

Judit Barbara Nagy

The Multifaceted Relationship between Museum and Theatre: Based on the Collection of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts

Abstract

The initial section of the case study briefly discusses the relationship between theatre and other artforms, while the second half uses a national example, mentioning the relevant connections between museum pedagogy and drama pedagogy. My writing offers an insight into the collection of the Hungarian Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts (Hopp Ferenc Ázsiai Művészeti Múzeum), highlighting notable theatre exhibits and other relevant studies.

Keywords: theatre, museum pedagogy, drama pedagogy, Far Eastern cultures, wayang, kabuki

Introduction

Theatre and its relationship with other art forms (e.g., fine arts) can be defined through a number of lenses. Often a form of connectivity is associated with theatre, as it can link together different forms of art. This can be understood in two separate approaches. Theatre is experienced and associated with another, more dominant art form, if we disregard its autonomy and unique qualities. The most typical example of this is that theatre is subordinate to literature. The second approach treats theatre as a separate and distinctive art form, which utilises the technology of other forms of art, modes, and methods of expression (P. Müller 2019, 9–10).

Péter P. Müller highlights that it is not necessary to emphasise the connective role of theatre. Equally, the emphasis can be placed on other relevant areas, thus becoming more evident how the existing relations between the fields of contact are established (P. Müller 2019, 11).

The present study does not wish to explore further analysis of these approaches. The principal objective is to introduce a concrete example in Hungary of museum education, where the museum's collections on fine art exhibits have theatrical significance.

Museum and theatre: Museum and theatre education methods and areas

The terms, museum and theatre, are closely associated with several skillsets and areas of pedagogic professions: drama and theatre pedagogy, and museum andragogy. Certain areas and methods of museum and theatre education are connected using each other's methods. This can be well-observed during museum pedagogic activities.

Museum pedagogy and drama pedagogy: The use of drama pedagogic methods in museum pedagogy

The introduction of museums within education did not start in the 21st century but at the start of the 20th century. This notion was first developed by John Dewey in his work *School and Society*, published in 1912.¹ Listing museum catalogues as national heritage dates even further back to the time of the Enlightenment. Since the First World War, museum pedagogy has developed constantly and since the 1920s has become an applied branch of pedagogy. At this time, other museum related fields, similarly became more widely applied (e.g., museum sociology), with the purpose of broadening the public's educational knowledge. In the 1970s it was a globally supported phenomenon, with hopes to realise the cause. It was equally taught as part of cultural and educational studies courses at universities (Koltai 2011, 48–50).

In museum education, primarily the action and motor learning became prominent. Objects used in these studies aid a more straightforward method of retaining a solid base of knowledge. One of the core methods of museum pedagogy are guided tours, the use of notebooks and exercise sheets, creating objects, board games and contests, storytelling, and equally the application of drama pedagogic methods (Koltai 2011, 51, 54–57).

Exploration of the self, community building, developing and communicational competencies all form an integral part of the objectives of drama pedagogy. Moreover, it seeks to help gain better understanding of theatrical plays and forms. There are several ways in which drama and dramatic methods are presented in education, such as during drama lessons, history lessons or even foreign language studies (Bethlenfalvy 2021, 17–19). We can equally encounter the methods of drama pedagogy during museum pedagogic activities. It is through these methods that creativity can be encouraged alongside attaining knowledge in a more person-centred manner. During lessons, museum pedagogists usually use dramatised stories and situational and re-enactment exercises well-known to students (Koltai 2011, 55).

1 Published in Hungarian as: *Az iskola és a társadalom*, Hungarian translation and introduction by Frigyes Ozorai. (Néptanítók könyvtára.) Budapest: Lampel, 1912.

Far Eastern theatre and the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts (Museum of Fine Arts): The prominent differences of Eastern and Western cultures

During the comparison of Eastern and Western cultures, it can be observed that one of the main differences is the understanding and the desire to learn. It can be observed that in the 'East', understanding comes from emotions and imagination. It often happens that the teaching and the process of mastering one skill is not connected to words or verbal practice. Petra Doma in her 2022 writing, titled *Az idegen vonzásában* ('In the Attraction of the Unknown'), highlights that in a broader sense. The "West" can relate to the notion of thinking and the "East" to feeling. These two largely differing qualities have an impactful influence on the traditions of theatre (Doma 2022, 23; 26–27).

Including Western and Eastern theatre's most important differences are the depictions of reality in terms of its presence and absence and the process of developing a plot. In Western theatre plot comes to life through the dialogues between the actors. Another notable difference is that "unanimous" is the adjective that best describes Eastern theatre. According to Petra Doma, "Eastern theatre is focused on song, dance, and pantomime and the text forming an inseparable whole." This difference is present in Westerners' approach to Eastern theatre practices. Most often, they can associate with Western plays more, as the plot is easier to follow and understand (Doma 2022, 40–41).

The Italian theorist and theatre director, Eugenio Barba, in his theatre anthropology study, raises awareness of the way in which Asian actors differ from their Western counterparts with their "powerful and effective" presence. Barba, as part of a comprehensive study examined various theatre practices (the Japanese kabuki and noh theatre, Indonesian [Bali] and Chinese theatre), the actor's posture and movement. He based three "principals" on these practices: the principle of alteration of balance, the principle of opposition and the principle of the "logic which is not immediately recognisable". He understands that for Western actors it would be pointless to learn and apply Asian techniques and cannot directly be translated into Western performances (Barba 1996, 38–43).

The establishment and development of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts in the 20th and 21st Centuries

Since the establishment of the museum over a hundred years ago, several exhibits have been added to the collection. The visitors interested in Asia cannot only look at these annually changing exhibitions but equally through the exhibits and the library catalogue's Hungarian and foreign language publications they can gain a better understanding and are able to study the cultures of the Far East. The interactive museum pedagogic activities also help to facilitate younger generations to attain knowledge more effectively.

The founder and namesake of the museum, the optician, collector and explorer, Ferenc Hopp's collection of over a thousand items, mostly associated with the Far East, was inherited by the state after he passed away in 1919. Ferenc Hopp made arrangement in his lifetime that for the items in his collection a Museum of Asiatic Arts should be established in his villa on Andrásy Avenue (Fajcsák 2019, 9–10).

Throughout its use of over a hundred years, the institution faced multiple changes, due to various plans and purposes it needed to fulfil since its founding in the respective eras. It was after the Second World War that they started to organise the collections and the exhibitions (e.g., Japanese Collection). It was processed by the director of the museum, Tibor Horváth, with the help of archaeologists and orientalists (Fajcsák 2019, 15). The expansion of the collection was thought to be the most important in the mid-20th century, however organising exhibitions and other works (e.g., restorations) were deemed more important in the second half of the century. By the 1960s numerous exhibitions had some association with theatre practice. The *Indiai és jávai művészet* ('Indian and Javanese Art') exhibition opened in 1982, which displayed the principal items of Javanese puppet theatre (Fajcsák 2019, 17).

There are other factors that are considered when organising exhibitions for the 21st century, where there is more of a role for other associated arts, such as film and photography (Fajcsák 2019, 18–19).

Exhibits relating to (puppet) theatre in the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts

The museum has multiple exhibits that relate to theatre and amongst the inheritance of the Database there are several items with connection to film and theatre studies. Some of them listed are the photographs taken by Dezső Bozóky during his travels to Japan in the early 20th century (e.g., the photo of the theatre in Yokohama: see image 4), and screenplays for films. The characteristic pieces of Far Eastern puppet theatre can be found typically in the Chinese and Japanese Collection.

A crucial part of the Southeast Asia Collection are the puppets used in the shadow and puppet theatre originating from the island of Java. The wayangs could be seen, for those interested in Asian puppetry, at several Hungarian exhibitions. At the very first temporary exhibition of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts in 1931, over a hundred and eighteen Javanese puppets from the collection of Ernő Zboray (with eighty-five *wayang golek* and thirty-three *wayang kulit*) (Brittig 2017, 231).

Wayang

The Indonesian *wayang* term does not only mean shadow theatre or shadow puppets, but it equally concerns every terminology related to theatre (e.g., plays). This shift was due to the mixture of certain aspects of intercultural influences and opposing religious beliefs. The original Javanese meaning was “shadow” (“puppet”, “ancient”) (Mizerák 2009, 87). In a traditional sense the word connotes a religious ritual too (Brittig 2013, 63).

Several versions are noted, and new forms are born even today, however the most widely known and ancient form being the *wayang kulit* (Brittig 2013, 63). The relevance of wayang kulit (a shadow performance made of leather) lies in its role in creating a line of continuity between events of the past and present, in order to preserve and illustrate important historical moments and events. These shadow performances have vital importance in keeping alive the traditions of myths and legends in the memory of the people over time. In 2003 they became part of the UNESCO World Heritage (Mizerák 2009, 88, 90).

The shape and preparation of the puppets is not consistent but instead differs from location to location (e.g., Java, Bali, Lombok) showing differences of various



Image 1. Shadow play puppet (in Indonesian: *wayang kulit Cirebon*), photo by Miklós Sulyok, Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts, Budapest, accession number: HFM_67.51.1.

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Image 2. *Wayang golek* puppet, photo by Miklós Sulyok, Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts, Budapest, accession number: HFM_2010.26.1.

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degree. During the performances around sixty to a hundred puppets are used. The puppets are kept upright with the use of a bison horn baton and the puppeteer, the *dalang*, moves the puppets with the help of two smaller sticks. These figures are illuminated with oil lamps and their outlines projected onto a linen canvas (Mizerák 2009, 89). Essentially, the role of the *dalang* goes far beyond the role of the puppeteer, as during the course of the piece they organise and manage all aspects of the shadow performance (e.g., the accompanying gamelan ensemble) (Tömöry 2012, 31). The *wayang kulit* is strongly connected to the afterlife. The performer of the shadow performance, the *dalang*, is never simply regarded as a puppeteer but equally a spiritual leader (Dus 2012, 19). They are well-versed

in religious traditions and ancient legends, with the props not only being puppets but animated creatures gifted with certain powers (Jeanneret 1969, 159).

The *wayang golek* is a much-liked puppet play in Indonesia. Some of the essential tools used are the puppets dressed in clothes of vivid colours. It differs from the *wayang kulit* in both the way the puppets are made (e.g., three-dimensional figures) and the performance style alike. The actor does not use sticks to move the puppets, but they place it on a table which is covered in holes on the top. Instead of the linen canvas, a curtain is used to cover the actor (Mizerák 2009, 92).

Woodcuts and the kabuki theatre

At the turn of the 19th century the interest in the cultures of the Far East (e.g., Japan) tremendously heightened in Europe. This was not only true of literature but the fine arts too. Amongst art collectors, the woodcuts of the Edo period and likewise the Meiji era was much sought after (Doma 2019, 30).

The Japanese Collection's outstanding pieces were the woodcuts from the 19th and 20th century, bought by the bishop, Duke Péter Vay. Amongst the notable artists were Utagawa Yoshitora (歌川 芳虎), Torii Kiyonaga (鳥居 清長), Utagawa Hiroshige (歌川 広重), as well as Utagawa Kunisada (歌川 国貞). The uniqueness of the Vay collection is that it includes both beautiful female figures (*bijin*, 美人) and landscapes, and woodcuts depicting scenes from kabuki theatre (Fajcsák 2022, 152–153).

Kabuki (歌舞伎, かぶき) is a Japanese theatre tradition with classical traits, which already existed before the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Besides *noh* (能) and *bunraku* (文楽), it is listed among the notable national theatre practices of Japan. According to some views, *bugaku* (舞楽) is amongst these too (Kokubu 1984, 11–12). Kabuki performances from the middle of the 18th century began to portray the day to day lives of the lower classes, which contributed to the establishment of the independent sewamono genre (social drama) (Kokubu 1984, 52).

Some of the indispensable toolsets of kabuki include spectacular props (e.g., costumes). One of its principal characteristics is a complicated plot, which includes a hero and a villain in the plays. Following the demonstration of obstacles and prolonged suffering of the hero, it concludes with the defeat of the villain and the victory of the hero, representing goodness (Kokubu 1984, 59).



Image 3. Scene III from the kabuki play *Chūsingura* (The story of the 47 rōnin) by Utagawa Yoshitōra, photo by Miklós Sulyok, Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts, Budapest, accession number: HFM_7352.

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The database heritage of Dezső Bozóky and the period's approach to the Far East

In the database of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts There are numerous photographs by Dezső Bozóky taken in the early 20th century during his visits to East Asia. In the photograph collection stereo photographs, slides and the photographs stuck in the album can be found, however, the original photo reproductions in the travel logs did not become part of the museum collection (Dénes and Sebestyén 2016, 13–14, 18).

The experiences and observations gained throughout the ship surgeon's travels to Asia can be examined by readers of today in a two-volume travel log.

The second volume, discussing Japan, was published in 1911. It can be assumed that Bozóky's interest was aroused by Japanese theatre practice, because during his visits to Yokohama he attended historic plays several times. In the book Bozóky's comments on plays and the brief overview of scenes as well as a more detailed description of the building itself (Bozóky 1911, 228–237). Given the fact that Bozóky made notes of the actor's movement on stage, posture, in my opinion, would provide an additional reason to examine the travel logs from a theatre anthropological lens.

The approach of Western society towards the theatres of the Far East shifted on the turn of the 19th century. In previous centuries most of the attention was on the differences between Eastern and Western theatres. It was thought that this exotic art is distant and largely different from the Western theatre in many ways, in its dramaturgy and method of acting amongst other things. By the time of



Image 4. A Theatre, Yokohama, original photograph by Dezső Bozóky; photograph of the glass slide by Tamás Katkó, Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts, Budapest, accession number: HFA_F.2004.564.

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Dezső Bozóky, this view was not the case anymore, as Asian theatre was viewed primarily for its ritualistic, primeval, and pure form alike (Doma 2022, 30–32).

The shift within Western views was due to the industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries, as contemporary society was discontent with capitalism resulting in a so-called identity change. This led to having plays in theatres that did not reflect the reality of the everyday, but instead genres that sought to entertain became more popular (e.g., vaudeville, commercial theatre). According to the Austrian teatrologist, Peter Simhandl, the principal aim of theatre was not to reflect reality anymore (Doma 2022, 33). "...It needed to praise values that were declared as universal norms and humanity's inviolable 'everlasting benefits'..." (Simhandl 1998, 202). By the end of the 19th century the need towards entertaining genres gradually declined, which was replaced by the popularity of naturalism and realism in theatre (Doma 2022, 34).

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