please refer to the GloPAD “Tools” page, http://libdev.library.cornell.edu/glopad_pi/tools.php , for the Cortona viewing plug-in if you’d like to navigate this stage model on your own computer]