

surrounded by raised seating and possible balconies. Because companies would also tour, these theatres were often mobile. A wooden fence covered with colorful banners surrounded the theatre, re-creating courtyards in much the same way Elizabethans would later take a familiar courtyard inn as the model for theatres such as the Globe.

At one point in the late 1200s, *Zaju* grew to have such popular support that a single amusement park (picture an early Disneyland) in a northern capital city had up to 50 *Zaju* theatres, one housing at least 1,000 people. Areas in large cities featuring *Zaju* theatres called “tile districts” were often huge fenced enclosures with flags and banners flying high above them.

Theatre Conventions

In *Zaju*, conventions of Sanskrit theatre and local custom blended, incorporating local gods, demons, heroes, and myths.

- **Dance and Music:** *Zaju* was representational rather than realistic.
- **Makeup:** Flamboyant makeup was used as a masking technique to identify character types.
- **Spectacle:** As the play progressed, interludes of acrobats, magicians, and musicians provided entertainment between acts. Even the most serious plays included elements of farce and magic. *The Country Bumpkin* ends with the sight of the farmer running around the stage to find a toilet and, when he can’t find one, leaving in disgust.

The *Zaju* theatre ended 600 years ago. Its vibrant appeal lives on in the texts and in its influence on today’s Beijing Opera. But as *Zaju* was disappearing, a deeply insular and elitist form of theatre was developing across the sea in Japan.

Japanese Medieval and Renaissance Theatre: *Noh*, Kabuki, and Bunraku

Noh

Worldview

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Japanese culture emerged as a distinct entity after centuries of Chinese domination. By the fourteenth century, the royal family still practiced Chinese arts in their centralized palace, but in the countryside, warriors ruled under the code of the samurai. The samurai was an aristocratic warrior who dominated his territory in the same way that feudal barons of Europe were controlling their fiefdoms during the same period. The samurai ruled from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries, and during the height of the samurai period, *Noh* drama evolved, with