

# “Interculturalism” and “International Co-production:”

## For a Historically Accurate Appreciation of *Pratthana*<sup>[1]</sup>

Tadashi Uchino

### What Is Intercultural Theater?

As for how to call the creative form of a performance work such as *Pratthana - A Portrait of Possession*, a seemingly unobjectionable term of “international co-production” is most often used as far as I could find<sup>[2]</sup>. Whenever I see the term, I personally sense a kind of emotive repulsive register, because an expression “international co-production” sounds awkward or it sounded as such once in the near past. Because of the borderless nature of globalization, the framework of nation-states that characterized the modernity was nullified, and accordingly, the concept of international seemed to have lost its substance. In fact, in the performing arts, the geographical movement of artists became intense after the 1980s, and a genre called interculturalism or intercultural theater, which intentionally avoided the reference to nation-states appeared. The genre is not necessarily unfamiliar to Japan, where Peter Brook’s *Mahabharata* (1985), which is considered to be a representative work of the genre, a nine-hour production based on the Indian epic “Mahabharata,” was shown (1988) to commemorate the first anniversary of the opening of the Saison Theater (1987-1999) in Tokyo. The performance was originally produced in French for the Avignon Festival, but when the world tour was organized, the language was changed to English. The production took the form of actors of various nationalities participating, and it was more or less the product of *zeitgeist* filled with anticipation of the end of the Cold War structure (globalization) from perestroika to the collapse of the Soviet Union. I remember the work never invited any controversy in Japan, but from the time of the first performance, it was meant to be strongly criticized by the postcolonial critics, who were appearing and beginning to dominate the discursive space in English-speaking spheres.

There were two main issues. The question of ownership of the so-called “India’s epic poem ‘Mahabharata,’” i.e., who owns “it” and who has the right to use, edit, enjoy and create a derivative version from “it.” Secondly, there was the question of a re-emergence of the old colonial mentality by Peter Brook, born in the former colonial power of England, who was de-contextualizing the representative epic of the former colony of India “in the name of art” and transplanting it to the European theater market, thereby depriving it of its “uniqueness.”

The origin of postcolonial criticism was, as is well known, the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978)<sup>[3]</sup>, a landmark book that relentlessly and empirically theorized the so-called colonialist sentiments of the orientalist in Europe. With perestroika followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the postcolonial criticism, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”<sup>[4]</sup> gained considerable influence in the humanities in the 1990s. Critical terminologies such as “cultural imperialism” “cultural appropriation” and “neo-colonialism” began to be used frequently. Many were harsh criticisms by scholars with some commitment to a political identity in the former colonies and the spearhead of the Brook criticism was Rustom Bharucha from India<sup>[5]</sup>.

As Rick Knowles has briefly traced the history in his *Theatre and Interculturalism* (2010)<sup>[6]</sup>, critics from the “third world” including Bharucha criticize allegedly experimental artists like Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine in France and Robert Wilson in the U.S., while Patrice Pavis, whose foundation is on the Western humanist liberalist tradition—a theoretical and ethical ground for the Western modernists—uses the universality of art as a shield to counter such criticism<sup>[7]</sup>. In the 1990s, when globalization was accelerating due to the fall of the Berlin wall, not only did many works emerge that could be categorized into and/or branded as “intercultural theatre” and “theatre of interculturalism,” theoretical and political debates about them became more lively with increasing precision and intellectual rigor. This led, for example, for Daphne P. Ray, a theatre studies scholar, to group them and name them “HIT” or “hegemonic intercultural theater.”<sup>[8]</sup>

- 1 This article is a translation of my own writing in Japanese with the same title in *Pratthana: A Portrait of Possession: The Official Guide* (Tokyo: Hakusui-sha, 2019), pp. 113-121. There are some parts where I made some revisions because of the nature of the content of the original.
- 2 For example, a press release from the premiere in Bangkok said: “This work is an international co-production project started by two artists of the same generation who were both born in the 1970s.” (<https://www.jpjf.go.jp/j/about/press/2018/003.html>). On the other hand, there is a debate about two Japanese notations for the concept. As it is irrelevant in English, we would not go further into the issue.
- 3 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, NY: Vintage Books, 1979.
- 4 “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- 5 Rustom Bharucha “Peter Brook’s Mahabharata: a view from India.” first appeared in *Theater*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, Spring, 1988, but has since been rewritten many times.
- 6 Ric Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- 7 Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1992. Here, the Pavis presents an “hourglass model” that will be much discussed in the years to come. According to Fisher-Lichte, the first appearance of the term was in E. Fischer-Lichte (et al.), *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1990 (Erika Fischer-Lichte et al., *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures* London: Routledge, p. 92). The notion is best explained in Japanese by Yokoyama Yoshiji (<http://onpam.net/?p=2728>).
- 8 Daphne P. Lei, “Interruption, Intervention, Interculturalism: Robert Wilson’s HIT Productions in Taiwan.” *Theatre Journal* 63 (2011), pp. 571-586. Lei’s definition of “HIT” is “a specific artistic genre and state of mind that combines First World capital and brainpower with Third World raw material and labor, and Western classical texts with Eastern performance traditions” (p. 571). Here, Ray mentions Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, Richard Schechner and Tadashi Suzuki, the Contemporary Legend Theater of Taiwan, and “to a certain extent,” Singapore’s On Keng Sen. It was in 2011 and the purpose of this paper is not to criticize HIT unilaterally from a postcolonial point of view, but to make a more objective evaluation, including what was actually achieved in the field.

One point to note here is that what postcolonial criticism is concerned with is not an obvious sense of discrimination, such as baseless disrespect. The problem is the opposite: the attitude of respecting and admiring the “other” culture. Because of that unilateral admiration and worshiping of the “other” culture -- at the very least, that is the “gesture” -- without any mutual grounds, they are attacked this time as the appropriation of the target culture. That you worship someone doesn’t mean that you can pick and borrow arbitrary parts; issues of “ownership” and “de-contextualization” mentioned above. In addition, the basic stance of postcolonial criticism after the post-structuralism is to make the political unconscious an issue, and “I don’t mean that” or “There is no such intention” does not work. In other words, the problem was the educational and social system or the language system itself that internalized and fixed the “sense of discrimination” that had penetrated to deeper level of human mind.

Thus, relentless critique came from the former colonies over the notion of “intercultural theatre” at the end of the Cold War, condemning the Eurocentric universality of art, cultural appropriation, and cultural exploitation. It may have been that this subversive intellectual enterprise only reinforced the dichotomy, as pointed out by Knowles. Or rather, it may be better to say that it is at this stage that “two sides” have finally become conscious of each other. This is because political or economic asymmetry was unashamedly exposed in the performance/scene of “intercultural theatre,” whether it be “the self vs. the other” “contemporary vs. tradition” or “the West and the Rest,” as “the West” always was the source of funding the intercultural theatre projects.

A good deal of time has passed since then, and these controversies seem now to have been forgotten, because, as Knowles has already mentioned in the second half of his book, in 2010, there has been, a tremendous cultural shift, a phenomenon that we may call the excessive speed of the subsequent globalization process, which has brought about a great deal of the reality of multiculturalism in the world<sup>[9]</sup>. Conflicts framed in too large a category such as “the West and the Rest” lost their meaning and the main concern for postcolonial consciousness spread into more micro-level identity politics or social, artistic, and cultural practices related to community issues. For example, in the “intercultural theatre” feature (*Theatre Journal*, December 2011) that included Ray’s article using the term HIT as mentioned earlier, the discourse that criticized HIT was defined as “classical intercultural theory” (William Petersen)<sup>[10]</sup>. That is to say, the focus is not on critique of HIT anymore, but is more on the collection of essays about “intercultural performance,” not “intercultural theatre,” then emerging in a wider geographical area. Thus, it can be seen here that the extension of domain or genre of practices from “theatre” to “performance” in 2011 was attracting a different kind of theoretical and sociological academic interests<sup>[11]</sup>.

#### From Intercultural Theater to “Interweaving Performance Cultures”

The concept of “interweaving performance cultures” advocated by German scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte has emerged in response to the changing environments at the end of the 2000s. Hers was not only an invention of a concept, but she founded an international and interdisciplinary research institute with that name in 2008 at the Free University of Berlin. The institute invited researchers and artists from all over the world as short-term fellows until 2018 and came up with a wide variety of interdisciplinary academic achievements. Note also that the full name of the institute is International Research Center “Interweaving Performance Cultures,” that is, it has “international” in its title not intercultural<sup>[12]</sup>.

In the preface “Interweaving Performance Cultures: Rethinking ‘Intercultural Theater’ – Towards an Experience and Theory Beyond Postcolonialism” in *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures*<sup>[13]</sup>, the first academic output of the Institute, Fisher-Lichte shows some doubts about the theoretical validity of the term intercultural theatre, overlapping, to some extent, Knowles ways of thinking as mentioned above. While delicately distancing herself from Knowles’ North American stance, she then goes on to conceptualize some emerging trends in contemporary art and cultural practices as “interweaving performance cultures.”

The notion of intercultural theatre presupposes that there is the thing called culture that you are supposed to go out of so that you can meet the other(s) in the middle ground (inter-). Accordingly, it implies that one is supposed to “represent” that culture in its entirety. “Interweaving performance cultures,” however, literally means that culture does not point to any tangible substance, thus the word culture is in plural. The notion only mentions the process of “interweaving” from which texture(s) rather than solid objects are born.

Many strands are plied into a thread; many such threads are then woven into a piece of cloth, which thus consists of diverse strands and threads... without necessarily remaining recognizable individually. They are dyed, plied and interwoven, forming particular patterns without allowing the viewer to trace each strand back

9 In the latter part of the book Knowles advocates the concept of “Intercultural Performance Ecology” and tries to discuss the increasing number of “Global emergence of new rhizome-like (in large numbers, without hierarchy, horizontal) intercultural performance from the bottom.” As a new intercultural performance, “Embracing collaboration and solidarity across practical and material differences within the ecology of local, urban, national and global intercultural performance” (p. 59), instead of “HIT.” He takes the case of his hometown, Toronto, Canada.

10 P. Farfan and R. Knowles, “Editorial Comment: Special Issue on Rethinking Intercultural Performance,” *Theatre Journal*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2011, n.p.

11 From this point on, this article shifts it focus to Fischer-Lichte’s theory, but Knowles and other North American-based “interculturalism” theorists have just published the following collection of essays, arguing that (as we shall see, it also has a momentum to go beyond postcolonial criticism) “interculturalism” is more important for the refugee and diaspora communities than the Fischer-Lichte-like criticism of interculturalism. (Charlotte Melvor and Jason King (eds.), *Rethinking Interculturalism and Performance Now*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.)

12 Fisher Lichte says that “interweaving performance cultures” is an English translation of “Verflechtungen von Theaterkulturen,” but that German and English are not entirely the same (Erika Fischer-Lichte (et al.), *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures*. NY: Routledge, 2014, p. 11).

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 1-21.

to its origin. On the other hand, a process of interweaving does not necessarily result in the production of a whole. In it, mistakes, errors, failures, and even small disasters might occur when unintended knots appear in the cloth, when threads unravel or flow apart, when the proportion of the dyes is off, or the cloth woven becomes stained. The process of weaving is not necessarily smooth or straightforward<sup>[14]</sup>.

14 Ibid., p. 11.

15 Ibid., pp. 11-12. Italics mine.

However, Fisher-Lichte does not suggest that it is sufficient for many case studies to be generated that focus on such individuality and detail because there is a “utopian dimension” to it. She notes that performance has a “paradigmatic role in society.” In other words, she believes performance may bring about the possibility of paradigm change in which people’s values are challenged and changed.

In performance, *new forms of social coexistence may be tried out, or they simply emerge*. In this sense, processes of interweaving performance cultures can and quite often do provide an experimental framework for experiencing the utopian potential of culturally diverse and globalized societies by realizing an aesthetic which gives shape to unprecedented collaborative policies in society. By permanently probing the emergence, stabilization, and destabilization of cultural identities, these performances can transfer their participants into states of in-betweenness, which allow them to anticipate a future wherein the journey itself, the permanence of transition, and the state of liminality, is indeed constitutive of their experience. What is perceived as an aesthetic experience in these performances will be experienced as everyday life in the future<sup>[15]</sup>.

It is easy to criticize here that an exceptional tradition of German public theatre system is taken for granted. Fisher-Lichte, however, uses the term performance rather than theater. If we refer to what is called “aesthetic” here as “fiction” we do not need to be too negative about the assertion that “utopian potential” in the practice of “interweaving performance cultures” as a place/process for envisioning the future. And, she says, it may lead to finding a path or hope to summon some sense of universality and collaborative future beyond postcolonialism, which has proved only to strengthen the dichotomy. Therefore, the research center for the interdisciplinary or the intercultural has to be “international” rather than interdisciplinary or intercultural because, after the experience of postcolonialism, basing the theoretical ground on the reality of current geopolitical formations, it is obvious, in one way or the other, the framework of the nation-state is still functioning. Only assuming that it does, we can envision a new sense of universality with the notion of collaborative future through diverse practices of “interweaving performance cultures.”

#### Intercultural Theatre in Japan (1)

What about in Japan? There have been cases since the Meiji period in which works and artists were invited from the West to perform, and they continue to do so, depending on the situation of each of respective periods. However, when we look at the time when the above-mentioned intercultural theatre became a controversial issue, we can at least sense a certain kind of contemporaneity, probably because of the world historical situation of the end of the cold war. This is not just because Brook’s intercultural theatre *Mahabharata* was seen in Japan. It is not because Suzuki Tadashi was discussed as intercultural theatre artist in Western discursive space, owing to his adaptation of some Western texts such as Greek tragedies and Shakespeare. This is because, since the 1980s, the issue of intercultural theatre has emerged in a broader context, in relation to Japan’s foreign policy as a nation-state. However, in the case of Japan, the geographical and imaginative framework of Japan was still intact, and the national framework was not so shaken. Therefore, the Western concept of intercultural was not used, and the prefix international such as in international co-production and international collaboration continued to be used without being questioned.

The Japan Foundation (JF hereafter), which was established in 1972 and has close ties with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was at the center of this trend. Founded as a public organization, JF responded to the needs of the times around the time of the bubble economy, when Japan was strengthening its political and economic ties with the Asian region. It established the ASEAN Cultural Center in 1990 and the Asia Center in 1995 and started to introduce arts and culture in Asian regions including the performing arts. The project had specialists assigned to each genre to conduct research and introduce them, and one of the center’s specialist, Hata Yuki, played a major role in the genre of performing arts. As for her work, there is an interview I conducted (“Connecting the theater people of Japan: The Japan Foundation international collaboration program.”<sup>[16]</sup>) where you can see how something that began as a research project gradually evolved into an invitation project and then into an international collaboration.

16 [https://performingarts.jp/E/pre\\_interview/0711/1.html](https://performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/0711/1.html)

Of the series of international co-production led by JF, it was *Lear* of 1997 that touched on the issues of intercultural theatre in Anglo-European contexts. The title *Lear* comes from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, but as can be understood from the fact that the word “King” is missing from the title, this play is an adaptation of the

- 17 For an overview of the performance at the premiere (1997), please visit <https://www.jpjf.go.jp/j/project/culture/archive/information/old/9708/08-08.html>. It was subsequently rerun in 1999 as part of Hong Kong, Singapore, Jakarta, Perth (Australia) (<https://www.jpjf.go.jp/j/project/culture/archive/information/old/9901/01-11.html>)
- 18 Rustom Bharucha, "Consumed in Singapore: The Intercultural Spectacle of *Lear*," *Theater*, Volume 31, Number 1, Winter 2001, pp. 107-127. This paper was also originally published as a monograph (2000) in Singapore.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 122. Italics mine.
- 20 On Keng Sen has made a lot of statements about *Lear* and Bharucha uses them to develop the criticisms here. Bharucha, for example, cites the following statement to criticize: "The resolution is not achieved by killing the father. The resolution has to go deeper. I don't have a solution for it. It's more a statement of our current situation. You have the Tiananmen Square happening, the student uprising in Indonesia, and the Anwar situation in Malaysia. We always begin a new era with hope, but it invariably degenerates into something else. And so I think we need to find a new type of uprising" (quoted on p. 122).
- 21 Bharucha is particularly critical of how Ong utilizes the Flying Circus Project that was being organized by Ong. The project was held at Theatre Works Ong as an artistic director from 1996 to 2013, and by Bharucha's definition, it was an "inter-Asian workshops" inviting artists and researchers from various genres not only from Asia but also from various other regions, where various exchanges took place. If the result is only used in a spectacle like *Lear* and "consumed," what is the meaning of all the exchange, Bharucha asks. (p. 124)
- 22 Also, while Ong calls *Desdemona* "ugly sister to *Lear*'s Cinderella" (quoted in p. 15), Bharucha nevertheless criticized it as harshly as *Lear*. (Rustom Bharucha, "Foreign Asia/Foreign Shakespeare: Disposing Notes on New Asian Interculturality Postcoloniality, and Reconciliation," *Theatre Journal*, Volume 56, Number 1, March 2004, pp. 1-28.
- 23 Noda Hideki and Hidenaga Otori, *Akaoni no Chosen* (The Challenge of *Red Demon*), Tokyo: Seido-sha, 2006.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp.14-16.

original. Kishida Rio, a playwright from Japan, wrote the text and the production was directed by Singaporean director Ong Ken Sen, whose work had been performed in Japan several times since 1992 with his artistic talent being recognized very early by JF. It is a large-scale work in which artists from various Asian regions, mainly leading traditional performing arts practitioners participated<sup>[17]</sup>. For this work, Rustom Bharucha, known for his criticism of Brook's *Mahabharata*, published a severely critical monograph and journal article entitled "Consumed in Singapore: The Intercultural Spectacle of *Lear*."<sup>[18]</sup>

This detailed *Lear* critique by Bharucha has an extremely complex logical structure and is difficult to summarize. In the process of scrutinizing various socio-political historical contexts and the actual performance, Bharucha gives a certain degree of favorable appreciation regarding the performance's aesthetic value and Kishida's feminist reading and transformation of the original. However, he comes to the conclusion that Ong is simply duplicating the problems of Western interculturalists, i.e., the issue of the ownership and decontextualization and asks if Ong is after all exploiting and consuming "Asia." This is due in the first place to the economic asymmetry that exists in and among Asia, with Singapore as the center and Japan (JF) as the same first world status, providing funds. Bharucha criticizes Ong for accepting that the only option available was "consuming the Other."

At one level, the intercultural "consumption of the Other" [in *Lear*] can be regarded as a self-critique, but it is also *implicitly* self-congratulatory, legitimizing the absence of any real respect for the Other, who can never be regarded on equal terms but who is—ultimately—fit only to be consumed. This is a cynical position to my mind that can do nothing to transform the existing inequities of cultural exchange, both within the borders of the state and beyond<sup>[19]</sup>.

Here, Bharucha raises strong doubts about Ong's claim that unlike previous Western-led intercultural theatre works, this is a new intercultural performance in the Asian region, as it presents a fresh vision of contemporary issues of patriarchy in Asia<sup>[20]</sup>. And Bharucha argues the need to look not at "intercultural," but at "intra-cultural," an interactive interactions and dynamism within their own cultural sphere, more specifically, for instance, how one can relate to globalization's contradictions manifested in "multiculturalization" of the streets of Singapore. What will change even if we can promote the diversity and strength of the performing arts in Asia by assigning leading actors of Asian traditional theatrical forms? That is exactly what Bharucha asks<sup>[21]</sup>.

My overarching simplification of the most important question in this essay could be rephrased as the question of why we have to go for the Asian version of the Eurocentric intercultural theatre, if we have a sense of belonging to the Asian region. And this question -- or I personally think it's a paradigm now -- has become one of the criteria for thinking about international collaboration since *Lear*. For this reason, the international collaborations that make Ong keep engaged in creating a different kind of intercultural work, such as *Desdemona* (Adelaide Theatre Festival/Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2000), the second collaboration with Kishida Rio and *The Spirit Play* (Singapore, 2000), the text by Singaporean playwright Kuo Pao Kun, and an different version of *The Spirit Play*, renamed *Dreamtime in Morishita Studios* (Tokyo, 2001). In those intercultural collaborative work, Ong seems to have responded to Bharucha's critique by paying more attention to the specific contexts and "the Other" and by avoiding an empty sense of the spectacle<sup>[22]</sup>.

## Intercultural Theatre in Japan (2)

Returning to the topic of JF's international co-production, aside from the project led by Hata, another one featuring Hideki Noda's *Akaoni* (Red Demon) had been underway since 1997. This is described in the book *Akaoni no Chosen* (The Red Demon's Challenge), co-authored by Noda and Otori Hidenaga, so please refer to the details in the book<sup>[23]</sup>. However, it is questionable whether this project can be called an international co-production in the sense that it translates existing plays into the target culture and presents them with actors from the location (the UK, Thailand and Korea). Moreover, while the Thai version of *Akaoni* was premiered in 1997 at the Setagaya Public Theater in Japan and premiered in Thailand the following year, JF is not involved in the London version (2003).

This form, which could be called "Bringing-in/Going-in" type, was not so common at least in those days, and in the book mentioned above, many of Noda's own descriptions were devoted to the struggle to realize the London version because "the scene of the contemporary Thai theater needed my directorship. But the United Kingdom did not."<sup>[24]</sup> A postcolonial critic like Bharucha would have criticized Noda's neo-colonialist attitude in that single statement. In other words, she might have wondered who has the right to declare "the scene of the contemporary Thai theatre needed my directorship." Moreover, it was a project in which the Japanese side

provided funds to perform a Japanese play in their local language. In any case, this type of “Bringing-in/Going-in” international co-production that Noda has conducted in Thailand and South Korea will continue to this day under the leadership of JF.

The subsequent international collaboration by JF Asia Center led by Hata since *Lear* took on a more experimental tinge. The method, however, was consistent. Taking into account the public nature of JF, rather than reintroducing the contemporary theatre of East and South-East Asia that are already known, Hata expanded her geographic perspective to South Asia. The basic approach was to be present at various local performances, talk with artists, and assemble projects. The first project was called the Five Asian Countries Collaboration, and after a two-year process, a performance work called *Memories of a Legend: Samarkand, Kabul, Hindustan* was created (2004/5).

In this production, one director was chosen from India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and three actors were recommended by each director to perform all together in the final work. Also, in 2003, there was an opportunity for the works of each director to be introduced to Japanese audiences at once. In addition, by repeatedly holding meetings with the artists concerned, they were able to confirm with each other what theatrical philosophy, aesthetics and methodologies they had. After such an elaborate process, the next step was for all the performers to gather in India and hold a workshop before the work was created while they were staying in Japan<sup>[25]</sup>. During the long process of this creation, there were sometimes heated arguments, and in the end, *The Baburnama*, a memoir of Babur (1483-1530.), the first emperor of the Mughal Empire, became the source text. The final form of this collaborative staging was that each of the five directors created a scene inspired by the memoir, which was still quite an adventurous international co-production.

25 [https://performingarts.jp/E/pre\\_interview/0711/1.html](https://performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/0711/1.html)

In the following *Performing Women: Three Reinterpretations from Greek Tragedy*, the participating countries expanded westward, with one director each from Uzbekistan and Iran, and Abilash Pillai, an Indian director who had participated in the past JF international collaborations, was selected, and the scenes were created in each base country. The final work was first performed in New Delhi, India, and then performed in Japan at Theater Cocoon in Shibuya, Tokyo (2007). Hata, who worked on international collaboration projects in this way, explained the idea behind it as follows:

This form of production perhaps contains some risk in terms of production quality compared to the usual style where all the decision-making rights are entrusted to the talents of a single director. On the other hand, having a single director direct a production with a multinational cast is quite commonplace in the world of opera. However, I believe that the real significance of international collaboration is having people of different cultures and different methodologies working together on a production on an equal standing and with equal decision-making rights. And that may not always mean having joint directorships, but this basic concept of multicultural artists working on equal standing is one that I want to continue to pursue. Of course, most important of all, however, is the substance and quality of the resulting work. Because that resulting work is the only form in which the meaning of the project can be communicated<sup>[26]</sup>.

26 [https://performingarts.jp/E/pre\\_interview/0711/2.html](https://performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/0711/2.html)

I personally participated in the above two international collaborations as a project advisor, and I had a lot of hands-on experience with the evolutionary form of creation and what Hata called “risk.” She does not mention *Lear* here, but the difference between these two projects and *Lear* is that Japanese artists do not participate as key members of the performance, such as directors, dramatists, or actors. In *Memories of a Legend* Hamai Koji participated in costume, and in *Performing Women*, Nakayama Daisuke in stage design, Oishi Shinichiro in lighting design, and musicians Kunihiro Kazuki and Shibata Reki participated only in performances in Tokyo and Seoul in the scene connecting each part. The biggest political risk of this series of projects was that Japanese artists were not visibly participating in the international collaboration that Japan funded.

Perhaps because of that, I have not heard much about these two projects, especially from the postcolonial critics. For one thing, the postcolonial critique itself may be on the decline as we enter the 1990s. Not only that, but in principle, the two projects presented a direction that was intra-cultural a la Bharucha’s critique. This was apparent when a director was invited from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, which are geographically close to each other but which have had diverse and complex histories interrelated. On the other hand, in the latter case, we came to a conclusion that the participants would take up one female character from Greek tragedies and each creates a 45-minute performance. The participating directors this time had enough experience in the areas where they were based, and the showcase image of three separate works came to the fore. Therefore, unlike the former, *Performing Women* became, in principle, a relativism in which differences based on common themes were presented rather than an intra-cultural negotiation and contradiction. For the three countries of India, Iran, and Uzbekistan, historical backgrounds and cultures were so

- 27 The text of *Performing Women: Three Reinterpretations from Greek Tragedy* with an introduction, directors' comments and some additional material are collected in *Butai Geijyutu* (Performing Arts), vol. 14., pp. 204-282, 2008.
- 28 The term "international co-production" appears in the guidelines of the Agency for Cultural Affairs and in the document called "The Third Basic Act on the Promotion of Culture and Art," which was decided by the cabinet meeting in 2012. In accordance with this act, the Agency for Cultural Affairs started financial support by creating a category called "international co-production" in "International Art Exchange Support Program". Considering that "international co-production" was mentioned only in media arts and films in the "Second Basic Act for the Promotion of Culture and Art" in 2008, it can be said that around this time the Agency for Cultural Affairs started supporting "international co-production" in performing arts, which led to an increase in the number of works with such a name.

different that they had to do so. We deliberately made relativism our principle, avoiding forced mixing and emphasis on commonality. As a result, the audiences in New Delhi, Tokyo, and Seoul where this production was performed are asked to "interweave performance cultures" of the three performances presented there, as well as the audiences in Japan who may have watched the work live, or on the NHK TV program "Arts Theatre" (November 8, 2008)<sup>[27]</sup>.

#### Interweaving Performance Cultures in *Pratthana*

Ten years later, *Pratthana* was created. In the meantime, the initiative for international collaboration was transferred from JF to the Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA, hereafter), and with the acceleration of globalization, ACA became involved in international collaboration, which had increased in number, by providing financial assistance in the form of "support for international collaboration"<sup>[28]</sup>. This systematization of international collaboration by ACA gave national legitimacy to the term international collaboration, which could have sounded anachronistic in the era of globalization at least up to the first ten years of the 21st century. Therefore, from a fundamentalist and formalistic perspective, we can assume that artists who apply for ACF grant are expected to "shoulder the burden of the nation" i.e., implicitly and/or explicitly representing something about Japan as a nation-state. On the other hand, JF, which had to scale down its activities for a period of time, will seek a new generation of international collaboration, especially with projects of new Asia Center, which was reestablished in 2014. And an advanced example of this is *Pratthana*.

On the outside, at least, *Pratthana* resembles Hideki Noda's *Akaoni* project, which we have already called "Bringing-in/Going-in" type collaboration. This is because Okada Toshiki, a Japanese native, "went in" Thailand for international collaboration, for a project financially supported by JF, a public organization of Japan, "brought in." Okada, however, did not choose the path of *Akaoni* in which his existing plays were translated into Thai and performed by Thai actors. This was because Okada, who is also a playwright, adapted a novel written by a Thai novelist, Uthis Haemamool, into a play script, and Okada directed Thai actors, which was quite unique. As far as the creative process is concerned, it is obvious that there is a complex multilayered, literal and metaphorical translation process. By itself, it can be said that the definition of *Pratthana* has become unfit for the conventional definition of intercultural theatre, whether led by the Westerners or Asians.

Okada was already involved in a multiyear project in Germany, that is a typical "Bringing-in/Going-in" project, funded not by Japan but by Münchner Kammerspiele, a municipal theatre in the city of Munich. This is a three-year long-term project to translate Okada's newly written plays into German, and for Okada to direct the ensemble actors of the theater, and they are to perform it as a repertoire. The Munich project, therefore, took the form of a new kind of "Brought-in/Going-in" rather than "Bringing-in/Going-in," in which Okada had already reached a new horizon of international collaboration or intercultural theatre.

As symbolized by the start of the "support for international coproduction" by ACA, it should also be noted that there were environmental changes in the 2010s, such as the implementation of a wide variety of interna-



*Memories of a Legend: Samarkand, Kabul, Hindustan* (Tokyo performance, 2004).  
Photo by Hitoshi Furuya, provided by The Japan Foundation.



*Performing Women: Three Reinterpretations from Greek Tragedy* (Tokyo performance, 2007).  
Photo by Hitoshi Furuya, provided by The Japan Foundation

tional collaboration on a wide range of scales, large and small, and an increase in the number of options and references for “What and how.”<sup>[29]</sup> Therefore, it may be said for the time being that *Pratthana* is a project in which the framework and methodology of the international collaboration that has already been patterned and can be assumed had become fixed to some extent. In that sense, if it means spending more time researching and discussing its creative process among participants than any other case, it’s just “conscientious” postcolonial, not neocolonial project. The question, therefore, becomes, how the actual performance was like.

The actual performances that already took place in Bangkok and Paris, as other commentators have already written, looked very different from previous Okada’s work. The actors were eleven Thai. Tsukahara Yuya of contact Gonzo as scenographer and choreographer, Matsumi Takuya as scenography assistant and video, Araki Masamitsu as sound, Fujitani Kyoko as costume, Pornpan Arayaveerasid as lighting and Witchaya Atamart as assistant director. As Shimanuki Taisuke, who saw the work in Bangkok, pointed out, all of them were “involved in the performance, as if they were also acting in it.” “The technical booth is in plain view from the audience seating, and the cast and staff members busily go back and forth across the playground as chora to move the scattered set articles and equipment, and to change clothes.”<sup>[30]</sup>

First of all, we should note that staff members were a mixed team of Japan and Thailand. The style of the performance itself, in which everything including the technical booth is bare, and the staff is visibly involved in the performance, may be “exceptional in the context of [Okada’s] career” (ibid.) but is not particularly new in terms of theatre history. Rather, the issue is why Okada and others chose such a performance style. This kind of obvious fictionality of staging was one of the major features of this performance.

As for the actors, they are not assigned to a single character during the four hours of performance, and they play the various characters of the play depending on the scene. Even the actors who are not performing sometimes remain on the stage and watch the scenes, so that it is clear to whom the performance and speech are directed. There are many scenes in which the actor does not face the audience but face to other actors.

Shimanuki described the texture and semiotic layout of the time and space of the performance that resulted from “a total of just under 20 people moving in all directions” as transforming “the black-box space into a street in overcrowded Bangkok.”<sup>[31]</sup> In other words, the production of a space-time in this performance has a certain degree of resonance from the spacio-time deployment in the original work, in which Uthis Haemamool semi-autobiography unfolds, overlapping itself with the tumultuous history of contemporary Thailand.

For this issue, Sasaki Atsushi, who was present at the premiere in Bangkok, has developed a more in-depth discussion. Sasaki refers to the fact that this play has a certain influence from Thongchai Winichakul’s concept of “geo-body” as “an imagined community,” which was related to the history of Thai modernization, and argues that Okada translates “geo-body” into “theatre-body.”<sup>[32]</sup> The term “geo-body” refers to a national body that the nation or people in Thailand have acquired as a result of its modernization, i.e., Westernization and their geographic and “objective” spatial perception of themselves. Of course, this body is already always structured in negotiations with the traditional sense of space (the formation of semi-secular identities as subjects of a kingdom by their spatial and geographical relations). And it continues to be constructed by much too obvious Thai state powers. Sasaki calls it the “geo-body that had been ravaged by history, torn to pieces, and dismembered,” and says that the gesture, style of existence and performance of the actors in “geo-body” were “reconstituted by all of the real bodies who were on the stage,”<sup>[33]</sup> while letting the audience be conscious of the specific Thai history and references to the personal history depicted in *Pratthana* by Haemamool.

Sasaki’s analysis is relevant, but in the context of this essay, the hallmark of *Pratthana* is the lack of singular perspective and the sense of authorship. It may have been Tsukahara Yuya, who not only stays on the stage almost all the time but also intervened in the performance quite visibly that brought such a diffusing texture to the performance as objects and gestures reminiscent of Tsukahara’s past activities as an artist and a performer are introduced discretely and sporadically. That being the case, what happens in the performance space is the “interweaving” of the elements of a very complex and different instances, which is reminiscent of the description already-cited Fisher-Lichte’s “interweaving performance cultures.”

The elements such as sounds and visual images, the presence of concrete or abstract objects, the physical and facial expressions and voice and the texture and color of the body and clothing, the light and shadow produced by lighting, etc., are not only for audience to appreciate the singular *telos* of the performance. These elements as “strands are plied into a thread; many such threads are then woven into a piece of cloth, which thus consists of diverse strands and threads,” while in the process, “unintended knots” may “appear in the cloth,” and “threads unravel or flow apart.”<sup>[34]</sup> Needless to say, the various attributes, which can be recognized within the

29 Following the change of government in 2004, JF was subject to a screening of projects, which resulted in a large-scale reduction of its budget. Before that, in 2009, the Asia Center was integrated into the headquarters, and was effectively closed. In 2014, however, the Asia Center was again temporarily established within JF, with a limited time of five fiscal years until 2020. The Asia Center, which has just begun its activities, has become involved in active international exchange with Southeast Asia. Although these projects include a variety of projects, a symbolic event in the field of performing arts is the fact that, since 2015, the TPAM (Tokyo Performing Arts Meeting), to which JF has long supported, has focused its efforts on exchanges with Asia as theme of “Asia Focus.” In this way, ideological and financial incentives towards “Asia Focus” and “international co-production” were once again implemented under the initiative of JF.

30 Shimanuki Taisuke, “The Story of Your Life: “Pratthana – A Portrait of Possession,” [http://pratthana.net/news/features/bangkok\\_review\\_en/](http://pratthana.net/news/features/bangkok_review_en/)

31 Ibid

32 Sasaki Atsushi, “Theater of Geo-bodies: Watching Toshiki Okada’s “Pratthana – A Portrait of Possession,” <http://pratthana.net/news/features/a-review-of-pratthana-a-portrait-of-possession-written-by-atsushi-sasaki/>

33 Ibid.a

34 Fischer-Lichte, *ibid.*, p.11.

category of Thai and Japanese nationality and culture emerge not only at the meta level but also at the level of literal symbolism and semiosis. Or, it cannot be said that the individuality of each artist is not registered in the space and time of the moment. It is more deceptive to argue otherwise.

In this performance, however, taking on this uniqueness and specificity made it possible to test “the new forms of social coexistence” between the bilateral of Thailand and Japan, rather than the multinational/multicultural, and as a result, the form “simply emerge[d].” In this way, by diluting the singular authorship and increasing the number of authors, *Pratthana* not only banished the power from the contemporary theater, which was synonymous with the space structured by hegemonic power relations, but also became a testing ground for a utopian project in which “new forms of social coexistence” was raised. Yes, if we refer back to Fisher-Lichte again, it is true that *Pratthana* “provide an experimental framework for experiencing the utopian potential of culturally diverse and globalized societies.”<sup>[35]</sup> In this way, *Pratthana* became a good example of a new category of “interweaving performance cultures” far away from historical genres of “international co-production” and “intercultural theatre.”

35 Ibid., p. 11-12.

#### Tadashi Uchino

Born in Tokyo in 1957, and with an MA (American Literature, 1984) and PhD (Performance Studies, 2001) from the University of Tokyo, Uchino is now Professor of Performance Studies at the Department of Japanese Studies, Gakushuin Women's College, focusing on Japanese and American contemporary theater. He was a professor of Performance Studies at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Tokyo University until 2017. Publications include *The Location of “J” Theatre: Towards Transnational Mobilities* (2016, University of Tokyo Press).



Photo by Takuya Matsumi