

Introduction

Asian theatre is one of the focal interests in the theatre scholarship in the world today. The number of papers on various aspects of Asian theatre which are presented at IFTR conferences has greatly increased in the past ten, fifteen years. IFTR Asian Theatre Working Group has held a biannual study meeting since 2009 in order to explore common interests of Asian theatre, to discuss the differences in theatre among Asian countries, and to learn from one another. The group consists of over 100 researchers from Asian countries and regions, including Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and India, as well as researchers who live in Western countries. Six themes have been central to our discussions: training, translation, the cultural exchange among Asian countries, the role of the female, tradition, and modernization.

Theatre scholars in general seem to be interested more in individual theatre productions, modern or traditional, or theatrical events in Asia than in the historical process of theatre modernization in Asian countries. In fact, their knowledge of this aspect is very limited and often surprisingly mistaken. This is not only the case of Western scholars but also that of us Asian scholars as well. We do not know much about theatre history of other Asian countries outside our own. This is the reason why we have chosen the theme of theatre modernization in Asia for the book of anthology to be edited by Asian Theatre Working Group. At a study meeting held in Osaka in March 2014, our working group examined and edited collected papers on the modernization of theatre to be submitted for publication. Nineteen members from overseas participated in this year's meeting. The papers in this anthology are mostly based on this meeting and its discussion.

We mean by the modernization in theatre the changing movement of certain theatrical styles or attitudes of the pre-modern or traditional theatre to the modern theatre. But, the question will be raised: What is the modern theatre? The concept of 'modern' is a Western one, which means that most characteristics of modern times and modern society were created in the West. Although the period of modern times in European history starts with the age of Renaissance, most scholars of sociology and economics think that modern society was established in Europe around the early 19th century along with the political, economical and scientific revolutions in the late 18th and early 19th century. Thus, modern society is marked with capitalism, democracy and rationalism. But this was the time when Western nations started to expand their ruling territories over Asian countries, colonizing many of them. Therefore, Asian countries were forced to be Westernized, i.e. modernized. Today, modernization is regarded both positively and negatively. But any country was, or is, not able to deny the development toward modernization in this globally capitalistic age. Theatre is no exception. Thus, the modernization of Asian

theatre began late in the 19th century or early in the 20th century, though it occurred earlier in some countries and later in others. When and how it has occurred are different in different countries in Asia. Each country must have experienced its unique features in the process of the theatre modernization, which also must have involved many particular problems and encountered opposing movements. This anthology is the collection of papers which reflect and analyze those features and problems as well as historical facts.

What is the modernization of theatre? To answer this question, we first have to investigate the concepts of “modern” and “theatre” separately. In the OED, the first definition of “modern” is “being at this time; now existing,” and the second is “of or pertaining to the present and recent times, as distinguished from the remote past; pertaining to or originating in the current age or period.” The word “modern” comes from the Latin word *modernus*, which, according to Ernst. R. Curtius (*European Literature and Latin Middle Ages*), was first used around the beginning of the sixth century (a fact that is endorsed by the OED as well), although Matei Calinescu says in his *Five Faces of Modernity* that it was already used at the end of the fifth century. *Modernus* had derived from an adverb, *modo*, which signified “just now.”

The history of the European world is usually divided into three periods: ancient, medieval, and modern. The modern era, the period that we regard as our own, began around the sixteenth century with the Renaissance. The periodization of history as ancient, medieval, and modern has been adopted in most countries in the world, undoubtedly including those in Asia, but the dividing years are not necessarily the same in each country. In Japan, for instance, the modern period, called *kindai*, is usually considered to have started in 1868, but *kinsei*, the Japanese term for the previous period, the Edo era (1603–1868), literally means “modern times” in English. *Kinsei*, the Edo era, was thus only partially modern in the Western concept of the word. Therefore, the Western periodization of history is not suitable to the Japanese version of history. Because the science of history was one of the modernized fields, the Western periodization was adopted. This is therefore the problem of the “modern” in the history of Asian countries.

The concept of “modern” has been further confused since the 1970s, because the new term “postmodern” has been in fashion in Asia as well as in the West. Furthermore, there has been a sort of backlash against the term “post-modern” on the part of some sociologists since the 1990s. They argue that contemporary society still maintains many important aspects of modernity that began in the West in the late eighteenth century. Anthony Giddens, one of the most prominent

critics in this discussion, has argued that, for each of the founders of sociology in the nineteenth century, a single overriding dynamic force shaped their understanding of modernity; this force was capitalism for Marx, industrialism for Durkheim, and rationalism for Weber. Giddens thinks, however, that modernity is closely connected with the nation-state, which inevitably becomes conscious of the clear border around its dominant territories (Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990, Pp. 11-13). This tendency, in turn—and also inevitably—leads to the expansion of the country's territories. Asia faced the overwhelmingly aggressive military powers of Western states beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century. Some Asian countries succumbed to their powers, and others hastily tried to militarily modernize themselves to cope with this aggression. Japan followed the latter course of action. She acquired the status of nation-state late in the nineteenth century, and began to take the aggressive military approach to other Asian countries following the Western model. The Western concept of “modern” is thus a sword of Damocles, so to speak.

This is not the place for further discussion of the issue of modernity. We only need to make sure that we are discussing the modernization, not post modernization, of theatre in Asia. However, since the period of modernity differs in different countries in Asia, modernization is in place in some countries when post modernization occurs in others. It is often difficult to make a clear distinction between the two.

A Japanese sociologist, Ken'ichi Tominaga, has offered a theory of modernization, influenced by Talcott Parsons, that suggests that the modernizing process of any society transpires in four sub-systems, namely the social, cultural, political, and economic systems (Ken'ichi Tominaga, *Nihon no kindai ka to shakai hendo* [*Modernization of Japan and the Social Change*], Tokyo, 1990). Needless to say, some societies arrive at the modern stage earlier than others, and even in those advanced countries all the characteristics of modernity did not appear at the same time. In the West, the social system was modernized with the disappearance of the feudalistic family system and the emergence of self-governing cities toward the end of the Middle Ages. As is well known, Ferdinand Tönnies characterized this process, in his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), as the transformation from the *Gemeinschaft* of the closed village society to the *Gesellschaft* of the open society of cities where the spirit of freedom and equality emerged. The cultural system modernized with the Renaissance and Reformation, under the dominant idea of rationalism. Following this, the

modernization of the political system was achieved with bourgeois revolutions, a typical manifestation of which was of course the Great Revolution in France in 1789. This promoted the tendency toward democracy. In the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution modernized the economic system, which first happened in England, and established the modern form of capitalism. Therefore, as was stated previously, Western society as a whole did not acquire its genuinely modern characteristics until the mid-nineteenth century.

However, we should distinguish between two forms of modernization, a distinction that Tominaga seems to be ignoring. The first is to make a field or an aspect of society modern, and the other is to become modern in a field or an aspect. This is another way to say that the verb “modernize” holds both transitive and intransitive meanings. In his *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (1920–1921), Max Weber says that all aspects of modernity were products of the West. That is to say, Western society became modern without adopting anything from non-Western countries. Non-Western countries, on the other hand, had to import everything from the West in order to modernize. This is the reason why modernization inevitably means Westernization. However, modernization was not realized in all four sub-systems at the same time in non-Western countries, either. On the contrary, the four sub-systems did not modernize evenly because of conflicts. Therefore, it is possible that a country could be in the modern era and yet only be partially modernized.

Theatre is also a contested concept, whose meanings are diverse and tricky. The first definition of “theatre” in the OED is “*Gr. And Rom. Antiq.* A place constructed in the open air, for viewing dramatic plays or other spectacles. An amphitheatre.” The second is “in modern use, an edifice specially adapted to dramatic representations; a playhouse.” Therefore, a theatre is before anything else a site constructed for the viewing of plays. This is only natural, for as is well known, the word “theatre” has its origin in the Greek word *theatron*, which derived from *theasthai*, meaning “to behold.” *Theatron* was the place for viewing in a Greek theatre. Theatre had been, for a long time in Europe, the name for a place that had a construction similar to the Greek theatre, as the OED says, such as “a temporary platform, dais, or other raised stage, for any public ceremony,” or “a room or hall fitted with tiers of rising seats facing the platform, lecturer’s table, or president’s seat, for lectures, scientific demonstrations, etc.” The meaning of “dramatic works collectively” comes into the definition of “theatre” later; the first example of this usage noted in the OED is from 1640. However, the modern form of theatre art, that is, an

illusionistic performance of a drama enacted by actors on the proscenium stage appreciated by collective spectators, did not prevail in Europe until around the turn of the nineteenth century, precisely the time when the features of modernity emerged in Europe.

Here we have to note two points. The first is that drama and theatre tend to be interchangeably used in the modern era. Drama has a long tradition of scholarly analysis, since Aristotle, while theatre has not, for its meaning had been, as stated above, ambiguous until the modern era. This means that it had been considered appropriate to apply criticism to the text of the drama, but not necessarily to the performance. It was in the eighteenth century that dramatic criticism began to be written in regard to the performance of the work. Lessing was the pioneering critic in this respect. In other words, theatre was eventually considered to have drama as its core only in modern Western countries. The modern theatre was not just intended to amuse the audience with an outward performing style. It eliminated a particular style of performance, which had been the main aspect for centuries, and tried to express particular problems of the modern era. It was naturally realistic. In this vein, the most prominent modern playwright was Ibsen.

The second point is that the Western concept of theatre, which came to Asian countries in the middle of the nineteenth or early twentieth century, was not only new for Asians but was also a recent idea for Westerners, especially in developing countries in Europe. Nevertheless, it was on the continuous line of history in Europe, while in Asia the Western concept of theatre caused a break in the trajectory of theatre history. Japan, for example, had had no word equivalent to the European “theatre,” so that a new word, *engeki*, had to be coined. *Engeki* was not just any theatre, but a particular form of theatre akin to that of the West, that is, realistic drama. Initially, therefore, *engeki* did not include *noh* theatre.

It was certainly not easy to incorporate this type of dramatic feature into the traditional Asian theatre, of which stylized theatre had been a main characteristic. Was this modernization forced by external powers, or brought out of its own volition? Of course, it was impossible to entirely modernize theatre in a short time. The context of theatre modernization naturally differs in different countries and also depends on the different processes of modernization in these societies. As Tominaga argues, the cultural system faces the most difficult conflict between the new and the traditional. Perhaps theatre’s transition is the most difficult in the whole field of art. It would be interesting to examine, from a comparative perspective, which aspects or elements

of theatre were first modernized, and what sorts of theatrical conflicts occurred during this process, in different countries or regions in Asia.

The papers in the Part 1 are critical surveys of the history of theatre modernization in Asian countries or regions: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malay, Singapore and Uyghur. Introducing the theatre history of modernization, the papers describe and explore the problematics of that. The part 2 focuses on any case studies of modernization history. They are on contemporary Taiwan performances, translation of modern French comedy into Chinese, modernization Chinese Xiqu, modern Okinawa plays, Malaysian traditional performance, Korean National theatre and Japanese plays during the war.

These papers describe that each country in Asia has accepted modernization (Westernization) during a certain point during the 20th century. During the process of acceptance, each country's traditional theatre first conflicted with and then reached an understanding with modern theatre. Some countries experienced modernization at the beginning of the 20th century, while others faced it during the second half of the 20th century. The experience lasted only a short time in some countries, while other countries continue to experience it to this day. Historical and political situations also differ according to each country. Ironically, the experience of accepting modern European theatre can unify theatres in Asian countries as Asian theatre. Nevertheless, some countries have supported this theory while some deny it.

A number of items related to modern theatre can be classified into the following categories: structures of theater buildings, performance forms and presentation manners, theatrical organizations and their training and education systems, the structure of works and dramas, the perception of performers, the attitude of the audience to the theatrical experience, and governmental policies. Each country has experienced modernization in these ways. During the process, some countries clearly accept modernization while some countries strenuously oppose it. Many contemporary theatres in Asia incorporate the Italianate stage in their performances. At present, every theatre in Asia has presented plays of Shakespeare, Chekhov, Ibsen to Brecht, Beckett and Pinter. Because Constantin Stanislavski's system exhibits versatility, his system has been amended and accepted in each country and coexists with each country's training system for performers. A country's focus and priority can be observed in the way his system is amended and adopted. For example, the English version of Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* was published in 1936 and the translation into Japanese began only a year later, in 1937, becoming the core for performance theory in Japanese theatre after World War II. In China, conservatories established after the revolution of 1949 were influenced by conservatories in the Soviet Union and the Stanislavski system was introduced. The system has been said to affect

even Chinese traditional theatre, including the Beijing opera.

Another complicating factor was that modernization was not only introduced from Europe but generated by neighboring Asian countries. This is still in debate and remains in this post-colonial era. Many countries throughout Asia have experienced, for example, Japanese colonialism and its traces continue to be seen in the cities. Japanese colonialism has been repeatedly expressed in the modern theatre of these countries, and it forms the framework or a core part of their dramatic works. Regarding Japanese colonialism, the Japanese perspective differs from that of other Asian countries. Although Japanese people experienced Japanese colonialism, Japan's position is said to be unique. In the era of Japanese colonialism prior to World War II, the cultures of other Asian countries were absorbed into many Japanese dramas and changed into the Japanese style. The absorption and altering have been repeatedly performed in the modern Japanese theatre innocently and unintentionally. Wars fought in Asia, such as the Korean War and the Vietnam War, were commonly experienced by many Asian people. As such, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was actually fought in Asia. This experience can be observed in the modern Asian theatre.

The papers describe these complicated and delicate matters in each way. Ironically, the experience of accepting modern value of theatre can unify in Asian theatre as Asian theatre. Nevertheless, some countries have supported this theory while some deny it. These papers also suggest identity of Asian theatre in each topic. Many of these papers focus on conflict between tradition and modernity in theatre, this suggests problematics of modernity closely related to that of tradition. They explain not only some of accommodations but conflicts between modernity and tradition in their theatre or performances. Although Asian countries, intentionally or not, preserved its traditional form and values of the theatres, they had to confront the newly introduced values or mechanism on European modernity. As the papers suggested, each theatre history experienced a kind of Asian dilemma based on the acknowledgement of the modernity. The following papers will satisfy, if partially, the curiosity of this kind.