

study of literature can only go so far when it restricts itself to the canonical version of texts found in books, and that the study of journals and magazines is key. The poetic narrative of love, rivalry, and mutual respect among Akiko, Tomiko, and Tekkan that Morton excavates is enthralling to read, and it is really only accessible thanks to Morton's attentive magazine scholarship. It would be interesting for future scholars to put this book in dialogue with the burgeoning field of magazine studies, discussed in *The Routledge Handbook of Magazine Research* (edited by David Abrahamson and Marcia R. Prior-Miller; Routledge, 2015). How does the study of journals and magazines enrich Japanese literary studies?

Though accessible and clear in style, *How Dark is My Flower* does presuppose a certain familiarity with Akiko's work and life and with Japanese literature more generally, making it perhaps a little advanced for most undergraduate classrooms. It will be of great interest to scholars and graduate students in Japanese literary studies, particularly those who work on modern poetry, still an understudied area.

The Comic Storytelling of Western Japan: Satire and Social Mobility in Kamigata Rakugo.

By **Matthew W. Shores**. Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 261 pp.

Reviewed by
Esra-Gökçe Şahin

Matthew W. Shores's *The Comic Storytelling of Western Japan: Satire and Social Mobility in Kamigata Rakugo* provides an in-depth view of one of Japan's most prominent stage crafts by providing a historical trajectory of the development of the genre. *Rakugo* is one of Japan's major verbal arts, which had developed in two separate geographical centers—Tokyo and Osaka. Mostly for political reasons, Edo *rakugo*, which originates in Tokyo, has gained more popularity over the years and had been researched more often. In that regard, Shores's research deserves particular attention for tracing the development of the Kamigata tradition that has become identified with the urban traditions of Osaka.

The book is very informative for both researchers and students in Japanese studies, as well as being comprehensive and useful for a general audience interested in stagecraft. The introduction starts with general information on *rakugo*. It is emphasized that “Kamigata *rakugo* is an oral tradition, a performing art, and it is literature.” (12) Shores further explains that he designed his research methodology and the outlay of the chapters to reflect these three major characteristics of the genre in the best way. The author also provides detailed information regarding the history and content of Kamigata *rakugo* tradition, with both abridged and full-length examples of actual *rakugo* stories. Shores worked as a participant observer, where he actually apprenticed under professional *rakugo* performers. This on-set practice gave him first-hand experience and an insider’s perspective. The book consists of two parts. Part I provides a historical trajectory and categorical analysis, and part II introduces classical stories from the genre of Kamigata *rakugo*. In the Introduction chapter of part I, the author tackles two major tasks: first of all, he describes the narrative structure, technical details and other major characteristics of *rakugo* as the comic storytelling art and performance of Japan. Here, Shores provides information regarding the structural breakdown of *rakugo* stories and explains how the punchlines as the humorous nuances are placed in each story to trigger laughter. Information on major traits of the genre, such as “One *rakugoka* plays all characters, distinguishing gender, age, and social position through voice, posture and gaze,” (2) is followed with the introduction of the prompts that help the embodiment of the protagonists and enactment of certain scenes. The second task is to provide information on the characteristics of the community of *rakugo* performers, such as the importance of hierarchy, both in the training process and during the stage shows. The introduction chapter also contains information regarding the socio-spatial aspects of a *rakugo* show and introduces the attitude of the audience as a lighthearted community whose purpose in visiting the shows is described as “not there to listen so much as they were there to fool around.” (6)

After these descriptions, Shores shifts his focus towards his main subject of analysis: the Osaka-based Kamigata *rakugo*. This division between the two major storytelling traditions (Edo *rakugo* and Kamigata *rakugo*) pertain to a more distinct division between the geographical areas of eastern and western regions of Japan. Here, Shores draws attention to the fact that these two traditions are often discussed in a comparative and competitive sense. The sense of competitiveness between the two

traditions is unquestionably related to the shift of political power from the western region, namely Kyoto to Edo at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Shores states, “There is a common belief that *rakugo* is essentially a Tokyo art, or that the Tokyo variety is the better of the two.” (7). As a result, it has been more common for Edo *rakugo* to become the object for scholarly analysis over the years. Hence, there is less research focusing on the analysis of Kamigata *rakugo*. The main difference between the two traditions is pointed as their emphases on social classes in addition to regionalism. It is explained that Kamigata *rakugo* is “merchant centered,” as opposed to Tokyo *rakugo*, where the playful interactions between *shokunin* (artisans, journeymen) and samurai are more commonly seen. This seemingly slight nuance opens into a broader difference in terms of the general characteristics of the two traditions as Shores states, “Kamigata *rakugo* stands out as extraordinarily bold, energetic, entertaining, and lifelike, a reflection of Osakans and the kind of entertainment they traditionally preferred.” (11) The key difference between the two traditions is indicated by the presence of music, and the narrative structure which positions “story within the story” in the Osaka *rakugo*.

After the introduction, the chapter breakdown in part I goes as follows: a first chapter on the characteristics of Kamigata *rakugo*, next a review of the development of the genre through time, and major traits of protagonists, along with a focus on a senior contemporary *rakugo* performer. English translations of five *rakugo* classics are placed at the end. Chapter 1 starts with the painstaking task of describing the characteristics of Kamigata *rakugo*. Introducing a genre by making references to its counterpart and explaining the differences between the two is a hard task, but it comes smoothly in Shores’ writing. In this chapter, Shores provides information regarding the major characteristics of Kamigata *rakugo*, in order to clarify the ways in which this particular tradition stands out differently from its counterpart, Edo *rakugo*.

In order to elucidate the origins of the differences, chapter 1 begins with detailed information regarding the characteristics of the landscape as well as the sociocultural background of urban life in Osaka, together with information on the formation of social classes. While providing this background information, Shores explains how Osakan identity has been shaped in this geographical space, rooted in the social structure and by the merchant culture. Osakan identity is dominated with the presence and the growth of the merchant class, with the privileges that were given to them. Shores states, “In 1591, Hideyoshi declared that the merchant and artisan

families of Osaka would be exempt from property taxes.” (24) This privilege, together with the economic prosperity gained from the accumulation of wealth as a result of commercial activities, has positioned the social class of merchants and artisans as central in the social structure (as opposed to the case in Edo). Shores also highlights that “Osaka had become the economic heart of Japan and, for many years, the country’s most crucial city.” (25)

After setting the scene by explaining the class structure, the chapter proceeds to compare the Osaka characteristic as a cheerful society, to the rather somber attitude of the samurai class in Edo/Tokyo. It is stated that “[l]aughter has long been an important part of Osaka life.” (30) Osaka had a major role in the growth of Japan’s economy in the seventeenth century, and its economic prosperity has led its residents towards spending time and wealth in the recreational activities. Shores explains this tendency in the following words: “Osaka literati—often *chōnin*—were concerned, if not obsessed, with learning for the sake of learning and quality of work.” (34) Here, Kamigata *rakugo* is portrayed as “a product of old merchant Osaka” (12), and it crafts the stories of the merchant class. Shores also mentions that Osaka’s close proximity to Nagasaki had boosted Kamigata *rakugo*’s content with the flow of scholarly knowledge and intellectual interactions in addition to the exchange of material goods. Osaka *chōnin* (merchant) identity as a character trait is said to have benefitted from these exchanges. In this atmosphere, laughter is depicted as a social lubricator and a cheerful attitude is seen as a prerequisite for communication and prosperous business negotiations among Osakans. Shores gives special emphasis to the connection between economic prosperity and recreational activities by drawing attention to the fact that Kamigata *rakugo*’s advancement is rooted in the affluence of the town as a merchant society.

Chapter 2 covers a large time span to track the development of *rakugo* from Japan’s very early ages until the contemporary years. The biggest focus is on the Tokugawa era, where *rakugo* as a genre has achieved its current form. The Tokugawa years have also raised the legendary *rakugo* performers whose legacies have given the genre its current form. Here the author emphasizes that the history of Kamigata *rakugo* is grounded in the sociopolitical histories of Kamigata/Kansai region. He also points to a major stylistic difference between the performances of *rakugo* in Tokyo vs. Osaka by stating that Kamigata *rakugo* had often been performed outdoors. The origin of this practice is said to be grounded in the Buddhist roots of the genre. Shores reports that outdoor sermons had been a

common practice in the Kyoto and Osaka regions, a practice that evolved into the development of performance culture and resulted with Kamigata *rakugo* often being performed outdoors. He later points that this tradition of performing outdoors had largely saved Kamigata *rakugo* from disappearing when a significant portion of the public buildings, including theaters, were destroyed during the bombings of WWII.

Another major difference between the two performance traditions is reported to be related to the rules and norms that govern the public spaces in the two regions of Kamigata vs. Edo. Kamigata's distance from the Tokugawa central government is said to have resulted with relatively more freedom in the public spaces, compared to the city of Edo, where the rules and regulations that governed the public spaces were dominated by the samurai elites. Shores further states:

Samurai walked the streets of every district in Edo with Shogunal officials among them. This was in stark contrast to the situation in Kamigata, where *chōnin* dominated the urban environment and samurai were relatively rare. Kamigata storytellers thus enjoyed more freedom. (48)

The rules, regulations, and norms that govern public spaces are known to have a major influence on the design of soundscapes in the realm of performance crafts. Shores reports that storytellers, who enjoyed the relatively loose atmosphere of the urban space, had filled up the streets “by shouting, playing musical instruments and sounding other noisemakers such as wooden clackers” to attract attention. (48) In the remaining part of chapter 2, Shores provides information regarding the lives and legacies of some popular *rakugoka* throughout history. He introduces *rakugoka* from Tokugawa and Meiji eras, post-World War II and beyond, in chronological order. This chronological lining provides a sense of the trajectory of the genre over the years.

After providing information on the historical and sociopolitical background in the first two chapters and explaining the ways in which Kamigata *rakugo* stands separately from the Edo *rakugo*, chapter 3 provides detailed insights regarding the tradition and characteristics of the major protagonists in Kamigata *rakugo*. Here, the storytelling structure and the flamboyance of Kamigata *rakugo* is given a special emphasis. It is also explained that Kamigata *rakugo* stories are demonstrated as narratives where human imagination and witticism push beyond socioeconomic restrictions. Chapter 3 also brings attention to the difference between Kamigata *rakugo* from Edo *rakugo* in terms of the content of the stories

and due to the reputation of both regions and their identification with different performative genres. Then, chapter 4 consists of a lengthy interview with a senior contemporary *rakugo* performer. The book's part I is wrapped-up with a conclusion chapter after the interview. What can be inferred from the conclusion chapter is that, as opposed to the Edo *rakugo* where the humorous puns and witty remarks target the lifestyle and mannerism of the ruling samurai class, Kamigata *rakugo* tends to mock the class of merchants, as "Osaka's de facto rulers." (157) After these instructions and discussions, in part II, Shores introduces the English translations of five Kamigata *rakugo* classics where the readers get a sense of the narrative flow and the dialogues among the protagonists. This provides a useful reference source for the readers who do not know Japanese.

Overall, Shores's book makes a significant contribution to Japanese studies. That said, as geographic mobilities and power shifts have been influencing the techniques, contents, and sociopolitical ideologies woven around artistic traditions, the book could benefit from a sharper perspective on the ideological divide between Kamigata and Edo. The sociohistorical trajectory of Kamigata vs. Edo *rakugo* could be regarded in parallel to the development of opera in various centers in Europe, such as Italy, Germany, and France, or the major schools of Soviet ballet such as Bolshoi and Kirov, where each location has nurtured the genre with their own political and demographic sources. Shores's descriptive analysis could benefit from expanding on the aesthetic and stylistic bifurcations of the ideological divide between the Tokugawa hierarchy that dominated the country with centralized military power and the relatively loose, cosmopolitan merchant ethos that flourished in the Kamigata region.