

The traditions of Asian Theatre are highly effective in shaping a performance because of their emphasis on symbolism, style and audience engagement through theatrical conventions. In our performance based on the Javanese Pangeran Diponegoro, we merged techniques from Wayang Kulit, Kabuki and Chinese Opera to create a dramatic journey that seamlessly shifted between myth and reality. By doing this, we immersed the audience in both the legend and story, as well as the humanity of Prince Diponegoro, which encouraged them to reflect on the key ideas of bravery and resistance. This combination of traditions shaped a theatrical journey that allowed audiences to experience our story of both myth and the tragedy of history.

One key Asian theatre technique we used was Wayang Kulit (shadow puppetry) which helped shape the opening of our performance. On stage, the two children (Mia and Zara) went under the lifted 'bedsheet' to reveal shadow puppets representing Diponegoro, his mother, and later townspeople. This moment brought the audience into the world of a bedtime story, using silhouettes, dim backlighting and very symbolic shapes to help establish the mythical tone. The elements of mood and symbol were manipulated as the audience perceived the prince as a hero of a legend, larger than life so to speak, before ever seeing him as a live actor. This technique engaged the audience by creating a sense of wonder, while also guiding them and the story to the eventual shift into the rebellion. The audience's focus here was really important as they imagined a world beyond the stage. The softer warm glow from the shadow lights felt almost dream-like, with the switch to the harsh red shadow lights later provided contrast that maintained the audience's immersion in this world. This deliberate manipulation of colour and shadow helped shape the emotional journey of our performance, keeping them engaged with the almost childlike scene before the shift toward darker themes of conflict. Through this, I gained a new insight on how Wayang Kulit relies on light, shadow and symbol to engage the audience in a world while still communicating deeply about moral struggles.

Another technique was the Kabuki-inspired movement and the use of colour. During the rebellion scene, the sheet was dropped and the prince emerged as a live actor, outlined by red stage lighting. The group chorused "Together, we rise!" before freezing shortly in strong Kabuki Mie (poses). This use of exaggerated gesture, elevated voice and the symbolic red lighting created tension and atmosphere on stage. The audience would have viewed the prince's bravery and the true emotional weight of the scene before any words were spoken. This made the rebellion feel epic and more stylised rather than realistic, which engaged the audience in the heightened emotional journey. The mie poses gave the audience time to take in the intensity of the scene, almost like looking at a living painting. The use of red also not only symbolised blood and war but also increased the tension in the space, which made the scene feel more urgent. By experimenting with Kabuki conventions, I realised how stillness and stylised poses can be just as powerful as actual dialogue, which allows the audience to reflect and engage emotionally during moments of increased dramatic tension.

We also drew from Chinese Opera conventions, specifically the use of music and chorus to underscore the current action. For example, when the Dutch army attacked, the ensemble exclaimed lines like 'HELP THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!' while percussion emphasised each moment of the conflict. This rhythmic underscoring manipulated the dramatic techniques of rhythm and contrast, which aided the stage action in feeling urgent, slightly chaotic and once again larger than life. This technique not only heightened the audience engagement but in a way helped unify the ensemble, giving the performance a collective voice that reflected the suffering of the people. On stage, the louder distressed vocalisations from the chorus kept the tension and pacing of the scene high. The rhythm from the percussion felt relentless, and when it stopped and froze, the silence was very powerful. The juxtaposition of the noise and silence here created a very sharp contrast that the audience reacted to audibly, leaning forward and holding their breath. From this, I learnt how musicality in Chinese opera ensures that the audience does not only watch, but also feel the rhythm of the performance within the beats of the percussion. This not only keeps the audience persistently engaged in the theatrical journey but also aids our conveying of key ideas and morals.

Finally, the symbolic ending of our performance drew together multiple Asian Theatre traditions. The prince was captured by a shadow puppet cage while the chorus lines were spoken in rhyming unison. The freeze frame, minimal props and staging, and stylised chorus created an impactful stage presence. The dramatic elements of tension and symbol were key, as the audience watched Diponegoro's bravery lead to his defeat. They responded with complete silence at this final image, showing how the stillness and contrast with the movement along with symbolism forced them to consider the prince's sacrifice. This moment was reflective of the heavy moral weight that Asian theatre contains, as these stories are told and felt through symbolic imagery to convey stories or ethics.

In conclusion, the techniques of Asian Theatre traditions shaped our performance by merging stylised movement, symbolism and rhythm into one cohesive theatrical journey. Wayang Kulit immersed the audience in the world of the myth, Kabuki Mie made the rebellion seem larger than life, and Chinese Opera integration of chorus and percussion helped us convey the chaos of war to the audience. When combined, these traditions helped us create a performance that manipulated the elements of drama: tension, mood, symbol, contrast and rhythm, to fully engage the audience. Our work on this task also showed me that Asian theatre does not rely on realism but instead has its own heightened theatricality that aims to achieve entertainment and reflection among the audience. By utilising these traditions, our performance successfully shaped a theatrical journey that was emotional, symbolic, and memorable for the audience.

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