

## ABOUT JEFFREY DYM



Jeff with Mr. Masao Morishita , one of the two brothers featured in our video clip in the Resource Section. Their father was one of the first street kamishibai performers.

Jeff teaches at California State University, Sacramento where he is currently an Associate Professor of History, teaching a variety of courses on Japanese History and Culture, as well as Asian History and World History. Jeff says that life is like *Kamishibai* - you never know what lies behind the next card!

Born and reared in Washington, D.C., Jeff attended Colby College in Waterville, ME, which had a two year language requirement. He decided to study Japanese with a view toward a business career (Japanese businesses were dominant in the 1980's). Little did Jeff know that taking Japanese would take him down a wholly unanticipated path.

He spent his junior year at Doshisha University in Kyoto where his interests in Japanese culture and history grew – and his interest in business waned. After finishing his senior year at Colby, Jeff returned to Japan and taught English for two years in Osaka.

He aspired to become a college professor however, and returned to the States for graduate studies, earning a M.A. in Japanese Studies from the University of Michigan, and a Ph.D. in History at the University of Hawaii.

During his junior in Japan, Jeff's homestay brother had asked him why Americans take bubble baths, noting that people frequently took them in American movies and on TV shows. Jeff explained that such was to get around the prohibition on nudity on TV and to qualify for certain movie ratings. That question however, got him thinking about how one culture views and understands another culture based on its cultural exports. He began looking into how movies affected Japanese perceptions of America. Traveling down this road led him to *benshi* (ben-she), Japanese silent film narrators, the topic of his doctoral dissertation – and later published as *Benshi, Japanese Silent Film Narrators and Their Forgotten Art of Setsumei*, 2003

The *benshi* era in Japan came to an end with the introduction of “talkies.” Many *benshi* lost their jobs, and according to the literature on *benshi*, a number of them became *kamishibai* performers. Thus, Jeff has embarked on a new path, researching the history of *kamishibai*.