

## SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

**Discipline: Drama**

**Fall 2008**

**DRAM 292Z: Asian Theatre History**

**Lower Division**

**Faculty: Cheri Vasek**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The Asian theatrical heritage is unique and rich in variety, and its influence on historical and contemporary Euro-centric theatre is significant. This historical survey examines the structure and form of traditional Asian theatre, viewed within the religious, sociological and aesthetic contexts of culture. Theatre, dance, puppetry and mask performances of South, Southeast and East Asia are investigated. India, Indonesia, China, Vietnam and Japan form the core of our examination.

In the Asian theatre tradition, culture, text and performance are wedded into a powerful and evocative whole. A study of the literature, separate from the performance context, compromises the vitality of these extraordinary theatrical forms. Therefore, our exploration in this course will address many elements. We will study the common literary foundations, as well as representative dramatic texts from each of the major regions. We will also explore historical antecedents, visual elements (masks, costumes, scenery), acting style, music, configuration of stage space and the evolution of aesthetic sensibility within each form. Historical background will be traced in order to provide the proper religious, cultural, sociological and aesthetic framework for the study of these traditional theatrical forms. We will look at the great religious and philosophical movements, their migration across Asia, and their influence on theatrical expression.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVE**

This class should serve to introduce the student to the structure and form of traditional Asian theatre, placed within a cultural context.

## **ANTICIPATED STUDENT OUTCOMES**

Develop an understanding and appreciation of Asian Theatre as a unique cultural expression.

Acquire specific knowledge of visual elements, performance styles and literary characteristics of the various dramatic forms studied.  
Demonstrate this acquired knowledge by identifying and describing the characteristics of the various theatrical forms studied.

Observe and be able to discuss the relationships between the forms in various regions.

Observe and be able to discuss the regional variations in theatrical forms that have evolved from shared literary traditions and a shared religious and/or philosophical heritage.

Understand the larger religious context of Asian theatre and dance forms, which transcends geographic regions.

Synthesize information presented in lectures, discussions and video presentations. Demonstrate this synthesis of knowledge through the student's performance in class discussions, reflection papers, quizzes and examinations.

Effectively articulate ideas and observations, as evidenced by performance in class discussions, reflection papers, quizzes and examinations.

## TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Class #	Topic	Video / DVD Shown in Class	Required Reading / Preparation PRIOR to class period	Assignment DUE
1	Asian Theatrical Modes of Expression – A Fusion of Song, Dance, Puppetry, Storytelling, Religious Rite	Theaters of Asia: An Introduction		
2	Derivation and Development - Elite Court Performances, Folk Theatre, Commercial Theatre	Excerpts: Wayang Kulit – the Shadow Puppet Theatre of Java Thang Long Vietnamese Water Puppets The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan (Bunraku)	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Introduction, pp. 1 - 11	
3	Derivation and Development - Elite Court Performances, Folk Theatre, Commercial Theatre	Excerpts: Korean masked folk dance drama (from Great Tales in Asian Art) Topeng Babakan Mask (Chinese masked opera) The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan (Noh)	Reading TBA	
Salvador, Brazil – 5 days – September 7 to 11, 2008				
4	Relationship of Religion and Performance - Aspects of Asian Culture Informed by and Expressed through Traditional Theatre Forms. Trance and shamanistic ritual	Video excerpts: The Bali Dances: A Veil Between Worlds	Reading TBA	

5	Performer Training in Asian Theatre	Video excerpts: Living Treasures of Japan The Tenth Dancer (Cambodia) Bunraku: Masters of Japanese Puppet Art	Reading TBA	
No class –				
6	India - overview - cultural context and literary traditions - The Mahabharata & the Ramayana	Video excerpt: “TheRamayana” (from Great Tales in Asian Art)	India Readings 1, 2 & 3 on the web at: <a href="http://www.class.uidaho.edu/asiantheatre/readings.htm">http://www.class.uidaho.edu/asiantheatre/readings.htm</a>	
Walvis Bay, Namibia – 5 days – September 19 to 23, 2008				
7	India – Sanskrit Theatre - characteristics	Video excerpts: The Little Clay Cart	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, India (Sanskrit Theatre), pp. 64 - 71	
Cape Town, South Africa – 7 days – September 26 to October 2, 2008				
8	Classical Dance Drama Forms of India	Video excerpts: Kerala Kalamandalam in Performance: Masters of Kathakali at the University of Idaho (4-13-05) Bharatanatyam	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, India (Regional Development) / Kathakali, pp. 72 – 73; 92 - 93	
9	Folk Dance Drama Forms of India Solo and Devotional Dance Traditions of India	Video excerpts: Seaikella Chhau, the Masked Dance of India Nangiarkoothu (Dance of Kerala) Kutiyattam Mohiniyattam	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, India (Genres) Kutiyattam, pp. 97-99	Reflection paper Africa 1 – 3 pgs.
10	Performer Training	Kalekshetra: Devotion to Dance		
No class – possible test on day 11?				

11	Midterm Exam			
12	Preparation for India experience			
Chennai, India – 5 days – October 14 to 18, 2008				
Field trip experience: Dance performance TBA (Bharatanatyam? Odissi?) Shree Bharatalaya school of dance, Chennai (Founder/Director, Professor Sudharani Raghupathy)				
13	Review / reflection of India experience - Indian influences in Southeast Asia. Mahabharata, Ramayana, Buddhism.			
14A	Malaysia – cultural context, dance / drama, puppetry forms		The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Malaysia, pp. 193 - 200	Reflection paper India, 1 – 3 pgs.
Penang, Malaysia – 5 days – October 22 to 26, 2008				
Field trip experience: Dance drama Shadow puppetry				
14B	Indonesia - cultural context, dance / drama, puppetry forms	Excerpts: Wayang Kulit – the Shadow Puppet Theatre of Java; Bali, Masterpiece of the Gods	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Indonesia, pp. 118 - 141	
15	Vietnam – cultural context, folk and court forms		The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Vietnam, pp. 245 - 250	
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam – 5 days - October 30 to November 4, 2008				
Field trip experience: Vietnamese water puppets				

16	China – cultural context, opera and puppetry forms	Performing Arts of China: The Opera; The Worlds of Mei Lenfang	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, China, pp. 26 - 59	Reflection paper Malaysia OR Vietnam, 1 – 3 pgs.
Hong Kong to Shanghai – 5 days – November 10 to 15, 2008				
Field trip experience: Chinese opera Chinese shadow puppets Chinese finger puppets				
17	Japan – cultural context	Excerpts: Living Treasures of Japan	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Japan, pp. 142 - 144	
Kobe to Yokohama, Japan – 5 days – November 14 to 18, 2008				
Field trip experience: Bunraku Kabuki Noh / Kyogen Contact / interpreter: Masako Hojo				
18	Japan – early indigenous forms & foreign influences		The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Japan, pp. 143 - 144	
19	Japan – Noh / Zen Buddhism	This is Kyogen; Noh Izutsu (The Wooden Water Well)	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Japan, pp. 145-147 & 176 - 178	
20	Japan – Kabuki	Excerpts: The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura: Yoshitsune & The 1000 Cherry Trees; Date No Juyaku: Ten Roles Of The Date Clan	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Japan, pp. 147 – 150 & 173-176	

21	Japan - Bunraku	Excerpts: Bunraku: Masters of Japanese Puppet Art The Lover's Exile (Bunraku)	The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Japan, pp. 147 – 150 & 171 - 173	
Honolulu, Hawaii – one day – November 27, 2008				
22	20 <sup>th</sup> century and contemporary theatre artists influenced by Asian forms		Reading TBA	Reflection paper China OR Japan, 1 – 3 pgs.
23	Review / reflection			
Final Exam				

## FIELD COMPONENT

Each student is required to complete THREE practica (either Faculty Directed or Independent). At least TWO of these should be faculty-directed field trips led by me (see list below). You are required to participate in one of the FDPs under my direction in Chennai, Penang, Ho Chi Minh City or Kobe (and are encouraged to choose two from among this set), since they are central to the material covered in this class. The third practica can be an Independent Practicum developed as part of a regularly offered SAS trip, or it may stand alone. If an Independent Practicum is selected, then the student must meet with the instructor prior to arriving in the port-of-call to discuss his or her approach and objectives.

### Reflection paper

After each practicum experience, the student is required to submit a reflection paper of 2 – 3 pages in length. Reflection papers may address one or more of these questions:

How do the visual components (costumes, scenery, props, makeup, masks) of this theatre/dance form help to convey story, cultural context and religious beliefs?

How is movement used in this theatre/dance form? How is the performer's physical training reflected in the performance? How does the manner in which the performer inhabits his/her body compare to what you are familiar with in American/European performance traditions? (Discuss posture, stance, dexterity, movement symbols, pacing, etc.)

Consider character within the story being told. Can you identify recognizable character types? Compare/contrast with the American/European performance traditions with which you are familiar. What aspects of character expression do you find to be universal (across cultures)?

#### SUGGESTED PRACTICA:

INDIA: Theru Koothu Theatre Performance (FDP)  
MALAYSIA: Mak Yong Performance (FDP)  
VIET NAM: Water Puppet Performance (FDP)  
HONG KONG: Heritage Museum & Black Box Theater (IND)  
JAPAN: Bunraku Theater (FDP); Kabuki Theatre (IND)

#### METHODS OF EVALUATION

Assessment of the student's growth relative to the course objectives will utilize the following tools: exams, quizzes, class discussion. Quiz structures vary, to address different learning modes, and will include:

Definition of key terminology

Identification of physical objects and performance sequences with short answer essays

#### REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

##### The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre

James R. Brandon, Editor

Cambridge University Press

ISBN: 0-521-58822-7

Paperback

Cost new: \$ 34.99 / Used: \$ 14.99

Useful for research – NOT required!

##### *Reserve Texts / Theatre Forms:*

Karen Brazell, Traditional Japanese Theater

Ronald Cavaye, Paul Griffith & Akihiko Senda, A Guide to the Japanese Stage

Natthapatra Chandavij and Promporn Pramualratana, Thai Puppets & Khon Masks

Jukka O. Miettinen, Classical Dance and Theatre in South-East Asia

Benito Ortolani, The Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism

Farley P. Richmond, Darius L. Swann and Phillip B. Zarrilli, Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance

Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete, Dance and Drama in Bali

Leela Venkataraman and Avinash Pasricha, Indian Classical Dance: Tradition in Transition

Phillip B. Zarrilli, Kathakali Dance-Drama, Where Gods and Demons Come to Play

*Reserve Texts / Playscripts:*

James R. Brandon, On Thrones of Gold

Donald Keene, Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu

Girish Karnad, Three Plays: Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana, Tughlaq

A. C. Scott, The Classical Theatre of China

Arvind Sharma & A. L. Basham, The Little Clay Cart

Rabindranath Tagore, Three Plays

Arthur Waley, The No Plays of Japan, An Anthology