

Resilience in Media Ecologies: Mapping the Converging Histories of Magic Lanterns, Omocha-e (Toy Prints) and Kamishibai (Paper Theater)

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Abstract

Histories of kamishibai (paper theater) typically trace its roots to early magic lantern shows, but Iwamoto Kenji questions this development: "At a time when many different audiovisual technologies were tied in some way to modern scientific instruments, kamishibai was made of just pictures and narrative and seemed to be a throwback to Edo-period spectacles" (2002). Iwamoto's dismissal of kamishibai as a "throwback" exposes the limitations of examining any medium in isolation rather than viewing it within an interconnected media ecology. Lyons and Plunkett argue, "In contemporary media practice, 'convergence' stands for the dominance of fusion and transferability between different forms...we are in an era in which media are always used in relation to each other" (2007). While acknowledging that the scale and interconnectedness of new media may be unprecedented, this paper asks whether theories of convergence in media ecologies may also provide new opportunities to reassess older media formats. Through a historical mapping of the transnationally shifting ecologies of magic lanterns and kamishibai through a series of omocha-e (toy-prints) from the Cotsen Children's Library collection (Princeton University Library), this paper demonstrates that kamishibai not only converged with magic-lantern technology through the mediation of omocha-e, but also that the two audio-visual media—kamishibai and magic lanterns—continued to develop in relation to each other, as they moved in tandem over time. The imaginative leap that transferred cinematic animation techniques to paper offers insights into kamishibai's resilience as a medium and its growing popularity around the world today.

Keywords: Kamishibai, Media Ecology, Media Convergence, Magic Lanterns, Film Studies

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Introduction

Kamishibai in the format commonly seen today began as a form of street entertainment, which was wildly popular in the 1930s and leading up to and following World War II. The kamishibai performer would ride from one neighborhood to the next, usually on a bicycle, selling candies and other treats and telling riveting cliff-hangers that ensured children would be back the next day for more. Kamishibai is said to have been so popular that when television was first imported to Japan in 1953, it was referred to as “*denki* (electric) kamishibai” (Kamichi 90). Ironically, television is often blamed for kamishibai’s later demise as a street-performance art, but the medium of kamishibai never did die out and, in fact, is experiencing a resurgence around the globe.



Figure 1. “Paper TV: Kamishibai Storytelling,”
Posted on Kamishibai Connections Facebook Group.

In October 2021, Filipino-Australian kamishibai storyteller Anna Manuel joined kamishibai storytellers from India, Archana Chandel and Ramya Srinidhi, to present an online kamishibai story program called “Paper TV” for the Federation of Asian Storytellers (FEAST) annual conference (Fig. 1). In a similar twist, on February 6, 2022, the Japanese kamishibai Facebook group Zenkoku kamishibai kōryū kai (全国紙芝居交流会) posted about a series of flashcard kamishibai stories on YouTube called “Paper Television invented in Yamagata” (山形発 紙テレビ). This raises the question: Do these anecdotes, separated by time and space, represent a series of quaint analogies between similar-looking media, or are they an example of what media theorist Henry Jenkins (2001) has identified as an organic and ongoing process of “convergence” in the minds of consumers and creators within a multilayered global media ecosystem? He writes:

Genres and delivery technologies come and go, but media persist as layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment system. A medium’s content may shift, its audience may change and its social status may rise or fall, but once a medium establishes itself it continues to be part of the media ecosystem.

Theories of “media ecology” (McLuhan 1964; Postman 1970) have been attracting increasing attention in Japanese media studies to account for the new interwoven and global scope of *animé* and video-game franchises, television and internet (LaMarre 2018). While

acknowledging that the scale and nature of 21st century media convergence made possible by digitization may be unprecedented, this paper examines the intersecting histories of magic lanterns, *omocha-e* (toy prints), and kamishibai in Japan to ask how the historical convergence and recent resurgence of these early technologies may explain a resilience in media ecologies that has been identified by Jenkins and others when describing our current media environment.

The Role of Paper

Histories of kamishibai typically trace its roots back to an early form of Japanese magic-lantern show called *utsushi-e* (literally, “projected pictures”), but, in his *Century of Magic Lanterns in Japan* (幻燈の世紀), Iwamoto Kenji questions whether the development of kamishibai represented progress: “At a time when many different audiovisual technologies were tied in some way to modern scientific instruments, kamishibai was made of just pictures and narrative and seemed to be a throwback to Edo-period spectacles” (2002, translated). Iwamoto’s dismissal of kamishibai as a “throwback” exposes the limitations of examining a medium in isolation in a linear historical trajectory rather than viewing it within a complex and interconnected media ecology. The inventors of kamishibai took the magic of light and shadow—the foundation of all cinematic technologies—and transferred it to a mundane and ubiquitous material: paper. This leads to the question of the role of paper in this process of convergence. Is paper itself a medium, a delivery technology, a platform? Can it be all three?

Henry Jenkins has identified at least five categories of convergence¹ and argues that collectively they will lead to a “digital renaissance” much like the invention of the printing press did for Europe. When defining “technological convergence,” he writes: “When words, images and sounds are transformed into digital information, we expand the potential relationships between them and enable them to flow across platforms. (Jenkins 2001).” In what follows, I shift the focus from digitized text or even moveable type to ask whether the material of paper itself might serve as a vehicle for “technological convergence,” expanding the potential relationships between technologies and allowing information to flow across them. To begin to address this question, I trace the repeated technological convergence of magic lanterns and kamishibai as they developed in tandem over time by examining several paper *omocha-e* (play-prints) held in the Cotsen Children’s Library collection at Princeton University.

Omocha-e is a term broadly used for Edo-period *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints designed for children’s amusement. Genres ranged widely from paper dolls (*kisekae-e*) to matching-picture games (*e-awase*), to board games (*sugoroku*) to elaborate theatrical or historical dioramas to be cut out and assembled (*tatebanko* or *kumitate-e*). What all these different genres of *omocha-e* had in common was the format of fitting onto a two-dimensional sheet (or, in some cases, multiple sheets) of *washi* paper. Typically, these prints include the name of the artist and publisher, date of publication, and a title to identify the theme or genre. At the heading of the title, the characters *shinpan* 新板 (or 新版), meaning “the latest” or newest information about the given topic, are often prominent. Beginning in the Edo period (1603-

¹ **Technological Convergence:** What Nicholas Negroponte labeled the transformation of “atoms to bits,” the digitization of all media content...**Economic Convergence:** The horizontal integration of the entertainment industry... **Social or Organic Convergence:** Consumers’ multitasking strategies for navigating the new information environment...**Cultural Convergence:** The explosion of new forms of creativity at the intersections of various media technologies, industries and consumers. **Global Convergence:** The cultural hybridity that results from the international circulation of media content.

1868), *omocha-e* prints offered a cheap and transportable medium to spread information quickly through the population. As such, they were also the perfect vehicles for media convergence. *Ezōshiya* print shops, where they were sold, could be found on almost every urban street, where people could easily purchase *omocha-e* about metropolitan fads—from the latest fashions in hairstyle and dress to the latest media technologies for education and amusement—as souvenir gifts (*omiyage*) to take home to their families in the provinces (Suzuki 2010, 7-19).

To begin this mapping, we will examine an *omocha-e* print (Fig. 2) titled “The latest magic-lantern pictures” (*Shinpan utsushi-e* 志ん板うつしゑ), which was published in 1884. The image at the bottom of the print (Fig. 3) is designed to look like the entryway into a *yose* theater with the stock character of Fukusuke—who typically served as a narrator between acts—bowing and inviting the audience into the venue. *Fukusuke* dolls are frequently found in Japanese shops to promote business, and the characters *ōire* (大入) above Fukusuke’s head means “a full house.” Among the cherry blossoms above the stage is the phrase “a new cast of characters by popular demand” (*shinrenchu hiiki*). On the right, there are messages from the publisher to the manager and patron (apparently, a fish merchant) and, on the left, to the child audience with the promise of “plenty of diversion” (*tesusabi takusan*).



Figure 2. “The latest magic-lantern pictures” (*Shinpan utsushi-e* 志ん板うつしゑ)
 Published in 1884 by Tsunashima Kamekichi 綱島亀吉. Cotsen Children’s Library.
 (Cotsen ID No. 9910023)

This print is an example of what was described earlier as *tatebanko* or *kumitate-e* because the owner would have cut the stage from the bottom of the print and reinforced it with strips of wood or cardboard. They would also have cut out the two white circles on either side of Fukusuke’s head and have reinforced the five levels of “slides” so they could be moved across the back of the stage to simulate a magic-lantern performance.

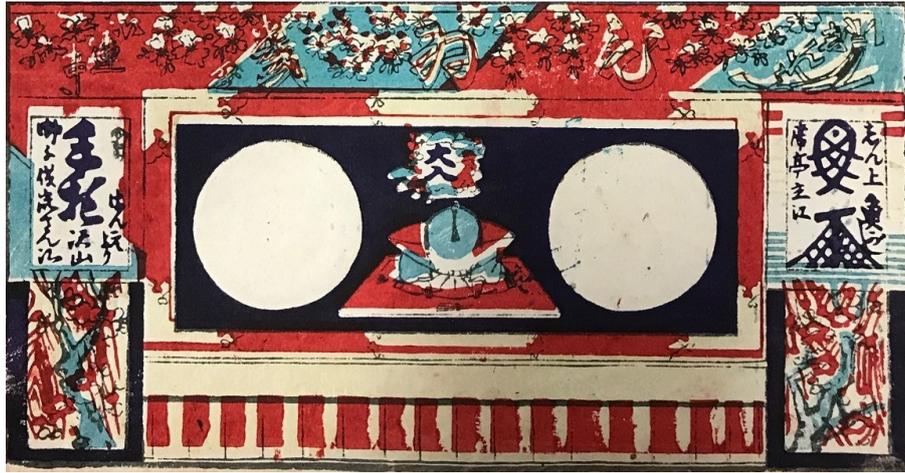


Figure 3. Detail from “The latest magic-lantern pictures”
 (*Shinpan utsushi-e* 志ん板うつしゑ) Published in 1884. Cotsen Children’s Library.
 (Cotsen ID No. 9910023)

Before proceeding any further, I will provide some background about the emergence of *utsushi-e* and its role in the *yose* theater.

Yose Theater and the Rise of Utsushi-e

Magic-lantern technology made its way to Japan in the 1700s, probably through the island of Dejima, where the Japanese carried on limited trade with the Dutch. Records of a Japanese adaptation of the instrument, called *utsushi-e*, began appearing in the city of Edo in 1801 (Tsuchiya, Okubo & Endō 33). With *utsushi-e*, animation of the characters was possible because pulling a series of illustrated slides quickly before a light source—like the short reel of a film—fooled the audience into thinking the characters had moved.

Japan had a vibrant theater culture during the Edo period (1603-1868) with kabuki and bunraku (*jōruri* 浄瑠璃) perhaps the most widely known, but the popularity of these large scale productions spawned all manner of miniature dramatic formats performed on the streets and in less formal venues. One such venue was *yose* 寄席. Although today *yose* has become synonymous with *rakugo* 落語 (a comic style of oral-storytelling), during the Edo period, it featured an eclectic array of dramatic spectacles (Miya in Tsuchiya et al. 67-71). The Japanese style of magic-lantern called *utsushi-e* found its home in *yose* performances, and the glass slides developed for this venue were inspired by the stock characters and themes from kabuki and *jōruri* plays with which *yose* audiences were already familiar (Tsuchiya et al. 40-66).

Japanese-style magic lanterns were unique in that they were small, portable, and almost entirely made of paulownia wood, which insulated the performers’ hands from the heat (Willis 2011). The projector was a box with a hole at the top so that the glass chimney of the burning oil or kerosene lamp inside could poke out and smoke could vent. This light source projected images painted on glass slides through a *washi* paper screen to viewers on the other side. Some claim that *utsushi-e* was the first real animé in Japan because animation occurred not only in the movement of the slides in front of the light source, but also by the performers moving around the space behind the screen, carrying their lanterns with them and projecting characters and scenery from different places (Kata 4). Several lanterns with different slides were used and animated at one time, causing audiences in the western (*kansai*) region of

Japan to refer to these colorful performances as “brocade shadow theater” (*nishiki kage e* 錦影絵). *Nishiki-e* (brocade pictures) was the term used for colorful Edo-period ukiyo-e prints, including some of the *omocha-e* prints under examination here, and there was considerable convergence between the two media (Kusahara 2021, 187). Early Japanese-style magic-lantern shows were projected from behind the paper screen, out of sight of the audience (Tsuchiya et al. 36-37), which made the images seem to appear magically out of nowhere.

I have analyzed all the different levels of slides of the Shinpan *utsushie* print in detail elsewhere (McGowan 2018) but for the purposes of this presentation, I will focus on the level directly above the stage (Fig. 4). Progressing from right to left, the audience would first see the female ghost (*yūrei* 幽霊) appear in the circle on the far right, coupled with the man, falling back in fear with the ghostly fire-ball at center. Shifting the slide one image over, the audience would then see two brave samurai, preparing to battle the apparitions. Note again, that one warrior faces to the right, where we last saw the female ghost, whereas the other warrior faces left, in anticipation of some new drama about to unfold. Shifting one more image over, a *tsukumogami* 付喪神, or a spirit made up of discarded objects, suddenly appears. No doubt, slides could have been moved back and forth in either direction to add further drama and animation to the scene.



Figure 4. Detail from “The latest magic-lantern pictures” (*Shinpan utsushi-e* 志ん板うつし絵) Published in 1884. Cotsen Children’s Library. (Cotsen ID No. 9910023)

As this print demonstrates, the various types of stock shape-shifters (*obake*), ghosts (*yūrei*), and monsters (*yōkai* 妖怪) that have become popular around the globe through the spread of *animé*, *manga*, and video games, were already well developed by the time this print was published in 1884, providing an early example of what Jenkins (2001) calls “cultural convergence,” where characters and stories freely cross media platforms. *Omocha-e* prints helped to spread these characters and new cinematic technologies beyond the urban centers of Edo or Osaka to remote provinces throughout Japan, and no doubt played a major role in paving the way for the widespread fascination with shapeshifters and monsters that continues in Japan to this day.

The Role of *Omocha-e* in the Development of *Kamishibai*

What has often been overlooked in histories of *kamishibai* is that *utsushi-e* was most likely transmediated through an *omocha-e* (play print) before becoming what we now know as the first tachie-style *kamishibai*. Quoting from a survey conducted in Tokyo in 1935, historian Chizuko Kamichi describes the invention of the first *kamishibai* as follows:

Shin-san was a *rakugo* storyteller, but he was not very good [at *rakugo*]. Instead, he excelled at drawing, so his master, Enchō (Sanyūtei Enchō) had him draw scenes from his popular plays, “Journey to the West” and “Chūshingura” [The 47 loyal retainers]. These were made into wood-block prints and sold in the candy stores, one print for one *sen*. The children would cut out the pictures and paste them onto bamboo skewers so they could play with them [...] Later, Shin-san collaborated with the incense seller Maruyama Zentarō to come up with a *tachi-e* puppet that was not just a wood-block print for children. (Kamichi 24, translated)

Kamichi’s description of wood-block prints sold in candy stores for children to cut up and assemble is clearly a reference to *omocha-e*. According to Kamichi’s explanation, kamishibai was not a direct off-shoot from Edo-period magic lantern shows, as is often assumed, but was first transmediated into an *omocha-e* play print, which later inspired Shin-san to develop this toy into a form of theater in its own right.

Shin-san’s original *omocha-e* print is no longer available, but there are *omocha-e* prints that continue to transmediate his invention for child audiences. This *omocha-e* (Fig. 5) from the Cotsen Children’s Library collection is not dated or titled, but it includes all the *tachi-e* kamishibai puppets needed to recreate the story of legendary *ninja* Sarutobi Sasuke. Just as with the Edo-period magic-lantern shows, still images of scenery are provided on the upper right and left but otherwise each character is depicted in two poses. The two poses would have been cut out and glued to either side of a bamboo stick. When the puppet is flipped around quickly – much like when pulling the lantern slides out of the stage – the puppet would appear to move.



Figure 5. Kamishibai puppets of Sarutobi Sasuke driving out demons,
Artist unknown, c. 1920-30, Cotsen Children’s Library.
(Cotsen ID No. 98569)

Judging from the style of animation, this *tachi-e* kamishibai print most likely dates from the 1920s or 30s, but it depicts many of the same themes and characters—the lantern ghost and three-eyed monster—as the 1884 *utsushi-e* print, revealing how magic lanterns, *omocha-e*

toy-prints, and kamishibai continued to develop *in relation* to each other over time.

It is not clear from Kamichi's description whether Shin-san actually invented this genre of *omocha-e* play print, but what Kamichi does suggest is that he was the first to recognise that this toy could be developed into a type of dramatic spectacle in its own right. By performing these animated puppets in a stage against a black curtain, which helped to accentuate the animation, Shin-san created a new kind of performance, which he called "the *new* magic lantern show" (*Shin-utsushi-e*), but audiences saw that he was using *paper* puppets to perform *theater* and began calling his performances *kamishibai* (Kata 8).

If we recall that *utsushi-e* images were projected through *washi* paper screens for audiences sitting on the opposite side, it may not seem like such a big leap to transfer the images directly onto paper, but Shin-san's apparently simple innovation freed him from the many challenges of performing actual *utsushi-e* magic-lantern shows, which required fire, expensive glass for the slides, and the darkness of an interior room. To say that this invention was a "throwback" is to ignore the imaginative leap from projected magic-lantern images on glass to paper that allowed audiences on the streets in broad daylight to experience the magical illusion of animated cinematic technology.

The Rise of the New Magic Lantern

Utsushi-e was largely forgotten in the push for rapid Westernization in the 1860s, but, when Japan participated in the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, the participants brought back Western-style magic lantern projectors called *gentō* (literally "illusion lantern") (Ishiyama 23). The Meiji government commissioned Tsurubuchi Hatsuzō to create educational magic-lantern projectors and slides to teach about constitutional reforms and civic responsibilities in the new era. The Cotsen Children's Library collection has an *omocha-e* print in the form of a *sugoroku* game board that captures this historic moment through vivid illustrations (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. Kyōiku hitsuyō gentō furiwake sugoroku (Important educational magic lantern slides of dividing into different professions board game), 1896.

Artist: Hiroshige III (1842-1894) (Cotsen ID No.101597)

The game follows a series of magic-lantern slides, illustrating historical figures, who led exemplary lives, and other stories of ethical behavior. Thanks to the success of Tsurubuchi and others, magic lanterns were soon adopted as educational tools in schools, religious settings, and private homes throughout Japan.

The illustration for the starting point of the game, at bottom-center of the print, depicts Tsurubuchi himself, instructing a group of young men and women about the life of the legendary emperor Nintoku. It is no coincidence that Tsurubuchi is explaining the magic-lantern slide in much the same way silent film was performed in Japan with a narrator (*katsudō benshi*), providing oral explanation of the pictures (Dym). Magic lanterns were an early form of cinema, and, when silent film first entered Japan, it was referred to as “Moving Shadow Pictures” or “Moving Magic-Lantern Pictures” (Fukujima 6–7). Although, as mentioned earlier, the early *tachie* form of kamishibai may have converged with kabuki or bunraku plays, by the 1920s, *tachie* were similarly converging with popular silent films. In his *Shōwa (1926-1989) History of Kamishibai* 紙芝居の昭和史, Kata Koji recalls that the first kamishibai he was commissioned to make was a *tachi-e* puppet of Charlie Chaplin’s “The Kid.”

The style of kamishibai that is commonly used today was invented around 1929. It came to be known as *hira-e* (flat pictures) to distinguish it from the earlier form of *tachi-e* (standing pictures). However, in corroboration of Jenkins’s claim that “once a medium establishes itself it continues to be part of the media ecosystem,” both of these forms continued to develop in tandem with each other for some time afterward. Although the *tachi-e* and *hira-e* styles of kamishibai appear outwardly to be quite different, they both arose from a similar impulse – to *transmediate* cinematic animation onto paper—and this apparently “backwards” innovation freed the performers from the inconvenience of expensive technology, allowing them to perform outside and interact with audiences in new ways.

Histories of kamishibai often describe the *hira-e* card format as an off-shoot of silent film, with early street performers emulating the vocal style of *katsudō benshi*, or silent film narrators (Dym; Orbaugh), but the connection between the new style of kamishibai and the western-style of magic lantern (*gentō*) is worthy of further exploration, as both increasingly entered educational settings. By 1937, there were 2000 kamishibai storytellers on the streets of Tokyo, and about 800,000 children were watching kamishibai stories on a daily basis nationwide (Nomura and Uchiyama, 1).² The power of this mass medium soon attracted the attention of educators, who wanted to harness its popularity for their own purposes. With the onset of WWII, kamishibai was quickly adopted by the Imperial military government, as a powerful instrument for propaganda, instructing the whole nation on how to work together for the war effort (Suzuki 2005; Orbaugh 2015). From the 1930s until the 1950s, kamishibai and magic lanterns were increasingly used interchangeably as audio-visual formats. In her book about the appropriation of street-performance kamishibai for the purposes of war propaganda, Sharalyn Orbaugh (2015) notes that one of the first kamishibai used in the war effort was a *gentō* magic-lantern show (53).

From Kamishibai-Magic Lanterns to Magic Lantern-Kamishibai

The Cotsen Children’s Library collection houses several propaganda kamishibai-style sets of magic-lantern slides. This one titled *Daitōa sensō!!* (The War for Greater East Asia!!) begins

² Ishiyama puts this figure closer to 700,000 (57).

with the patriotic display of Japanese flags in front of the imperial palace in Tokyo and ends with the bombing of the island of Hawaii (Fig. 7). The narrative progresses over 12 scenes (two on each slide) just like a typical kamishibai story, but these tiny glass slides had a much greater impact than the paper version because they could be projected on large screens for bigger audiences.



Figure 7. Daitōa Sensō!! (大東亜戦争!!), Illustrator/Publisher not identified, c. 1942-45. (Cotsen ID No. 71688129)

The convergence between these two formats can be further demonstrated in a miniature war propaganda kamishibai-*omochae* created as a children's toy to be cut up and assembled (Fig. 8). Although this might not be an *omocha-e* in the sense of the *ukiyo-e* prints that flourished in the Edo period, I would argue that it is a direct descendent. Only 2 x 2.5 inches, when constructed, this miniature stage is part of an *omiyage*, or promotional gift. The complete package was designed as an advertisement for medicine and other health products, as well as a celebration of the 2600th year (1940) since the founding of the Japanese empire by the legendary Emperor Jimmu.



Figure 8. Omiyage (オミヤゲ), Ōsaka-shi : Hatsubaigen Kabushiki Gaisha Takeda ChōBee Shōten, [1940?]. (Cotsen ID No. 71687659)

The twelve miniature kamishibai story cards depict a series of victorious battles and events, starting with the 1937 Marco Polo Bridge Incident at the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and ending with the founding of the so-called Reorganized National

Government of the Republic of China (1940-1945). An image of the fully assembled stage is provided at lower left of the card. In terms of size, theme, and illustration style, these cards are very similar to the magic-lantern slide kamishibai shown in Figure 7 above.

After the war, magic lanterns and kamishibai continued to converge in educational settings. In the 1950s, Takahashi Gozan, director of the Magic Lantern Kamishibai Association and a prominent voice in educational kamishibai, oversaw a series of historical kamishibai designed to look like magic lantern shows (Fig. 9). The visual style of this series mimics the pastel colours and light and shadow techniques of magic-lantern slides. Beginning with the historical transition of Japan’s capital city from Edo to Tokyo (江戸から東京へ) at the beginning of the Meiji period, the stories in the series include detailed instructions for how to use the cards when teaching older students in public schools.



Figure 9. Edo kara Tokyo e (江戸から東京へ), Tōkyō :
Nihon Kamishibai Gentō Kabushiki Kaisha, Shōwa 31 [1956].
(Cotsen ID No. 99566259)

Efforts to Prevent Convergence

As kamishibai and magic lanterns continued to converge, there were also voices calling to keep them separate. In *Educational University Seminars: Audio Visual Education*, Saki Akio (1951) wrote, “Many people think kamishibai and magic lantern are the same, but they should be treated as different media” (189). Saki acknowledged that both of these media were relatively new to education— especially in the case of kamishibai—but he argued that they both held great promise and had become essential to classroom teaching (187). This certainly proved true in the case of the magic lantern as methods of photography improved and its delivery technology transitioned into the slide projector and, more recently, PowerPoint slides. However, in the case of kamishibai, several setbacks prevented it from reaching its potential in classrooms in Japan. In 1967, the Ministry of Education decreed that kamishibai stages and cards were “expendable goods” and no longer required schools to purchase them. In the 1970s, kamishibai cards were moved out of the audio-visual sections of libraries and placed together with picture books (Kamichi 99–100). Indeed, today kamishibai cards more frequently are converged in people’s minds with picture books because they are used interchangeably in school settings for literacy education and reading aloud. Many illustrators of kamishibai today are also picture-book illustrators, further blurring the boundaries between the two formats. Publishers of kamishibai tend to focus on what will sell and that has led to an emphasis on stories for kindergarten and pre-school children. Today, the general public in Japan often perceives of kamishibai as a medium only for very young children. The fact that kamishibai was initially inspired by early cinema and was created for audiences of all ages

has largely been forgotten in Japan, although this may change yet again as people around the world are increasingly adopting and adapting the format for new contexts and diverse audiences.

Conclusion

As this brief mapping of early cinematic media demonstrates, kamishibai not only converged with magic-lantern technology through the mediation of *omocha-e* from the very beginning, but both audio-visual media—kamishibai and magic lanterns—continued to evolve and develop *in relation* to each other, cross-fertilizing and intersecting as they moved in tandem over time. In fact, it would appear from these examples that the stronger tendency of media is toward convergence, and it is only through concerted and repeated efforts of people like Saki Akio or Iwamoto Kenji that these media remain separate and classifiable. These efforts also raise the question of whether the relatively low social status of all three of these popular cultural media—magic lanterns, kamishibai, and *omocha-e*—made them more prone to convergence because the stakes involved in maintaining purity of form were never as high as the potential profit of coming up with the latest (*shinpan*) novelty.

In *Multimedia Histories: From the Magic Lantern to the Internet*, James Lyons and John Plunkett (2007) write that “Along with ‘interactivity,’ ‘convergence’ is probably the other term most often used to characterize the impact of digital media...In contemporary media practice, ‘convergence’ stands for the dominance of fusion and transferability between different forms...we are in an era in which media are always used in relation to each other” (xxii). Although this may seem like a new phenomenon, the interwoven histories of kamishibai, *omocha-e*, and magic lanterns demonstrate that this complex ecology of cultural forms is anything but new. Taking an ecological and integrated approach to media and how they evolve in relation to each other opens up new ways of looking at the histories of all three media. When viewed through ecological networks, we can see how kamishibai and magic lanterns have and will no doubt continue to regenerate and evolve in new directions as they travel to other cultures and new communities over time.

By way of conclusion, let us return to the question of the role of paper, which has been quietly serving as the material at the base of most of the media examined in this article: Is paper a medium, a delivery technology, or a platform? Although I have only begun to tease out the implications of this question, the mapping of converging technologies in this study suggests that paper was and continues to be an efficient and durable delivery technology, perhaps even a platform, especially in the absence of more expensive or less reliable technologies. I would even go so far as to reword Jenkins’s claim for digital technologies to argue: “When words, images and sounds are transferred onto *paper*, we expand the potential relationships between them and enable them to flow across platforms.” I will conclude with two examples. In 2003, when my son was ten and had no access to video-game consoles, he contrived a “paper video game” over a series of 20 taped together single sheets of paper, complete with associated levels, avatars, and gems. Even more recently, in a spectacular convergence of old and new media, the Japanese kamishibai troupe Spice Arthur 702 performed what they call “Bunraku Star Wars,” (Fig. 10), which transports the kamishibai format back to its roots in both traditional Japanese theater and early cinema, while at the same time recreating that most well-known of futuristic galaxies, all on paper.

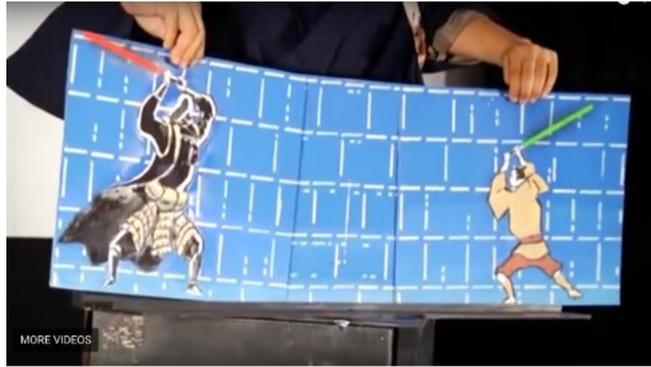


Figure 10. From Spice Arthur 702 “Bunraku Star Wars.”
<https://www.list.co.uk/event/417589-japanese-picture-storytelling-with-spice-arthur-702/#videos> (accessed 02-17-2022)

In this complex example of multiple converging media—incorporating aspects of film, traditional puppet theater, magic lanterns, and kamishibai—Spice Arthur 702 demonstrates the resilience of kamishibai as a medium and shows how the transference of light and shadow technologies onto paper continues to be relevant to performers in Japan and throughout the world today.

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