



Gender and Sexuality in East Asia

Joint Social Science and History & Humanities Study Group

October 20 (Wed), 2021, 18:30h JST

**From learning good manners to training one's own apprentices:
Female *rakugo* performers on Tokyo's stages**

Sarah Stark, University of Ghent, Belgium

When talking about traditional Japanese stage-arts, what comes to mind is men in kimono. In most stage arts, to this day, female performers are either not trained at all or trained but not accepted to perform in their respective schools' main stages. Until recently, this was also true for Tokyo's *rakugo* world. While records of female performers on Tokyo's *rakugo* stages exist as early as the late Edo period, there has been a long-lasting opposition to allowing female performers to train and perform. The first two female performers were promoted to *shin'uchi* (master/headliner) in 1993. In March 2021, Benzaiten Izumi was promoted to *shin'uchi* as the first female disciple of a female performer.

Today, about 5% of Tokyo's *rakugo* performers are female and most enjoy a big fan following. However, the portfolio of *rakugo* stories has been created by men for (mostly) male audiences. This presentation gives an historic overview of the development of the involvement of female performers on Tokyo's *yose* stages and discusses the different approaches that female performers take on-stage, in green rooms and with audiences, particularly looking into issues such as modification of stories, voice, tone, appearance and stage persona as well as the earliest training stage of *zenza*, which all performers in Tokyo must go through.

Sarah Stark is a Ph.D. candidate at the Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte at the University of Ghent (Belgium). She studied at the University of Trier, the Tokyo Gakugei Daigaku as well as the University of Edinburgh. She is writing her dissertation on the training of rakugo performers in Tokyo.

About

The *Gender and Sexuality in East Asia*-Lecture Series is organized by Barbara Geilhorn and Nora Kottmann. The events are open to all. Further information: dij.tokyo/gender

Online Presentation

Registration for this online event is required via email to geilhorn@dijtokyo.org until **19 October 2021 (JST)**. Log in data will be provided after registration.