

The mission statement of IKAJA is as follows: "Kamishibai is a part of Japan's unique cultural heritage that is moving forward into a new era. It is important now to create good kamishibai works which shall be performed by skilled performers, in order to enlarge the circle of empathy wrought between audience, performers and among the people not only in Japan, but throughout the world. The aim of the International Kamishibai Association of Japan (IKAJA) is to foster communication throughout the world between people who are already enthusiasts, those express an interest in the subject and those who wish to perform kamishibai." From the earliest days, it was clear that the organization was firmly focused on expanding overseas.

"Kyokan" – A cherished quality in Japan

Enthusiasts overseas who attend IKAJA lectures and enjoy excellent kamishibai works are said to have a good understanding of the meaning of the word *kyokan*. However, it is not easy to find an exact equivalent in other languages. Even if there are words that are similar in meaning, they are really no better than belts that are one notch too short for your trousers. This made me realize that just as the format and special features of kamishibai are unique, the idea of *kyokan* within kamishibai is also unique, and could only arise because of the nature of Japanese society. For this reason, IKAJA uses the words "kamishiba"

and "kyokan" in the original Japanese, to avoid any dilution of their meaning through translation.

I would like now to say a few things about overseas views on *kyokan*. "We need to find ways to deepen *kyokan* in schools and to strengthen it," says Karin van Veldhuizen-Wanrooij, who owns the Dutch kamishibai company Kinderhart. "In the Netherlands, the emphasis in education is placed on individual development. Because children of different nationalities are gathered together in classrooms, there is a growing awareness that an individual-focused education makes it harder to generate mutual understanding among children."

Dutch children's books writer Rindert Kromhout says that children from other EU countries, as well as the Middle East, Africa and Asia, have found it difficult to listen to storytelling in groups due to language difficulties. "With kamishibai you have pictures and the performer telling the story, and there is communication between the performer and the audience. And because both story and pictures are presented in an easy-to-understand way, children who are not good with words can concentrate on the story with other children and share in its make-believe-world."

In Japanese elementary and junior high schools too, an increasing number of teachers are using kamishibai to deal with children that cannot sit still or who have different languages and cultural backgrounds. As "multiculturalism" moves up the agenda, kamishibai is gaining a new luster in Japan and around the world.

Now I would like to look back over the history of kamishibai.

The origins of kamishibai

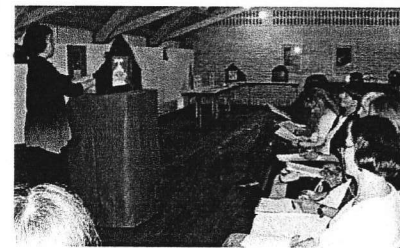
Kamishibai was born in the working class downtown areas of Tokyo in 1930. Then, it was known as gaito kamishibai (street-corner-kamishibai). This was immediately after the outbreak of the Great Depression. To earn their daily bread, jobseekers set up impromptu kamishibai stage with drawers filled with cheap confectionery on the backseat of their bicycles. Then they performed the stories for children that gathered together at street corners.

Since kamishibai began as a sales tool, it was generally frivolous and was criticized for not being "educational." Around 1935, some people began publishing new kinds of kamishibai such as kyoiku kamishibai (educational kamishibai), yochien kamishibai (kindergarten kamishibai). The Christian Yone Imai used it for evangelization. These works were different from the kind performed on the streets. However, before it reached maturity as a cultural form, kamishibai then evolved into kokusaku kamishibai or "state-policy" kamishibai, and was used to glorify militarism as Japan girded for the Pacific War. According to Kyoko Sakai, chairperson of Doshinsha Publishing Co., Ltd. and supervisor of IKAJA, "its unavoidable complicity in Japan's war of invasion was a tragedy for kamishibai. However, those of us who value kamishibai will not look away from this negative aspect of its history."

For this reason, the "educational kamishibai" movement of the post-war years sincerely addressed approaches to issues such as how to create a peaceful, democratic society and existential themes. In the 1950s, a stream of excellent works were published, such as Okaasan no hanashi (Mother's story) originally written H.C. Andersen, adapted by Keiko Inaniwa and illustrated by Chihiro Iwasaki, as well as Heiwano chikai (The Oath of Peace) dealing with the atomic bombing, written by Keiko Inaniwa and illustrated by Churyo Sato. These two works addressed the meaning and wonder of life.

Although much research has been done into picture books and children's literature, there has been little serious progress in the study of kamishibai.

Then, in the 1990s, the "traveling kamishibai university" (Demae kamishibai daigaku) and "Kamishibai theoretical discussion group" (Kamshibai Riron no kai) began its activities. These were dedicated to research aimed at positioning kamishibai as a sophisticated element of



Kyoko Sakai talks about kamishibai in the Jella Lepman Hall at the International Youth Library in Munich

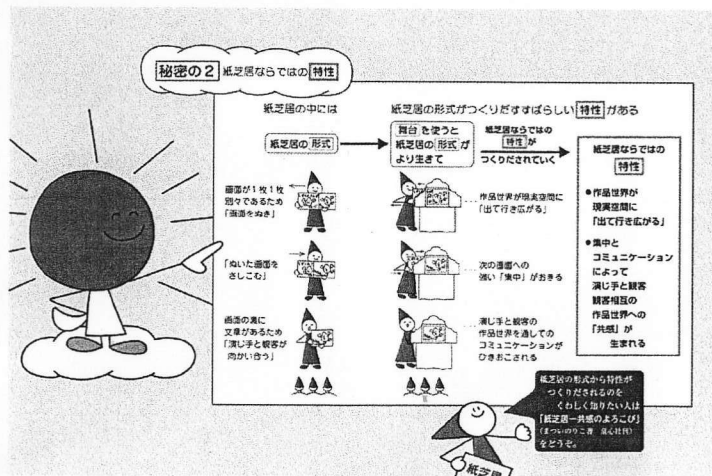
Doshinsha Publishing: Established in 1957, at the initiative of Keiko Inaniwa, to keep alive the educational kamishibai movement in the post-war years. According to Kinji Muramatsu, the departure point was making the break with military-propaganda kamishibai, refocusing it on the value of human life and peace, and making it treasured by children

children's culture. IKAJA, founded in the early 2000s, was largely a grouping of its members. The unique features of the IKAJA movement are that it questions the very essence of kamishibai, while always seeking ways of performing kamishibai works more intimately. This is why the movement has gained traction overseas as well.

Working with overseas partners

Some overseas kamishibai lovers have no knowledge of this historical background. As the number of online overseas membership applications grows, Japan's continued role as the source of information on kamishibai has grown more important.

At the same time, the enthusiasm of those who have discovered and come to love excellent kamishibai works has itself become part of the development of kamishibai. For example, Barbara Scharioth, former director of International Youth Library in Munich, has been visited by IKAJA, and given a kamishibai lecture in autumn of 2004. She is one of those who have recognized the role of kamishibai in conveying the peace message. As a result, Nido to (Never again, text and illustrations by Eiko Matsui) was selected in the collection of works for the 2006 Hello, Dear Enemy! international exhibition of picture books with peace and tolerance as their themes, organized by the International Youth Library in Munich. This was the first time a kamishibai work had been featured. Centered on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this appeal for nuclear disarmament uses a lovely bird image as motif. In the domestic tour of this Hello, Dear Enemy! organized



Kamishibaino enjihou Q&A (Questions and answers on performing kamishibai) by Noriko Matsui (Doshinsha Publishing)