

# Remediating the Past: Silent Film and Contemporary Performance

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## Motivation

- Today, we have seen a renewed interest in silent film narrators (benshi and pyeonsa) and orchestral silent film performance.
- How can we understand such projects: these new, remediated works and the “reframing” that occurs when we combine older works with contemporary interpretations?
- What are the implications for performance, historical scholarship, and contemporary film viewing?

## Context

- Contemporary film scholarship has begun to reconsider the relationship between the viewer and the mode of viewing, particularly about early film and silent works.
- Today, artists are revisiting and remediating older texts, adding new material, changing the mode of viewership (from a Nickelodeon to an art theater, for example), the format (often, from 35mm to a digital restoration), and other crucial elements.
- Additionally, archivists and scholars are finding and reviving older silent film-era performance recordings.

# This project reconsiders silent Asian film exhibition of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the remediation of those performance practices today.



Illustration of a silent film/benshi performance.



Photoplay theater district with film advertisements.



Contemporary benshi performer Ichiro Kataoka.

## Project Description

This project will

- Feature three silent film performance events over the three semesters.
- Record and interview the performers.
- Bring in scholars to discuss the attributes and effects of these contemporary performances.

## Project Deliverables

- After 1 year, the group will have staged performances and amassed recordings.
- Over the course of 2 years, we will host a larger roundtable to discuss scholarly implications and establish a digital framework for a repository of recordings and scholarship.
- We will measure success qualitatively and quantitatively, in terms of events held, recordings taken, and the quality of the scholarly implications.

## Potential Impact

- The research will create a digital repository for recordings and interviews.
- These events will become catalysts for scholarly inquiry, working both as a reflection on the past as an archeology of older media forms and an examination of the present through the lens of contemporary film.
- The project will experiment with ways to use digital media to reconceptualize past performances.

## Images

From left to right

- Archival image
- [http://www.taito-culture.jp/customs/engei\\_hall/english/page\\_03.html](http://www.taito-culture.jp/customs/engei_hall/english/page_03.html)
- <https://www.hollywoodsoapbox.com/benshi-ichiro-kataoka-set-for-passing-fancy-screening-in-nyc/>

