

PASSING DOWN THE MAGIC LANTERNIST'S SKILLS

Nishiki Kage-e Project 3 in Osaka

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On 9 November 2025, a performance of *Nishiki Kage-e* – the traditional Japanese back-projected magic lantern show using hand-held lanterns from the Edo Period (1603-1868) – was given by the *Nishiki Kage-e Ikeda-gumi* company. 'Performing Arts and Traditional Culture in an Old House' took place at the former Ueda Family Residence, a designated cultural property of Yao City, on the outskirts of Osaka, as part of the *Nishiki Kage-e* Project 3 (see TML 36 for Project 1 in 2023).



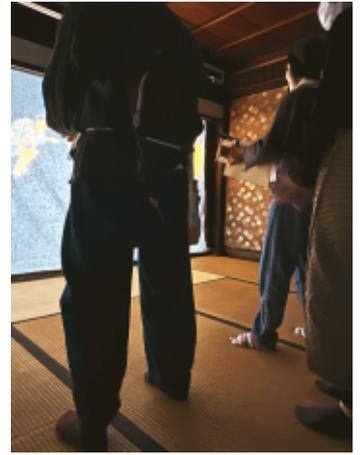
Ranging in age from 9 to 70 plus, both new participants (joining during the current Project 3 in 2025) and previous participants (who have been involved since Project 1 in 2023) acted as magic lanternists, with a *Furo* (wooden lantern) and *Taneitas* (slides), to perform the complete *Nishiki Kage-e* story. In the run-up to the show, at the suggestion of the curator Ryo Ando who has been a magic lanternist since Project 1, full-size colour prints of the *Taneitas* were distributed to the lanternists so they could make paper versions from the printouts. By imagining their roles in the story, they used these to practise at anytime and anywhere they could.



What made Project 3 so special was that the magic lanternists who have been involved since Project 1 – including Kato, Nakao, Nakahigashi and Director Sawada – have begun to help and guide the new lanternists on operating the *Furos* and *Taneitas*. During rehearsals, they were able to demonstrate how to perform roles other than their own. For the first time, they also operated chromatropes (*Karin-sha*) during the performance.

Akihiro Sugii, the father of the Sugii family, has been involved in the project since the first event in 2023 and recalls seeing a *Nishiki-e Ikeda-gumi* performance for the first time some years earlier when he was single. The family joined after listening to my lecture on *Nishiki Kage-e* at the former Ueda





family home in June 2023 and Akihiro then attended two workshops with his two sons, Kanta (now 14) and Takeru (now 11). The three have grown remarkably competent as magic lanternists. Not only are their physical movements in *Nishiki Kage-e* now expert, but their advice, based on their own experience, is also invaluable. In this third project, the mother, Moe, also joined in, and the whole family performed 'Kyokugoma' ('Tricks of a Spinning Top'). This Sugii family performance was a moving event for us all.

Another highlight was the presence of veteran magic lanternist Mami who is vital to the *Nishiki Kage-e Ikeda-gumi*. She has supported almost all *Nishiki Kage-e* performances from behind the scenes. Her acting instruction, supported by her precise and flexible performance and expressiveness, is invaluable.

On the day of the performance, the *zashiki* (traditional guest room with *tatami* mats) of the old house was transformed into a colourful world of stories, floating in the darkness of the *washi* (Japanese paper screen). The audience was immersed in this world, reacting with surprise, sighing, and sometimes laughing and clapping along. The exceptional verbal artistry of Mikami, who has been involved for nearly five years, further excited and captivated the audience's emotions. And the magic lanternists behind the screen were encouraged and empowered by the reactions of the audience in the *zashiki* as they performed their *Nishiki Kage-e* tales. In a traditional Edo-period house in late autumn, the audience and performers felt as though they had slipped back in time to that very era.

Photography by Ueda Mitsuhiko and others