

General meeting on April 11, 1973.

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## Developments in Japan and Overseas

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# What We Learned Digging Through Rare Materials from the Early Days of the ITI Japanese Centre 2023, the fiftieth anniversary of the first issue of the *Theatre Yearbook*, as a gateway

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The March 2023 publication of *Theatre Yearbook 2023*, a fiscal 2022 project of the Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute, marks fifty years since publishing the first issue in this series, *Theatre Yearbook 1973* (noting that in 1972, the year before that first issue, we published its predecessor, the *International Theatre Materials Collection*). Taking that as an opportunity, the *Yearbook* editorial board decided to go back another twenty or so years before that inaugural publication and reacquaint ourselves with the situation and historical development of international performing arts exchange in the Japanese Centre's earliest days.

**Naturally, many aspects of those days cannot be uncovered from surviving materials alone, but through that effort, we hoped to clarify in concrete terms the impact that the global exchange of theatre and dance that resumed after the Second World War has had on the establishment and development of contemporary theatre and dance in Japan.**

### **Establishment of ITI Headquarters and the Japanese Centre**

The International Theatre Institute (ITI), a worldwide network of professional theatre and dance organizations, was founded shortly after the Second World War, in 1948. Prior to that, there were discussions at a 1946 UNESCO conference in Paris of creating an international theatre organization, and after a 1947 preparatory meeting in Paris by prominent theatre professionals from around the world, those from 28 countries gathered in Prague for the foundational general meeting in 1948. The history of the ITI Japanese Centre began three years later, in 1951.

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The San Francisco Peace Conference, which stipulated the postwar settlement between Japan and the Allied Powers, occurred in September of the same year. The Peace Treaty entered into force in April 1952, but the Japanese Centre had already begun its activities as a member of the ITI's global network prior to that date.

From the perspective of today's readers, it may seem completely natural for Japan to be treated as a member of the international community, but by keeping in mind the postwar environment and Japan's status as a defeated nation, one realizes that it was a completely different world in those days.

The direct impetus for the Japanese Centre's founding came in 1950 when Kitamura Kihachi<sup>1</sup>, who later became one of our founding sponsors, attended the 1950 PEN International Congress in Edinburgh as a Japan representative, learned about the ITI, and on his way home, stopped to meet the ITI Secretariat in Paris to obtain more information. The playwright André Josset (1897–1976), then secretary general of the ITI, asked Kitamura to establish a Centre in Japan.

After returning to Japan, Kitamura consulted with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education (External Relations and UNESCO

Division and Art Division, Minister's Secretariat) regarding the establishment of the Japanese Centre, and the following year, on May 24, 1951, we came into being. The founding sponsors were Kawabata Yasunari, Kawatake Shigetoshi, Kitamura Kihachi, and Kubota Mantaro. Takahashi Seiichiro<sup>2</sup> was appointed as our first president and Kitamura Kihachi as director general.

Immediately after completing the procedures for establishing the Japanese Centre, Kubota Mantaro attended the Fourth ITI World Congress in Oslo in June 1951 as the Japanese Centre representative, and Japan's membership was approved there.

The Founding Prospectus of the Japanese Centre places Japan as a representative of one side of theatrical exchange between East and West, and this Oriental versus Occidental framework clearly shows the nature of cultural exchange in those days.

### Activities in the Japanese Centre's first decade

The activities of the ITI Japanese Centre in the first decade after its founding can be seen in its newsletter, *ITI News*. Starting with its first "Vol. 0" in 1951, which contained the organization's Founding Prospectus, *ITI News* issues were published at a relatively steady pace until 1961<sup>3</sup>.

Early *ITI News* issues indicate that at the time, in response to the activities of ITI centers around the world, there was extensive promotion of International Theatre Month events in Japan with the cooperation of major domestic theatres and entertainment companies<sup>4</sup>. There were also discussions of cooperation for the publication of *Le décor de théâtre dans le monde depuis 1935* [Theatrical scenery in the world since 1935] (1956), which was being edited and published by the ITI headquarters in Paris, with the Japanese Centre responding to publisher requests for stage set diagrams and photographs.

At the time, the Paris headquarters provided us with the periodicals *Le théâtre dans le monde* [World Theatre] (quarterly) and *World Premières* (monthly). A few copies of these publications are preserved in the current Japanese Centre office.

*ITI News* issues often included a "Correspondences with the Secretariat"

column that noted daily communications, notices, and requests sent to the Secretariat from the Paris headquarters and other national ITI Centres, and what the Japanese Centre was able to do in response. For example, we responded to questions from the Paris headquarters regarding the current situation in Japan for an international survey on the role of theatre in youth education, and in response to a request from the UK Centre, we airmailed International Theatre Month pamphlets and posters from the Kabuki-za and other theatres. *ITI News* No. 30 states: “In April, we responded to a questionnaire from the Paris headquarters regarding state subsidies for theatres. Our response was later published in the first issue of the ITI newsletter *International Theatre Informations*.”

We also received inquiries from individual theatre-related organizations through ITI Centres in their respective countries. *ITI News* No. 28 (April 1960) reports that Laurence Olivier Productions inquired about Mishima Yukio’s *Tropical Tree*, and after contacting Mishima, we made arrangements for a synopsis and translation. This shows how even in its early days, the Japanese Centre served as a window for access to the performing arts in Japan.

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*ITI News* at the founding of the ITI.

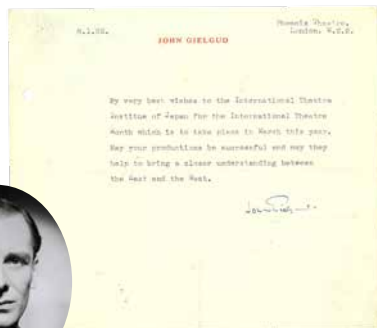
An International Theatre Month pamphlet.

## ITI Japanese Centre's involvement in the first overseas Noh tour

One of the earliest postwar examples of a Japanese performing troupe travelling overseas was the participation of a Noh troupe in the 1954 *Festival Internazionale del Teatro*. This was made possible when the Festival, through communications with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, requested the participation of Japanese theatre troupes. Apparently, the Japanese Centre started receiving requests for delegates of Japanese performance troupes from as early as 1951, the year we were founded.

The Noh performance was realized in 1954, when a fifteen-member troupe, including Kita Minoru and the Second Generation Kanze Yoshiyuki, participated in the Festival. *ITI News* Nos. 12 and 13 describe in detail how that event came about and reports on the performances there.

The first *Festival d'Art dramatique de Paris* in 1954 (organized by the city of Paris and held at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt) also involved the ITI headquarters in its operations, and records show that the Festival requested the participation of a Japanese theatre group. The Festival and its second occurrence



A letter from John Gielgud, sending his congratulations regarding International Theatre Month in Japan.



January 8, 1952 issue of *World Theatre*, with features on pantomime, Nordic theatre, etc.



*World PREMIÈRES* No. 41 (Jan/Feb 1964), with *World Theatre* Day messages from Laurence Olivier and Jean-Louis Barrault.

A brochure regarding Noh troupe participation in the 1954 Venice Biennale.



in 1955 were extremely successful. After that, it became known as *Théâtre des Nations*, a name that embodies the postwar atmosphere for deepened understanding of foreign countries through culture<sup>5</sup>.

**ITI and *Théâtre des Nations***

Following the extremely successful *Festival d'Art dramatique de Paris* events in 1954 and 1955, the creation of the *Théâtre des Nations* was proposed in 1955 at the 6th ITI World Congress in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, in 1955 (*ITI News* No. 16). The *Théâtre des Nations*, which became the ITI Headquarters' best-known project worldwide, was recognized as a cutting-edge event leading international theatrical exchanges in that period. A look at the groups appearing shows participation by the most famous theatre companies and directors from each country, including Italy's Piccolo Teatro (Giorgio Strehler), Germany's Berliner Ensemble

(Bertolt Brecht), Laurence Olivier and Peter Brook from England, Ernst Ingmar Bergman from Sweden, and the Living Theatre from the United States.

In November 1956, *Théâtre des Nations* general director A.-M. Julien visited Japan for an observational tour on his way back from the First World Conference of the ITI in Bombay, and a Noh troupe led by Kita Minoru attended the following year's festival.

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Letter and brochure from A.-M. Julien regarding hosting of the *Théâtre des Nations*, July 10, 1962.

## A period of inactivity

The Japanese Centre's *ITI News* was published for ten years following its inception, culminating in the publication of its No. 31 issue in 1961. Unfortunately, publication ceased after that. This was likely due to the December 1960 death of Kitamura Kihachi, who had served as director general since the organization's founding, resulting in a stagnation of administrative functions.

Looking at subsequent developments, *ITI News* No. 32 was published on a one-off basis in 1965, after a blank of approximately four years since its previous issue. However, that revival was short-lived. After that one issue, the newsletter again entered a hiatus; the next reprint would not come until 1971.

So far, we have found no documents that allow speculation on the circumstances during this period, and the cause of that long gap in Japanese Centre activities in the years around 1965 remains unknown.

## Cooperation with two international symposiums

As described in the previous section, the 1960s was a period of stagnation in Japanese Centre activities. In fact, since the 1961 cessation of *ITI News*'s publication, the only clue regarding the status of such activities can be found in the one-off October 1965 issue of *ITI News* No. 32.

Articles in that issue indicate that two major international UNESCO-related conferences were held in years before and after its publication (1963 and 1968), and that the ITI Japanese Centre cooperated with these conferences.

First, in November 1963, the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO hosted the International Symposium on the Theatre in the East and the West in Tokyo. Symposium representatives included Eugène Ionesco and more than forty other theatre professionals from twenty-one countries. Its theme was "Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values." The Japanese National Commission for UNESCO issued proceedings for that symposium in 1965.

Next, the Cultural Conference on Mutual Influences between Japanese and Western Arts was held in Tokyo and Kyoto in 1968 (as described in the first issue of the *ITI Bulletin* in 1971), with discussions in four categories: literature, music, architecture, and theatre. The National Commission for UNESCO published

proceedings of that meeting in English and Japanese in 1969. Unfortunately, specifics regarding the Japanese Centre's cooperation are not clear.

### **Role as a delegate organization for the Tokyo Noh Troupe's performances in Europe and the U.S.**

Although it is unclear how this is related to the above two international conferences, in 1965, the Japanese Centre and the Kanze Noh Theater sent a 28-member "Tokyo Noh Troupe" to various European countries and the US. This was a large-scale tour, including visits to six European cities (Athens, Ulm, Vicenza, Rome, Paris, and Dusseldorf) and one U.S. city (Seattle).

According to *ITI News* No. 32, the Japanese Centre was involved with the Tokyo Noh Troupe as its "delegating organization" (i.e., the entity responsible for project implementation). However, as mentioned above, that 1965 issue of *ITI News* is the only one published during the period, so no existing documents allow us to determine the situation before and after, making it difficult to explore the situation at the time in further detail.

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### **Possible temporary external support and a second suspension of activities**

However, considering the two above-mentioned international symposiums held around 1965 and our serving as the delegating organization for the Tokyo Noh Troupe, we can speculate that the Centre was expected to play a role in promoting such large-scale projects, and thus that there was some form of external support, and that this manifested as the Japanese Centre's revival specifically at that time.

Afterward, however, the ITI Japanese Centre again entered a long period of inactivity. *ITI News* was later renamed *ITI Bulletin*, the first issue of which was published in March 1971. There was thus a second gap of about four and a half years after the publication of *ITI News* No. 32 in October 1965.



## ***Festival Mondial du Théâtre de Nancy, featuring contemporary Japanese theatre***

After the *Théâtre des Nations*, which was founded in the 1950s and quickly gained international fame, the *Festival Mondial du Théâtre de Nancy*, led by Jack Lang, became the driving force behind international theatrical trends from the mid-1960s to the 1970s. That festival was held in the northern France town of Nancy starting in 1964 as the *Festival Mondial du Théâtre Universitaire*, gaining worldwide acclaim through a series of productions by the leading-edge theatre companies of the time. Jack Lang was a major politician who later served as Minister of Culture in the Mitterrand administration, leaving a significant mark on the development of French cultural policy that extends to the present day.

April 1971 appearances at the Nancy festival included the Seinenza Theatre Company, Tenjo Sajiki, and the Youkiza Puppet Theatre from Japan, as well as productions by Robert Wilson, Tadeusz Kantor, and Augusto Boal. The Japanese learned about many European avant-garde theatre troupes during this period, and many Japanese contemporary theatres started receiving invitations to theatre festivals throughout Europe. More than any other theatre festival, the Nancy festival played a major role in this process.

The first issue of the new *ITI Bulletin* (March 1971) noted that Lang asked the ITI Japanese Centre to provide arrangements for staff members coming to observe Japanese theatres from December 22, 1970 to January 17, 1971, which we did. At the time, there were also plans for Japan to “host” the Nancy festival, and Lang himself visited Japan in August of that year (*ITI Bulletin* No. 4, September 1971)<sup>6</sup>.

## **Reconstruction of the Japanese Centre**

As described above, the Japanese Centre was inactive for about ten years before and after 1965, but its participation in the *Festival Mondial du Théâtre de Nancy* seemed to provide an impetus for its reorganization. On December 12, 1970, the Center elected playwright Hojo Hideji, then president of the Japan Theatre Arts Association, as its director general and held a reorganization meeting. Documents from that period show that the Japanese Centre was largely inactive in the

four immediately preceding fiscal years (1967–1970) (*ITI Bulletin* No. 1).

Interestingly, at the time of this “reorganizational meeting,” the Japanese Centre had 874 registered members, of which 28 attended the meeting and 561 sent proxies. That is remarkably higher enrollment, nearly three times, over our current (fiscal 2022) membership of just over 200. This suggests that there was some sort of initiative by the board members and others at that time, who likely lobbied leading industry associations, and that the members of those associations joined *en masse* due to that top-down approach.

The 1971 restructuring of the ITI Japanese Centre got underway with a general assembly in December 1970. At that time, we obtained cooperation from leading companies in the theatre and broadcasting industries. We also caught up with dues to the ITI headquarters, which had been in arrears for several years. (Even so, ITI Japanese Centre’s financial base remained fragile, and there was uncertainty regarding whether sufficient financial resources would be available for its future operations.)

### **Three main post-restructuring projects and the first issue of the *Theatre Yearbook* (1973)**

At around this time, the Agency for Cultural Affairs began subsidizing ITI Japanese Centre projects. This allowed three activities related to international exchange in the field of theatre to be carried out on a regular basis as major annual projects: “editing and publishing the *Theatre Yearbook*,” “holding international theatre exhibitions,” and “lectures on international theatre.” Further, very impactful projects started undergoing development with the cooperation of experts in various fields who became involved as board members.

*ITI Bulletin* No. 1 (March 1971) notes that the business activities of the U.S. Centre and those in other countries inspired the Japanese Centre to start publishing its *Yearbook*. The publication of our *Yearbook* itself has a pre-history: the first issue was published in March 1972 as the *International Theatre Collection*, but renamed the following year as the *Theatre Yearbook*.

In the beginning, *Yearbook* pages introducing overseas performing arts to Japanese readers covered only the US, the UK, France, Germany, and other

developed countries. We began covering China in the 1980s, South Korea in the 1990s, and since the 2000s we have expanded our coverage to include countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other regions that we had previously neglected. All told, the 51 issues of the *Theatre Yearbook* from 1973 to 2023 have introduced works and news from 87 countries and regions.

Initially, introductions of “Japanese performing arts” to the rest of the world were dominated by traditional performing arts such as Noh and kabuki, but the *Yearbook* introduces contemporary theatre in general, including modern-realist *shingeki* and avant-garde works. In 1983, we started introducing television and radio dramas, in 1984 we added *butoh* and other forms of contemporary dance, and in that fashion, *Yearbook*’s contents have continually changed with the times. In addition, since the 1997 edition, *Yearbook* has been published in two volumes: one in Japanese and one in English.

## Summary

This article traced the history of the Japanese Centre from its founding immediately after the Second World War, through a period of stagnation in the 1960s, and finally to its reconstruction period in the 1970s and the start of the *Yearbook* project.

If one is to understand current trends in world theatre and the impacts that Japanese traditional, contemporary, and avant-garde theatre has had on the world, it is vital to know the roles played by the Japanese Centre and the ITI Headquarters, the longest active NGO among UNESCO organizations in the fields of theatre and dance.

For the first time, we have dug through materials from the earliest days of our organization, allowing us a glimpse of the history of theatrical exchange between Japan and other countries that had previously remained unknown to the public. Taking this initiative as an initial first step, I hope we can continue to trace the changes of the times and to further deepen our awareness of the significance of international exchange NGOs in the cultural sphere.

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Author's note

In this article, we showed how the Japanese Centre was closely involved in the overseas performances of Noh troupes on two occasions, in 1954 and 1965. By contrast, Shochiku, at the request of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, took full control of organizing overseas Kabuki tours, realizing and overseeing the success of many overseas performances. This is briefly described in a report by Kawatake Toshio in *International Theatre Yearbook 1973*.

1 Kitamura Kihachi (1898–1960) was a director, playwright, theatre critic, and translator. After graduating from Tokyo Imperial University with a degree in English literature, he joined the Tsukiji Shogekijo Theatre in 1924, where he translated and directed many plays. Together with his wife, actor Murase Sachiko, he formed Geijutsu Shogekijo Theatre in 1937. After the war, he worked to rebuild *shingeki* theatre as permanent secretary of the New Theatre People's Association, and in 1951 he founded the Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute, of which he became director general. His publications include *Expressionist Drama, An Introduction to Directing*, and a collection of plays, *Beautiful Family*.

2 Takahashi Seiichiro (1884–1982) was an economist. After graduating from Keio University with a degree in political science, he studied the history of economics in England and returned to Japan to teach at his alma mater. 1947, as Minister of Education in the Yoshida Cabinet, he enacted the Basic Act on Education and the School Education Act. Internationally known for his collection and research of ukiyo-e prints, he served as director of the Japan Art Academy and the Tokyo National Museum, and in 1951 became president of the Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute. His works include *A Study of the Economic Theory of Mercantilism and Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Ukiyo-e*.

3 There is no mention of "ITI News" in Nos. 0 or 1; that name was first used in issue No. 2.

4 When it was first founded, International Theatre Month was supported by a wide range of theatre-related organizations, from major entertainment companies to student and amateur theatre troupes. As an annual International Theatre Month event, it was customary to hold an onstage opening ceremony before the start of a Kabuki-za performance.

5 The Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt was known as the Théâtre des Nations from 1879–1898 and from 1957–1967, so that name can refer to the theatre or the theatre festival, depending on the context. The name was changed from Théâtre des Nations to Théâtre de la Ville in 1968, and retains that name to this day.

6 This concept was conceived by Wakabayashi Akira (1926–2013), founder of the International Youth Theatre Center (KSEC) and an actor and director affiliated with the Bungakuza, but the project was never realized.

**Sota, Shuji**

In 1980, Shuji Sota joined Toho Co., Ltd., where he worked in publicity and advertising for stage performances. Since 1990, he has led projects for international exchange in the performing arts at the Japan Center, Pacific Basin Arts Communication. In 1995, he was involved in the launch of the Tokyo International Performing Arts Festival (now Festival/Tokyo) and the Tokyo Performing Arts Market (now YPAM), and has since been in charge of their administrative offices. He has been a professor at Atomi University's Faculty of Management since 2002, and served as the secretary general of the Japanese Centre of ITI since 2009 and as its managing director since 2013.

(Translation: Tony Gonzalez)