

NEW LANTERNISTS ARE MOST WELCOME!

Mitsue Ikeda's magic lantern event in Yao

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In June a gathering for a *Nishiki Kage-e* (Japanese magic lantern) lecture and workshop of *Ikeda-gumi* (performers) led by Mitsue Ikeda took place in Yao. It was held at the Kyu-Uedake Residence (Fig. 1) a traditional Japanese-style building, more than a century old. Yao is a suburban city on the outskirts of Osaka (at the centre of western Japan) whose wealth was once based on cotton production. The non-profit organization (NPO) HICALI, which takes care of this old historical venue that is designated a Yao city cultural asset as well as a 'national registered tangible cultural property', offered Mitsue this attractive location to showcase her magic lantern performance.

After retiring as a university professor, Mitsue has become more and more focussed on *Nishiki Kage-e*. One example has been her collaboration with Japanese traditional puppetry, *Bunraku*, as already reported in *TML* (No. 20, September 2019). In April 2022, she was invited to take part in a puppetry festival, greatly enhancing the procession that highlighted the event. And now she has started another project: giving a series of lessons to train new lanternists for a show this autumn, for, as you may already know, many *furo*



1. Kyu-Uedake Jutaku – the cultural old house where the event took place

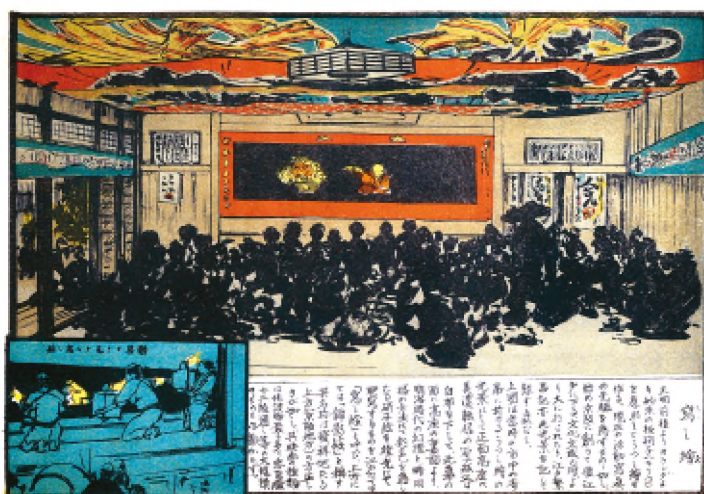
lanterns (the traditional Japanese lanterns made of paulownia wood that is light and heat resistant) and lanternists are needed to complete the unique Japanese projection art and practice of the magic lantern. If more people become interested in this medium and enjoy performing it themselves, that promises well for this wonderful tradition to continue in the future.

The gathering on 10 June marked the mid-point event of her well-planned project. Mitsue gave a compelling lecture giving a brief history of *Nishiki Kage-e*, emphasizing the original, particular charms of projections. Her focus was on the style in the western part of Japan in contrast to the eastern *Utsushi-e* of, for example, the Minwa-za Company in Tokyo. She showed the audience images of old wood prints including material she had recently discovered by diligent searching in museums and libraries (Figs 2 and 3). The audience especially enjoyed the examples she showed from the sets *A Boar Hunt* (Fig. 4) which originated from *Rakugo*, the traditional Japanese art of comic storytelling, and *A Comical Spinning Top* (Fig. 5).

The performance then proved in practice the delights of the medium that Mitsue highlighted in her lecture. In addition, the fact that it was performed by six NPO-connected staff with ex-*Ikeda-gumi* members, after a highly intensive eight-hour training session, greatly impressed us all. Of course it may be concluded that their own various backgrounds in arts, music, architecture, teaching or puppetry contributed to this successful show overall.

This occasion also turned out to be an effective recruitment event for the final target of the year – a grand show scheduled for 18 November 2023, the District 'Culture Day'. A sufficient number of candidates signed up for the scheme after the show. The youngest is a ten year-old boy who had already participated in the workshop, and sat right in the middle of the front row during the lecture, watching with eager eyes. The current project will certainly encourage interest, participation and popularity among local people, which, we hope, will form a solid basis for maintaining this traditional art in times to come.

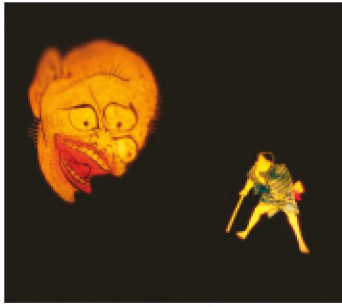
The curator Ryo Ando, having fulfilled his task as one of the lanternists, seemed happy and satisfied with the event. His support has resulted in creating an activity with future prospects. Altogether 40 people, the maximum capacity, came together for this special occasion and recruitment certainly proved successful. The NPO is an already well-known organizer of interesting events at the beautifully conserved residence. These include performances of *Rakugo* every year, traditional puppetry by an all-female group called *Otome-Bunraku*, original music concerts, and so on. This year, a traditional Japanese magic lantern show will be added to the programme to entertain people on a chilly evening before winter sets in.



2. Utsushi-e and Nishiki Kage-e performance. From *Unofficial History: Customs in Edo and Tokyo* by Sei Ito (Vol. 6, 1932) (Courtesy Torokko Puppetry Library, Japan)



3. Edo period (1603-1868) performances drawn by Masanao Otake. From *Fuzoku Gaho, an Illustrated magazine of Japanese life* (No. 74, 10 July 1894)



4. From A Boar Hunt –
'mitsume nyudo (the
three-eyed monster)
appears' (left)

5. From A Comical
Spinning Top –
Kyokugoma (right and
below)

