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# KYOTO LECTURES

Wednesday, January 26th, 18:00h

M.W. Shores SPEAKER

## Rakugo as Variety Entertainment ↔ Rakugo as Literature

Unlike the arts of *nō*, *kabuki* and *bunraku*, Japan's comic storytelling art *rakugo* rarely gets termed 'literature'. This has to do with the fact that it's an oral tradition without formal scripts, and because intellectuals have long viewed *rakugo* as uncouth, unsophisticated variety entertainment. Still, some label *rakugo* a 'classical' (*koten*) art. Truth be told, many still aren't sure what to make of *rakugo*, so it gets overlooked. But *rakugo* is many things, literature included. The art is intimately linked to more conventional literature (on the page), both early modern and modern. Yet, some become alarmed or offended at the suggestion that *rakugo* is literature. This is strange considering that *rakugo* makes up an immense body of work and serves as an extraordinary vessel for much that has otherwise vanished with history—adages, customs, jokes, home remedies, poems, prejudices, profanity, recipes, songs, stories, wisdom, words, and more. This talk aims to challenge misguided perceptions of *rakugo* and how we define Japanese literature.

M.W. Shores is a scholar of Japanese literary arts and entertainment, with a focus on *rakugo* and its early-modern precursors, literary and otherwise. He began his career at Cambridge, where he was a fellow of Peterhouse. He has been Lecturer of Japanese at The University of Sydney since 2019. Shores has spent over a decade in Japan for research as well as apprenticeships with two prominent *rakugo* masters, and has directed Traditional Theater Training (TTT) at Kyoto Art Center since 2015. His recent monograph is *The Comic Storytelling of Western Japan: Satire and Social Mobility in Kamigata Rakugo* (Cambridge University Press, 2021). For more see [mwshores.com](http://mwshores.com).

**This lecture will be held on Zoom. The meeting link will remain posted on the ISEAS website top page (<https://iseas-kyoto.org>) from two days before the event.**

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