

Asian Performing Arts Festival

Participant Interview #02

Shintaro Mori / Director

As a theater director, Shintaro Mori has worked with many translations of classical western plays, such as the works of Ibsen, Brecht and Shakespeare, as well as modern western plays. While affirming that he “had fun communicating with the Asian members,” and that he is “glad he participated from the first meeting,” he also seems to have felt the difficulties of facing the Asian theater.

“In the case of the Japanese translations of the European works, the cultural distance between Japan and Europe is so large that it allows us to jump over the cultural barrier. I do not think that the Japanese go through the same pain as the British do when presenting a work by Chekhov. For example, by simply addressing a character by his name such as 'Tom,' we can create an estrangement effect. However, for the westerners, since the works are at the extension of the realism, they are required to make double or even triple effort.

For the Japanese, it is more difficult to work with Asian plays, such as Korean works. We cannot simply lie because we are so close to the Korean culture, but we cannot pull the Korean culture completely to our side, either. We are not able to jump over the cultural differences because we are too close to each other.”

This year's theme given to the directors from different countries was: “Rice and Rice Plants: On the Similarities and the Differences of Food.” Nguyen Bao Tram, Actress at the Thanglong Water Puppet Theatre from Hanoi, participated in Mori's team.

“Through our team collaboration, and through other teams' works, I was impressed by the speed of globalization and felt that we all grew up watching the same things. We could find endless similarities but it was actually difficult to find differences.

In my play, I used the *che*, a rice culture which does not exist in Japan. The food culture is not exempt from globalization either, but I thought that the true hometown cooking is something that one cannot forget.

I also used Uniqlo clothes in the play, since Tram loves the brand; she wore a Uniqlo jacket over the *ao dai*. Different cultures clashed and merged at our production site.”

The water puppet theater that Nguyen performs is a traditional theater born in the rural areas of Vietnam. Mori's team, on the other hand, chose a classical Noh repertoire of *Izutsu* as a motif.

“When I explained about Noh to Tram, I could explain the basics but could not respond to her specific questions. It gave me an opportunity to look back on my own cultural roots. In the original Noh play, the woman's happiness, arising from her reminiscence of the past, is expressed alongside her sorrow. I asked Tram if there are repertoires of traditional dance which express such mixed sentiments, but she told me that she did not know of any. Her response made me think why such a sense of value exists in Japan.

For such things that the Japanese can “kind of” understand without an explanation, he was obliged to explain clearly. Mori says that this helped him clear his mind. He now shows great interest in going overseas in the future to create works.

“I believe that I was given an ideal working condition this time. It took place in Japan, and I was surrounded by the Japanese. I can only imagine the difficulties the other teams encountered. At the same time, I wonder if I was able to gain even more if I was placed in the same situation as them. When you have to explain your vision as a director in a foreign country, one needs to face its roots and to think. Perhaps one learns for the first time what communication really is, when one creates works in a foreign country.”