

第4部 課題

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第18回 毎日パソコン入力コンクール 冬季大会

【課題】 第4部 英文B

Late storyteller Katsura Utamaru helped popularize rakugo

制限時間 5分

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Editorial: Late storyteller Katsura Utamaru helped popularize rakugo 

Rakugo comic storyteller Katsura Utamaru, who recently passed away at age 81, utilized his extraordinary name-recognition and popularity to give performances across the country and conveyed the charms of rakugo to the public. His contributions to the spread of rakugo are immeasurable. 

Utamaru served as chairman of Rakugo Geijutsu Kyokai (rakugo arts association) and as the emcee of the Japanese comedy TV show "Shoten." 

He performed for 67 years since he entered the rakugo world when he was a third-year junior high school student. He last appeared in public as a storyteller when he performed "Komamonoya Seidan" at the National Engei Hall on April 19, some 2 1/2 months before he died. 

In his final years, his health worsened and he was often hospitalized. Still, he never lost his deep attachment to rakugo and returned to the stage many times. In recent years, he performed while wearing an oxygen inhaler, but his brilliant acts fascinated the audience. 

Utamaru remained an active performer until the end of his life. He rose to stardom as he appeared in the comedy TV show "Shoten" for half a century since it started in May 1966. He had served as the emcee since 2006 until he stepped down in 2016. 

Despite his TV appearances, Utamaru never forgot his role as a traditional rakugo storyteller who performed classical works. When he was in his 60s, he began to dig up forgotten classical rakugo stories. He performed a full-length ghost story by Sanyutei Encho, who was active as a rakugo performer from the end of the Edo period to the early Meiji era. Utamaru's performance and revival of this forgotten work gained acclaim. 📄

"If I do these things, it might motivate other people to do the same after me," Utamaru said, looking ahead to the future of rakugo. 📄

The history of rakugo is said to extend 300 to 400 years. After going through several booms, rakugo's popularity is quite high now. 📄

There are more than 800 rakugo storytellers in eastern and western Japan. More than 1,000 rakugo performances are held every month in the Tokyo metropolitan area alone. Rakugo developed as a performing art in big cities during the Edo period. A theater for rakugo and other comic performing arts was opened in Sendai this past April and another will be inaugurated in Kobe's Shinkaichi entertainment district on July 11. 📄

Still, there are apparently many people who find it difficult to connect with rakugo, in which a performer dressed in traditional Japanese kimono costume plays roles of various people -- old, young, men and women. The storytellers even describe diverse scenes while using only a folding paper fan and a towel as their stage props. 📄

It is particularly the case with those in regional areas where there are no permanent rakugo venues. 

There are likely many people who went to theaters to listen to performances by the popular Utamaru and were then fascinated by the profound art of rakugo storytelling. 

"Preserving rakugo and attracting audiences to performances are the responsibility of the storytellers," Utamaru often said. We hope that younger rakugo entertainers will inherit Utamaru's passion for the craft.