

The Small Theater, Soft Power: The Means to Build an Ideal Society

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Introduction

During my one year in Tokyo, I did not only gain a deep-dimensioned understanding of the small theater situation in this city, but also learned its ways and means, as well as the artist's own. These experiences helped me enlarge my new perspective, see many possibilities, strengthen my friendship with good old friends and build new ones, and get significant inspiration, all of which will definitely and markedly benefit the next step of the small theater in Bangkok.

Project activities and their outcomes

In order to help me understand this theater culture more, I got involved in many activities pertaining to developing and ensuring the survival of the small theater in the city of Tokyo. I took part in temple festivals and shrine worshipping ceremonies, and experienced many of such traditional theaters as the Kabuki theater, Bunraku puppetry, Taichu Enki theater, and Noh theater. I also visited museums of art, history, economics, society, and politics. Moreover, I participated in several workshops on theater skills, rehearsals, and post-productions in many different studios. I also observed discussions at first performance celebrations, where performers exchanged opinions and views. I visited bars and places where artists hang out, as well as flea markets and second-hand markets, from where most props used in the shows were bought.

Actually, there are many more aspects to share, but in this paper, I will be focusing directly on just the theater spaces, with their activities as the main emphasis.

Data collection

I went to see, observe, and interview many people involved in different theaters around Tokyo and other cities, where there were 58 venues altogether:

- 8 Government and Public Theaters:
 - : New National Theater, Hatsudai
 - : Tram Theater /Setagaya Public Theater, Sangenjaya
 - : Za Kohenji Public Theater, Koenji
 - : Tokyo Metropolitans Arts Space, Ikebukuro
 - : Suitengu-pit, Suitengu Mae
 - : Kanagawa Theater, Kanakawa
 - : Shizuoka Performing Art Centre SPAC, Shizuoka
 - : Neko Theater, Matsuyama

31 Small Theaters

- Run by artists
 - : Store House, Ueno
(belongs to Store House Company)
 - : Store House, Ekoda
(belongs to Store House Company)
 - : Umegaoka box, Umegaoka
(belongs to Yoji Sakate)
 - : Agora Theater, Komaba Todaimae
(belongs to Oriza Hirata)
 - : Actrore Theater, Nagano
(belongs to Wada Yoshio)
 - : Space Waseda, Waseda
(belongs to Ryosanji Company)
 - : Proto Theater, Takadanobaba
(belongs to DA-M Theater Company)
 - : D-Soko Theater, Nippori
(belongs to OM-2 Company)
 - : Space Canvas, Ochanomizu
(belongs to Gengidan Kaitaisha Company)
 - : Iwato Theater, Kagurazaka
(belongs to Black Tent Company)
 - : Gendaiza Theater, Higashi-Koganei
 - : Terpisichore Theater, Nagano

- Runs by private organization
 - : Pocket Square, Nakano
 - : Bon Bon Theater, Nakano
 - : Hope Theater, Nakano
 - : Momo Theater Nakano
 - : Akashi studio in Koenji,

: Geki Liberty Theater, Shimo Kitazawa
 : Off Off Theater, Shimo Kitazawa
 : Ekimae Gekijo, Shimo Kitazawa
 : Gekisyo Gekijo, Shimo Kitazawa
 : Suzunari Theater, Shimo Kitazawa
 : 711 Theater, Shimo Kitazawa
 : Rakuen Theater, Shimo Kitazawa
 : Honda Theater, Shimo Kitazawa
 : Zatsuyu Theater, Shinjuku Sanchome
 : Space Edge, Shibuya
 : Oji Theater, Oji Ekimae
 : Theater Green, Ikebukuro
 : RAFT studio, Higashi Nakano,
 : STspot, Yokohama

10 Other Spaces

: Mitara Hoshino Hall, Mitaka
 : Himawari Theater, Ebisu
 : Wiz Hall, Nogata
 : Eggman Theater Tokyo, Iwamotocho
 : Nissay Theater, Hibiya
 : Hokutopia Theater, Oji Ekimae
 : Theater X, Ryogoku
 : Morishita Studio, Morishita
 : Mirai Kan Centre, West Ikebukuro
 : Dance Studio, Setagaya ward, Yogyo

2 Theaters in Universities

:Tama Art University, Kaminage
 :Nihon University College of Art, Ekoda campus

7 Organizations

: The Japan Director Association
 : NNTT Drama Studio
 : Theater Museum, Waseda University
 : The Japan Foundation
 : Saison Foundation
 : Tokyo Performing Arts Meeting
 : Japan Performing Arts Producer Network

Collaborative theater production

I did a collaboration with DA-M Company at Proto Theater. A conceptual style of theater, “Unbearable Dream”, featuring the collaborations of artists from Japan, India, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Afghanistan and Thailand, was performed in the Asia Meets Asia Festival 2012 under the direction of Hiroshi Ohashi.

Workshop and lecture

-For Mirai Kan Cultural Centre
 : “Let the Body Talk”, a creative body movement and writing workshop
 : “Thai Classical Theaters”, a lecture and demonstration
 : “Thai Sounds and Songs”, a lecture and demonstration

 -For the Japan Directors Association
 : “Thai Likay Theater Techniques”, skills training workshops
 : “Journey of Modern Theater in Thailand”, a lecture
 : “Pradit and His Theater Works”, a lecture
 : “Japanese Modern Theater through My Eyes”, a lecture

Significant point of new knowledge

The role of the small theaters in Tokyo

Apart from being the so-called “Got Talent Space” of the local artists, these small theaters are where people gather around and see a variety of plays at an affordable price. The small theaters indicate how stressful or relaxed the metropolitan lifestyle is. Besides these mentioned roles, small theaters are also being appreciated for the following reasons:

The small theater - It is a space for the infinite variety of uniqueness where artists can express their own selves and is a get-together place for people who share the same artistic taste. Modern theater started to play an important role in Japanese society ever since the era of political reform and has sustained this role through the years, insofar as people of any age and status are concerned. Despite the Japanese people’s prosperous experience and the popularity of mainstream theater nowadays, the alternative theater and its specific audiences are still alive, continuing to be a home for the uniqueness of the theater itself, the artists, and the audiences. This is the reason why Tokyo is so attractive and charmingly full of cultural diversity.

The small theater - It is a space of social communication where people sit closely, laughing, crying, absorbing,

empathizing, realizing, and inspiring each other. This leads to a sense of community where one can learn how to assimilate and enhance communication skills, perception, and understanding, in both individual and social dimensions.

The small theater – It is a space for strengthening democratic development. After a play ends, a familiar sight every time is that of the director and the actors chatting with the audiences, most of whom are still around to cheer and exchange opinions. A post-show talk and discussion of the play are sometimes arranged by some venues. These cozy relaxing activities in the small theater obviously initiate a proper public discussion and respect for other people's points of view, which could be diverse. This is unquestionably a significant pathway to democratic creation.

With its above-mentioned roles, the small theater is still flourishing in metropolitan societies like Tokyo. However, the survival of the artists who dedicate themselves earnestly to this kind of small-income art is threatened. Therefore, there must be other factors that should ensure the upkeep of minor theaters for as long as possible.

The demand for small theater spaces

The alternative theater situation is very active in Tokyo. New groups come and go. There are roughly around 3,500 groups in Japan today. So, there is a high demand for small theater spaces.

There are about 30 of them in Tokyo, some of them owned by government; private organizations, foundations, and artists own the rest. They are all in great demand. Many are open all year round with no proper programming, while some try to organize their own curated programs with the purpose of upholding the concept of their space; sometimes, they do allow the artist to use the space while exercising creative freedom.

Financial management of small theater spaces

Profit:

1. Renting out the space brings in good income, since there is always high demand for small theaters.

2. Applying for grants from government or private organizations when arranging such activities as theater productions, workshops on theater developments, seminars on theater, the publishing (publication) of play scripts and theater manuals. Grants may be (?) the main source of funding for many theater spaces.
3. Ticket sales, even though this is not the main source of income but is an important source nonetheless.
4. Annual support from theater membership and such items as yearly packaged tickets that cover payment for watching every show in the theater.
5. Donations for future developments.

Costs

1. Rental for the space. Rates vary depending on the size and location of the space. This is the main expense item for which management teams or artists must be responsible. They can find (generate) some support from private cultural organizations, but not from government, which does not have any policies (funding? Budget) for matters such as this.
2. The small theaters are normally run by a small staff whose main responsibility is to take care of the space, in general. More specialized undertakings that have to do with lighting, sound, and public relations are usually put in the hands of invited experts. Most of the time, the theater space lets the artists handle their own management requirements.
3. High tax rates for the legal venues. This burden is so heavy for the artists that they have to constantly keep calling for tax discounts from the government.

The effect of government support

Funding support from the government stimulates competition between small theater venues to create more projects, so that they might have a chance to receive such grants. A positive outcome of this race is the emergence of many ideas and activities. But, at the same time, there is also a possible negative impact that may arise from a conflict of ideas

among the spaces and artists. This sometimes limits the possibilities of their project's contents.

Small theater networking

Even if there is no official networking across theater venues or between theater venues and theater artists for that matter, they instinctively help out each other by way of distributing each other's brochures, attending each other's performances and festivals hosted by another group. These kinds of indirect support constitute another important factor for maintaining a strong theater society.

Conflict and innovation

There is a conflict between traditional theater artists who favor classic literature and new age artists, especially those in the small theater scenes, who are more interested in finding new techniques for telling stories and try to avoid classic arts. This has, however, given way to new possibilities in Japanese contemporary theater and to the birth of many new age directors of different styles. But it has also caused a decrease in language skills development concerns and proper standard pronunciations among new wave actors. Still, on a positive light, it has also fostered new artistic styles that might bloom into something outstanding in the future. But, destructively as mentioned, the art of the language might be forgotten and could decline sooner than expected.

Modern theater and Japan's development

We have already recognized that theater is a product of social movement, while the manner by which theater spaces emerge and how they are sustained are activated by the demand of audiences in the area. Therefore, the study of theater and its existence must focus on these kinds of social features. Following are some conclusions from my observation of theater arts in Tokyo.

1. Japan's modern and democratic society

This is the most important factor behind theater development and its existence. Over time and across conflicts, Japanese society has been reforming

itself, moderately and progressively, from its long-standing monarchical regime to democracy. Until now, with democratic notions already settled and deep-rooted, the growth of democratic awareness, the acceptance of differences, and respect for community rules, alongside the constitution, continues. This democracy-based society, as a result, brings about awareness of the equality of all eligible citizens. This quality of life, in terms of sensibility, discipline and morality, is the fundamental basis that motivates the new pathway for theater art's issues. Accordingly, the issues may vary further than such primary subjects as ancient beliefs or noble-class praising. Doubtlessly, some Japanese may be displeased with the occurrence but, in spite of this, they realize well enough how necessary theater art is to their lives. This acceptance, as a matter of fact, is another essential dynamic for modern theater's development factors.

Looking back, in Thai society, political reform is just a form, since most people still lack understanding of democratic schemes. They perceive the definition of democracy to simply be "an election", which would eventually bring them a god-like hero who could rescue them from poverty. They are incapable of constructing a path to democratic structure by themselves, so, in point of fact, the modern theater arts in Thailand is so frail.

Thus, the artist's mission is to create a piece of work which could constantly initiate the democratic way of thinking, especially for the next generations. Once democratic perception has been seeded sustainably, there will be hope for modern theater arts to grow in Thailand, as it is growing in other countries.

2. The New National Theater

The New National Theater is considered a symbolic image of theater art's existence and the acceptance that the art of contemporary theater is as equally important as the other traditional arts in Japan. The symbolic image is like an inner strength that makes the Japanese feel recognized and properly accepted in society.

Established by the Japanese government, the New National Theater is a theater complex in the center of Tokyo. Consisting of an opera house that can seat 1,800, a play house that seats 1,000 and a small hall that can accommodate 350 to 500 seats, it is meant especially for contemporary performing arts. The venue has been welcoming both local and international performances, and even theater performances for children. Initially, this theater complex was a project presented to the government by a group of artists in 1966. It was opened to the public in 1997, after 31 years of struggle. Looking back again to Thailand, if we actively make a real effort from today onward, we might just have our own national theater within the next 30 years.

3. NNTT Drama Studio

This place is proof of the government's thoughtful vision of producing more new-fangled artists, for them to be among the next-generation powers, apart from those from the fields of technology and athletics.

NNTT Drama Studio, which is operated by non-profit organizations and supported by the government, has been producing such qualified artists for the theater world since 1995. Kuriyama Tamiya, the former Artistic Director of New National Theater, Tokyo, who is presently director of Drama Studio, believes that Japanese modern theater is obviously categorized according to its style, its origin, and the artist's stage of development. During the period 1961-1979, the small theater's movement became the crucial clue to the artist's recognition and the foundation of a much stronger base for theater development policy. There were several new theater venues being founded in many major cities. Support grants, artist's welfare initiatives, and funding for artists-in-residence were also plentiful.

4. The Theater Museum, Waseda University

The Theater Museum, Waseda University was established in October 1928 with the support of people from various sections of society, on the occasion of the 70th Birthday of Dr. Tsubouchi Shoyo, a famous writer known for his work in

theater and his translation of the collected works of Shakespeare into Japanese. The museum has been gathering a large collection of literary works, prints, and other objects related to drama and theater from all over the world, for the purpose of fostering a comparative study of world theater. Apart from collecting and displaying the history of theater arts, the theater museum, as its main responsibility, also lets the visitors see the overview of the theater route from time to time. In so doing, it can link the past to the present, and perceive how this influences the future.

It can be said that the theater museum is a place of learning and inspiration. It is a delightful achievement for theater artists and all art followers. History can prove how much influence theater has had on Japanese society and how the whole nation treasures it. Doubtlessly, it is an art form that should always be nurtured and sustained.

5. Public theater

Public theater is a space run by the government and private organizations. It serves as a public space for artistic recreation for the mind and soul. It is as equally important as other necessary utilities like roads, schools, and hospitals.

Actually, public theater has a variety of meanings in Japan. In this paper, I will narrow it down to "a public space, which is run by the government and non-profit private organizations and granted by the government". Below are some examples of public theaters that I visited in Tokyo.

Setagaya Public Theater: This is the most familiar space for me and some Thai theater artists, since we had chances to participate in some theater activities, for example the play *Red Demon* in 1997 and 1999, the project *Lohan's Journey* from 2002 to 2007, the play *Mobile* in 2006. It is the most successful venue with a pile of many eligible play productions. It is also recognized for its program-curating and its packed audiences in almost every show.

Tokyo Metropolitan Arts Space (TMAS): This is another familiar space for me since my first

performance in the project *Cry of Asia II* in 1995 took place here. A recent collaboration saw Mr. Noda Hideki become the artistic director. He offered his play's scripts for Bangkok's theater network to make adaptations using the Thai context. Adaptations included *The Girl from Soil* directed by Nikorn Saetang and the Likay Theater's version of *Red Demon* directed by Pradit Prasartthong, both of which were performed during the Mekong Project, 2009. Tokyo Metropolitan Arts Space was established and granted by the government of Tokyo. It is run by a non-profit private organization. This space is what we take as an aspiring model for our Bangkok arts and culture center.

Za Koenji Public Theater: Founded with the cooperation of local artists, writers, and the government in Uginami, it opened in 2008. The space was formed by many various sections of society. This group effort inspires public theaters about to emerge all over Japan so much.

6. Small theaters founded and run by artists.

Shimo Kitazawa : A community of small theaters

Same as other districts, Shimo Kitazawa was a decadent area following the growth of politics, the economic crisis, and a decade-long war.

Mr. Honda Kazuo, a stage play actor, used to conduct illegal business in this area but finally gave it up after his own daughter asked "Father, what do you do as a profession?" For his daughter's sake, he changed his career path from such illegal stuffs to that of a full-time actor and founded his own self-funding small theaters: Honda Theater, Off Off Theater, Ekimae Theater, Genki Syo Theater, Rankuen Theater, Suzunari Theater, and 711 theater. Shortly after, Shimo Kitazawa became a theater district, where stage theater artists, directors, actors, and critics loved gathering around. It is usually considered one of Tokyo's most famous areas for small theaters and as a theater artist's community. Nowadays, Mr. Honda has turned out to be one of the most remarkable persons in theater society, having successfully transformed the area of Shimo Kitazawa into a lively center of alternative theaters.

Proto Theater: Small but lively

A tiny little theater in the area of Takadanobaba is another familiar venue, where I performed during the Asia meets Asia Festival 2000. In it, as well, I collaborated with international artists for the Asia meets Asia Festival 2012.

Mr. Hiroshi Ohashi is a director and the founder of DA-M Theater. He opened a 30 to 50-seat playhouse in 1983, for his own group's experimental works and those of other theater groups. He intended not to use his theater group's name, but PORTO Theater instead, so that the other groups could come utilize the space. He preferred this kind of small theater to government-funded spaces because it was devoid of any conditions and restrictions, thereby making it possible for artists to create their works at liberty.

Despite its small size, it is not easy to run this kind of theater. In the past 30 years, Mr. Ohashi gained major income from government funding and from some business sectors. Using these funds, he hosted such projects with international artists as the festival "Asia meets Asia". Another source of income, apart from that derived from exchanging and collaborating with other artists, is space rental. The wages of the person who takes care of the space are also derived from the above-mentioned budget.

Apart from managing this theater, Mr. Ohashi does take part in many other activities, not spending all his time and energy on the space. His interesting vision on space management is not to treat space as a burden, but with ease, in the belief that doing so will ensure its long-lasting existence.

D-Soko Theater: For so long as the theater groups constantly produce theater works, this space might well exist.

Mr. Shigeo Makabe, the artistic director of D-Soko Theater and the director of the OM2 Theater Group, revealed that he started renting a goods-storage in Higashi-Nippori and adapted it into a theater space open to the public in 2008. He has had 25 long years of taking care of many theater spaces.

The theater has two full-time personnel taking care of it. The space is being promoted through public relations efforts via websites and emails. Apart from such, the rest of the tasks are the theater group's responsibility. In addition to rental, the space generates income from a small coffee shop and government grants.

All over Japan, there are approximately 3,500 professional and amateur theater groups, but only 30 small theaters are available in Tokyo. Therefore, the spaces are always in high demand. However, the space owner must struggle with the payment of taxes, which Mr. Shigeo finds to be so high that he thinks all owners should coalesce and call for a reduction.

He is certain that the small theaters are always necessary for new generation practitioners. Although, there are a number of not too well-trained theater groups, he believes that one day, for as long as they keep on doing theater work, they will become more and more well-polished.

Space WASEDA: Theater is a vivid classroom.

Walking from the subway station along Waseda Dori Street and after just a short turn, one sees a small theater venue in an underground location, beneath a Chinese restaurant. This is Space Waseda, run by Mr. Show Ryuzanji of the Ryuzanji Theater Group. It was opened in 1997 with a theater space that could seat 30.

This theater group is famous and has quite a few regular fans. It has the reputation of being a mobile theater, giving performances in many local areas and abroad. A prominent distinction of this group is the location of its performance space, which is not necessarily a proper theater but could be a temple, a park, or a museum, among others. However, the group still needs that tiny immobile space, to be able to run the rehearsals and, sometimes, to perform in. Mr. Show does agree with this, acknowledging that having its own space would help the audiences know where to keep in touch with the group.

The group's major income comes from its 30 core members, from ticket sales when it performs at

the space, from international shows, and also from government grants.

This theater venue is not far from Waseda University, one of the most prestigious universities in Japan, which also offers degrees in theater. There is, in spite of this, a very rare connection between these two places.

Most departments of theater in Tokyo universities usually provide a full-facility theater so that the students do not need to make a connection with any other public theaters. Such a set-up leads to the student's lack of a real experience and relationship with the outside world, from which they could learn something new apart from what they learn from books. They could also have adjusted themselves to real situations, gained inspiration to create works and, most importantly, enjoyed the opportunity to work with professional artists. Had the set-up in universities been different.

Gendaiza Theater: Theater is a hangout place with friends.

Gendaiza Theater is located not far from the Higashi-Koganei subway station. Like many theaters in Tokyo, it hides itself in the underground zone, where the 100-seat space has been run by Gendaiza Theater Groups for more than 40 years.

The first view I had of it revealed a hundred elderly people sitting closely together in a small guest room, waiting for the show. The scene reminded me of a New Year sensation, where friends would gather around and make Moji rice cake together.

When the usher escorted the audiences to the seats inside, the theater took me completely by surprise. The space was designed in an ancient style with a painted canvas as backdrop, similar to the Likay and Khon sets in our national theater in Bangkok. The props were realistic, and could include even a house and a tree.

Takahiro Sakai, a former member of this theater group, took me on a backstage tour after the show. He said that this theater group has been renowned among its regular fans for 40 years. Interestingly, apart from rental as major income, the group has

another source of income: the membership fees of 1,000 individuals from all over the country. This long relationship between the theater group and the audience has apparently been facilitated by good management, diligent attention, and sincerity.

Suddenly, I felt that this friendship and the long affiliation between artists and audiences are the main reasons why people still keep on watching stage plays, despite the easy availability of television and online movies. The prevailing relationship among these people keeps one from feeling alone in this cruel world.

Iwato Theater: As long as we keep on dreaming, we can create an endless legend.

This 100-seat playhouse in Kakurasaka is run by the Black Tent Theater Group, a long-standing theater group that once enjoyed considerable influence on Japan's social movement. The place that they have been renting since 2005 is now partially ruined. It will be fully renovated in 2012.

Mr. Hiroyuki Muneshige, the group's manager, said that the space has very high monthly maintenance costs. Besides the rental expenses and taxes, the theater group also pays wages to two personnel. The major income is derived from shows, membership, such theater activities as acting workshops and from sub-rentals. Thus, the rental is divided into two periods—four months for the group and another eight months that the latter is paid by other groups. The total income can reasonably cope with the expenses, so that the space is still ongoing, neither too contemptible nor too well-off.

The Black Tent Theater Group refuses to seek government grants, since it feels worn-out by the procedures involved and would rather avoid the limits to creative freedom. Whenever a play is showing, the space helps contribute to the production through public relations efforts via emails, leaflets (this country really overuses those leaflet brochures), newspapers, magazines, and direct sales promotion efforts. For example, tickets can be directly purchased from the actors at a discount.

It is necessary for theater people to make as many friends as possible, for the sake of ticket sales, and to have a good relationship with bistros and coffee shops.

Black Tent has a long-standing history of creating plays on social topics. Since 1968, it has been using a black mobile tent in which to perform its various works all over Japan. It has continually pursued its existence amidst a vague dream, in accordance with the changing society and times. Currently, the younger generation of the group prefers international tours, while the old favors mounting its social topic plays in a small theater, since the latter group believes that this is the core reason why people gather in this place.

Before the conflict between the old and the new generations grew more serious, the group decided to discontinue the space for a while. The temporary closing down of Iwato in 2012 offered a good chance to reorient everyone on their original self once again.

No matter what kind of performances they prefer, whether it be an outdated topic play or a lively international level one, with understanding obtaining from self-realization, the new age of the group will come to life at another time. As long as the members keep on dreaming, they can unquestionably create an endless legend.

Store House: Networking as another way to survive.

Another long-standing small theater, this was founded by Mr. Shingo Kimura. He once opened a studio in Nerma-ku in 1984 and named it after his theater group, Shichitensha. Ten years later, he started the Store House theater studio in Ekoda, but it was closed down in 2009 because of the inadequate fire escape. The space was instead used as a rehearsal room. The STORE House theater space was once again opened in June 2011, in the underground portion of a building in Ueno. Its major income comes from space rentals from the theaters in Ueno and Ekoda, and from the theater as institution. Apart from these, it receives government grants for some theater activities.

What has made Mr. Kimura a longstanding theater person is, partially, his having continual work, ranging from directing his physical-based play, to doing performances in many countries, giving acting classes, and holding international festivals. All these activities connect him with people and yield beneficial results.

The most serious difficulty in running theater space is the high tax rate, he confessed. Mr. Kimura suggests that space owners should form a group and call for a tax reduction for non-profit theaters. But this is not expected to happen because of the absence of an official connection among the 30 theater spaces. There is, in reality, only a personal level of relationship between them.

7. Small theaters founded and run by government or private organizations.

Theater Green, a temple theater: Since theater arts could bring about a virtuous society.

Not far from east of the Ikebukuro subway station is a small path called Theater Green Road. It is considered a theater complex, comprising three small studios in one place. This has influenced the development of the Toshima-ku area a lot. There are two extremely different groups of residents living in this area: the Tokyo upper-class patricians and the immigrants from all walks of life, including Thai people. Theater Green, founded by monastic monks, has been existing in Ikebukuro for more than 40 years.

After the Second World War, Ikebukuro fell into decadence with homeless people and criminals abounding. Yasunari Asahina, a monk from Sengyoji temple east of Ikebukuro, initiated art activities in the nearby community, in the belief that art was capable of purifying people's minds and healing the area. Theater was one of those activities. At the start, the artists used the temple as a rehearsal space, but this caused annoyance to the neighbors; hence, the monk built a space within the temple area as a replacement.

Besides the rehearsal room, the building also consisted of a small theater inside. In 2003, the

building was knocked down as it grew so ruined with the passage of time. A new six-storey building with three small theater spaces was once again opened in 2005 under a new director, a monk named Asahina Bunsui, who is the son of Asahina. This young and energetic monk also has the same mission of creating an ideal society through the art of theater. With his long, continual and considerable effort to carry out the mission, Theater Green has undeniably become a time-honored and a significant model for other small theaters in Tokyo.

To expand its audience, the space holds a constant theater festival, to which the attending theater groups bring more fans. As the space does not have any regular members, more efforts in raising income are not necessary.

The monk Asahina dreams of seeing some more temples in Japan shifting their main focus to theater activities. There are thousands of temples in Japan, but only four to five of them support theater. Asahina wishes that, one day, people would, as a priority, prefer watching theater performances to movies during their spare time.

Oji Theater: Step board for young theater artists

With 80 to 100 seats, this 8 x 11 x 5.2 m space hosts 45 productions a year. Located in OJI since 1998, it is run by Sato Denki, a small electronic private company. The company is an award-winning one, bagging the Mesena Award five years ago. This award once went to the huge company Toyota.

Besides funding from the company, Oji Theater's income also comes from the annual membership fees of its 40 members who enjoy such membership privileges as unlimited access to every show all year round, and being part of curating processes twice a year.

Oji Theater is the place where young theater artists strive to perform, despite its highly rated rental. It has proven popular as a path to success in a theater career because of its high standard of curation processes and its being a center of attention among the press and critics.

Mr. Satoru Tameyama, the Artistic Director of this space since its opening, said that in accordance with the space's image of being a pathway to success, he has to ensure that the featured works must be outstanding. These need not be the best nor need they have the best director, but the work must be developable as to become striking. Each year, he watches around 200 to 250 plays to ensure that he does not miss a distinguished work of the youngsters.

Before opening the space, he spent 15 years merging efforts with the network of critics with which he has since developed a very close relationship. These critics regularly help release previews and reviews about his theater.

Apart from watching new plays, he spends most of his time writing and reviewing the works of the young directors invited. He also constantly remains in touch with critics, directors, and art directors, meeting up with them once in a while. Although he could do this more easily through an online social network, he believes that "Words from mouths are much more valued than information from websites".

8. The Japan Director's Association

The Japan Director's Association was established in 1960 with a view to becoming a medium to unite Japanese directors of all generations, enhancing their social, economic and artistic status, and establishing a network between them. In 2012, the Association had approximately 600 members, of which 60 were professional theater groups. The executive board is composed of seven invited individuals qualified in the field and another 14 chosen via voting. A board member's work is voluntary as it comes without a regular salary, but with wages depending on each project. I had a chance to meet some of the board members like Mr. Yoshio Wada, the chief director (Rakutendan Theater Group); Yoji Aoi, Vice Chairman (Company One Corporation Theater Group); and Show Ryusanji, Vice Chairman (Ryuzanji Theater Group). The head office is located in the same building as NNTT Drama Studio, a school formerly located in West Shinjuku. The space consists of a workroom,

a meeting room, and a studio for holding workshops and theater activities. It is considered a practical place for young directors to exchange experiences and for a variety of such international activities as the Japan-Korea Director's Conference.

It can be said that The Director's Association brings about prosperity and security to the profession. It also helps improve the craft's development and creates a network among contemporary artists, through which a society under the government's support is formed, just like those of other well-respected professions. Besides, it provides members equal rights and inspires artists to exert greater effort toward professional creativity.

9. Performing Arts Producer Networking in Japan

During my one year stay in Japan, I interviewed many small theater owners about creating their connection network. Most of them found it unnecessary, since it might require excessive work. In their opinions, the spaces were capable of supporting themselves without relying on external aid. A number of the theaters in Tokyo are another factor that creates a competitive situation, especially with regard to the limited government grants. They experience competition more than they do cooperation as a network. However, there do exist some kindhearted theaters that help each other when necessary, just as friends in a tiny little community do. An obvious assistance is that they help distribute posters and leaflets of other theater spaces at their front desks. They also release theater news of their allied theater groups.

Just two days before I came back to Thailand, I had a chance to meet a former actor and playwright, Mr. Satoshi Kawagoshi. He is a member of a small theater group and has been working as a producer in Osaka for five years. The 40-year old Mr. Satoshi brought me good news about the network to be established among theater producers within the year.

After the massive earthquake hit the northeastern part of Japan in March 2011, causing the collapses

of electrical lines, telephone and subway systems in Tokyo City to darken and freeze for many hours, several play productions were postponed, while some were cancelled. One problem that arose as a result was the handling of expenses forthcoming and the issuance of refunds for purchased tickets. The New National Theater finally came up with problem-solving mechanisms and gave refunds to all audiences. This range of occurrences taught a group of theater producers to reconsider the matter of creating a connection network among themselves, apparently for solving what problems might arise in the future.

Also, some producers of small theaters sensed the lack of a new group of theater audiences in the forthcoming years because, while Japan has the oldest life expectancy rate, it has a very low life expectancy at birth. Moreover, the radiation leak as a consequence of the March 2011 earthquake is expected to result in a significant rise in child mortality in the 10 years following. Still, those producers believe that the theater artists will be pursuing their work no matter what happens.

In 2008, there was an attempt to establish an international scale connection network among Japanese producers. To be called the “Tokyo Performing Arts Market” (TPAM), this turned out to be unsuccessful since there was very little response to its marketing during the recent economic crisis. The project was then changed to the Tokyo Performing Arts Meeting.

This was another effort to create a theater producer’s connection for which Mrs. Maruoka Hiromi from TPAM created a model, whereby three groups were joined together and representatives, including a new generation producer aged 30-40 years. Then, the group had to find specific sustainability methods for theater arts in Japan. This project has been well supported by Saison Foundation with Mrs. Hisano Atsuko’s backing, for the approval of the first three years of fundamental funding. This project has a temporary name: “Japan Performing Arts Producers Network”.

The network setup processes during the initial period consist of:

1. Setting up a selection committee team made up of 10 new generation producers from all over the country. This initiative for network integration will bring a more concrete direction and policy towards sustainability issues for theater arts. The brainstorming process is being discussed among the selected groups on the way to policy outcomes and a membership handbook, whose completion is assumed to take place by July 2012. The committees have the right to meet up with the government directly, without any re-examination from such senior artists who have bargaining power over the government. This conception will strengthen the power of the team rather than an individual person.

2. Fundraising for project management by requesting donations from the network instead of asking the government for contributions. This self-supporting mechanism is more stable and sustainable than government’s help. Moreover, it brings the real feeling of ownership among the producer-members.

3. The structure is made up of a so-called horizontal organizational structure, in which every committee is equally treated. The policies are managed by the secretariat. The overall structure is not a typical system based on the preference of those with the most number of years of service at the place. Committee members are selected from among the new generation producers, who have time to contribute to the project. There is also a provision of wages for all of them. Such senior producers or renowned artists, who have bargaining power but do not have time to devote to the endeavor, are not preferred. This stipulation would make the project effective in real circumstances and could keep the seniority system at bay.

Although only recently established, this network connection has a good strategic vision. It has made me look back at the 11 years of Bangkok Theater Network’s existence. I realized that our

network has grown by moderate movements forward, and it has been structured through a similar strategic model as the Japanese one. Our network also avoids being dependent on government's help and would rather do the fundraising among the members. Despite the small amount of money we can gather, the ownership and the feeling of ownership are successfully created. Although our network structure was initially established with a renowned person as chief, the internal structure has been a horizontal organizational one consisting of 11 regular members. These core members serve as the decision-making board in charge of policy management. By managing this, they will heed advice from the irregular members and the university members. And then, at the final stage, the secretariat office, run by myself, will take further action based on the selected policy. This kind of structure model is quite unfamiliar to our country, though, and may be somewhat incomprehensible to other people and the members themselves. Then again, everything needs time to become perfect.

The obvious difference between theater network development in Japan and Thailand is that theaters primarily depend on the support of non-governmental cultural organizations, while we are totally self-supporting. In addition, according to their social and cultural context, the Japanese audiences are better prepared to support theater arts—there may not be too many of them, but they are also not too few. In contrast, the size of the audience in Thai society is very small.

Over the past 11 years, the Bangkok Theater Network has made quite significant strides forward, but what we still lack is the sustainability of the small theaters. Moreover, the network committees, especially the secretariat, are still needed for each term. Such committees from society and the press must be accepted according to their “position as stated by the network structure”, rather than based on their reputation. If one day we could really strive to achieve this structural model, our network will be considered one of the first successful structured networks in this crippled unstructured country.

10. Information databases and public relations.

Although small-space theaters in Tokyo are not a moneymaking business, public relations need to be provided in order to persuade the public to keep in contact with them and maintain their acceptance in the existence of theater art. This is why information databases and public relations are essential.

Website

This source provides a basic and necessary database; it makes information easy to find. Such a website that systematically gathers all small theater news in Tokyo is available, but is mostly written in Japanese. This monolingual webpage has much more significance for local audiences than for international ones, just like small theaters have in many countries.

Documents, magazines and journals about small theaters

Leaflets, books, and magazines containing theater information are necessarily available, both free of charge and for sales. Some government and private organizations have launched an annual journal with a collection of statistics and theater information, critiques and a review of the general situation. Scripts and play analysis papers are also published. This publishing of news provides not only overall information, but is also a significant record for theater art's existence.

Play posters

This kind of printed media is always seen in public, even in a big city like Tokyo, where commercial plays claim superiority.

Leaflets

This is the most popular printed matter. It is distributed in every theater, put on the audience's seats, and can be taken home or given to friends. It is such a personal level of spreading the news. In every theater, a pile of leaflets from a variety of play productions is available. Apart from being

an important printed form of media, leaflets are also considered as theater souvenirs and records of each theater production.

11. Funding and government support

Government funding is available to support theater activities such as play production, for work study, in the form of loans for investment, awards, competitions for unique works, and theater festivals. All these play a very important role in sustaining contemporary theater arts and all of the small theaters in this country.

Government support has its own advantages and disadvantages. It could give opportunities to create more theater works without any financial distractions. But it could also create a more competitive situation among artists and impose limitations on their work's contents.

Inspiration and direction for the development of contemporary theater towards the ideal society

Lessons and experiences I learned from this visit could be adapted and expanded as knowledge for our small-spaced theater's development in Bangkok. These lessons could be summed up as follows:

1. Promoting the artist network and the spaces is necessary to make the proceedings flow within the group. This would cause contemporary theater in the small theater community to grow significantly so that bargaining power, in terms of policy negotiations, would be enhanced.
2. Holding a forum / activity could increase support from the public sectors, government organizations, private groups and institutions that could help in the upkeep of the art of contemporary theater. So could initiating basic structures for its sustainability such as public theaters, museums and libraries about theater, grants for small theater spaces to host activities, grants to support festivals and other similar projects. This would eventually lessen the need for help from our incompetent government.

The most urgent requirement is to set up an information center for contemporary theater or a kind of Thai theater museum, which could be supported by either government or private organizations.

This kind of information center would make information and theater news accessible to all audiences. And that kind of theater museum would create a more concrete image for theater art as one of our national art forms. This would finally bring us a feeling of possession and pride, from which the sustainability of theater art would grow by leaps and bounds.