

Title: Watching “Spiritual Aspects of Rice Culture in Southeast Asia”

May 10th to 14th, 2015

I participated in “Spiritual Aspects of Rice Culture in Southeast Asia” at the invitation of Narumol Thammapruxsa, who welcomed me in Thailand. Although I mainly participated in the audience, I did help somewhat with decorations. It is somewhat distant from the focus of this research, but it was a meaningful chance to see a lot of physical expression from Southeast Asian countries.



*The picture on the right is of me helping with decoration.

The event was sponsored by SEAMEO SPAFA (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, Southeast Asian Regional Center for Archaeology and Fine Arts) which featured research presentations (in English) during the day, and ceremonial performances celebrating the rice harvest from various ASEAN countries starting at 7:00 pm. The performances at night were particularly interesting. The program was as follows.

May 11th

1. Bringing Home the Rice Goddess Dewi Sri (Shadow pictures from the island of Java in Indonesia)
2. Khuong Mua Festival (Tribal ceremony from Vietnam)
3. The Cycle of Rice Rituals of Myanmar (Ceremony and dance from Myanmar)
4. Tayub Tanam Padi (Dance from the island of Java in Indonesia)

May 12th

1. Monogit/Humabot/Magavu (Ceremony from Malaysia)
2. Kun Preah Me (Dance from Cambodia)
3. The Lao Traditions of Rice Cultivation (Dance from Laos)
4. Singing in the Rice Culture of Bali (Ceremony from the island of Bali in Indonesia)
5. Vietnam Youth Theatre (Dance performance by “Vietnam Youth Theatre”)
6. Tamarok Parai Ritual (Ceremony from Brunei Saram)
7. Reyog Performance (Ceremony from the island of Java in Indonesia)

May 14th

1. Tayub Panen Padi (Ceremony from the island of Java in Indonesia)
2. Bidayuh Bijagoi Biratak (Ceremony from Malaysia)
3. Ton’ak Ifugao (Ceremony from Ifugao)

*Ifugao is a province on the island of Luzon in the Philippines which is famous for its rice terraces, and the minority ethnic groups that live there.

4. Beating the Rice Stalks (Ceremony from Thailand)

5. Dedication to the Rice Goddess (Ceremony from Ayutthaya province in Thailand)
6. Eating the New Rice Crop (Ceremony from Thailand)
7. Honour the Rice Goddess (Dance from the island of Bali in Indonesia)
8. Joged Bumbung (Dance from the island of Bali in Indonesia)

*There was one more ceremony not written in the program, but there is no information on it.

*The 10th was used for preparation. The 13th was a break from the program, so I went to see the Siam Niramity Show with the Bali team from Indonesia.

The program lasted for over 3 hours each day, stretching all the way to 5 hours on the final day. While there was such diversity as to make it difficult to lump everything together into “Southeast Asia”, I felt as though they came from the same mold as Japan’s traditional arts and festivals. It is the same mold that produces the lion dance, tengu masks, and kabuki.



*The picture on the right is of an Indonesian mask reminiscent of the lion dance.

Reyog Performance

Among all these, the performances from Indonesia in particular caught my interest. According to what I found on the Internet after taking interest, almost all of the performances and art aimed at tourists seen in Indonesia, especially in Bali, was created as a joint effort with Westerners who visited Bali from the time of the Dutch colonial period in the 1920s onwards. I believe that is to say they have succeeded in entertainmentization or modernization of traditional arts. (This is just what I found on the Internet, and I must research in greater detail once I return home.)

Watching the ceremonial performances of various countries from that perspective, the ceremonies of various tribes in their original unaltered form would of course be boring to outsiders and foreigners such as myself, and watching dances as part of ceremonies, there are shockingly bad dancers participating in the ceremonies. In other words, everyone in a village participates in tribal ceremonies, and showing (or appealing to) it to anyone is not the most important thing, so the dancers are not very refined.

By comparison, I could feel the professionalism in dancers from Indonesia. All of the dancers had reached a certain level. While their costumes had ethnic elements, upon close inspection they were actually carefully arranged Western clothes. This sort of modernized performance was more interesting to me. Wouldn't it be interesting to research how Indonesia performing arts were adapted and modernized for tourism?

In addition, excluding the tribal ceremonial performances, teachers and students of drama and dance arts from universities in each country participated in almost all the ceremonial performances. In other words, systems in which universities teach traditional performing arts have been established in each

country. I felt envious of this, and felt a sense of crisis for Japanese drama education. When I was university I had no interest in drama, and I didn't understand my major "environmental information" very well either. So I think it would be a problem if we made Japan like Russia where you cannot enter drama as a profession unless you are in the drama elite, but if we don't establish an educational system somewhat more, Japan is in trouble! As I came in contact with foreigners, I felt that Japanese drama people including myself have a very shallow education on drama.