

***Likay Aka Oni* Red Demon: Encounter and Exchange of Intercultural Performance**

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Abstract

This paper investigates the possibilities of cultural exchange between a Japanese contemporary play and a Thai *Likay* performance.¹ This paper focuses on the process of inter-Asian cultural exchange between Thai and Japanese in terms of East-meets-East dialogue, cultural flows beyond the boundaries of two countries and cultural issues in the art of the theatre. Furthermore, it illustrates the process by which Pradit Prasatthong,² a Thai playwright, adapted *Aka Oni*, a Japanese play-script in his work after he had collaboratively worked with Hideki Noda³ in the original version of *Aka Oni* in 1997. This paper also exposes Japanese audiences to *Likay*, a Thai traditional-popular theatre form. Prasatthong⁴, the director of *Likay Aka Oni*, a new version of Noda's play, has endeavoured to make a contribution to intercultural communication and to produce a performance that can be appreciated by both Thai and Japanese audiences.

Keywords: Cultural Encounter and Exchange, Intercultural Performance, *Aka Oni*, Red Demon, Makhampom Theatre Troupe, Contemporary *Likay*

¹ This performance is called *Likay Aka Oni* (Japanese), *Likay* Red Demon (English), and *Likay Yak Tau Daeng* (Thai).

² Pradit Prasatthong (b.1960) trained as a sociologist and is an actor-director-playwright in a contemporary and tradition-based contemporary performance, and a former member of the Makhampom Theatre Troupe. He is the first Thailand's Silapathorn Award Winner (2004) in performing arts. The Silapathorn Award was founded in 2004 by the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture. The Award is given to contemporary Thai artists aged between 30 to 50 in five branches, including visual arts, literature, music, movie and performing arts. Pradit Prasatthong is currently a director and actor of Anatta Theatre Troupe which was founded by him in 2012.

³ Hideki Noda (b.1955) is a renowned Japanese playwright, director, and actor. He is also an art director of Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre (TMT).

⁴ According to English translation of sounds from Thai, the director's surname 'Prasatthong' can possibly be written as 'Prasartthong'.

Likay Aka Oni, a Japanese play performed in Thai *Likay* style, is a tradition-based contemporary performance of a story of cultural differentiation and of communication breakdown. Makhampom Theatre Troupe performed *Likay Aka Oni* at Jim Thompson Art Centre, Bangkok (2009), Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space (2009) and Esplanade's Theatre Studio in Singapore (2010), as part of the 2009 Mekong-Japan Exchange celebration held by Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre (TMT). Discussion in this paper mainly focuses on the Tokyo production, performed between 19 and 23 November 2009, where I joined the production as a staff member of documentation. This paper first identifies the frameworks of intercultural theories which were utilised in *Likay Aka Oni*. I then discuss the creation process in the text, rehearsal, and performance techniques, in order to demonstrate how the production crafted a piece that crosses cultural and national boundaries in terms of theatre adaptation and hybridisation between Thailand and Japan.

Collaborative Exchange in Theatrical Adaptation and Hybridisation

Patrice Pavis, in his concept of intercultural theatre, argues that the hybridisation of the intercultural process often results in the original forms being no longer distinguishable (1996, p. 8). *Likay Aka Oni*, however, is not such a case. Rather, the intercultural theatre in this project is “a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions” (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, p. 36). The production integrates performance elements of different cultures into a form that aims to retain the cultural integrity of the specific materials used in forging a new text and theatre practice (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, p. 5). This cultural exchange process can be seen as

the transmission of theatrical troupes and gags between actors and playwrights; the exchanges of actors, playwrights, and theatrical culture [. . .] the representation of foreign identity [. . .] that communicated across national and regional boundaries, and allowed for both material and symbolic exchange (Henke and Nicholson, 2008, p. 1).

Noda points out that although any interchange might threaten the special qualities of a particular culture, without such an exchange, nothing new would be initiated (Parivudhipongs, 2009).

In *Likay Aka Oni*, the exchange between the two different cultural motifs exhibits a two-way communicative approach, drawn from Rustom Bharucha's pendulum model which presents reciprocity of intercultural theatre and its two-way exchange. Bharucha asserts that

interculturalism evokes a back-and-forth movement, suggesting the swing of a pendulum rather than a downward movement through the narrow trajectory of filters by which the ‘source culture’ is emptied while the ‘target culture’ is filled. (Bharucha 1993, p. 241)

This model challenges Pavis's “hourglass” model (1992, pp. 4-5) which is seen as the cultural flows between the “source” and “target” cultures where a foreign or source culture passes from the upper bulb through the narrow neck of the glass and into the lower bulb of the target culture. This process is considered as a one-way communication (Lo and Gilbert, 2002; Daugherty, 2005).

Likay Aka Oni production, therefore, is the result of an encounter followed by a process of exchange between equals. The production was created based on cross-cultural negotiation at both dramaturgical and aesthetic levels. The “in between” of collaborative exchange occurred when the practitioners “created a true hybrid and a powerful piece of performance”

(Daugherty, 2005, p. 55). Prasatthong maintains *Likay* form and its essential elements but he combines them with universal social issues in which his *Likay* productions can present contemporary content through a popular-traditional form. In other words, Prasatthong brought *Likay* form to a Japanese audience through a story with which many of its members might be familiar. Although the Thai *Likay* form was strange for Japanese theatre audiences, they were able to follow the plot synopsis and relate the performance to their preconceptions of the story, which provided a means of understanding and appreciation.

Working with Thai, Working with Japanese: Cultural Encounter and Exchange

As an actress in Prasatthong's contemporary *Likay* performance in more than ten productions since 2003, I have learned to understand his approach of mixing theatrical materials from two worlds, namely "contemporary" and "traditional," as well as his ability to work well with traditional artists. Prasatthong maintains *Likay* form and its essential elements but he combines them with universal social issues so they can present contemporary content through a popular-traditional form. Noda utilised the same approach in his contemporary *Noh* production, *The Diver*, which I saw in October 2008 in Tokyo. *The Diver* was derived from the ancient Japanese *Tale of Genji* but was reinterpreted and performed as a contemporary stage play by three British cast members and Noda himself, featuring conventional *Noh* stage props, such as a fan, together with a *Noh* musical ensemble. In the first interview I conducted with Noda in 2009, he raised the issue of how necessary it is to know, understand, and adapt when working with artists from different theatrical fields. He explained:

I am now rehearsing a *Kabuki* play. When I met the traditional actors, I introduced them to new things. When I work with modern actors, I always think about [their] traditional way. When I lived in London working with British, I introduced them [to] Asian styles. A culture is always appearing new things (Noda, Interview 2009).

In Noda's opinion, as cultures develop, new things appear in them, as inter-cultural interaction prompts reworking from traditional bases. This cultural-exchange approach was also used when Noda and Prasatthong collaboratively worked together with other Thai practitioners on the *Aka Oni* production (1997-1998); both of them made efforts to learn about each other's culture when working together. Their cultural cooperation, combined with their similar attitudes and approaches to making theatre, is clear in the final production. The cultural exchange between them resulted in not only a new style of theatre, but also manners, attitudes, and working styles of the actors from both national traditions.

Noda adjusted his approach to working with Thai artists and this greatly impressed Prasatthong. Japanese and Thai dramatists have different attitudes to the working process, particularly in theatre practice. The Japanese consider each aspect of contributing to a dramatic production as "serious" work, while Thais regard the same process as "a fun experience." As Prasatthong explained in an interview:

As the word 'play' implies, Thai actors never forget to enjoy themselves in their work, even though working on a production is a job. We believe that a performance is something that we should enjoy acting in, and we don't like to look at productions simply as jobs that must be done. When the Japanese do a play, they work seriously in rehearsal and are much disciplined about being on time and obeying the rules of conduct. But that is not the case with Thai actors. Often we aren't on time and we haven't learned our lines completely. We always approach a play with a spirit of fun. And sometimes we play around too much, which can be a problem too. (Sentoku 2009, p. 4)

In response to such different work attitudes and reflecting his understanding of cultural exchange, Noda conducted ice breaking activities at the start of sessions, such as playing football, basketball or some traditional Japanese game (Sentoku, 2009, p. 4). While Noda adapted his approach to work with Thai practitioners, Thai practitioners also learned from him as a representative of Japanese culture, and tried to adopt a great number of useful disciplines such as being punctual and more serious while rehearsing, but more relaxed when taking a rest. Thirty Thai applicants took part in the workshop in 1997, and fifteen of them, including Prasatthong, were chosen to perform *Aka Oni* in 1998.

Originally scripted and directed by Noda as a NODA MAP production, *Aka Oni* was first staged in 1996 in Japan with Japanese performers alongside a British actor playing the character of the Red Demon. The following year, the Japan Foundation's Asian Performing Arts Exchange and Research Program was launched with the purpose of bringing together Asian and Japanese theatre people to create joint productions. In 1997, Noda held a workshop with Thai actors from Bangkok and to create and perform a Thai version of *Aka Oni*. This Thai version, with Thai cast members and Noda himself playing the demon's role, was performed in Bangkok in 1998 and re-produced in Tokyo in 1999 (Sentoku, 2009, p. 1). In 2003, Noda directed and staged an English-language version of his *Aka Oni* in London using British cast members.

Principally, *Aka Oni* deals with racism and the difficulties of intercultural communication, particularly of discrimination towards people from outside Japanese culture. When villagers on an unknown island meet an odd-looking creature who is washed ashore, speaking an unfamiliar language that nobody can understand, they view him as a monster and fear him. Called *Aka Oni* (Red Demon) by the locals, he is exiled from the village. The villagers decide to kill him, but the heroine, referred to in the play as "that woman," tries to help him, which results in terrible consequences (Ayako, 1999). When performed in the Setagaya theatre, Japan, the production used Thai cast members and Thai language with Japanese narration via headsets for Japanese audiences. The performance was well received by both Japanese and Thai audiences. When it came to choosing a work by Makhampom Theatre Troupe to be performed collaboratively in the Mekong Festival in 2009, this story was again selected.

Adapting the text: Juxtaposition of Thai *Likay* Elements and Japanese Text

In the adaptation of the original to the Thai *Likay Aka Oni* production, Prasatthong describes the two crucial aspects of how to reinterpret the story and how to present it in a new form as a cultural transformation. For the first point, Prasatthong rethinks the old version which emphasised equality among humans in the world. The story shows the conflict between the local people—who can be presumed to be Asian, Japanese or Thai people—and Europeans, for instance, in the aftermath of World War II. Although this theme is still relevant today, Prasatthong, as a Thai artist, is interested in finding some more specific idea which effectively reflects the Southeast Asian and Thai situation. The second aspect was about how to get the *Likay* form to fit well with this content.

Based on the play *Aka Oni*, *Likay Aka Oni* tells the tale of the inhabitants of an unknown island who doggedly believe that there is no land on the other side of the ocean. The play features four main characters: three humans and one demon. The human characters' names are

Thai: Kmuki, Kini, and Paglan.⁵ Kmuki means ‘fierce male giant’, Kini means ‘female giant’, and Paglan means ‘strong, big-bodied male giant’. Red Demon, the role of stranger, is named Kasi, the Arabic word for ‘giant’ used by many Muslims. Prasatthong points out that this Muslim name refers to the religious conflict between Buddhist and Muslim in the three southern frontier provinces of Thailand (Interview, 2010).

Kmuki, a dimwitted man, Kini, his sister, whom the villagers call “that woman” and whom Kmuki calls “you” – she symbolises a nameless woman subject to the lust of men, and their friend Paglan, meet the stranger, Kasi, and they all try to be friends. However, their attempt at friendship fails because the villagers disapprove of the stranger and try to drive Kasi away. This is because none of the villagers can communicate with Kasi, and assume that Kasi, whose appearance is different from their own, is a monster and cannibal and will eat them. Since Kini wants to help Kasi, Paglan has to help Kini, because he has fallen in love with her. Hence, after being banished, Paglan, Kini, Kasi and Kmuki leave the village by boat. On their journey across the sea, Kini loses consciousness due to malnutrition. She comes to after eating shark fin soup provided by Kmuki and Paglan, but she finds out later that the soup is not, in fact shark fin at all: as Kasi has disappeared, Kini realises that she has eaten him, so she runs away and commits suicide by jumping off a cliff.

With the universal content of social concern about discrimination and miscommunication among different nationalities in the globe, Prasatthong brought in this theme and used it as the backbone of his invention. The original text of *Aka Oni* relates the images and stories of homeless people, refugees, and those banished from their hometowns across the world. Reinterpreting this text, in which “different traditions and contexts are found in a new context and situation,” Prasatthong refocused it on the continual political and religious turmoil in the three southern frontier provinces of Thailand. *Likay Aka Oni* can be also seen as highlighting the way in which “the original meanings of the different traditions in their original contexts [. . .] are now [. . .] supplanted by different meanings” (Preez, 2011, p. 159).

In Thailand, some Buddhists and Muslims look at one another as enemies. This is largely due to ignorance, as Prasatthong explained: “[We] consider our people as strangers. Anyone who talks or thinks differently will be the opposite side” (Yi-Sheng, 2010). In addition, “the pain here belongs not only to the victims of discrimination, but also to those who benefit from others’ ignorance and those who remain ignorant” (Amranand, 2009, p. 8). In this sense, Prasatthong has pointed out that

If this world was *Likay* theatre, we could not distinguish performer from audience members. In particular, we live in the world in which ‘otherness’ is basically imposed to strangers. So, a demon can exist everywhere, not only a *Likay* theatre. I wish *Likay Aka Oni* would remind audiences about this point and encourage them to look at their neighbours, strangers, and other people as friends not demons. (Chaipanha, 2009, my translation)

Moreover, in *Likay Aka Oni*, the Red Demon or Kasi can be seen either good or evil. While Kasi sends messages to his friends at sea, these messages are inaccessible. No one knows about how good or bad Kasi and his friends are, but they all represent otherness. It is unnecessary to present the Red Demon as a furious or fierce character, because he will always

⁵ In the Japanese version, names of characters are: Tombi, Mizukane, and ‘That Woman’ for Kmuki, Paglan, and Kini in Makhampom’s *Likay* performance. Additionally, *Aka Oni* was named as Kasi in the latter version.

be looked on as an alien, no matter his manner or behaviours. Accordingly, Prasatthong emphasises in *Likay Aka Oni* the notion that giants and demons are not always dangerous and should not always be avoided. Sometimes human beings are more dangerous than these characters. Reflecting this idea, Kini recites a very important line to Kmuki, Paglan, and the villagers at the end of the performance. Before running away, she asks her brother and the villagers if it is not the truth that they ate the Red Demon's flesh to survive, rather than the Red Demon eating them.

Prasatthong started this production by repeatedly reading the original script and dividing all main sequences. Music, songs, rhyme, verse and other *Likay* elements were written into the performance. Since a *Likay* version performed in Japan had to be finished within one hour, some scenes and sub-plots were cut out, particularly those in which Paglan laments his unrequited love to Kini, whom he has lost to the uprooted stranger, Kasi. While Thai audiences tend to like this kind of love or sad scene, it might cause Japanese audiences to feel apathetic because those scenes were quite slow and delicate. In another major change, Prasatthong skilfully translated and adjusted the original prose text of *Aka Oni* to the verse and song of *Likay*. The revised text fit the melodramatic and comedic style of *Likay*. It is worth noting that *Likay* performance can do justice to the content of the original version of *Aka Oni*, allowing performers to appropriately link the written to the spoken word and rhythmic, physical, emotional, and symbolic stylisations to one another. This adjustment in the production manifested "the pendulum" between Japanese play and embodied *Likay* in motion which swings between the unfamiliar (new) plot and the familiar performance techniques (Daugherty, 2005, p. 65; p. 67).

Although the play represented a shortened version, Prasatthong kept a stylised *Likay* scene in which Kasi has painted a cave's walls with a paradisiacal landscape that reflects his search for a celestial land and in which his ship has left, assuming that Kasi is dead. In this scene, Kini and Kasi perform a classical Thai dance, accompanied by beautiful instrumental music, performed by the troupe's musical ensemble, and a choral performance given by the other performers offstage. To audiences, this scene suggested Kini and Kasi's close, perhaps even romantic, relationship. By contrast, in Noda's original version of *Aka Oni*, the nature of the two characters' relationship was unclear. Prasatthong developed it further, adding new elements and presenting them in a contemporary *Likay* style.

Finding a Form in Performing Hybridity

Likay is a popular performance style of Thai folk musical theatre or Thai folk opera. Type-characters generally improvise dialogues, *ranikloeng*, free verse, and song lyrics during the performance which follows a scenario provided by a story teller or a director, extending the storylines and stock rhymes. It is accompanied by *piphat*, the Thai classical orchestra, and combined with Thai classical dance and modern songs. *Likay*'s symbols include elaborate sparkling costumes, glittering headdresses with crystal crowns and ornaments, and a glamorous stage. The *Likay* style was used for *Aka Oni* because the Mekong project's organiser was impressed by its form after watching *The Message*⁶, another Makhampom contemporary *Likay* performance in 2008 and asked Prasatthong to contribute another *Likay*

⁶ *The Message*'s theme was based on the sufferings of people, again living in the Kong River Area in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. They have miserable lives due to changes resulting from a dam project in China. *The Message* was performed in Thailand between 2007 and 2008 and it was also invited to play in Yokohama, Japan in 2008.

production using Japanese text. Prasatthong himself also wanted to present Noda's *Aka Oni* in *Likay* version as he explained:

Likay is an art form that has developed along with Thai society, it is one of the few arts that has maintained traditional aspects but also kept relevance to contemporary life, so it does not become outdated. When Mr. Takahagi made me the offer of directing a Noda play, I immediately thought that if I were to direct it myself I would do it in the *Likay* style. *Likay* is originally a Malay art form, which means it emerged from Islamic culture. Therefore, I thought to set the play in southern Thailand where many people of Malay descent live. So, I thought that it should be set in a seaside village in southern Thailand and use music that sounds exotic to the Thai ear. (Sentoku, 2009, p. 7)

Additionally, Prasatthong was informed by Thai audiences, who saw *Aka Oni* in a contemporary stage play in 1998 that, although the performance was admirable, they could not follow it well, due to its swift dialogue and quick pace. Therefore, Prasatthong has affirmed that *Aka Oni*'s text is excellent but has added that the addition of *Likay* elements such as song, rhyme and verse, to *Likay Aka Oni*'s repertoire, might enhance a Thai audience's appreciation of the story (Interview, 2009a). Therefore, the very swift spoken dialogue was replaced by song and dance that was designed to cover the entire conversation of a contemporary stage play version. *Likay Aka Oni* can also had the potential to open up the worlds of audience members who did not care much for traditional art forms and to impart a sense of the contemporary, through the use of a different kind of performance language.

Furthermore, Japanese audiences can compare *Likay* performance to their *Kabuki* or *Tai shu eng keki* in terms of a traditional-popular play. *Tai shu eng keki* means the theatre for people or masses, and it is also called a working-class *kabuki*. Noda pointed out that they are examples of Japanese local and popular performances, consisting of simple stories that can make the audience emotional and cry and laugh (Interview, 2009). Indeed, many interesting theatrical motifs that appear in *Likay* are also present across other Asian popular theatre traditions. Thailand's *Likay* and other kinds of traditional-popular performance in Southeast Asia, such as Laos' *Lamleong*, Cambodia's *Yike*, Malaysia's *Bangsawan*, and Indonesia's *Ludruk*, can be seen as common performances within the region which have similar attributes and elements.

Stage and Presentation: Dual performing Style on a Transnational Performance

A *Likay* performance consists of several crucial elements. Protagonists and antagonists usually introduce themselves directly to the audience. In each scene, a character or characters will sing *ranikloeng*⁷ song or another Thai classical tune while performing a monologue or dialogue that presents their objectives and what they will do next. Although adjusting *Aka Oni* to a variety of the *Likay* performing style, Prasatthong maintained the fundamental *Likay* structure and elements, employing an adapted conventional approach in his reinterpretation of the original *Aka Oni* text. Starting with *ok khaek*, the opening scene in traditional *Likay*, two female characters and one male character sang the Thai tune *mari suekariya*, used in a *ronggeng* performance, followed by a rapper, sung in English by the male character in the middle of the song. While dancing and singing, the three performers asked the audience to clap their hands with the drum beat. After this dance revue which prepared the audience to see *Likay*, *Kmuki*,

⁷ *Ranikloeng* verse lib is a trademark of *Likay* in which characters introduce themselves and express their feelings, or narrate a story line and situation. The ending verse of each rhyme contains a punch line to make the rhyme sound eloquent.

the foolish character who is able to communicate both to other characters and to the audience, introduces himself and a story:

Hello ladies and gentlemen, my name is Kmuki, I am an idiot. I have never asked my parents why they named me Kmuki, because I have not seen them before since I was born. Never mind. Today, I will tell you a funny story about a shark fin. Yes, it is about a delicious shark fin soup that you all love eating. But the shark fin in this story is a top secret; it would have been kept a secret forever, if only there had been no storm that night. (*Likay Aka Oni*, my translation)

Fictitious supposition or imaginative exercising is a *Likay* convention that is agreeable both to audiences and performers. In *Likay Aka Oni*, an empty bottle that served as a hand prop⁸ was also an important symbol of the other side of the sea. It was used not only as a fictitious prop, but as a mock microphone, by Kmuki, who spoke through it to the audience. An echo coming from the bottle represented Kmuki's belief that the microphone was alive. When Kmuki's sister commits suicide, however, the bottle stops echoing. The lack of echo reflected Kmuki's hopelessness about life and people, although he kept saying to the audience that he was fine.

I don't know much about this world. That's why I can continue to live. Sometimes I think of my sister and Red Demon laughing together in the boat. At that time, I thought she was laughing, but perhaps she was despairing. Whenever that image comes to my mind, little by little, I begin to understand the meaning of despair. (*Likay Aka Oni*, in Amranand, 2009, p. 8)

His introduction about the funny story of shark fin was later presented as the story's tragic ending; the echo of the bottle stopped when his (funny) imagination was destroyed, and the real world was revealed.

Prasatthong departed from conventional *Likay* staging in this production, with a unique seating and stage arrangement used both in Thai and Japanese performances. The audience sat in a U-shape space surrounding the performance area with the musical ensemble was set at the back of the stage and hidden with lighting, except for at the opening and the end of the performance. In order to adapt to this new stage set-up, the Thai actors needed more rehearsals and had to adapt their cues. Some typical *Likay* stage elements were missing, such as the *Likay* symbol of a bench, used to represent the highest throne in a throne hall. Similarly, rather than use the traditional entrance and exit, characters were able to enter at any spot on the stage. With no bench centre-stage, the opening scene featured an ensemble dance, in which the villagers danced around the stage, while Kasi made his first appearance in conventional *Likay* style, sporting a glittering red costume and a giant mask.

⁸The props in *Likay* are close-at-hand materials that are easily found; for example, a new-born baby is created by a towel rolled around a doll; a loincloth covering a body can be a sign of disguising and hiding; and a broomstick can be ridden as a horse.



Figure 1: A thrust stage is surrounded by the audience on all three sides, projecting Japanese subtitles.⁹



Figures 2 and 3: Lighting and block marking in a dress-rehearsal

⁹All photos courtesy of the author unless otherwise indicated.



Figure 4: The finale

As Kasi makes his first appearance in traditional *Likay* style, his slow and delicate hand actions and body posture present classical Thai theatre movements, and also indicate his major role in the performance. In terms of stylisation, *Likay* often toys with the meaning through exaggerated action, depicted through lights, sounds, costumes, expressions, graceful movements, and speaking. *Likay Aka Oni* demonstrated the uniqueness of this traditional-popular Thai theatre form by presenting diversified ranges of voice and tone in a performance. Additionally, characters used strong eye expressions, a different communication from Noda's staging, in which eye expression as well as inner thought and sentiment are minimised.

Along with *ranikloeng* song and other types of *Likay* music such as *hongthong* and *songmai*, *Likay Aka Oni* employed Thai classical tunes with Javanese tones and Malayan ethnic melodies. Furthermore, musical genres influenced by the Dutch and related to the Java and Malaya music cultures, such as *Batavia*, were adopted, as were Muslim melodies from the southern part of Thailand and Malaysia.



Figure 5: *Piphat*, or a music ensemble band, is positioned at the back of the stage.



Figure 6: Performers warm up their voice by using a voice projection technique. (Photo Courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

Typically, a conventional *Likay* performance uses stock-written verses and improvisation, adapting from performers' stock verse through a situation in each scene as a major method. Prasatthong's production of *Likay Aka Oni*, on the other hand, principally relied on a full-script and rehearsal process. Prasatthong allowed his performers to improvise some minor lines, occasionally in Japanese, which contributed to the hilarity of the play. The sole use of improvisation might have rendered the content of the production inappropriate and led to loss of control over the play's running time. Moreover, it would likely have confused the Japanese member of the crew who managed the Japanese subtitles, although she was able to communicate in Thai.

Costumes in *Likay Aka Oni* were adapted from a conventional *Likay* costume. In the past *Likay* performers wore costumes according to a character's nationality, such as Chinese, Burmese or Javanese. Today *Likay* actors usually wear only Burmese style on their lower body: a loincloth and covered skirt, while actresses wear the Victorian style gown, decorated with glittering ornaments, such as fake diamonds or crystals. Since Prasatthong wanted to concentrate on the problems faced by the three southern provinces of Thailand in *Likay Aka Oni*, he employed Javanese images and costumes in the play. Male characters wore Javanese-style glittering silver jackets with loincloths, decorated with *sabu*, the hanging ornate fabric along their waists, as well as Malayan-style cloth wrappings around their heads and long-haired wigs. Female characters wore glittering silver gowns in slightly different designs and decorated their hair with glittering ornaments and artificial flowers.

Audience Perceptions and Interpretations

According to Anya Peterson-Royce, audiences of different cultures or nationalities may have different expectations of performances. She points out that "American audiences want to know what is happening at very short intervals, while French audiences can let almost an entire number be presented before they need to have some closure" (2004, p. 156). Similarly, Thai and Japanese audiences' perceptions and demands of *Likay Aka Oni* may have differed. Thai audiences may have liked seeing how Prasatthong used the *Likay* form to present Noda's masterpiece, while Japanese audiences may have been curious to know what would happen when Noda's play was presented in a Thai *Likay* form. When *Likay Aka Oni* was performed at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space, sub-titles were displayed on screens on both the right- and left- hand sides of the stage. Before each performance, the audience was shown a short video on how to watch *Likay*. The video asked audiences to express their emotions during the performance, including by interrupting it with shouted suggestions on what the actors should do in scenes. This guide on how to watch *Likay* was offered because the troupe had unpleasant

experiences performing *Likay* in Yokohama, Japan in 2008. In Yokohama, audiences did not want to interrupt performances, due to their perception that audiences should be well-behaved. Thus, they were restrained in their emotions and interactions, holding back on laughing and talking while watching the performance. What is more, they did not respond to characters when asked to. Since *Likay* requires audience interaction, this made the performance tedious.



Figure 7: After talk, from left: Hideki Noda, translator, Nat Nuanphang (Mizukane in *Aka Oni* 1998's version), translator, Pradit Prasatthong

The question of the extent to which the arts speak a universal language, and thus whether the Thai language in *Likay Aka Oni* impeded audiences' appreciation of our performances, is pertinent. The main points of feedback given by Japanese audiences, collected from forty questionnaires, which I gave out and collected on my own after each performance finished, concerned their comprehension and appreciation of the play. Around sixty percent said that their understanding depended on the facial expressions, emotions, and interactions of the actors, rather than on spoken dialogue. However, a large proportion also considered familiarity with the original story before seeing the production necessary. They expressed such opinions as:

Facial expressions and gestures help the audience understand the story. Subtitles were very helpful in understanding the story in detail.

There are many expressions in this performance that do not rely on spoken language. I could understand the performance, even though I could not see the subtitles from my seat.

According to Japanese audiences, the most impressive motifs in *Likay Aka Oni* were live music, singing, and acting talent. Surprisingly, the beautiful stylised dresses, together with the fake but splendid diamond earrings, necklaces, and decorative headdresses were regarded as unimportant.

Providentially, two informal talks were given after each show by Japanese theatre practitioners and scholars whose comments were very useful. They opened by noting that some of the Japanese sub-titles were inaccurate. For instance, most of the characters in *Likay Aka Oni* said "*sinwang*," hopeless in Thai. The Japanese translator chose instead the word for "desperate," which, as one of the theatre critics commented, is inappropriate because "hopeless" is more precise than "desperate" in this context. Furthermore, the scholars added that the audience's understanding relied on their beliefs, religions, and experiences. Regarding comprehension, Prasatthong had intended to add to the dialogue Japanese words, articulated in Thai accent, in order to demonstrate the effort made by the characters in *Likay Aka Oni* to communicate with

Japanese audiences and to enhance the play's hilarity. However, this was disallowed by the Japanese project's art director, who did not believe that the use of out-of-tone Japanese language would be necessary to create comedy. In fact, he really thought that Japanese audiences preferred to listen to the entirely beautiful and harmonious Thai language both verse and songs (Prasatthong, Interview 2009b).

Conclusion

The cultural exchange between Thai and Japanese theatre elements can raise further questions about intercultural theatre in terms of East-meets-East cultural exchange. This phenomenon is a continuing process in the wide and complicated crossroad of interculturalism in terms of "addressing the pervasive phenomena of cultural hybridity and cross-cultural exchange" (Henke and Nicholson, 2008, p. 9). In the process of theatre exchange, Prasatthong and Noda used a collaborative approach, adapting, adjusting, and inventing theatrical elements from Japanese's play text performing in Thai *Likay* form, providing an illustration of performing techniques and aesthetic transformation. Knowing and understanding different working cultures, therefore, was crucial in making the smooth process of encounter and exchange of the different traditions of the two cultures (Bharucha, 1993, p. 241 as cited in Daugherty, 2005, p. 66). Performing *Likay Aka Oni* for Japanese audiences whose viewing culture is to some degree dissimilar to Thai *Likay* was another aspect that Thai practitioners should bear in mind when contributing to an East-to-East intercultural and international piece of performance.

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