Chinese Theatre

* Started as Interpretive Dance which was a dramatic ritual and part of religious activities
  + Only the Emperor, Priest, and Court could participate/watch
* Almost 3000 years later… Emperor Ming Huang created a school for actors in his garden
  + The school was so successful that Chinese actors are called “Children of the Pear Tree Garden”
  + The theatre style was highly formal and centered on three main themes
    - Ancestor Worship
    - Military Glory
    - Faithfulness to a husband
  + Written in classical Chinese
    - Only the most well-educated could understand it
* Changed w/ Mongolian invasion
  + Added action/ acrobatics/songs/dances
* 1949 – Communists rewrote many of the classical plays and used them to preach government policy
* Peking Opera
  + Westerners gave Chinese Theatre this name because Chinese drama features chanting/singing/music
    - Exotic to west and has influenced western writing
      * Thorton Wilder’s *Our Town*
  + Most acting done by men – even female characters
  + Acting in Chinese theatre is considered a “life study”
  + Movements/poses are highly symbolic, done with gracefulness, and have specific meaning
    - Sleeve over the eye – WEEPING
    - Red umbrella with white paper falling from it – SNOW
  + Elaborate costumes and thick makeup
    - Colors represented personality
      * Red – FAITHFUL
      * Blue – CRUELTY
      * White – EVILNESS
* Greatly influenced Japanese theatre

Japanese Theatre

* Noh plays
  + used formal language and were only for the aristocrats
  + the plays are still performed today almost the same as they were originally
  + short plays; considered serious/philosophical studies
  + poetry with dance and music
  + Costumes: ornate silks (regardless of character’s class or status)
    - Cut of fabric and makeup showed class representation
    - Major characters wore carved wooden masks w/ stereotyped (emotional) expressions
  + Kyogen plays provided a comic interlude between Noh plays (to provide relief from serious nature of Noh dramas)
    - Did not use music or masks
    - Usually 5 Noh plays were performed mixed in with 3 Kyogen plays
* Bunraku – doll theatre
  + Featured 4 foot tall dolls – carved in detail with moving eyelids, eyebrows, mouths, and fingers
  + Dolls dressed in elaborate costumes
  + Narrators read dialogue with music
  + Doll attendants dressed in black with gauze masks manipulated dolls
* Kabuki Theatre
  + Drama for the common man
  + Singing/dancing
  + Melodramatic and sensational
  + Range of subjects:
    - Heavy/tension filled drama featuring historical tragedies including
      * Suicide/murder/torture
    - Unspoken dance dramas with demons
    - Domestic love triangles

Hindu Theatre

* Most drama was for the upper class
  + Took place in palace garden or playhouse (small theatre) on palace grounds
* Plays were very intimate/delicate/restrained
  + Meant to be pleasant entertainment
    - Always had a happy ending
* Used a Green Room
  + Place for actors to relax and change
  + Almost every theatre and TV station today has a green room
* 1st to permit women onstage as actors