



Kamishibai

Street-storytelling is traditional in various places around Asia. A custom popular in the first half of the twentieth century, though it started three centuries ago and can be traced back to earlier Asian picture-storytelling traditions, was *kamishibai* ('paper drama') using sets of large printed or painted cards to illustrate the story, which had around 25,000 practitioners by 1950.

"The kamishibai storyteller [*gaito kamishibaiya-san*] was also a candy seller. Riding a bicycle equipped with a small stage for showing the story cards, he would enter a village or neighborhood, dismount and loudly strike together two wooden clappers [*hyoshigi*] or allow a lucky child to do so. The sound was a signal for children to run from their homes and gather around him for story time. Those who bought candy got to stand nearest to the stage. Then, in a dramatic manner, he would start to tell 2-3 kamishibai episodes. He would not tell the whole story! The stories were told as continuing serials, that is, he would always stop at an exciting moment, leaving the children impatient for his next visit. With the advent of television in 1953, the itinerant storyteller gradually disappeared from Japan's streets. In recent years, however, kamishibai have enjoyed a renaissance in Japanese schools, libraries and culture centers."

from *Kamishibai for Kids*
www.kamishibai.com