

Greetings from the President's Office

2019.11.12 NO.20

What the English Rakugo Reminds Me Of – The Successful AIU Festival

Fall is the season for school festivals. With the days approaching, the quiet campus turns into a busy one with students' enthusiasm. This year AIU held its school festival on October 13th and 14th. Even though it was rainy on the first day, the festival turned out to be very successful on both days. Students entertained visitors with a variety of local cuisines and other activities.

Some non-AIU stalls joined us from both the women's and youth department of the local Kawabe-Yuwa Chamber of Commerce, selling foods such as *Kiritanpo* (Akita's traditional hot pot), *Udon*-noodle, *Yakisoba* (stir-fried noodles), as well as *Taiyaki* (a fish-shaped pancake filled with bean jam). *Babahera* Ice Cream, which is Akita's specialty ice cream, and Hanawa Hormone Stew had especially long queues. Our students offered a variety of international cuisines like chai tea, Toppoki (stir-fried Korean rice cakes), Churros and many more.

Back in the 2014 AIU Festival, one student held a Rakugo show in English. Translating Japanese classical Rakugo into English is not easy, however, his performance also included acting and gestures, making his performance very good. I believe this example represents one of AIU's unique features, that students can perform the traditional Japanese arts in English.

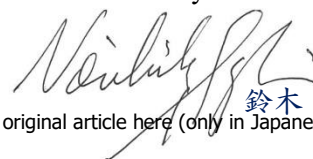
There is currently a Rakugo boom in Japan and is becoming more internationalized through Rakugo performers whose first language is not Japanese. Mr. Katsura Shunshine from Canada promotes English Rakugo to the world, while Mr. Katsura Asakichi, a Rakugo performer from western Japan, performs Rakugo in English all over Japan and abroad. I do not know which is more difficult, conducting classes in English or performing Rakugo in English. However, both require performing in public, which necessitates not only conversation skills but also courage and not being afraid of failure.

Actually, to be honest, I also performed English Rakugo when I was a student at Indiana University in the US. Upon a request from my friend, I decided to perform Rakugo.

Needless to say, I knew it would be almost impossible to do a traditional long one, so I decided to pick up the funniest parts of a Rakugo story to make it shorter. I ran to the library and came across a series of thick books entitled "Japanese Classical Rakugo Complete Works" in a Japanese corner.

It was odd to read books on Japanese Rakugo at a library in the US but I was able to finish reading the series quickly and without any difficulties because I had a thirst for Japanese language badly at that time. I eventually chose and translated three Rakugo stories and several Japanese senryu poems as well.

I cannot recall how and what I did. On the contrary, I do remember that there was not much applause, probably due to my poor translation or unskillful performance. After my performance, some of my American friends asked me what the punch line of my performance was. My response, or maybe I should say excuse, was that punch lines in Japan are different from punch lines in the US. By the way, someone said that my appearance on stage resembled "Moomin," the Japanese anime, to them, which resulted in my nickname from then on to be Nori Moomin.



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This article was originally posted on Asahi Shimbun local version dated September 24th 2019. Read the original article here (only in Japanese).
<http://www.asahi.com/area/akita/articles/MTW20191112051550001.html>

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