

COMPLETION REPORT

"Transnationalization, Acculturation and Negotiation: A Review of the Histories of Collaboration Between Japanese and Pilipino Artists and the Creation of Art and Cultural Space From 2003-2008".

Introduction

It was more than two decades ago that a cultural space was spawned between the Philippines and Japan. By the early 80s, the artists and theater troupes that would soon form the bulk of cultural exchange between the two countries were having their presence felt in the world of arts and social commentaries. Some of these artists were developing their pieces as early as the mid- or late-70s. It is important to point out these literary growths because these pieces would be the same elements that were in the mind of cultural workers or students who went to Japan to study or to immerse themselves in networking with developmental non-government organizations.

An important theater group in the Philippines called PETA (Philippine Educational Theater Association) worked with the Black Tent (BT) Theater of Japan in 1979. In 1983, a 6-week summer workshop and theater forum was held in Tokyo. This would involve not only theater practitioners but also development workers from India, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Japan. This event became known as Asian Theater Forum. The result was a three-day festival held in a park in Setagaya.

This Asian Theater Forum would soon give rise to more workshops that would extend till 1985. The collaboration with Black Tent Theater would bring PETA to Japan. At the core of this visit is a performance called "Pledge for Freedom" in 1986. The date is crucial because this marks the People Power revolution and the presentation is about the triumph of freedom over dictatorship.

In 2003, the first attempt at Kabuki in the professional way was being prepared in the University of the Philippines. Their project was the play "Kanjincho," one of the most popular Kabuki dramas, in Japanese literature. The idea of staging Kabuki in the Philippines came from Dr. Jina Umali, who returned to the Philippines in 2001 after her studies and research on Japanese Literature for some eight years at Doshisha University in Kyoto.

Interestingly, Umali with Dr. Matthew Santamaria of the University of the Philippines Asia Center were active in the staging of the play "In My Father's House," in Kyoto. The play deals with the disintegration of a family during the occupation of Manila by the Japanese. It narrates the story of three brothers during World War II as they take different directions, pushed by the unusual circumstances of wartime Philippines.

Umali would be instrumental in bringing to the Philippines Nohgakushi Umewaka Naohiko. Soon, the scholar would not only stage Noh but act in them and also train people in the said traditional theater form.

In 2005, Umewaka conducted what Umali described as an intensive training, which went on for five weeks to train Filipino artists for a joint performance with Noh masters. The Noh master was using the

principles of Noh for the Filipinos. The event they were preparing for was the commemoration of the fiftieth year of the resumption of the diplomatic relationship between the Philippines and Japan.

In 2005, Umewaka staged “The Coffee Shop Within the Play” with Filipino actors. Upon the invitation of the University of the Philippines Diliman’s Center for International Studies, he conducted an intensive five-week daily training rehearsal using the principles of Noh for Filipinos to prepare them for a joint Noh performance with Noh Masters to commemorate the golden years of Philippines-Japan Friendship. He would be returning to the Philippines to train Filipino students in Manila and in other places in the country. Umewaka would come back to Manila in 2007 to deepen the training of the Noh Theater Ensemble at the University of the Philippines. He directed also that year his modern play, “The Italian Restaurant,” which would demonstrate to Filipino audience a Noh play that is not within the cultural history and geography of Japan, as Filipinos imagine Japan and its culture to be.

Umewaka would meet during these visits Dr. Amelia Lapena Bonifacio, Professor Emeritus of the University of the Philippines. The professor is the author of “Ang Paglalakbay ni Sisa: Isang Noh sa Laguna,” from which “The Dance of Sisa,” was taken directed and performed in by Umewaka. This is Lapena-Bonifacio's reinterpretation as a Noh play of Jose Rizal's Sisa character from the novel *Noli me Tangere*. The “Noh” play was written in 1973 during her fellowship in Japan but would get its staging by Noh practitioners in 2005.

In Amelia Lapena Bonifacio’s interpretation of Sisa, the mother is no longer the weak character. Using the narrative technique of Noh, Bonifacio makes Sisa come back from the dead/past to confront the present. Sisa in the Noh mode remembers the cruelty of histories, doing what Rizal and his novel could not do. Sisa faces up to the Spanish priest: the colonized equal to the colonizer.

Here is a play that, coming from a different cultural background (Japan), but helping out in crystallizing the lessons of another nation’s (the Philippines) cultural history. Only in arts would this kind of effort be problematized.

Shoko Matsumoto did the lighting design for the play, *The Dance of Sisa*, billed under an Okina play. The design, according to the Japanese lighting artist, was a healing light design, appropriate to the resumption of goodwill between the two nations.

The Case of Shoko Matsumoto, Cosmopolitan and Transnational

Shoko Matsumoto participated in many theatrical productions that involved Japanese artists in the Philippines, with these productions further mediated by organizations like the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the Philippine government’s National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), local government units, the Japan Foundation and the Japan Information and Cultural Center.

In this regard, Matsumoto is a significant actor in the many theatrical productions. A crucial part of Matsumoto’s engagement in theater productions are the companion workshops on light design for all those participating in the production. In some cases, Matsumoto organizes also set design workshops involving Filipino and Japanese designers. This brings about a collaboration of cultures and tradition outside the theater presentations.

This study, however, focused on two notable productions: the *Philippine Bedtime Stories* in 2004 and *Philippine Bedtime Stories 2* in 2006 as joint projects between Filipino and Japanese theater groups in

Tokyo, Theater Company RIN KO GUN. The said production covered many play, and was performed in Tagalog/Pilipino and Japanese with English subtitles.

This theater Company named RIN KO GUN has long been engaged in exchanges with Southeast Asia and Filipino theater groups, with collaboration beginning in 1999 when company members joined a workshop run by Rodgardo Labad of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) in Yokohama.

As part of this exchange, RIN KO GUN member Toshihisa Yoshida stayed for one year in the Philippines as a fellowship student from the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 2002. He would return to Japan in 2003.

Another production that underscored the exchange in terms of acculturation and transnationalization was Bakeretta. A co-production of the Japan Foundation, Tanghalang Pilipino and the Sinag Arts Foundation, Bakeretta became part of a wave of Japanese horror films that came surging over Asia, including the Philippines.

At the center of these productions was Chong Wishing, the Japanese director and playwright.

Chong Wishing, a Korean-Japanese, dramatizes the evolved transnational qualities and atmosphere of what transpired between the Philippines and Japan in the intervening years covered by 1983 and 2009. Chong Wishing completes the journey also of negotiation and acculturation when one realizes that the director attributes a significant part of his career to exposure to Black Tent Theater, the same group that basically began the journey of Philippine theater groups in the political, cultural and aesthetic sense to and from Japan way back in 1979.

Conclusion.

If we are going to do a historical timeline and place it along the concepts of cultural exchange where negotiation, appropriation, acculturation and, finally, transnationalization occurs, this is how the historical map will appear as such, with years overlapping and traditions not entirely closed unto themselves.

1983-1986: Cultural Exchange built along theatrical presentations. The groups are left untouched in terms of identity: Philippine theater groups are marked in terms of origin and historical tradition; the same is with Japanese theater groups.

1983-2000 The Japayuki phenomenon contributed to an earlier blurring of what is perceived to be authentically Filipino with communities of Filipino entertainers presenting improvised folk dances and other cultural artifacts and mostly by memory. These groups freely allowed Japanese individuals and other non-Filipino individuals to participate in the presentation. In reverse, the same groups also presented and re-presented not by memories but by perception what they thought to be Japanese arts through songs and gestures. The years from 1983 to 2000 serves as introduction.

1983-1999: Philippine theatre groups evolved partnering with Japanese Theater groups. Church-based and non-governmental organizations are the conduits and sponsor for these exchanges. The

exchange is political. Grassroots organizations begin to be involved more significantly at this point.

1986-2008 Migrant theater groups performing in Japan appropriated traditions from home country.

1990-2000 Theater groups from the Philippines and Japan considering the common themes in each nation. In the case of the Philippines, the democratic space allowed this exchange.

2000-2009 Shoko Matsumoto as a case study of a Japanese artist whose exposure in and to Philippine theater art scene and other art performance spaces reveal a truly transnational/cosmopolitan persona

2000-2009 Theater groups under the Sinag Arts Studio learn Japanese lighting design from a Japanese artist even if the results are not considered as Japanese. Transnationalization is now rooted in the interstices of exchanges between the Philippine and Japanese art. The “Japaneseness” of Sinag-Arts (literally “Shine Arts) is blurred in its Philippine name and even amidst the many events that are focused on identifiably Japanese artifacts and arts (Ikebana, Japanese Food as in O-bento, etc which are presented via Sinag Arts.)

2000-2009 Japan Information and Cultural Center (JICC) and Japan Foundation contribute to the exchange by bringing in to the Philippines Japanese traditional theater arts. Cinema is also exchanged. The same two organizations are also responsible for sending to Japan theater groups and individual Filipino artists.

2003-2008 Philippine and Japanese theater artists collaborate to craft theater pieces that cannot be identified anymore as wholly Japanese or wholly Filipino. The templates are found in two presentations: Bakeretta and Philippine Bedtime Stories, where Japanese playwrights compose scenes that are of the Philippines and where Japanese actors perform in plays situated in the Philippines and whose themes are not limited to clear geographies that one could ascribe to either the Philippines or Japan.

From an art form that started as a means to introduce cultures to each other, to theater groups negotiating with how presentations would best communicate cultures, the cultural spaces created interstitially produced through the years presentations that crystallized and conjured as well as constructed boundaries. These borders were sometimes broken by simultaneous and/or combined use of languages, i.e., Philippine and Japanese. When at last Japanese theater art forms (Kabuki, Noh) were readily taught (the Japanese teachers believed it could be done) to Filipino artists, this readiness was laid down by earlier artists appropriating Western fairy tales and embedding them in the social realities of Philippine children (the case of Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) doing Hans Christian Andersen must be a Filipino, which toured Japan). When some Shakespearean tragic plays (Romeo and Juliet by Black Tent and PETA) were adapted, the Philippine and Japanese theater groups looked into

the political love-hate relationship between Japan and the Philippines. The transnational artists and arts survived in the middle of Philippine-Japan relations.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

1. Oct. 23, 2009, Hanoi, Vietnam, The Second International Conference of Japanese Studies in Southeastt Asia, Translucent, Transparent: The Lighting Aesthetics of Shoko Matsumoto and the Creation of Aesthetics in the Collaboration Between Japanese and Filipino Theater Artists. Presenter: Tito Genova Valiente
2. September 6-9, Naga City, Philippines. Lecture: Japanese Theater Experiences in the Philippines. Theater Worskhop and Collaboration between Ateneo de Naga University Dignos [Bird] Theater Company with Umewaka Naohiko/University of the Philippines Center for International Studies
3. Oct. 4 2010, Ateneo de Manila. Humanities Week. Negotiating Cultures: A Review of the Histories of Collaboration Between Japanese and Filipino Artists and the Creation of Art and Cultural Spaces
4. University of the Philippines and Cultural Center of the Philippines. Round-table Discussion in Rinko-Gun Theater Company production/presentation
5. July 29, 2011. Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Manila, Philippines. Roundtable Discussion on Japanese Cultures in the Philippines, following the Collateral Lecture Monuments and Mascots, Aesthetics of Kawaiisa, Presenter: Tito Genova Valiente with resident curators, critics and mass media representatives
6. ONGOING: Documentation of the Artistic Collaborations Between Japanese and Filipino Theater and Public Spaces Artists vis-à-vis Shoko Matsumoto's archived materials in the Library of the University of the Philippines Center for International Studies. Researcher and Consultant/Editor: Tito Genova Valiente.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)