

Presentation at the Gathering, International Communication

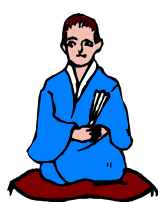
Akishima City, Tokyo, September 28, 2007

Hi, good evening. How are you?

More than one year has passed since I made a presentation here. Now, I am 66 years old and in the seventh year of my retirement.

From this year, I started to learn English Rakugo. Rakugo is a story with a witty end. Why did I begin to learn Rakugo?

While I was listening to the NHK radio program, “Monoshiri Eigojuku”, one of the serialized programs featured English Rakugo.



Rakugo is not so popular worldwide yet, but we have evidence that many foreigners are fond of listening to Rakugo these days.

In fact, looking back at the history of export and import industries of Japan, the export of merchandize such as cars, televisions, and watches has increased tremendously in these decades.

While, as for culture, we have imported so many novels, dramas, music, arts and so on from the western countries.

For export of Japanese culture, however, there are very few; we can count only, for example, the traditional Kabuki, the Manga and the Karaoke.

I have an opinion. I think, in addition to political and economical exchange, it is very important for us to promote cultural exchange in order to establish better relationships between nations.

Therefore, I think, Rakugo is one of the best items to promote this cultural exchange. It is because any person in any country would like to hear interesting and humorous stories that make him relaxed and happy.

This is why I began to study English Rakugo. I want to embrace a dream to transmit it to the citizens in overseas countries in the near future.

Today, I would like to share with you two stories from my collection of Koten Rakugos. Because I am just a beginner and I cannot recite the stories perfectly, and I am not wearing a Kimono, nor having a Zabuton for Koza, I

would like you to kindly bear with me.

As an introduction to Rakugo, before I begin my narration of the two stories, let me share with you two interesting experiences that happened in my daily life the other day.

From the time I entered a life living only on pension; it is totally different from the time when I was working. I tried to economize as much as possible.

For example, the cost to visit a barber is one of them. I have quit going to the barber shop. Instead, my wife, who is pretty good at handling scissors, cuts my hair. Thanks to her, I have saved 4000 yen every month.

Because I am not working at the office now, and have little chance to meet young charming ladies, I have become indifferent to my appearance.



However, actually in general, I cannot recommend this modest approach to everyone. It is said, “The more you become older, the more you should try to be dandyish”.

I think this saying is exactly to the point.

Frankly speaking, however, I don't have any means to make me dandyish.

As you see now, particularly in my head, because of my scarce hair, I am almost half bald.

Even so, when I needed to have an interview with an important figure or to attend an important meeting, I dared to go to a barber shop on occasions.

But, alas! The hair of my head is like this. The space that is overgrown with hair is far smaller than other places.

Once, I told my barber,

“Master, as you see, the volume of my hair is almost half of the other clients. You needn't to take care of all the bald parts. So, why can't you give me a discount?”

What do you think the master barber replied?



He said,
“Sir. Please don’t make such an unreasonable demand. It’s quite clear that the amount of hair you have is fewer than that of others.

Consequently, I am handling my scissors **with the utmost, extra care**. This is so that I will not remove or damage any of your hair, **not even a single piece!** In this sense, I would rather incline to ask you to **pay me double!**”

He was far smarter than I. I have got no chance against him.

The second experience:

I would like to refer to it as my “magic pillow”. This story appears in my website.

Essays at will, “Soliloquy of Don Quixote”

The backstage of English and Spanish Pages of my website

While I am sleeping I have magicians working in my pillow!

Two years ago, on my website, a few of my friends from overseas asked me to add some of my reports and essays to my website, in English and Spanish, also.

In response to their requests I began to translate my writings that I presumed may be of interest to my friends from overseas.

Nevertheless, I lacked the confidence in my translations. I needed to ask native speakers to proofread my work.

I have a number of foreign friend in Japan but most of them are too busy to do any proofreading for me.

To my great surprise and pleasure, while I was trying to find capable translators locally, my friends living overseas offered me their support.

For English, I have Mr. K who lives in the United States. For Spanish, Mr. M from Panama volunteered.

Mr. K was a doctor and Lieutenant Colonel at Yokota Air Base and Mr. M was a veterinarian and is now participating in the editing the newsletters of the Buddhist organization in Panama.

I am very grateful to them for their cordial support.

Thinking back, it is logical that almost 100% of native speakers would live in their own countries!

With the technology of the Internet, if I send my translated manuscript from Japan to the US or Panama in the evening, I would receive a proofread copy as early as the next morning.

The time difference between Japan and these countries gives me this advantage.

In another words, **the task is done while I am sleeping!**

The book, “The world is becoming flat” written by Thomas Freedman has become a best seller in Tokyo. In this book he cites an example of our information age as follows.

“Within seconds, a message computer in the US can be Internet, from India to England to the US leaping zones of the globe.”



originated from a personal sent to India via the England, and from through the different time

In short, a task relayed through the Internet is continuously being attended by someone else from another country around the clock, even though the people who started the task may be sleeping.

At the time when I was dispatched to Panama as a correspondent 30 years ago, even facsimile didn't exist. E-mail was unheard of. We corresponded by telex, frantically typing Japanese in Romaji.

We could never imagine the time like now would come. It's unbelievable that we are enjoying these tremendous present-day conveniences. Don't you think so?

This manuscript, too, was proofread by my friend, in the US.

In fact, I have a magic pillow that works for me while I am sleeping.

Now, I would like to share with you two stories from Koten Rakugo.

The first one is “Dish Manor”, the Japanese title is “Sara Yashiki” and the second one is “The judgment of the Tengu”, the Japanese title is “Tengu

Sabaki”.

I hope you can really enjoy the stories.

Dish Manor

There once was a man who was rich and cruel.

In his house was a servant girl whose name was Okiku, and she was so beautiful that her master fell in love with her at first sight.

He told her that he loved her.

He told her that he wanted to be with her for the rest of his life. He told her he would kill himself if she refused him.

Okiku told him to keep his hands to himself.

The master was furious.

He couldn't believe a woman, particularly a woman so beautiful—could refuse him.

He vowed revenge.

He brought out the family's collection of priceless dishes.

There were ten dishes, and they were very old and very beautiful.

He ordered Okiku to clean them, and told her if she broke one, he would kill her.

And so Okiku set to work with the utmost care, and when she wasn't looking, the master took one of the dishes and hid it away.

He then went to Okiku and demanded she show him all the dishes.

She laid them out, one by one.

“One, two, three, four.....” she counted.

But once she reached the ninth plate, she couldn't find the tenth.

The master accused Okiku of stealing a dish and took out his sword.

Sobbing, she told him that she hadn't stolen the dish.

But he wouldn't listen.

He killed her, and threw her body down the well.

The following night, the master was settling down to sleep when he heard a sad, ghostly voice:” **One, two.....**”it said.

“**Who’s there?**” the master cried, terrified.

“**Three, four.....**” continued the voice.

The master tore open the screen door but there was no one there.

“**Five, six.....**” said the voice.

The master ran out into the garden.

“**Seven, eight.....**” said the voice.



The master found himself near the well. He saw something black floating out of it.

It was human hair.

The master fell back in horror.

There was a woman coming out of the well.

“**Nine.....**” said the voice.

“**Okiku!**”

Screamed the master, and the next morning his servants found him dead.

Every night after that, the ghost of Okiku would rise from the well, counting the dishes, and it was said that whoever listened to her count to nine would die instantly.

In less than a month, she became a nationwide sensation.

People now came from far and wide to see Okiku float out of her well and count her plates.

“**One, two, three,**” she would moan, and the crowd pressed around, watching her. When she reached “**seven**”, someone would shout, “**Run!**”

And the crowd would rush out of the garden, because they knew if they heard her count to nine, they would die.

She became more and more popular.

Soon the crowds became so big that ticket booths were set up outside the house. People had to book months in advance to get in.

Stalls appeared, selling everything from Okiku dolls and Okiku cakes, to Okiku plates, tea sets and fans with “I survived Okiku” written on them.

There were songs about her, poems about her, plays about her. Other cities created their own ghosts to rival her.

Experts argued about which of the 10 plates—all on exhibition in a local museum—was the Tenth.

Women dressed like Okiku, and girls had to be rescued from wells after throwing themselves in, because they wanted to be like her.

But fame did not affect Okiku.

She continued to appear each night, unfazed by the crowd, looking the same as she did when she first floated out of the well

—although some complained that she wasn’t counting like she used to.

“It’s just routine now,” said one disappointed fan. “Nothing like the pure emotion when I first saw her.”)

Then one night, something strange happened.

Okiku appeared as usual, everyone cheered, and she started counting: “One, two.....atchoo!”

“You all right there, Okiku?” asked someone from the audience.

“Just a little cold,” said Okiku, wiping her nose.

“Nothing to worry about. Three, four.....atchoo!”

And when she reached “seven,” the crowd yelled and tried to run out of the garden.

But because there were more people than usual, they got stuck in the gate. They couldn’t get out.

“Eight,” said Okiku.

The crowd struggled to get out.

“We’re going to die!” screamed a woman hysterically.

“Nine,” said Okiku.

The crowd froze.

“Ten,” said Okiku. “Eleven, Twelve.”

“What’s going on?” someone asked, and Okiku said,

“It’s this blasted cold. I’m taking tomorrow night off so I thought I’d do nine more plates in advance.”

The Judgment of the Tengu

Kihachi woke one morning to find his wife squatting over him, looking at him intently.

“What were you dreaming about?” she demanded.

“Nothing,” Kihachi said.

“You were dreaming about something. I know it. Something good. Share it!”

“I don’t remember.”

“Yes, you do, you just won’t tell me about it.”

“But how can I tell you about it if I don’t remember?”

“You’re lying. You had such a nice dream you wanted to keep it to yourself. I hate you.”

“Be reasonable.”

“I don’t know why I married you.”

“Honestly...”

“My father hated you too. From the start.”

“He was always very nice to me.”

“He said you had no backbone.”

“He said that?”

“Yes, and more. But I still married you. Even though my whole family was against it. I didn’t think you would become like this. I didn’t think you would become a person who wouldn’t share his dreams. Oh, it is a woman’s lot to suffer at the hands of men!”

“How do you know I was having a dream anyway?”

“Because you had a big, fat grin on your face.”

“Well, I don’t remember, I’m sorry.”

“You aren’t sorry.”

“Yes, I am sorry.”

“It was about a woman, wasn’t it? That’s why you’re sorry.”

“Please....this is ridiculous.”

“It’s that woman down at the inn, isn’t it? The brass one, parading around the place, exhibiting her breasts like they were yubari melons.”

“No!”

“Well, my fine husband, she dyes her hair!”

At this moment, their neighbor entered.

“What’s going on?” the neighbor asked. “I heard shouting.”

“My husband is leaving me for another woman!”

cried the wife.

“This is nonsense,” said her husband.

“Please,” said the neighbor to the sobbing woman.

“Go outside, and I’ll talk with your husband.”

The wife left the house.

“So, what happened?” asked the neighbor.

“Oh, a dream,” said Kihachi.

“So, what was the dream about?” asked the neighbor.

“I didn’t have one,” said Kihachi.

“Come on, you can tell me.”

“My wife thought I had a dream. She was wrong, but she wouldn’t believe me, and that’s why we started fighting. It’s idiotic.”

“Tell me.”

“Honestly, I don’t remember. I’d tell you if I did.”

“How long have I known you?”

“For most of my life, since we were children. You’re one of my best friends.”

“And you won’t tell me your dream.”

“Oh, please, don’t you start.”

“Do all these years of friendship mean nothing to you?”

“Listen, I would tell you if I had a dream, but I haven’t.”

“We were like brothers.”

“We still are.”

“No. Not any more. Not now you’re hiding things from me.”

“But I’m not.”

“I would have died for you in battle.”

“You’d have died because you’re hopeless with a sword.”

At that moment, a watchman came by.

“I heard shouting,” the watchman said. “What’s going on?”

“This man,” said the neighbor, pointing at Kihachi.

“My closest friend, my only friend in the world, this man will not share his dream with me.”

“Why not?” the watchman asked.

“Because there is no dream,” said Kihachi.

“Everyone has a dream,” said the watchman. “It’s what makes us human.”

“Do you remember,” said the neighbor, his voice choking with emotion.

“Do you remember that summer long ago? We’d just stolen persimmons from old Mrs. Tenugui’s garden. We were sitting in the sun by the river, and you said no matter what happened, we’d look out for each other, we’d always be there for each other.”

“I don’t see how that’s connected with anything” said Kihachi.

“I will NEVER eat persimmons again,” cried the neighbor.

“How could you?” said the watchman to Kihachi, tears in his eyes.

“Now you’re against me too?” asked Kihachi.

“You’re under arrest,” said the watchman.

Kihachi was dragged before the town magistrate.

“What has this man done?” demanded the magistrate through his great beard.

The watchman started: “This man has refused to....”

“Guilty!” shouted the magistrate, thumping the table.

“He has refused,” continued the watchman, “to say....”

“Guilty, I say!”

“.....what he dreamed about this morning, sir.”

“Are you deaf, man?” shouted the magistrate.

“This man is guilty. Take him outside, tie him to a tree. We will hang him tomorrow.”

“This is not fair,” shouted Kihachi.

“This is not justice.”

“I am a magistrate,” said the magistrate. “Justice is what I say it is.”

Kihachi was taken out into the garden.

“There aren’t any trees free,” said the gardener.

“The magistrate has been busy recently, and there are already about three prisoners tied to each tree. We will have to tie you to a shrub.”

Night soon fell, and it was a very dark night with no moon. Kihachi heard a flutter of wings.

Something large moved through the air above him.



He looked up, trying to see what it was, but it was too dark.

There was another flutter of wings, and then, all of a sudden, he was flying through the air. Something had grabbed him by the back of the neck and was holding him tightly in its grip.

“I am a tengu,” a voice said above him, “and I am setting you free.”

“Why?” asked Kihachi.

“Because you are innocent.”

“At last, someone who has some sense.”

They flew on in silence for a while.

“So what did you dream about?”

“I didn’t have a dream.”

“I set you free. I saved our life. You must tell me.”

“But honestly, I didn’t have one.”

“Is this how you repay me? Tell me, or I will drop you from this great height and your body will break on the rocks below, like an egg.”

“I wish I could, but.....”

And suddenly he was falling.

Falling, falling, falling.....

And then he woke up. He was screaming the word “Egg!”

“Gosh, you look like you’ve had a bad dream,” his wife said.

“Oh, it’s nothing, really,” said Kihachi.

“What were you dreaming about?”

(The stories and the illustrations are from the book “Traditional Comic Stories from Japan” edited by The Japan Times)