

STUDY ON THE BESETO THEATRE FESTIVAL (1994-2004)

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council  
of Texas State University-San Marcos  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

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San Marcos, Texas  
August 2006

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To start with, I wish to thank my thesis committee chair, Dr. John Fleming for the greatest leadership, countless advice, and incredible support. Also, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Richard Soddors and Dr. Debra Charlton for their continued encouragement and kindness. They are the first American faculty in my life, and have taught me a great deal of knowledge and broad outlook. Their efforts enabled me to complete this thesis.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my previous professors in Seoul, South Korea, especially Dr. Il Soo Shin, Dr. Mi Hye Kim, and Dr. Sang Ran Lee. They gave me the courage I needed to fulfill my functions as a theatre major.

To my colleagues, friends, lab co-workers, and the first American boss in my job history, Brian Shanks who have offered me an amazing emotional support, I am very thankful. Since this thesis houses international subjects, I needed world-wide interviewees and translators. I also appreciate their willingness to be the helpers for this international project. Deserving special note are Chandra Nerumalla, Hideo Goto, Sinchai Kanthikamakorn, Sumie Ito, Warren Lee, and Xuelian Meng.

And last, but not least, to my family in Seoul, I must thank them for love and concern for me. They always make me become a righteous person.

This manuscript was submitted on July 31, 2006.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The phrase “BeSeTo Belt” or “BeSeTo Line” refers to a cooperative system of the three Northeast Asian countries: China, Korea, and Japan. The origin of the term “BeSeTo” stems from a theatre festival of the three countries and signifies the three capital cities of the countries: Beijing in China, Seoul in Korea, and Tokyo in Japan. The starting point of BeSeTo was the 1994 BeSeTo Theatre Festival in Seoul, Korea, and gradually BeSeTo has become well known for an economic, cultural, and political league of China, Korea, and Japan as well as a theatrical alliance of the three Northeast Asian countries. Now in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the term BeSeTo covers not only cultural, artistic, and athletic cooperation, but also economic, IT business, and political cooperation among China, Korea, and Japan.

Although the BeSeTo Belt partly seeks some profits, such as economic returns, the theme of this cooperative structure is friendship among the three countries. Since theatre is often considered the most reflective artistic genre for humanity, the origin of BeSeTo, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival was created to promote peace among China, Korea, and Japan. The founder of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival published the following manifesto:

The world is now moving towards the time of interculturalism. The approaching 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the time for mutual exchange and the time for meeting, ending the history of isolation and split. Having a long history, China, Japan, and Korea are the countries that have raised together the flower of oriental culture. Unfortunately, in spite of cultural homogeneity, our relationship has been close yet also distant. At the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we need to forward the cultural exchange more actively.

1. The BeSeTo Theatre Festival is the cultural meeting that inspires the creative spirit of performing arts through the mutual exchange of the theatrical art.
2. The BeSeTo Theatre Festival is the cultural meeting that seeks the identity and aesthetic potentials of oriental theatre.
3. The BeSeTo Theatre Festival is the cultural meeting where we think together about our life and the future of human beings in a time of radical change.
4. The BeSeTo Theatre Festival is the cultural meeting that activates the cultural communication between the peoples of China, Japan, and Korea, overcoming the past history of conflict.
5. The BeSeTo Theatre Festival is the cultural meeting that pursues the spiritual and emotional understanding, in order to intensify the companionship among us. (BeSeTo Theatre Festival Korean Committee 3)

The origins of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival go back to August 1993. In 1993, Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki invited Kim Euikyung, an administrator of a Korean performing arts association, to Toga, Japan, where Suzuki's company was working. During their meeting, Kim suggested a Northeast Asian theatre festival that would promote the exchange of theatre and friendship among Japan, Korea, and China. Although, China was initially hesitant, the three Northeast Asian countries soon reached an accord on the movement.

Since 1994 the BeSeTo Theatre Festival has occurred annually, rotating among Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo. While this festival initially contained only theater, since 1996 they have often included dance drama and a broader consideration of performance genres. The BeSeTo Theatre Festival has also influenced other Asian countries. For

example, “inspired by BeSeTo, Nepal, India, and Bangladesh created the NIB Theater Festival (Nepal, India, and Bangladesh Theatre Festival) in 2004” (Yang 17).

China, Korea, and Japan have many things in common. While each country has developed the following characteristics differently, to varying degrees each country is influenced by Confucian and Buddhist ideas, uses Chinese characters, and embraces the traditional martial arts, such as Kung fu, Tae Kwan do and Karate. While the countries share similarities, their history is also full of conflicts, wars, and tensions as they have vied for power in the region. The geographic adjacency of the three countries has ignited competition as well as a spirit of emulation; however, the peaceful relations that exist today among the three countries are fairly recent. It is undeniable that today’s amicable atmosphere in Northeast Asia is unprecedented in their history. Perhaps an unconscious emotional empathy deriving from their common cultural denominators has helped foster the unparalleled friendly atmosphere. It is also possible that the countries are tired of the long history of conflict and realize that it is time for peaceful cooperation in order to spur social, political, and economical growth during this time of globalism. Regardless of specific reasons, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival has been instrumental in helping to foster friendship in the aftermath of the cold war mentality.

As a theatre festival, BeSeTo is a cultural junction of the three countries, fulfilling its role successfully. Throughout history theatre has played various roles, including providing a reflection of reality, serving as a means of therapy, and offering didactic lessons. Now the BeSeTo Theatre Festival seems to play a diplomatic role as well as a cultural exchange. As far back as Plato and Aristotle, the question of whether theatre affects people harmfully or beneficially has been raised. While people still debate the

varying purposes of art and drama, it is obvious that theatre has been influential.

Regardless of interpretations about theatre's aesthetic or functional tasks, it is likely that the BeSeTo Theatre Festival is praiseworthy in that it has had a positive effect on the relationship among China, Korea, and Japan.

The ensuing chapters provide a fuller understanding of the context and significance of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival. The first chapter offers a study of the historical, cultural, and sociological background of the creation and mottos of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival. It examines both the similarities and differences of the three countries in order to explore the historical and environmental background of the BeSeTo. The second chapter examines the significance of BeSeTo and how this theatre festival has played a beneficial role in improving the relationship among the three countries, helping to forge a friendly alliance among the long-time rivals. The third section of this thesis presents an examination of the history of the BeSeTo Theater Festival from its inception in 1994 through the 2004 festival. It discusses significant individuals, notable productions, and the ways in which the festival has changed through the years. The conclusion of this thesis explores possible avenues of the development and recommends the desirable direction of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival.

As the world moves “towards the time of interculturalism” (BeSeTo Manifesto), the artistic exchange of BeSeTo has helped alter and improve the socio-political dynamics among these three Northeast Asian powers. Likewise, a fuller understanding of these three cultures might prove beneficial in their relations with Western powers. I hope this research is able to provide an impetus for strengthening the study of contemporary theatres of Asian countries, especially China, Korea, and Japan. It is through our



understanding of respective cultures that people might more readily see their common humanity.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, AND SOCIOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BIRTH OF BESETO THEATRE FESTIVAL

As the BeSeTo Theatre Festival Manifesto signified, the relationship of China, Korea, and Japan, “in spite of cultural homogeneity [was] close yet also distant” (BeSeTo Theatre Festival Manifesto). Although these countries are culturally similar in a number of ways, they also have a violent history and have engaged in a number of wars and kept each other in check. These three Northeast Asian countries shared similar emotional and cultural beliefs, influenced by Confucian and Buddhist legacies.

#### People, Places, Population

Although some Chinese, Korean, and Japanese people believe that they have peculiar appearances, there are certain common physical traits evident in the Northeast Asian people. Genetically, they come under the Mongoloid Subspecies. Brown eyes, fair yellow skin, dark hair, and relatively slender physique are the hereditary nature of these Northeast Asians. On the other hand, Northeast Asians tend to have paler skin color than Southeast Asians such as native people of Indochina, Thailand, and Malaysia. These brown-eyed people also have geographical adjacency. Northeast Asia includes parts of Russia, Mongolia, China, Korea, and Japan. The latter three among Northeast

Asian countries share remarkable geographic adjacency. To the southeast of the Korean peninsula, “only 120 miles distant, lies Honshu, the principal island of Japan: to the West, at about the same distance, lies the Shantung peninsula of China: furthermore, Manchuria, the northeastern province of China, shares most of Korea’s northern boundary” (McCune 3). According to 2005 population data, approximately 1.3 billion people were living in China. Furthermore, over 48 million people live in Korea and more than 127 million in Japan. All three countries show relatively high population density, especially in Korea and Japan: China, 136 p/km<sup>2</sup>; Korea, 491 p/km<sup>2</sup> (World’s 12<sup>th</sup> highest population density); and Japan, 337 p/km<sup>2</sup> (World’s 18<sup>th</sup>).<sup>1</sup>

Those three neighboring countries, China, Korea, and Japan, have a long history, and have been a center of Oriental culture. China is one of the four oldest major civilizations. “While the development of Chinese civilization indubitably took place later than that of the others, Egyptian, Mesopotamian or Indians” (Rodzinski 1), its historical records date to at least 1500 BC. In turn, Korea and Japan have been influenced by Chinese traditional culture, particularly via Confucian tradition and Buddhism.

While contemporary China experiences a much lower standard of living than that of Korea (South Korea) and Japan, China was the dominant influence in East Asia until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. China has over one-fifth of the world’s population, and their history of written language system is the world’s longest. The Chinese alphabet is still accepted in not only contemporary China, but also in Korea and Japan.

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<sup>1</sup> As a point of comparison, the population density of the United Kingdom is 243 p/km<sup>2</sup>, while the United States is 30 p/km<sup>2</sup>.

### Culture and Religion

Founded by Prince Siddhartha in the sixth century B.C., Buddhism originally came from Northeastern India; however, China, via its geographical placement on the route between Central Asia and East Asia, played a pivotal role in transmitting Buddhism throughout East Asia. Over time Buddhism “provided the major cultural link between South Asia and East Asia” (Meyer 99). Furthermore, Zen Buddhism, a new branch or school of Buddhism, was founded in China by Bodhidharma, an Indian Buddhist monk. Zen can be regarded as a part of the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, and it focuses on Paramitas, which means the hard-to-reach culmination of certain practices achieved through continual meditations; in contrast, the Theravadin branch of Buddhism stresses the Noble Eightfold Path as a means to the cessation of suffering.

Indeed, in China, Korea, and Japan people practice Zen/Mahayana/Northern Buddhism rather than the original Indian versions of Theravadins/Hinayana/Southern Buddhism. Zen is a meditation emphasizing Buddhism, and widely accepted in China, Korea, and Japan. Since these three countries have different pronunciations of the same Chinese character, the name varies. The Chinese call it Chan/Ch’an. In Korea it is Seon/Son, while in Japan it is Zen. While there are nuances in the way it is practiced, the principles have the same origin. Indeed, while Zen Buddhism is traditionally seen as a Japanese form of Buddhism, Zen itself “evolved out of Chinese Chan/Ch’an Buddhism” (James 21).

Buddhism has undoubtedly been “one of the three main Chinese religions” (Meyer 100). Other religions/philosophies practiced in China include Taoism, which is “a simple naturalism that would lead men to ignore the teaching of definite virtues and

ethics and to believe in the Tao (the way)” (Bingham, Conroy, and Ikle 309), and Confucianism, which “stresses the value of the middle way” (Meyer 984). Buddhism is also influential in contemporary Korea: 40% of Koreans are religious, and 50% of them are Buddhist, while 45% are Christians ([http://www.npec.or.jp/northeast\\_asia/en/social/index.html](http://www.npec.or.jp/northeast_asia/en/social/index.html)). Contemporary Japanese are also frequent practitioners of Buddhism; the two major religions in Japan are Buddhism and Shintoism, which is the only “indigenous religion, which is nature based and animistic” (Gannon 44).

Mahayana, which flourished in China, Korea, and Japan, as a major branch of Buddhism, characterizes compassion, enlightened wisdom, salvation, and universalism. Unlike Hynayana/Theravadins, Mahayana believes that ‘Buddha’ is a preternatural existence between earth and the celestial world and that the historical figure, Buddha, was an incarnation/avatar of a Buddha.

In addition to Buddhism, Chinese Confucian ideals serve as a link among China, Korea, and Japan. Rather than a religion, Confucianism is a philosophy of life for social harmony and virtues. The founder, “Confucious/K’ung Fu Tzu was born in 551 B.C. in the state of Lu (Shantung) in China” (Rodzinski 34). He lived during the Chou/Zhou dynasty, a period characterized by slack morality. His philosophy and the moral/ethical code which he tried to establish as an educator was fundamentally “a code for the ruling upper class; this aristocratic approach was characteristic not only for Confucius but for almost all the philosophers of the classical period, regardless of the differences in their views” (Rodzinski 35). This high spirited etiquette reflects the principles of Li (propriety), Hsiao (family responsibility and love), Yi (righteousness), Xin (honesty and trustworthiness), Jen (benevolence and humanity), and Chung (loyalty to the state).

While Confucianism has evolved differently in Korea and Japan, the basic ethical virtue for harmony has remained the same. Likewise, the Confucian moral teachings in East Asia, including China, Korea, and Japan, have been “blended with the Taoist communion with nature and Buddhist concepts of the afterlife, to form a set of complementary, peacefully co-existent and ecumenical religions” (<http://www.religious-tolerance.org/confuciu.htm>). Thus, Confucian ideas have widely permeated Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese and are respected and understood even by non-Confucians.

The traditions of Chinese characters are another commonality among China, Korea, and Japan. While these three Northeast Asian countries have their own language, “their literary tradition is based on the borrowed Chinese ideogram system” (Jackson and Hudman 343). However, the Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese have different pronunciations of the same Chinese character; therefore, it is difficult to understand their respective languages without linguistics. In addition, unlike Chinese, Korean and Japanese employ no tones. Despite those differences, many Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese can recognize the meaning of the Chinese traditional characters if they see the characters.

### Martial Arts

China, Korea, and Japan have traditional martial arts such as Chinese Kung Fu, Korean Taekwondo, and Japanese Karate. While there are a wide variety of martial arts styles--including Buddhist style, Muslim style, and Taoist style--the martial arts in Asia, especially in China, Korea, and Japan, typically follow the Confucian cultural tradition of teacher-disciple apprenticeship. The relationship between masters

and students, based on hierarchy, is extremely strict. The common features of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese traditional martial arts are found in mentality and the hierarchic relationship, which is based on seniority. For instance, the students who are beginners are considered as younger brothers/sisters, and the master's peers are regarded as uncles/aunts for students. Likewise, their traditional martial arts are not mere fighting skills. They have their own decorum such as fellowship, patience, and veneration towards the master, senior and fellow.

### Differences

In spite of the common cultural factors found in China, Korea, and Japan, these neighboring countries have often had tense relationships, including many wars and conflicts, in order to gain an influence in the region. Throughout Asian history, today's peaceful atmosphere among China, Korea, and Japan seems unparalleled. While they share common historical/cultural denominators, and have remarkable geographic adjacency, there are also many differences among the three countries as they exhibit their own characteristics.

China, which is the fatherland of Confucianism and Taoism and greatly contributed to the spread of Buddhism in East Asia, has over one-fifth of the world's population and nearly 5000 years of civilization. Thus, it might be natural that China has played an important role in East Asian traditional cultures. Although both Korea and Japan have been greatly influenced by China, the "cultural translation" of the Chinese traditions varied between the two countries. Some historians liken China with Rome because of their dominant cultural influence, and compare Japan and Korea with England

and France respectively. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese culture served as a model for Korea and influenced the region in a manner similar to Rome's influence on France. Like England, Japan's status as an island left it isolated from the mainland, and so it developed a more unique, independent culture.

### China

During China's 5000-year history there have been many conflicts in the region including domestic conflicts (i.e., the rise and fall of various dynasties) and wars with foreign nations. China's long history and large geographical area have greatly contributed to the country's enormous, and amazingly diverse, population. China has 56 official nationalities including: Han (92%), Zhuang, Manchu, Hui, Miao, Uyghur, Yi, Tujia, Mongol, Tibetan, Buyei, Dong, Yao, Korean, Bai, Hani, Li, Kazak, Dai, She, Lisu, Gelao, Lahu, Dongxiang, Va, Sui, Nazi, Qiang, Tu, Xibe, Mulao, Kirgiz, Daur, Jingpo, Salar, Blang, Maonan, Tajik, Pumi, Achang, Nu, Ewenki, Gin, Jino, Deang, Uzbek, Russians, Yugur, Bonan, Monba, Orogen, Derung, Tatar, Hezhen, Lhoba, and Taiwanese aborigines. Moreover, China has a considerable number of unrecognized ethnicities such as Jewish, Oirat, and Lli Turki. The various ethnic groups in China have spawned various religions, coexistences of the religions, and multiculturalism, resulting in both conflicts and compromises. Thus, respecting cultural diversity and religious variety has become one of the China's distinct characteristics.

Although Hans comprise the majority of the Chinese population, throughout history China has been conquered and dynasties created by various diverse ethnic groups. For example, the Yuan Dynasty (1271 to 1368) was founded by the Mongolian Kublai



Khan (1215-1294). He was the grandson of the legendary Mongolian conqueror Genghis/Chingiz Khan (1162-1227), who founded the largest Mongol Empire: “At its greatest extent it stretched from Korea to Hungary, including, except for India and the south-east of the continent, most of Asia, as well as a good deal of eastern Europe” (Morgan 5). Also, the last Imperial Dynasty of China, the Qing Dynasty (1644 to 1911) was ruled by another minority ethnic group, the Manchu.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the mixture of various ethnic groups in China and their multicultural spirit are the result of many conflicts and compromises in China’s long history.

Many of the minor ethnic groups in the region have assimilated to the Han culture, and the separation between the Han majority and the various minority groups is not terribly distinct. Many Chinese are proud of their assimilative power in Chinese culture. As such, prejudice against minorities has been more limited. Contemporary Chinese often find their identity in ‘Chinese people’, rather than their historical nationalities, such as Manchu, Han, or any of the other 54 nationalities.

China, with its huge continent, well-established traditional culture, and multi-ethnic union, has played a major role in world history in many fields, including culture, religion, and philosophy. The country, however, has also experienced much discord in its history, such as frequent invasions from foreign nations and unfavorable eyes from neighboring countries, caused by Chinese arrogance about being a great cultural nation. The Chinese people are proud of their highly civilized culture and have been throughout their history; as such, they have been viewed as pompous and patronizing at times. For instance, the Eastern/Later Han Dynasty (23 to 220) established relations with Japan, but

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Qing Dynasty is sometimes known as the Manchu Dynasty.

were noted as “displaying a culturally superior attitude toward both the Japanese states and people, shorter in stature, designating them as *wa*, which means dwarf” (Meyer 92).

China has been involved in many wars with foreign countries during its 5000 year history. The Great Wall of China is a good example of an extreme measure taken by China to protect its people from further suffering caused by frequent foreign invasions. The Great Wall of China was built during the Ming Dynasty, which is the last dynasty led by an ethnic Han, in order to protect the Ming from raids by the Turkish tribes. It was preceded by several walls built since the third century BC against the raids of nomadic tribes. The Great Wall of China is the result of repeated wars and suffering caused by foreign invasions; today this historical legacy of China is considered one of the Seven Medieval Wonders of the World.

The Opium war, the Franco-Chinese war, and the Sino-Japanese wars during the last dynasty of China, the Qing, greatly contributed to the decline of the great nation of China. Furthermore, China’s arrogance and domestic conditions during the Qing Dynasty played a part in the country’s decline. The Qing Dynasty had to undergo sudden changes and was faced with internal problems, including economic issues, rebellions, and explosive population growth, as well as foreign pressure.

Again, the Qing Dynasty was comprised of ethnic Manchu, many from the Han majority “regarded the dynasty as alien’s kingdom” (Kim and Jin 122); however contemporary China does not discriminate against people from minor ethnicities. Accordingly, the Chinese soldiers, who were primarily Han, were not as determined to fight for the country or to protect the kingdom. For instance, during the Sino-Japanese war, only one private troop from China faced the Japanese. This is because to the people

belonging to the Han majority, the war was not a war between China and Japan, but a war between the foreign dynasty Manchu and Japan. The private troop did not have a strong will to fight for the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty. Rather, the owner of the private troop begrudged his soldiers' sacrifice and was only concerned about the loss of his troop; he was more concerned about losing his power within China due to losing his troop rather than the defeat of China of Manchu Kingdom by Japan. Moreover, Japan used to be regarded as an uncivilized and trifling island. Therefore, from Chinese perspectives, Japan's action was a matter of no importance at all.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the great cultural country of China has been losing its influence due to delayed modernization. The Xinhai Revolution in 1911 maintained that China should be a republic with democratic ideals as opposed to a monarchy (Qing Dynasty) comprised of 'foreign' people who did not even represent the majority of the population (Han). As such, Republic of China was established in 1912. This new China nation experienced political conflicts between the Chinese Nationalist party and the Communist party. Another political change occurred in 1949 when the Chinese Civil War ended with the victory of the Communist party of China. Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China, and China began to move in a new direction.

### Japan

Japan, "which means Land of the Rising Sun" (Meyer 121), has a long history like China and Korea. However, the boundaries of "insular Japan have been more stable than Korea's" (Craig 107). Unlike China and Korea, Japan as an island could be safe from foreign invasions; especially such geographic advantage played an enormous role in

protecting Japan from many Northern invaders. The Korean peninsula often functioned as a barrier for Japan from invasions from the North nomadic people such as the Mongolians.

Japan has also been influenced by Chinese culture, and “it was by way of Korea that Japan was drawn within the orbit of Chinese culture” (Kolb 414). For instance, during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, many aristocrats, artisans, scholars, and monks from Baekje, one of the Three Kingdoms of Korea introduced Chinese and Korean culture, including Chinese characters, pottery, and Buddhism. One of the biggest differences among the common denominators in North East Asia, is the way Buddhism was developed in Japan; “Japan in turn also shaped the faith; as Shintoism assimilated Buddha and bodhisattvas, Buddhist simplicity and individuality was transformed into Japanese hierarchical patterns in theological doctrine and monastic orders” (Meyer 129).

The political atmosphere in Japan has varied throughout history, much more so than that of China and Korea - countries that were ruled mostly by dynasties until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For example, the Nara period (710 to 794) and the Heian period (794 to 1185) were Japanese dynasties, while during the Kamakura periods (1185 to 1333), Japan was a feudal country with a ruling class of warriors called Samurai.

Contrary to China and Korea, Japan’s modernization occurred early. Matthew Perry’s second visit, with the Treaty of Peace and Amity, established formal diplomatic relations between Japan and the United States in 1854. Furthermore, “similar treaties were concluded between the Japanese and other major European powers within two years” (Meyer 207). Thus, Western influences started to change Japan into a modernized country.

The turning point toward modernization was the Meiji Restoration of Japan (1868 to 1912), which characterized the process of Japan's establishment of a strong internal base with many reforms, helped the country achieve world power. The Shogun resigned with the abolition of the Feudal system, and the emperor's authority was reestablished. Western influence also became evident in Japan; the country adapted Western style institutions, quasi-parliamentary constitutional government, the modern style military method, and the Western legal system into the culture. During this period, Japan became the first state in Asia to eliminate all unequal treaties with the West, and Japan embarked on "wars with China and Russia, annexed Korea, and came into diplomatic accommodation with major European powers and the United States" (Meyer 278).

Throughout history China and Korea regarded Japan as an insignificant force; however Japan began to gain power in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, largely due to early modernization, and where there is power there is often war. For Japan, the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895) was a battle with China over the Korean peninsula. Again, during 1904-1905, Japan was involved in the Russo-Japanese war, fighting with Russia over Manchuria. War victories made Japan a dominant power in Asia for the first time. In 1895, Japan annexed Taiwan, and after 5 years, the Korean peninsula was also annexed by Japan.

After the World War I, Japan succeeded in the expansion of Japanese control over various parts of China. The defeat of World War II, however, daunted Japanese control, and Japan lost many countries it once annexed or ruled, including Taiwan and Korea. As a defeated nation Japan also suffered economic loss. Moreover, Japan was occupied by the Allied Powers during 1945 to 1952. After the truce of the Korean War (1950- 1953),

Japan began to overcome financial problems, and contemporary Japan is one of the leading industrialized countries in the world.

### Korea

Because of a tendency to “be more emotional than their Asian neighbors” (Gannon 128), Koreans are sometimes called the “Irish of Asia,” as well as the “French of Asia.” Korea’s long history is at least 2500 years old and includes an incredible number of foreign invasions. Koreans’ more emotional characteristics may be caused by frequent invasions from foreign powers. Furthermore, Korea has become subjected to pressures from China and Japan because of their geographic position; the Korean peninsula lies midway between China and Japan. As such, the Korean peninsula was often a source of conflict between China and Japan during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-95) between the Qing, which was the last dynasty of China (1644-1911), and the Meiji of Japan (1868-1912) was due to competing interests in Joseon Kingdom (1392-1910), which was the last dynasty of Korea.

Korean relationships with China and Japan began during the period of the three kingdoms of Korea (57 BC to 668); the three kingdoms were Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla. These three kingdoms were respectively connected with China and Japan, and the two neighboring countries played considerable roles in the rise and fall of the kingdoms. Also during this period a relationship between China and Japan developed, and Confucianism and Buddhism spread throughout the region.

Goguryeo, “founded in the fourth century B.C., expanded rule from southern Manchuria, and conquered the neighboring Physo people in the Sungari River basin as

Chinese retreated into Lelang” (Meyer 119). The Goguryeo Kingdom often fought with the Chinese Sui and Tang Dynasties, and the downfall of Sui was partly due to the frequent battles with the Goguryeo Kingdom. Frequent showdowns between the Korean Goguryeo and China spawned hostile relations with the Chinese Tang, and as such the Tang joined with another Korean kingdom, Silla, in order to hold Goguryeo in check.

The Baekje Kingdom, located in the southwestern part of the Korean peninsula, established close relations with Japan in order to increase protection from the Goguryeo Kingdom in the Northern part of the country, and from the Silla Kingdom-- who the Chinese Tang Dynasty supported-- located in the southeast. Furthermore, the alliance with the Korean Baekje Kingdom offered Japan needed protection from the threatening alliance of the Chinese Tang and the Korean Silla dynasties. Consequently, the Baekje Kingdom contributed to the development of ancient Japan, introducing Buddhism, and various technologies for sculpture, architecture, and pottery into Japanese culture. Indeed, Baekje is famous for the Baekje smile that is found on many Buddhist sculptures. Contrary to Goguryeo’s bravery, Baekje characterizes warmth and artistic delicacy.

The Silla, the least advanced kingdom of the three, eventually unified the three kingdoms; with assistance from the Chinese Tang Dynasty, the Silla conquered Baekje in 660 and Goguryeo in 668. The Japanese, allied with the Baekje, tried to help the struggling kingdom, but the allied forces were too powerful. The Silla and Chinese Tang succeeded in the unification of a majority of Korea, except the Northern part of Goguryeo, which is called Balhae (698 to 926) the new country of Goguryeo remnants.

The story about the rise and fall of the Three Kingdoms of Korea indicates that the relationship among Korea, China, and Japan has a long history, which goes back as

far as the first century BC and seventh century AD. As the Baekje-Japanese allied forces were defeated by the Silla-Chinese Tang, and the Silla united the three Kingdoms, the relationship between Korea and Japan was weakened; as such, Korean relations began to gravitate more towards China. In the meantime, many Baekje people moved into Japan to avoid Silla's rule.

Following the unified Silla Kingdom and preceding the Joseon Dynasty was the Koryo Kingdom (918 to 1392), and this period was characterized by Mongol invasions. Mongols were nomads and they became a mighty force in Asia; the Mongol invasions were threatening for both Korea and China. Indeed, the Koryo Dynasty experienced Mongolian interference between 1256 and 1340s, and the Mongols ruled China during the Yuan Dynasty (Mongol Empire) during 1271 to 1368.

The foreign invasions to the Korean peninsula continued into the Joseon Dynasty (1392 to 1910), which was the longest-lived, actively ruling dynasty in the history of China, Korea, and Japan. Joseon, a strict Confucian Dynasty, suffered from many invasions, especially from Japan and China. For example, the Imjin War, also known as the Seven-Year-War (1592 to 1598), was started because the Japanese wanted to conquer China through the Korean peninsula. While the Japanese invasions failed, they seriously damaged the Joseon Dynasty. Moreover, "the Manchu invasions which followed before the wounds could be healed, hastened markedly the decline of the dynasty" (Hazard 81).

In 1910, the falling Joseon dynasty was annexed by Japan with the Japan-Korea annexation treaty, and Japanese occupation lasted until 1945 at the end of World War II. However, Korea's dramatic history was not over yet. As soon as the defeat of Japan in 1945, Korea was governed by America and the Soviet Union: the Soviets supported the



North Korean government, which had a relation with Communist China, while the United States was on South Korea's side in order to restrain the Communists. The Korean War (1950-1953) was an explosion of the two separated governments, and Korea is still divided into two opposing countries: North Korea, a communist country, and South Korea, a capitalist liberal democracy.

With the lapse of time, the pent-up hatred during the long histories of China, Korea, and Japan has manifested in the region as an emotional bias rather than a hostile state of war. For Chinese and Koreans, the Japanese are often viewed as opportunists. This is because Japan succeeded early in modernization, and won the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars through major support from Great Britain and America; interestingly, after Japan's victories the country turned against Britain and America and joined with Germany during World War II. Furthermore, while China and Korea helped ancient Japan become a civilized country, sharing their culture and knowledge with the neighboring country, the Japanese were rewarded for their efforts by invasions. As a result, China and Korea tended to view Japan as untrustworthy and ungrateful.

On the other hand, Japan has had hard feelings toward China and Korea because of patronizing attitudes from these countries throughout history. Indeed, until Japan's Meiji Restoration period (1868-1912), China and Korea intolerably patronized Japan, designating Japan as a "land of dwarfs" or as "frivolous barbarians." Hence, from the Japanese perspective, China and Korea were often seen as arrogant countries. Likewise, when Japan annexed the Republic of China (Taiwan) in 1895 and Korea in 1910, it increased the antipathy of Korea and the Republic of China against Japan.

### Cooperation

As previously mentioned, in order to truly understand the current relations between China, Korea and Japan, it is important to study their relationships throughout history. The histories of China, Korea, and Japan are intermingled, dramatic, and complex, and their feelings for one another are complicated. However, since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the three countries have developed in distinct directions through their dealings with different political-economic situations and various domestic problems. Fortunately, contemporary China, Korea, and Japan have become cooperative entities.

Today's friendly atmosphere among China, Korea, and Japan are due to three major factors. Firstly, the three countries have recognized the synergistic economic effect, which can be expected to increase by future economic cooperation: the "advanced technology of Japan, skilled and marketing experience of Korea, and low-cost production and manufacturing base of China" (Cook, Doel, and Li 158) provide strong economic incentives for cooperation. Also, China was "motivated to follow the path of its successful East Asian neighbors" (So 7), especially South Korea and Japan who enjoyed a higher standard of living than that of China, and began "export-oriented industrialization" (So 7). The second factor is politics. For instance, the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe left China as "one of the lone communist fortresses" (Cook, Doel, and Li 157) in the world. Furthermore, the Korean peninsula continues to be separated, and the South Koreans still need to hold North Korea in check. Globalism is the third incentive for cooperation in the region. Tired of the long history of conflicts, China, Korea, and Japan have realized the significance of being peaceful. Having some common cultural elements, the three Northeast Asian countries

regard the trend of Globalization as both an opportunity and a challenge for the world.

### Conclusion

This chapter presents a historical perspective of the common denominators, the distinct characteristics, and the many conflicts and collaborations between China, Korea, and Japan. While these Northeast Asian countries have spiritual, emotional, and religious common denominators, such as Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, a Chinese character based language system and individual traditional marital arts, the history of the three countries developed distinctly due to various geographic characteristics, domestic conditions, and timing of reform. Regarding the differences between these countries, Mun Sik Kim (an anthropologist of Chinese nationality, Korean heritage, and who was educated in Japan), argues that “a continental China is a culture of giver: an insular Japan is a culture of taker: and a peninsular Korea is a culture of both giver and taker” (220), indicating that their geographic placement greatly influenced the history and culture of each country.

As the BeSeTo Manifesto indicated, it aims not only for cultural meetings and the exchange of artistic expression, but also as a way of overcoming the past history of conflicts. Through the fellowship of artistic exchange they seek increased companionship among China, Korea, and Japan. The mutual historical, cultural, and sociological backgrounds of the three countries, covering from the ancient time to contemporary, shows us the background of the birth of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival as a catalyst to alleviate the historical complications. The festival has proven to be a diplomatic tool that has helped the three countries overcome their past conflicts to arrive at a more

harmonious relationship that has created a high synergy for both economic and political cooperation.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BESETO THEATRE FESTIVAL

Since the creation of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival, many international groups and associations have started to use the term “BeSeTo.” The term is now sometimes used in the fields of arts/culture, economic/business circles, electric/scientific fields, contemporary geographical descriptions, and in advertising fields. For instance, the BeSeTo Opera, which aims for cultural exchange among China, Korea, and Japan via Opera, was created in 1996, while many calligraphic artists, especially in China, Korea, and Japan, have participated in the BeSeTo international exhibition of calligraphic works. Also, the phrase “BeSeTo Belt” is not a stranger anymore in international business circles, and it refers to the Northeast Asian market. BeSeTo, as a domain name on the World Wide Web, is flourishing as a symbol of Orientalism, Asian influence, or various associations of Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese. On the internet, The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) officially cites the term “BeSeTo” when the tri-nation symposia, composed of China, Korea, and Japan, holds or when they mention the three countries. Likewise, using the phrase BeSeTo is becoming a lucrative marketing strategy, aiming for people’s curiosity toward Asia: In Maryland, a BeSeTo Department Store and BeSeTo Food Court attract their potential consumers who are interested in (Northeast) Asia.

Like the former Soviet Bloc or the current European Union, the wide use of “BeSeTo” seems to predict the birth of a new infrastructure in cultural/social/economic fields. While the BeSeTo Theatre Festival may not have directly spawned such movement in all fields, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival obviously brought the consciousness of a cooperative system of BeSeTo, and the rapid spread of the “BeSeTo” appellation is surprising. The increasing number of people using the term BeSeTo suggests that the theatre personnel who founded the festival are helping to achieve their goal of cultural harmony and cooperation among the peoples of China, Korea, and Japan.

While the history of China, Korea, and Japan is closely connected, the historical conflicts resulted in long-running animosities. Although younger generations of the three countries are relatively friendly, many older people of the three Northeast Asian countries still harbor ill feelings against one another. Today, such feelings against one another often reflect an unconscious bias rather than an overt animosity. Many productions in the BeSeTo Theatre Festival have presented stories regarding their bitter histories; in part, they are an attempt to trace back the history and heal the wounded feelings. For example, Bok Guen Chung’s The Princess Dukhye, staged in the Second BeSeTo Theatre Festival, told the story of the victimized Princess Dukhye, who was the last Korean princess of the Joseon dynasty (1392 to 1910) before Japan’s invasion. This production became a means of reconciliation; after viewing the play “many Japanese audiences made words of apology” (Han 93) and many audiences, regardless of nationalities, stressed the need for peace. This is because, for both Koreans and Japanese, the theatre audience seemed to value their common humanity above their designation as Korean or Japanese.

Another significance of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival can be found in its

contribution to the development of contemporary theatres of each country. Indeed many theatre artists from each country, such as director Ota Shogo from Japan, actor Seok Hwan Ahn from Korea, and playwright-director Li Ryui from China, gained international attention through the BeSeTo Theatre Festival. Also, a number of symposiums have been held in each country, discussing the participating productions and exploring ways to foster the growth of Northeast Asian theatre.

Underneath the historical/political conflicts, China, Korea, and Japan share cultural components and so the BeSeTo ideal, or the creation of an Asian Union, centered on the BeSeTo axis is possible to achieve. Accordingly, the significance of the leader of the BeSeTo ideal, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival, seems to be potential in many fields, including contemporary theatre. For example, the founders of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival are proud that they served as the stimulus for the NIB (Nepal, India, and Bangladesh) Theatre Festival. While each of the countries has its own pending questions for what the results of the BeSeTo alliance should be, the term BeSeTo resonates as an impressive, challenging incentive for Asian people.

The reason why the BeSeTo concept from the theatre festival has been accepted positively and has rapidly spread is mainly the growing global significance of Northeast Asia in the international world over the past decade. This global significance covers not only their huge economic growth in international markets, but also an increasing interest in the culture of Asian people. The contemporary world has a tendency to assemble an economic bloc according to a cultural circle like the European Union. The group of China, Korea, and Japan is one of the strongest candidates for that kind of cultural circle in that they recognize the potentially enormous synergistic effects on economic efforts, and their

cultural cohesion traces back to the ancient period as well as the archetypes of Buddhism and Confucianism.

On the other hand, while the dramatic economic growth of the Northeast Asia region since the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century has made the area interesting for international people, this area still has several dangerous factors. Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons as well as missile programs in socialistic North Korea and China may destabilize the region. Likewise, territorial disputes, including the division of the Korean peninsula and the conflict between mainland China and the Republic of China have not been fully resolved. In addition there are potential aftereffects of the unprecedented sudden financial growth during the decade. As the 1990s birth of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival was apropos with the rising globalism and unparalleled peaceful atmosphere in the Northeast Asia, tempering such potentially negative factors would be one of the further missions which the BeSeTo Theatre Festival considers as it moves forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Although the history of China, Korea, and Japan has more often been full of malice, conflict, and rivalry rather than good friends, their ethnic contiguity and cultural background offer hope for continued cooperation. According to Gannon, “a considerable number of people flowed into Japan from the Korean peninsula until the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and by that time the mixing was nearly complete” (32). Those Korean people were from Baekje, one of the three kingdoms in the period of 300 to 700. Later, when the Silla kingdom conquered Baekje and Goguryeo, more Baekje people flowed into Japan because of its geographic adjacency. Also, a number of scholars believe that during China’s Yuan Dynasty (1271 to 1368), the Mongol emperors frequently invaded the Koryo Dynasty of Korea; the invasions also resulted in many hybrids of the two people.



Therefore, many Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese share some ethnic contiguity even though Korea and Japan are often thought of as perhaps the most homogeneous people in the modern age.

The cultural similarities of China, Korea, and Japan such as Confucian philosophy, Buddhist legacy, Chinese characters, and traditional marital arts are considerable enough to make them feel, perhaps unconsciously, an emotional empathy for each other. Although China, Korea, and Japan have often been against one another in their history, their common backgrounds are too much to be an eternal enemy. Their feelings can be explained as love and hate rather than mere harshness. Furthermore, the global spirit of contemporary culture functions as a catalyst in melting their long, complicated animosity. Being tired of a divisive mentality and conflicts of attrition, the three Northeast Asian countries started to make peace, cultivating an atmosphere that includes economic cooperation, political security, and a spirit of unity that reflects their deep-rooted emotional connection.

Recognizing the diplomatic role theatre can play, the festival represents an idea. Through theatre, they have helped heal the injuries of history, fostering a new identity, offering a symbol of cooperation among the former warring nations of China, Korea, and Japan. As one of the best Asian partners of the International Theatre Institute, the BeSeTo Theatre festival plays a beneficial role in the globalization of international theatre. In terms of its relationship with ITI, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival serves as a major presenter of Northeast Asian Theatre to the world.

Theatre reflects the art, humanity, culture, and peculiarity of its country of origin. Thus, theatre offers remarkable access to understanding a country, thereby offering a

good way of creating connections among people from different countries. The BeSeTo Theatre Festival people believe in theatre's mighty power of emotional connection, of therapy, and as theatre a tool for seeking identity, soul, and culture. The increased economic and political cooperation among the three countries suggests that the BeSeTo Theatre Festival is achieving part of its mission.

## CHAPTER IV

### HISTORY OF THE BESETO THEATRE FESTIVAL (1994-2004)

The history of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival from 1994 to 2004 has been incredibly diverse according to each festival, country, and production. The overarching similarity between all the BeSeTo Theatre Festivals from 1994 to 2004 has been the inclusion of contemporary theatres from China, Korea, and Japan. Since the festival is an annual event, each country hosts it every third year, with the rotation order being Korea, Japan, and then China. Thus, the festival varies not only according to the fundamental peculiarity of each host nation, but also on the condition of the host nation at that time. Furthermore, since the festival's tri-nation selection committee yearly seeks for an accord on the administration guidance, subject, and confirmation of production for the upcoming festival each year, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival also depends on the annual advisory of the international committee from the three countries. While every clause of the BeSeTo Manifesto is regarded equally important, each year focuses on a particular clause, or set of clauses, depending on the features, themes, and productions of the respective festival as well as the conditions, aims, and backgrounds of the host country.

As BeSeTo signifies, this festival functions as a symbol of friendship and cooperation. Every member of the festival's tri-nation committee has equal rights to

advise one another, as well as a responsibility to operate the event. Different ways of management according to the situation of the host nation are accepted. Also, the committee of the three countries explores the seasonal, financial, and socio-political features of the upcoming host country and its influence toward the theatre festival for the collaborative event. Hence, the flexibility of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival is a natural consequence of realistic matters rather than preplanned steps.

Following the July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994 proclamation of foundation by three chief directors--Hsu Xiao Chong from China, Euikyung Kim from Korea, and Tadashi Suzuki from Japan--the first BeSeTo Theatre Festival opened on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1994. The directors' proclamation was made in Seoul, and "since 1994 marked the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Seoul's serving as the capital of Korea, the decision was made for Seoul to serve as the first host city, and the government of Seoul agreed to offer \$50,000 of financial support to the festival" (Kim 65). Although the phrase BeSeTo begins with "Be", which represents Beijing in China, the economic advantage of Seoul and meaningful 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Seoul at the time led to the decision for the first BeSeTo theatre festival to be held in Seoul.

The first BeSeTo Theatre Festival put emphasis on the originality of each production from China, Korea, and Japan. The productions intended the introduction of their peculiar productions to one another rather than joint work. Prior to collaboration works, they needed to know how different their theatres were, and accordingly, the first BeSeTo Theatre Festival in Seoul aimed at understanding one another and served as a meeting place for dramatic performances of respective Chinese, Korean, and Japanese theatres.

As the host country Korea presented two contemporary Korean plays. One was A Moonlight Night in Baek-Ma River by Tae-Seok Oh, dealing with the fall of the Baekje Empire in 660. Rather than a story-telling production, A Moonlight Night in Baek-Ma River focuses on praying for the repose of the departed souls of the destroyed soldiers and the last King of the Baekje Empire. Mixing realism and spiritual/ritual dance of Korea, the play stood as an example of alternative Korean theatre. The other Korean production was A Toenail of General Oh by Cho Yeoul Park, a story about the recruitment of a man who used to be simple country man and his experience as a clumsy soldier. Park's play houses the humanity of a simple and honest countryman under the strange situation of a war.

Japan presented an adaptation of King Lear by William Shakespeare, directed by one of the most distinguished directors in Japan, Tadashi Suzuki. This production offered a radical interpretation of Shakespeare's play, portraying the world as a huge hospital, and Lear as one of the patients in that an Old Man in the hospital identifies with Shakespeare's Lear. Suzuki's production offered an intriguing mix of the formal beauty of traditional Japanese theatre with modern psychological drama. As a matter of fact, at the first performance of Suzuki's adapted King Lear in 1984 in Toga, "this caused certain negative reactions in some of Suzuki's hitherto friendly critics, one even complaining that the version was 'uncharacteristic' of Suzuki because it was too 'consistent' in the semantic structure of the drama as a whole" (Yasunari 247). However, since many of Suzuki's adaptations of Shakespearian drama, including King Lear, aim for the recreation of Western theatre into a combination of Asian (Japanese) traditional theatre and psychological drama with universal truth, such attempts drew much attention from

contemporary experimental theatre people in Korea and China who had similar interests in such combinations.

China staged a contemporary Chinese play, Tian Xia Di Yi Lou (The World's Greatest), by Jiping He. The play was performed by the Beijing People's Art Theatre, which is an exemplar of realist theatre in China. This play handles the rise and fall of a duck restaurant, symbolizing the ups and downs of a country/society. While the Beijing People's Art Theatre is famous for realism, Jiping He's play included some symbolic elements contained within an essentially realistic style. China has had one of the longest histories in the world, and thus has numerous tales and stories of the rise and fall of both individuals and dynasties. This production reflected such features of China.

While there was little collaboration of the three countries during the first BeSeTo Theatre Festival in 1994, the second BeSeTo Theatre Festival in Tokyo featured a joint production. As head producer of the host country, Tadashi Suzuki suggested a work that would include actors from China, Korea, and Japan, and this plan was accepted by the other countries. Workshops were held in both Seoul and Beijing, and international performers from the three Northeast Asian countries participated in the workshops. The workshops culminated in auditions for their first joint production, The Water Station-2, written and directed by Shogo Ota, who is a disciple of Suzuki. The play deals with the life and death of a great variety of typified people. As the first cooperative production of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival, Ota aimed for a universal theme and story as the play stresses the journey to the other world. Visually, one of the striking features of the production was the presence of continually flowing water throughout the show. A water

channel from the top of the stage to a hole in the center of the stage symbolized the flux of time in human life.

In addition to the collaborative production, the Second BeSeTo Theatre Festival included one Korean production, two Japanese plays, and one Chinese production. While the highlight of the second festival was the collaborative works of three Northeast Asian countries, one of the most discussed productions was Korea's entry, The Princess Dukhye, by Bok Geun Chung. While the festival emphasizes cooperation, The Princess Dukhye draws attention to the bitter history between Korea and Japan. The play tells the story of Princess Dukhye<sup>3</sup>, who was the last Korean princess of the Joseon dynasty (1392 to 1910), and the last figure of royalty in Korean history. Staging The Princess Dukhye in Japan was somewhat sensitive for both Korea and Japan since Princess Dukhye was coercively transferred to Japan during her childhood, and since the last Korean dynasty was destroyed by newly Westernized Japan. However, the story of the last descendant of Korean majesty, who lived in a tragic period because of Japan's sudden invasion, created a reverential atmosphere for both countries. Several Japanese elders who saw the show, remarked with tears, that they used to spend their childhood with Princess Dukhye. This production touched the universal humanity in both sides--an assaulter and a victim--and created a reconciliatory atmosphere.

The Third BeSeTo Theatre Festival in Beijing, China was held from October 21<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> in 1996. This festival had a bigger scale than the former two festivals in Seoul and

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<sup>3</sup> Since Princess Dukhye was a daughter of a concubine, her original title of courtesy was 'Ong Ju', which means a princess by a concubine instead of 'Gong Ju' a princess. Unlike Western Dynasties, Joseon Dynasty classified royalty according to their maternal line even though their paternal line was an emperor. However, since the term Princess does not sort it by the umbilical line, this play is usually translated as The Princess Dukhye.

Tokyo; 14 productions from 12 theatre troupes from the three countries were staged in Beijing. Performances at the festival included: three contemporary productions from China (Zhang Chien by Yi Chen and Bao Xuan Yao, Yianhu by Yong He Zhang and Bao Chun Wang, and Tanghulu by Rang Bing Kuhn); four performances from Korea (three modern dance performances--Empress Myung Sung, Heo Ju, Cho Hon, and the play When Spring Comes in the Mountains and on the Plains by In Hoon Choi); and a Japanese production of Elektra by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. China as the host country presented six Mai-Hwa award-winning traditional Chinese theatres. Furthermore, it was during the Third BeSeTo Theatre Festival in 1996 that modern dance performances were included in the mix, extending the festival's range beyond strictly theatre arts.

In addition to the increased level of production, the Third BeSeTo Theatre Festival in Beijing was highly academic in that it held four enthusiastic symposia on contemporary theatre in China, Korea, and Japan, which included discussions about the festival's productions. Each symposium had its own themes, and theatres of China, Korea, and Japan were respectively represented at each symposium. Through the symposia, scholarly records began to be kept of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival.

The first symposium held in 1996 mainly facilitated discussions regarding the newly added modern dance performances, as well as explorations of contemporary Korean theatre. The second symposium explored the boundary between globalized theatre and national traits of contemporary China, Korea, and Japan. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there has been a flood of Western influence into the region; as such, theatre professionals in China, Korea, and Japan have a tendency to receive Western theatre unconditionally, and many contemporary professionals in the field are concerned whether



their countries have confused their own individual identities, with regards to theatre, with Western ideals. Lin Lin, a Chinese theatre critic, argues that “there are three types of theatre in contemporary China, Korea, and Japan: Traditional theatre, Western theatre, and Mixed theatre of Western and traditional styles, and such coexistence is breeding discord between national culture and globalism” (197). Since the three countries shared a similar anxiety regarding the direction of contemporary theatre in Northeast Asia and a desire to seek appropriate boundaries between Western theatre and their own, the symposium spawned another thread of common consciousness among China, Korea, and Japan.

The subject of the third symposium held in 1996 was contemporary Chinese theatre. The people of Korea and Japan had rarely seen Chinese theatre, thus a recognition and study of Chinese theatre practices were the main theme of the symposium. The fourth and final symposium dealt with Tadashi Suzuki’s dramatic theory, and the mutuality of European and Asian theatres. While China and Korea staged originally created plays, Japan presented the adaptation of Elektra by the Suzuki Company of Toga. Suzuki’s unique concept of the adaptation was the issue of the last symposium. Suzuki’s Elektra only focused on the fear and loneliness of Clytemnestra and Elektra. With extreme tension, this production presented a story about human emotional and mental tragedy rather than a story of revenge.

The Fourth BeSeTo Theatre Festival in 1997, which occurred in Seoul, was held with new BeSeTo international committee members. As a matter of fact, the BeSeTo international committee experienced a structural adjustment during the end of the Third BeSeTo Theatre Festival. Wanting more time to concentrate on his work as a director,

Tadashi Suzuki resigned his position on the committee, and new committee members were organized.

Korea, the host country for the Fourth BeSeTo Theatre Festival, offered five different stages for use by the BeSeTo members, and four Korean plays were presented. San Sit Kim by Hyun Hwa Lee is a story about revival and immortality by purgation; it mixed Western avant-garde theatre with traditional Korean ritual. Oh Gue- A Form of Death by Youn Teak Lee deals with a son's exorcism for his dying mother. Come See Me, by Guang Lim Kim is an original work of the Korean film Memory of Murder, which tells the true story of a series of murders that occurred in Korea during the 1980s. The Spring Day by Gang Baek Lee, an experimental, contemporary Korean play, deals with a desire to possess. Japan and China staged one play each. With Suzuki no longer part of Japan's committee, they selected The Great Doctor Yabu Hara, the work of contemporary Japanese playwright Hisashi Inoue, an author known for his eccentric touch. China's entry was Lady Stayed by Yue Mai Chien, performed by the renowned Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center.

Japan's second turn hosting the BeSeTo Theatre Festival, the Fifth BeSeTo Theatre Festival in 1998, was held from October 15<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> in Tokyo. This festival was known for its unique staging atmosphere. The Japanese officials chose Zojoji, a Buddhist temple under the Tokyo Tower, as the performance area for the BeSeTo Theatre Festival. Productions were staged on the underground theatre of Zojoji, in the accommodation theatre in the main building of the temple, or at the stairs of the Buddhist sanctum.

Each production was staged at a different space in Zojoji. Japan performed Kyoji Kobayashi's The Rise and Fall of the Garden of Zeus, at the outdoor accommodation

stage in Zojoji. Korea staged a modern dance performance The Empress Myung Sung in the main building of Zojoji, and China performed The Green Veranda, by Rao Wai Kang in the underground theatre of the temple. The festival was able to gain both domestic and international attention because of the historic temple Zojoji, and the three countries experienced the performance in a non-theatre space for the first time since the birth of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival.

The Sixth BeSeTo Theatre Festival held in 1999 had a different context in that it was held along with the Sixth Chinese Theatre Festival, a nationwide event held every two years in China. With the economic support of the city of Shenyang, the Sixth BeSeTo Theatre Festival occurred in Shenyang rather than Beijing. In addition to the financial support offered by the government of Shenyang, Chinese officials moved the festival from Beijing because they wanted to spread the BeSeTo Theatre Festival over more cities in China.

The result of this double festival was reciprocally successful. The Sixth BeSeTo Theatre Festival in Shenyang was an unprecedented success, and the Sixth Chinese Theatre Festival achieved an international name. Two productions of the 1999 BeSeTo Theatre Festival embodied the modernization of tradition. China's Luotuo Xiangzi by Xung Won Nong, a modernized Beijing Opera, was presented at both the Chinese Theatre Festival and the BeSeTo Theatre Festival. Japan's The Story of Chunsue by Izumi Kyoka, a play about love between a human and a ghost, was a combination of modern theatre techniques and traditional Japanese Bunraku puppetry. Meantime, Korea chose a realistic play, Mue Eyu Do Gi Hang by Seduk Ham, adapted by Suk Man Kim for the Sixth BeSeTo Theatre Festival. Another Chinese production, The Baptism by

Wang Hai Ling, was performed by the Modern Drama Troupe of the Military; such professional military theatre troupes are a peculiarity of the People's Republic of China.

China's decision to hold the two theatre festivals at the same time was intended to benefit both parties. The Chinese Theatre Festival is one of the biggest theatre festivals in China, and it wanted more international attention; thus, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival--as an international theatre festival--provided a good opportunity for such attention. On the other hand, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival needed to have the support from the Chinese public, and the domestic popularity of the Chinese Theatre Festival helped the BeSeTo Theatre Festival in reaching a broader audience in China.

The Seventh BeSeTo Theatre Festival held in Seoul 2000 revolved around an innovative idea. Using their own traditional theatre styles, China, Korea, and Japan each staged a portion of the Korean classical opera Chunhyang. This opera is a traditional Korean love story, and focuses on Lady Chunhyang's devotion to one man. The three acts of the play were chronologically allotted to each of the three countries: China got the theme of love, the beginning of the play; Japan had the middle act of the play, on the subject of the sufferings of the young lovers; and Korea got the last act, about the reunion of Chunhyang and the love of her life. China staged the first act with a Beijing opera style, Japan did the second act in a Kabuki style, and Korea staged the final act with a Korean traditional opera style.

Though the three Northeast Asian countries use Chinese characters, the pronunciations are different, and so the name of the heroine, Chunhyang, varied according to the act and the country. The Chinese pronounce it Chunshang. In Korea it is Chunhyang, while in Japan it is Shunkyo. Likewise, the style and dialogue were different.

However, this means of co-production in the 2000 BeSeTo Theatre Festival was meant to respect the tradition, style, and feature of each country, as well as further develop the deep feeling of emotional connection among theatre artists and Asian-cultured people.

After the 2000 BeSeTo Theatre Festival, the BeSeTo project experienced another major change in the international BeSeTo committee. Until 2000, each country had three representatives on the international committee, including one chief administrator; it was during the Seventh BeSeTo Theatre Festival that each country now had four representatives from each country on the committee. This change reflected the growth of the festival since its inception in 1994.

Also, for the upcoming 2001 festival, there was a discussion about renaming of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival in order to increase its international scope. Rather than limit themselves to China, Korea, and Japan, the committee considered expanding the festival to other countries, with a corresponding name change to the Asian Theatre Festival. After some debate the committee concluded that renaming the festival was premature and agreed that the festival should remain centered around the three countries.

The Eighth BeSeTo Theatre Festival was held successively in Tokyo, Shizuoka, and Togamura in 2001. For this festival, they extended special invitations to India, Russia, and France. This broader scale showed a change in the history of BeSeTo Theatre Festival. At the same time, the way of participations was also changed; starting in 2001, the host country selects the participating productions among applied productions from non-host countries.

Unlike the Eighth BeSeTo Theatre Festival, the Ninth BeSeTo Theatre Festival in Beijing in 2002 reverted back to being BeSeTo-centered as there were no productions

outside of China, Korea, and Japan. In addition, the 2002 BeSeTo Theatre Festival was surrounded by a series of memorable events. First, 2002 was China's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations with Japan, and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China's establishment of diplomatic relations with Korea. Furthermore, Korea and Japan were the countries co-hosting the 2002 Soccer World Cup.

China, as the host country of the Ninth BeSeTo Theatre Festival, selected four productions among the applied productions from non-host countries. From Japan, they chose Light and Moss by Takeda Taijun, which dealt with the damage of war and the dignity of a human being. Also chosen was A New Interpretation of the Tale of Genji by Sakakibara Masatsune, which focused on the tear-provoking subject of waiting in vain. From Korea, they chose Hamlet of the Orient, an adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, with a concentration on Hamlet's agony. Hamlet of the Orient attempted a drastic elimination of the plot and focused only on Hamlet's distress; thus it turned from a Shakespearian classical drama to a postmodern theatre production. Another play chosen was A Learned Man, Jo Nam Myung, a story about a typical Confucian scholar of Asia; a learned man from a Confucian culture is characterized by his "transcendental attitude against the secularity" (Kim and Jin 221). China staged three plays: an adaptation of Sophocles' Antigone, The Thebes City focuses on the continued love of Antigone and Haimon in Heaven after both of them have died. Wanjia Denghwo by Lee Reong Win was performed by the Beijing People's Art Theatre, a famous theatre troupe in contemporary China. China also staged a legendary Chinese play, Farewell My Concubine by Lillian Lee, which is a Chinese classic love story set in China in 2000 B.C.

When Korea hosted the 2003 BeSeTo Theatre Festival, they embraced the idea of holding the festival outside of their capital city, Seoul. Instead, the 10<sup>th</sup> BeSeTo Theatre Festival was held in Uijeongbu, and only four productions participated: China staged Farewell My Concubine again; Japan played Cyrano de Bergerac, an adaptation of Edmond Rostand's work; and Korea as the host country staged a juvenile drama, My Love DMZ by Tae-Seok Oh, about the protection of the natural environment, and also Our Country Uttury by Guang Lim Kim, which tried to alter traditional outdoor performance into the form of a drama with a stage.

The 2003 BeSeTo Theatre Festival had a symposium in honor of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The themes were the ten-year history of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival and Education of Theatre for the next generation. The past ten years of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival were a journey of settlement of the festival. Every festival had its own unique characteristics, and adventurous works were also tried and tested. The variance and flexibility of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival over the previous 10 years were understood as the process of settlement. However, non-formalized style, capricious rules, and unstable support according to the time and place sometimes made the festival stagnant. Another 10 years of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival should allow it to overcome the barrier of being an abecedarian.

Theatrical art is one of the most revealing arts used to understand the culture, emotion, and inclination of various societies. For friendship, understanding, and overcoming the wound of bitter history, the festival is, no doubt, not a mere theatre festival for the people of China, Korea, and Japan. For example, as a theme of Japan's invasion to Korea, The Princess Dukhye by Bok Geun Chung brought mutual

understanding between Korean and Japanese people. Some productions, like Hamlet of the Orient and Elektra, showed new ways to combine Western classics with (Northeast) Asian emotions and styles. Such productions focused on transcending the “universal” human condition, regardless of the nationality; contemporary theatre professionals who were looking for a new mode of expression in the three countries were inspired by what they saw. Moreover, the symposia of the festival played a significant role in planning and analyzing the productions, facilitating an environment of friendship among the various theatre professionals, and providing a platform in which the future of Northeast Asian theatre could be studied and discussed.

Japan, the host country of the 11<sup>th</sup> BeSeTo Theatre Festival in 2004, attempted something new; the BeSeTo Theatre Festival in 2004 was linked with Waseda University. Connected with a university campus, the Japanese tried to make the BeSeTo Theatre Festival out of ready-made theatre, and tried to facilitate the younger generation’s participation. Japan’s innovative attempt moved the BeSeTo Theatre Festival in yet another new direction.

The 12<sup>th</sup> BeSeTo Theatre Festival, held in China in 2005, also encouraged the active participation of a younger generation from the three countries. The theme of the 2005 BeSeTo Theatre Festival symposium was “The growth of young theatre people of China, Korea, and Japan,” and it was held along with the 9<sup>th</sup> Chinese Theatre Festival in Ningbo, the seaport sub-provincial city of China. The continual exploration of alternative ways of conducting the BeSeTo Theatre Festival is making many theatre people in China, Korea, and Japan eager to see the ways in which it will evolve during its second ten years of existence.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Up to now, this study has shown the background of the birth of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival, the significance of the festival, and the first 10 years history of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival from its inception in 1994. While it has attempted to sketch out the main characteristics of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival during those 10 years, it would be a serious oversight to conclude the festival should be judged by only its first 10 years. Rather, this study lays the foundation for future work on the BeSeTo Theatre Festival.

To appreciate the significance of the birth of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival requires an understanding of the relations between China, Korea, and Japan. The historical background of the incredibly long (sometimes cordial and sometimes divisive) connection among the three nations showed the aim in the creation of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival was not entirely superficial. While the birth of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival got much attention and the new terminology “BeSeTo” has rapidly spread to other fields, especially because of its international significance and exceptional background, it is also true that the ten-year history of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival was gradually losing multinational attention.

One of the most successful fruits of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival can be found in the diffusion of the phrase “BeSeTo” to various fields of the world such as business, science, and other kinds of arts. This phenomenon that specific terminology from theatre has spread into other fields is notably significant in theatre history. While some words from theatre (like Oedipus or Electra) have been appropriated by other disciplines (such as psychology) to create new concepts (e.g. Oedipus Complex or Electra Complex), the scope of use has typically been limited to that field doing the appropriation. In contrast, the scope of using the new phrase “BeSeTo” has been wider, and the speed of the diffusion faster.

The BeSeTo Theatre Festival has been trying to forge a cordial atmosphere among the three countries as they share their aesthetic sensibilities with one another and seek broader understanding of one another. To expand that understanding, they have sometimes hosted the festival outside of the capital cities that provide the festival’s namesake and have also periodically attempted to be more international via the inclusion of theatre from other countries. However, in terms of collaborative productions, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival still has a long way to go.

According to Pavis Patrice, intercultural theatre “in [its] strictest sense, creates hybrid forms drawing upon a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions traceable to distant cultural areas” (8). However, strictly speaking, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival during 1994 to 2004 showed only two “hybridized” productions: The Water Station-2 of the Second BeSeTo Theatre Festival in 1995 and Chunhyang of the Seventh BeSeTo Theatre Festival in 2000. While the BeSeTo Theatre

Festival has been successful in fostering an exchange of theatre among the three countries, rarely have productions been truly intercultural.

The first ten years of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival might be considered a beginner stage, focusing on introductions of theatres from each country, various attempts to find the right track, and efforts to place this international festival on a firm basis. The second ten years of the BeSeTo Theatre festival might offer the possibility of a more ambitious spirit to be a more intercultural theatre festival. Fortunately, the 11<sup>th</sup> BeSeTo Theatre and the 12<sup>th</sup> BeSeTo Theatre Festival have made new challenges. The 11<sup>th</sup> BeSeTo Theatre Festival encouraged the younger generation, characterized by global age or internet age to participate in the festival through the relation with a campus. Such movement can be a good sign to create truly collaborative productions in a global age. Likewise, the 12<sup>th</sup> festival marked the first time Vietnam participated (with a production of Macbeth). This step toward the inclusion of other countries is a positive sign.

In order to achieve their goals of cordial cultural exchange, alleviation of historical conflict, and development of contemporary Northeast Asian theatre, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival depends on a strong sense of cooperation, cooperation among not only theatre artists but also by the multinational press. The scant number of cross-country collaborative productions as well as the limited number of international participants may be one reason why global press attention has waxed and waned. While the first ten years of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival have occasionally included international productions, there is greater potential for more widespread participation. An increase in both international and intercultural productions may be the key to the BeSeTo Theatre Festival being more fully recognized on the global stage.

On the other hand, the history of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival from 1994 to 2004 has successfully shown the features of the contemporary theatres in China, Korea, and Japan. Each country has seen how they are different as well as the potentialities for fortified cultural exchange among the three countries. To some degree the theatrical visions of the respective countries have helped overcome the bitter history, stretching all the way back to ancient times that has often divided these countries from one another.

During the 10 years of the BeSeTo Theatre, the productions of each festival, from China, Korea, and Japan have varied greatly. Overall, they usually staged contemporary productions as opposed to works drawn from their respective traditional forms. The point of similarities of the contemporary productions can be found in their laboratory systems, including the coexistence of traditional and modern forms, mixture of Western and Eastern styles, and reconstruction of their traditional theatres.

Ten years are not a long time especially when compared with the long history of the countries. Instead of a hasty judgment or excessively critical comments on the BeSeTo Theatre Festival through its first ten years, I would like to close by proposing desirable ways for the development of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival.

On the basis of the experience of its first ten years, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival needs to be systematic and official in the matter of planning. Since they manage participating productions, schedules, and subjects, the BeSeTo International Committee would be the pivot for the change in that the committee has the authority to discuss, choose, and plan all aspects of every festival.

The BeSeTo International Committee of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival has experienced irregular change in its structure, managing method, and the number of

members. It can be natural that they have had to adjust them frequently because the first ten years are the period of rudiments. However, the responsibilities of the Committee are getting heavier as they aim for the bigger scale of a more international festival.

Also, since the BeSeTo Theatre Festival emphasizes the character of cultural meetings, scholarship should be a component as well as the actual productions. As the BeSeTo Theatre Festival manifesto signifies, it is not a mere theatre event but a cultural exchange. Enhancing the academic purpose of the festival and the specialty of theatre art would require increased attention to the professional, scholarly record. During the first ten years many casual critiques from China, Korea, Japan, have been released, but the scholarly records still have not been enough to provide full, accurate information of the festival's history. Therefore, more archival records are essential for the festival's international development and historical matters.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is becoming increasingly metropolitan-centered as well as increasingly intercultural. Reflecting economic necessities, socio-political relations, and cultural communities rather than national homogeneity or political doctrine, there has been an increasing influx of exchange between countries. Like many countries of the European Union, China, Korea, and Japan of Northeast Asia have started to become good economic, cultural, and social partners to one another, and the artists of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival have helped lead that increase in cultural exchange. China's rapid development of today, Korea's economic miracle during the 1970s and 1980s, and Japan's fast progress in Asia have much connection with one another.

On the other hand, while the European Union offers a model of intercultural exchange, Asia is too big to organize an Asian Union easily. Asia is the largest continent

in the world, and much more fractionated than Europe. For example, while China, Korea, and Japan have common denominators (Confucian philosophy, Chinese characters, Buddhist tradition, pale skin, and some measure of racial mixture), it is hard to say that such common denominators combine Southeast Asian countries like Cambodia, India, and Laos.

Moreover, the Northeast Asian countries are in uncomfortable situations themselves. The Northeast Asian countries still have historical complications and political discords such as North Korea's tough line, the complications between Taiwan and mainland China, historical grudges against one another, and the territorial dispute between Korea and Japan for the Sea of Japan/East Sea. While there is hope that the globalism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will overcome the long history of conflicts, China, Korea, and Japan still have many steps to achieve a lasting union, including solution to conflicts, peaceful policy, and maintenance of current partnership.

The advances of both technology and interculturalism have increasingly made borders more permeable. While it still has many things to improve upon, the recently created BeSeTo Theatre Festival is an attempt to keep pace with the times. While ten years is not long enough to judge the festival, its early history is evidence of the potential power of theatre as it has helped heal some of the bitter history among China, Korea, and Japan. The history of the BeSeTo Theatre Festival from 1994 to 2004 has served as a stepping-stone for future successes and cross-fertilization in Northeast Asia.

These tentative conclusions regarding the relative success of BeSeTo artists achieving the goals laid out in the BeSeTo Theatre Festival Manifesto await further refinement and correction in the light of further research. Indeed, as a major

contemporary international theatre festival, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival merits further and continued study. Likewise, as the host nations of China, Korea, and Japan continue to rise in economic and political power, it is important that their culture would be understood not only in Northeast Asia, but globally as well. Overall, it is hoped that this thesis has helped contribute to the understanding of the Northeast Asian history, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival, Asian theatre studies, and intercultural theatre studies.

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## VITA

Eh Jee Chang was born in Seoul, South Korea, on November 19, 1978, the daughter of Tae Sook Han and Jea Hoon Chang. After completing her works at Guacheon Foreign Language High School, Guacheon, South Korea, in 1997, she entered Seoul Institute of the Arts, Seoul, South Korea. In 1999, she transferred to Sang Myung University, Cheonan, South Korea, and received her B.A. in Theatre from this university in February, 2002. During her undergraduate studies, she served a variety of theatrical productions as a part-time administrative assistant and dramaturge. She also worked as an actress with South Korean Film Director Ji Woon Kim for the on-line film Coming Out in 2000. In March, 2002, she began her graduate studies in Hanyang University, Seoul, South Korea, and completed her course works in 2004. In August, 2004, she entered the Graduate School of Texas State University-San Marcos, Texas. During her graduate studies in Texas State University-San Marcos, she served Dr. John Fleming as a teaching assistant. She is currently employed as a lab assistant with Instructional Technologies in Texas State University-San Marcos.

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