

Asian Performing Arts Festival
Participant Interview #06

Chikako SUZUKI / (LEE Sung Gu's team (Korea) / Actress)

SUZUKI participated as an actress in the team led by LEE Sung Gu, a Korean theater director. As a member of Seinendan Theater Company, she has already had many experiences in the field of international collaboration in the past.

Her first serious experience with international collaboration was in 2008, when she participated in an artist-in-residence program in Kyoto which lasted for ten days, along with a French theater director and another Japanese artist. They developed a full-scale work from drama reading, and presented it in Tokyo, Kyoto and Avignon in 2009 and 2012.

“There were a lot of difficulties, but at the same time, it was a profoundly inspiring experience. Since then, I have always strongly wanted to be involved in international collaboration again.”

As an actress, she has participated in Seinendan's Southeast Asian tour which included countries such as China, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Even though the languages were completely different, she felt familiarity with Southeast Asian food and the physiques that are similar to Japanese.

However, during the show, she was surprised by the laughter arising from the audience during a scene which is not supposed to be “funny.”

“Apparently, the fact that a Japanese came out on stage itself was funny. I realized then, that even though I used to think that I am close to them as an Asian myself, in fact, we are very far. I wanted to deepen the understanding of this experience through participating in the Festival.”

The Workshop allowed for a “fairly dense communication.” Based on the motif of the traditional Korean *chesa* rites and the setting of “a Son and his deceased Mother” that Mr. LEE had set, everyone engaged in earnest discussions concerning what kind of scenes or episodes are possible, and the cultural differences in the images of death.

The team consisted of a Korean director and Japanese actors. The Assistant Director took notes of the words that were improvised by the actors on stage to write the dialogues. However, the dialogues were steadily trimmed from the next day on. The actors were instructed to “think that they had already heard the words spoken before and after,” and to “condense the line into one word” in order to make the dialogues as concise as possible.

“My role was the Mother, and I practiced saying 'I love you.' to the Son in Korean. When I was finally able to say it correctly, that line was cut. I was instructed to 'smile at the Son with the same emotion.' In other words, even if the words were cut from the scene, the thoughts and the feelings were still there. I felt that I was going through a 'good process.'”

SUZUKI made concrete discoveries concerning the physical movements as part of acting. Where it would not be uncommon in Japanese theater for an actor to stand still or to act in silence, Mr. LEE directed the actors to “move.”

“I used to think that even if I remain immobile, my inner feelings are constantly moving, and that there is a meaning to stopping the movements purposefully at certain moments, but the director repeatedly told us to 'give more output.'

Perhaps this is the reason why I always felt that the Korean theater is extremely dynamic and energetic. The fact that we could have such in-depth conversation over a short period was a valuable experience.”

Even though the team continued to work on and refine the piece the last day of the production, it was still “unfinished” on the first day of the performance. However, SUZUKI says that they “could believe in the rich accumulation that resulted from the rehearsals,” and that they “were able to share the best experience with the audience on the first day of the performance.” Their performance was even better on the second day, and one of the members of the other teams said that he “could not stop crying,” and that he was “deeply moved by a work that is only 10 minutes long.” When she worked with the French theater director in the past, SUZUKI “focused on what [she] could receive from the other side.” As she recalled working with the director this time, she says that she maintained the attitude of “what [she] could contribute.”

“It is certainly better if I am able to explain the accumulation of things inside me that makes who I am as an actress, as well as being able to explain what kind of actress I am. I discovered that the relationship (with the director through an international collaboration) is a two-way relationship, and not one-way.”