

The Art of *Tsukkomi*:
Its Origin and Role
In Contemporary Japanese Society

An Honors Thesis for the Department of
German, Russian and Asian Languages and Literatures

Zesheng Xiong

Tufts University, 2015

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I	4
1.1 How <i>Tsukkomi</i> Works	4
1.2 <i>Tsukkomi</i> as a Word in the Japanese Language.....	11
1.2.1 How Japanese Works	12
1.2.2 What Does <i>Tsukkomi</i> Mean? What Forms Does It Appear In?.....	13
Chapter II	18
2.1 The Culture of Laughter.....	19
2.2 An Introduction to <i>Manzai</i> and Its History	21
Chapter III	31
3.1 How to Become a Well-Liked Person	32
3.1.1 Jokes Used in Daily Life in Japan.....	32
3.1.2 Why Is Your Conversation Boring?.....	34
3.2 <i>Tsukkcommunication</i>	42
Chapter IV	53
4.1 The Society Laughs	53
4.2 An Era of <i>Tsukkomi</i> : For Good or for Bad?	59
Conclusions	67
Bibliography	69

The Art of *Tsukkomi*: Its Origin and Role in Contemporary Japanese Society

Imagine that a friend of yours is recently burdened with strenuous projects at work. He has talked to you about them; you know for sure that every night he needs to stay at work until late, leaving no time for him to hang out with you; in particular, one of these projects is due in a day or two. But then, on this sunny day, he calls you at 3 p.m., and cheerfully utters the following words through the speaker:

“Have you heard of that new movie that came out last week? I got some tickets; do you want to see it together today?”

How would you reply? Suppose it is not the case that he and his team will somehow manage to wrap up their work early today, and he is simply growing slothful and starting to escape his responsibilities. What would be your answer to his invitation? Perhaps you would want to remind him that he should stick to his work instead, and that doing so would eventually yield better payoffs. So why not say something like:

“You don’t have time for movies, do you? Don’t give up on your work; we can always see the movie once you’re done with those projects!”

This, specifically the “You don’t have time for movies, do you?” part, is known in Japan as a *tsukkomi*. It is, put in the simplest form, an act of highlighting the absurdity of something that someone else has said or done. When we hear funny statements coming from our friends, and especially when they themselves do not realize why they are acting funny, it is only natural that we wish to point this out, so that they do not go any further with these statements. Why, though, one may ask, should this act on our part be so significant that it deserves a name for it, as well

as a thesis specifically aimed at exploring it? What makes it so noteworthy?

It turns out that *tsukkomi*, often said to be deeply rooted in traditional Japanese comedy, has not only powerful applications in everyday life, but profound influence on the entire Japanese society as well. A *tsukkomi* well contrived can often not only achieve its original goal of pointing out inconsistencies in your friend's words, but also serve as enjoyable humor that strengthens your friendship. It is also widely used in literature, TV shows, commercials, etc., where it consistently delivers joy and laughter to the audience. Further, Japanese thinkers have looked at *tsukkomi* in the backdrop of the Japanese society and concluded that, due to its prevalence in everybody's daily life, it is now officially the Era of *Tsukkomi* in Japan. (Is that necessarily a good thing, though? This we shall later discover.)

Despite such influence that *tsukkomi* wields, it is not common to come across an English-language study that specifically tackles it, deciphering its implications and presenting them to people speaking the most widely used language in the world and holding an interest in Japan. To be sure, there is plenty of English-language literature on Japanese humor, theatrical or everyday-life, some of these brilliant pieces of original research this author will also be borrowing from; yet *tsukkomi* as a stand-alone social phenomenon is yet to be formally treated, at least not in English. Such is the purpose of this thesis; this author will closely examine each aspect of *tsukkomi*, including its formal definition, the literal meaning of its name, its reported origin as a role in the Japanese double-act stand-up comedy *manzai*, its current applications in people's everyday life and in mass media, and the more profound consequences that it brings to the Japanese people and society, as mentioned above.

The bulk of this thesis will be organized into four chapters. Chapter I will formally define *tsukkomi*: How exactly is *tsukkomi* played out, and what are some typical types of *tsukkomi*? What does *tsukkomi* originally mean as a word in the Japanese language, and why has it assumed its current meaning in the context of contemporary Japanese culture? These questions will be addressed with examples. Chapter II will then take a look at *tsukkomi* as one of the two roles in *manzai*, the Japanese double-act stand-up comedy, study its functions, and consider to what extent is the *tsukkomi* in popular culture today inspired by *manzai*'s *tsukkomi*. Chapter III will consider the popular culture aspect of *tsukkomi*: we will look at books by various authors, written in Japanese, which introduce applications of *tsukkomi* in promoting skills in interpersonal communication as well as in bettering advertising practices. Chapter IV will take the topic further by looking at authors that consider how *tsukkomi* possesses power beyond its surface value, how every Japanese has come to issue *tsukkomi* on a daily basis, and how this has shaped and transformed both the people and the society. Finally, in the concluding chapter of the thesis, this author will briefly discuss the possibility of future cross-cultural comparative studies between the Japanese concept of *tsukkomi* and its counterparts (or lack thereof) in other cultures and languages.

A quick note on stylistic issues before we begin Chapter I. All Japanese names that appear in this thesis come in their natural order in Japanese; that is, last name followed by first name. The only exception is the bibliography section, in which all names strictly follow requirements for that section, and a Japanese name may appear in it in a first-last order, as needed.

Chapter I

1.1 How *Tsukkomi* Works

To best define as well as illustrate the way in which *Tsukkomi* functions, this section will borrow some wisdom from the Japanese-language online encyclopedia: NICO NICO PEDIA. Similar to Wikipedia, NICO NICO PEDIA is also a user based website of knowledge where any person can make alterations. This usually serves the argument against drawing information from such websites in an academic research, since they are not trustworthy sources; however, this author argues for the borrowing of knowledge from NICO NICO PEDIA because, after all, we are dealing with a concept in contemporary Japanese culture, and one of the best ways to understand such a concept is to see what actual contemporary Japanese netizens say about it. Admittedly, this online encyclopedia is less serious than Wikipedia in that it allows its users to include jokes, etc. (we will immediately see an example of these below), as long as they serve explanatory purposes; nevertheless, as we shall see, jokes can sometimes explain things better than bland descriptions. Furthermore, NICO NICO PEDIA will not be the only source we look at that contains a definition of *tsukkomi*; part of the focus of Chapter I, in fact, is to establish an authentic definition of it by comparing multiple sources.

Here is what NICO NICO PEDIA's entry for *tsukkomi* looks like. (For clarification purposes, please recall that there will be a forthcoming joke.) Upon loading the page, the following line is what you will see:

ツッコミとは、「しっこ煮」が語源となった言葉で「おしっこを煮た食べ物」の事である。

Tsukkomi originates from the word “shikkoni,” and as such, it stands for “food made by boiling pee (oshikko).”

Below this line is some 27 blank lines followed by an ellipsis. Then, it is below this ellipsis that you will finally see, printed in a huge, orange font:

なんでやねん!

No way!

And it is only after this “self-*tsukkomi*” that a serious discussion of *tsukkomi* ensues. According to this entry (that is, the serious components of it), *tsukkomi* originally stands for “thrusting into something with great impetus” (we will discuss the meaning of this word in detail in the next section); in our context, it means “an attack on the contradiction or other problematic aspects of another person’s words during a discussion” (“*Tsukkomi*”). The entry also notes that, thanks to influence from *manzai*, the stand-up comedy, and the thriving mass media, especially television shows, *tsukkomi* is often perceived not only as a plain action, but also as the role that stands opposite to the *boke*, which is the name of the other role in *manzai* that makes the problematic statement in the first place. This aspect of *tsukkomi* will be treated in detail in Chapter 2.

(Note: “*なんでやねん!*” (“*Nandeyanen!*”), which appeared in the example above, is an iconic way of uttering a *tsukkomi* in *manzai*.)

Consider what this definition, “an attack on the contradiction or other problematic aspects of another person’s words during a discussion,” tells us. As both the example in the introductory chapter of this thesis and the NICO NICO PEDIA example illustrate, *tsukkomi* is intrinsically a

response to another statement that falls short of reason or common sense. Indeed, while its morality is up for debate, we can probably say with safety that, when we human beings are faced with such a statement, we feel an urge to correct it. Just as we are likely to dissuade our friend from ditching his work in favor of a newly released movie, our pursuit of perfectness, whether ultimately achievable or not, demands that we do not overlook such imperfections, as long as they possess some relevance to our well-being, such as that of our friends’.

When this attack plays out in a comical way, it is considered a successful *tsukkomi*. It also seems that the hilarity is powered mainly by the fallacious statement that preceded the *tsukkomi*. Then, we may be forgiven to ask, why does this simple action of “pointing out” attain such a high status in Japan, whereas no equivalent term prevails in the English world? (To be sure, the comedy terminology “straight man” in English basically captures the role of *tsukkomi* in *manzai*; yet we do not hear such thing as “That ‘straight-man-ship’ you just made was fantastic!” in our everyday life.) Cross-lingual comparisons will not be a focus of this paper, but this author finds it necessary to provide a brief answer here. The answer is twofold. Firstly, as the NICO NICO PEDIA entry has suggested, because of the rich traditions of *manzai* and its popularization through the mass media, people become accustomed to these *tsukkomi*, may expect them in situations calling for one, and will readily interpret it as such and laugh at it when it is put into clear words. A detailed look into the *manzai* tradition, as mentioned before, will be made in Chapter 2. Secondly, due to this anticipation for a *tsukkomi*, the funny statement by itself loses some of its charm; it is the *tsukkomi*, especially if well-construed, that completes the mini-*manzai*-theater, and ignites the explosives of laughter. And when it does so, people are

positively aware that what has been issued is called a “*tsukkomi*”, and thereby its popularity rises further.

Having settled the definition of *tsukkomi*, we now take a step further and examine some basic forms that *tsukkomi* in Japan can assume. According to NICO NICO PEDIA, there are roughly eight types of *tsukkomi*. The first type is called *dotsuki tsukkomi*, which involves physically (and non-violently) hitting the *boke* (again, the person making the funny statement) in the head or the chest with a fist or a toy hammer. It may come as a surprise that *tsukkomi* is possible without uttering a word: but as our definition has shown, what matters is that an “attack” is made, and a physical “attack” can be equally potent in highlighting the hilarity. Commonsensically, of course, we are warned that “because it can easily turn into violence if you are not careful with the the timing and the strength of your hit, it is somewhat surprising that this type of *tsukkomi* actually requires a decent level of skills” (“*Tsukkomi*”).

The second type of *tsukkomi* is called *tatoe tsukkomi*, or “*tsukkomi* by comparison.” In other words, our “straight man” compares the “funny man” to something or someone else, thereby further strengthening the humor that one already finds in the funny statement alone. A rather vulgar example that the entry provides nevertheless shows us vividly how this type of *tsukkomi* works. The *boke* starts talking about his day:

今日朝起きてな、飯食って、トイレに入ったらこんな太いのが3本も出て（延々と朝からの行動を話す）…。

You know? After I got up this morning and ate my breakfast, I went to the toilet and discharged three pieces this thick! ... (Then he goes on and on talking about more of his

activities since morning.)

And our *tsukkomi* guy replies with:

長いわ! 帰省ラッシュの大和トンネルの渋滞ぐらい長いわ!

That's so long! Almost as long as those traffic jams in Yamato Tunnel during the year-end rush! (“Tsukkomi.”)

(Note: Think of any of New York City's tunnels during rush hours for a reference.)

This example, unlike the two that we have shown above, exemplifies occasions where the “straight man” actually assumes a big proportion of the responsibility of creating humor; as we can see, the “funny man” here is talking about vulgar things and talking ceaselessly, which are moderately funny, to be sure, yet nobody will laugh out loud at these two things alone. Then comes the “straight man,” who, by cleverly referring to both the vulgar stuff in the *boke*'s speech as well as his lengthy speech itself in a single phrase “so long,” and comparing them to a lengthy traffic congestion, officially turns the conversation into an eye-opening piece of humor; to this we say: he created an excellent *tatoe tsukkomi*.

In addition, as the entry notes, “*tsukkomi* by comparison” may often assume less complicated forms than the one above, by simply comparing the *boke* to another person that shares similarities with him / her, using the following phrase: “お前は○○か!” (“Are you a (fill in the blank)!”). It should be clear by now that this structure can work as an equally sharp *tsukkomi* that sends in the needed spark. We will revisit this type of *tsukkomi* in Chapter III when we discuss *tsukkomi*'s application in people's daily lives.

The third type of *tsukkomi* is called *nori tsukkomi*. *Nori* in Japanese means to go along with

a topic. Therefore, *nori tsukkomi* refers to the type of *tsukkomi* that “goes along with the *boke*’s story at first, before unleashing a *tsukkomi*.” (Note: The words *boke* and *tsukkomi* can both mean either a role in the *manzai* dual or the action that each takes.) The example provided by NICO NICO PEDIA for this type of *tsukkomi* starts with the *tsukkomi* guy saying:

俺パン作ってん。

I’m making bread.

The *boke* replies with something seemingly unrelated:

そうか、君のかみさん美人やし、さぞかしパンツもうまいんやろなー。

Aah right, your wife is a beauty, no doubt her panties will taste good.

Before we proceed to the punch line, some explanation is in order. Why would the *boke* start raising something unrelated and obscene, all of a sudden? This is because he misinterpreted the *tsukkomi*’s words. “Bread” in Japanese is *pan* (originally adapted from the Portuguese word *pão*), and immediately following *pan* the *tsukkomi* said *tsukutten*, or “making,” creating the following line: *pantsukutten* (in Japanese, verbs come at the end of sentences) (“Shinmura Izuru Kinen Zaidan.”). Upon hearing this phrase, on the other hand, the *boke* divided it at the wrong place, interpreting it as *pantsu kutten*, with *pantsu* meaning panties, and *kutten* meaning “eating,” and the whole sentence meaning “*I’m eating panties.*” Thus the way he answered.

Then, our *tsukkomi* replies to the *boke* by first showing agreement:

そうそう、芳しくて香ばしくてコクがあって…ってなんでやねん！誰がパンツ食うか！

Exactly, exactly, the sweet, fragrant, and delicious... What the heck?! Who's going to eat panties?!

Was it the case that the *tsukkomi* did not realize this mis-communication until half-way through his approving reply? We do not know. Nevertheless, whether this is a well-crafted line or an instance of impromptu speech, such uncertainty only makes the whole scene all the more hilarious: the mere thought that he could have been unwittingly admitting to “eating panties,” and even commenting on the experience, completes the trick in our minds. This is what makes *nori tsukkomi* so attractive.

The forth type of *tsukkomi* is called *one-phrase tsukkomi*. According to NICO NICO PEDIA, “unlike with *tatoe tsukkomi*, [in *one-phrase tsukkomi*] one refrains from delivering a harangue, and instead attempts to make a *tsukkomi* with a single, resounding phrase” (“*Tsukkomi*”). This is understandable: when a single word can pull off the trick, then we might as well do so, for it is undoubtedly more impressive than a prolonged preachment. The example given is succinct, too:

ボケ 「とりあえず脱ぐか」。

Boke: “So let's strip off, shall we?”

ツッコミ 「裸族か!」

Tsukkomi: “Are you a nudist?!”

This example, again, differs slightly from the ones introduced above. Without context, it is not exactly clear whether this *boke* has lost his mind or not; depending on the setting, he could have been making a legitimate suggestion. Nevertheless, whichever is the case, the *tsukkomi*

succeeds in using a very short phrase to express how he *thinks* about the *boke*'s suggestion.

The fifth type of *tsukkomi* is *ijirare tsukkomi*, which means that the *tsukkomi* gets played around by the *boke* "due to the former's body features or character," before giving a *tsukkomi*.

The sixth type of *tsukkomi* is *sō tsukkomi*, or group *tsukkomi*; it refers to a group of people responding to a *boke* together. Obviously this can overlap with the previous types, which focus more on specific techniques involved in making a *tsukkomi*, whereas *sō tsukkomi* seeks instead to amplify its effect by allowing multiple people to do it at the same time. It is noted on the entry, however, that there is generally no artist in the humorous industry in Japan who is famous for performing group *tsukkomi*; rather, it is more often seen in television shows, manga, etc.

The seventh type of *tsukkomi* is known as *mushi tsukkomi*, which means that, instead of making any comments at all, the "straight man" simply appears totally stunned or irresponsible to the "funny man's" statement. In doing so, the "straight man" attempts to use silence and disregard (*mushi*) to highlight how unreasonable the *boke* is.

The eighth type of *tsukkomi* is called *boke goroshi*. This is a more aggressive type of *tsukkomi*; the Japanese suffix "-goroshi" stands for "killing," though it is not the case that the *tsukkomi* will attempt to murder the *boke*. Instead, the former attempts to murder the *fun* of the *boke*'s statement by giving a "bland" description of it first, before the *boke* even gets there. This can create a laughable situation in itself, but as the entry has noted, "to trigger laughter using this method requires highly advanced skills." It is entirely imaginable that such an aggressive measure can counteract and kill any laughter altogether, if inappropriately applied.

1.2 *Tsukkomi* as a Word in the Japanese Language

Having explored the various types of *tsukkomi* using description and examples, it is now time to take a step back and look at the word *tsukkomi* itself within the framework of the Japanese language. Without understanding the word *tsukkomi*, we may nevertheless perceive it as a cultural phenomenon; yet we will not only miss the chance to understand it in the same way that Japanese people do, but also lack the tools required for a more in-depth look into *tsukkomi*'s relation with *manzai*, as well as its multifaceted applications and implications. In fact, knowledge of the word will become a crucial asset in our analysis in subsequent chapters. For these reasons, this author will, in this section, provide an examination of the word that we have so far treated only as a proper noun: *tsukkomi*.

1.2.1 How Japanese Works

Prior to analyzing what the word means, however, a brief introduction to the way the Japanese language functions as a whole, especially when the Japanese verb is concerned, is necessary; for without appreciation of a language there shall be no appreciation of a word from that language. Japanese is no exception: understanding the basic grammatical formations and transformations of the Japanese language is the key to understanding why *tsukkomi* appears in its various forms, which in turn serves as the backbone of understanding it as a social phenomenon.

Our core concern in this introduction to the Japanese language is the Japanese verb. (The reason why this is the case will soon become self-evident.) Japanese verbs, when appearing in their “dictionary forms,” are words that end with the “u” sound. For example, “to go” is 「行く」 in Japanese, pronounced 「い<」 (*iku*), or 「ゆ<」 (*yuku*) in classical Japanese. In written

language, the kanji 「行」 (meaning “to go,” “to walk”) replaces the first sound, 「い」 (*i*) or 「ゆ」 (*u*), in order to distinguish 「行く」 from other written words that sound the same and reduce confusion (there is no space between words in the Japanese script). Meanwhile, the last sound, 「く」 (*ku*), is still written down in Hiragana without omission, because for Japanese verbs, the final one or two sounds serve as the functional component, and can be transformed in various ways to allow the verb to serve a myriad of grammatical functions. For example, 「行った」 (*itta*) or 「行きました」 (*ikimashita*) means “went,” and 「行かない」 (*ikanai*) or 「行きません」 (*ikimasen*) means “(I) won’t go,” in both cases following two separate sets of transformation rules in accordance with differing levels of deference.

We will not go into the details of transformations that do not concern our study of *tsukkomi*; yet a particular type of transformation, namely the conjunctive form (連用形 *renyōkei*), shall be discussed in detail here. There are roughly three big categories of Japanese verbs, some indigenously Japanese, some borrowed from China, etc.; for the one type that we are interested in, specifically the type of verbs that are indigenously Japanese, such as 「行く」, their conjunctive forms are made by turning the final *u*-ending sounds into *i*-ending sounds. Thus 「行く」’s conjunctive form is 「行き」 (*iki* or *yuki*). Conjunctive forms are good for turning verbs into nouns, as well as preparing it for conjugation with other words. For example, when 「行き」 is paired with 「方」 (*kata* method), they form a new word 「行き方」 (*ikikata*) which means “the way to go (to a place).” As you may have guessed already, this is precisely how the word *tsukkomi* is formed.

1.2.2 What Does *Tsukkomi* Mean? What Forms Does It Appear In?

Having acquired a basic knowledge of the Japanese language, it is now time to make sense of *tsukkomi* as a Japanese word, understand why it is employed to denominate the social phenomenon that this thesis focuses on, and explore the various forms that the same word can take on when written not in Latin letters, but in its original script.

As has been explained in the previous sub-section, *tsukkomi* is formed by turning a verb from its original, “dictionary” form into conjunctive form. This verb is:

突っ込む (Pronounced as: つっこむ (Hiragana) / *tsukkomu* (Romanized script).)

Before we consult a dictionary, we first conduct an analysis purely based on the word composition of 「突っ込む」. One can realize by comparing the word to its Hiragana pronunciation that two kanji, or Chinese characters, are applied. One kanji represents a single action, so it comes as no surprise that this word is originally formed by combining two simpler verbs: 「突く」 (*tsuku*) and 「込む」 (*komu*). 「突く」 means “to thrust,” and 「込む」, when conjugated with other verbs, means “to enter something / put into something,” “to completely turn into a certain state,” or “to do something to a full extent,” according to the Japanese dictionary *Kōjien*, which we will often consult for its wisdom (Shinmura Izuru Kinen Zaidan). One should notice that the second and the third definitions above are simply the transitive / intransitive versions of the same thing, because many verbs in Japanese describe not an action, but a change in state, such as 「合う」 (read as *au*, meaning “to become the same”), and 「痩せる」 (read as *yaseru*, meaning “to become thin”). (There is no need to worry about how the Japanese would say “two thing *are* the same” or “someone *is* thin”; there exists a verb conjugation that, when applied to this type of non-action verbs, turns these changes of state into

states themselves.) When 「突く」 and 「込む」 are conjugated using our old friend -- the conjunctive form, it becomes 「突き込む」 (*tsukikomu*). The consecutive sounds *ki* and *ko* are not easy to pronounce, so it becomes abbreviated into what we know today as 「突っ込む」 (*tsukkomu*).

It should be noted here that the correct way to pronounce a *sokuon*, or the sound that appears in the Latin alphabet presentation of *tsukkomu* and *tsukkomi* as the doubled *k*, and in the original Japanese script as a small 「っ」 (as opposed to the full-sized 「つ」, pronounced *tsu*), is to simply pause producing any sound for one “beat” after pronouncing the first sound *tsu* and before pronouncing the next (third) sound *ko*, all the while preparing your mouth so that the upcoming consonant *k* will easily come out of it. Japanese is a language that flows in “beats,” and the *sokuon* is often applied to take up one beat, while replacing a sound that was originally hard to pronounce, such as the *ki* in *tsukikomu* in this case.

Given the construction of the compound word 「突っ込む」 from 「突く」 and 「込む」 that we have discussed above, we should now be able to infer what its basic, literal meaning is: to “fully,” “completely” thrust into something. Of course, it should be expected that the actual word would expand on this basic meaning, and obtain specific meanings in specific situations.

Now we take a look at the Japanese dictionary *Kōjien*'s definition of *tsukkomu*. The translation is done by this author, leaving out examples and only retaining distinctive lines of definition, while the original texts are quoted in their full lengths.

[一] (他五)

I. As a “transitive verb”:

①はげしい勢いで中へ入れる。さしこむ。また、無造作に入れる。「何でもポケットに一・む」

1. To thrust something into something else with great impetus. Or, to do so in a casual manner.

②すべてのものを区別せず、いっしょにする。

2. To not distinguish among things, and mix them together.

③はげしく追及する。「余計なことを言うで一・まれるぞ」

3. To intensely go after / question.

④内部へ深く入れる。「事件に首を一・む」

4. To thrust something into something else deeply.

[二] (自五)

II. As an “intransitive verb”:

①はげしい勢いで中へ入る。つき入る。

1. To thrust into something with great impetus.

②突撃する。「敵陣に一・む」

2. To charge at (an enemy).

③内部へ深く立ち入る。「一・んだ話をする」

3. To enter into something deeply. (Shinmura Izuru Kinen Zaidan)

(Note: In Japanese the ideas of “transitive verbs” (*tadōshi*) and “intransitive verbs” (*jidōshi*) are different from the English concepts, which is why quotation marks are applied to them in the translation above. The Japanese “transitive verb” *tadōshi* (literally meaning “words in which an alien entity moves”) is used to describe actuations, or the act of causing another object to act or move, while the Japanese “intransitive verb” *jidōshi* (literally meaning “words in which the self moves”) is used to describe actions (or changes in state, as discussed above) that the subject itself takes. This distinction should be pretty clear from the definitions given above by the *Kōjien*. In addition, both the *tadōshi* and the *jidōshi* may take objects (by using the object indicator particle 「を」 (*o*)). For example, the Japanese word for “walk,” 「歩く」 (*aruku*), while classified as a *jidōshi*, takes whatever the person walks on as an object of the sentence; thus 「橋を歩く」 (*hashi o aruku*) means “to walk on a bridge,” with the “bridge”

being the object of 「歩く」.)

Kōjien's definitions confirm our analysis. Further, it finally provides us with the needed information that can bridge the word with our social phenomenon *tsukkomi*. (Recall that *tsukkomi* is the noun form of the verb *tsukkomu*.) Reproduced below is, once again, NICO NICO PEDIA's definition of *tsukkomi* that pertains to our discussion:

“An attack on the contradiction or other problematic aspects of another person's words during a discussion.”

Kōjien's Definition I.3 shows that *tsukkomu*, originating from the act of “thrusting in hard,” has indeed been expanded in meaning to refer to the act of fiercely questioning someone, or criticizing someone's error. This is, after all, an act of “thrusting in hard.” When this act is applied to a friend who has just uttered something funny or potentially funny, we say that we “*tsukkomu*” them, not with an intent to embarrass, but in an attempt to utilize humor to highlight the absurdity without hurting the friend's pride. This is *tsukkomi*, an act well-suited to be described by such a word.

Before we wrap up this sub-section and conclude the chapter, we have one more piece of the puzzle to look at: how *tsukkomi* is written down in Japanese. One may rightfully feel puzzled by this suggestion: since *tsukkomu* is written as 「突っ込む」, we should write *tsukkomi* as 「突っ込み」 (*tsukkomi*) as well, right? Well, not necessarily. For the Japanese language, whose writing system is essentially foreign and at whose core lie its sounds, there is a high level of freedom when it comes to writing a word down. For words with Chinese origins, one can freely transplant a (often not so significantly) different meaning to it by using phonetic

notations; for intrinsically Japanese words like *tsukkomi*, while one will likely shy away from altering its sound (unless he/she intends to express a remarkably different meaning), he/she still has the freedom to choose from any of the three types of characters: the Hiragana and Katakana phonetic alphabets, and the kanji. If we return to the NICO NICO PEDIA page on *tsukkomi* and take a look, we will immediately notice that, while the verb *tsukkomu* is always written as 「突っ込む」, the noun form *tsukkomi* takes on two different styles: one is 「突っ込み」, but another seemingly more dominant version is: 「ツッコミ」, written entirely in Katakana, as opposed to the “Hiragana plus kanji” configuration of the former style. In fact, the names of seven of the eight types of *tsukkomi* include the word *tsukkomi* itself, and in all seven cases the written form used is 「ツッコミ」. In Japanese, Katakana is used when one deals with a loan word, when one wants to stress a concept (much in the same way that English users apply the upper case), and when one wants to distinguish a particular application of a word from its other applications, among other uses. This author asserts that it is for this third reason that *tsukkomi* is often written as the Katakana 「ツッコミ」; as we unravel the concept’s entanglement with *manzai* in Chapter 2, we will better appreciate how *tsukkomi* rose to such an elevated status in the minds of the Japanese people that it calls for a specialized written form consisting of Katakana only.

Chapter II

Having acquired a basic understanding of *tsukkomi*, we now consider the following question: where does the notion of *tsukkomi* originate from? As noted, *tsukkomi* as a means of people’s daily communication enjoys tremendous popularity in Japan, yet we can hardly find a

counterpart of it in the English-speaking United States; to understand this disparity, we first need to examine a traditional Japanese performing art which may serve as a strong candidate in explaining the popularity of *tsukkomi: manzai*, the Japanese double-act stand-up comedy. This chapter will therefore lay out an introduction to the *manzai* tradition, paying special attention to the *tsukkomi* role in it and verifying how, or if, it indeed spread the idea of *tsukkomi* in the minds of the Japanese populace.

2.1 The Culture of Laughter

Before *manzai* is introduced, we should take a look at a discrepancy which may have been seen lurking around in this thesis, yet we have not yet addressed thus far: that is, the discrepancy between the stereotypical impression of Japan as a nation obsessed with formality and deference, and the apparent richness of Japan's tradition of laughter, which this thesis suggests. Is it not the case that the Japanese, a friendly and detachedly respectful people, would not be the best people in the world to develop a profound tradition of laughter? The answer is no, as such blatant stereotyping will inevitably result in over-simplification. For one thing, it is grossly arrogant to assume that, just because the Japanese people are respectful to others, they must not know how to laugh; it is merely a question of intimacy, and one can be assured that jokes and laughter become much more frequent as they become more closely related to the people they are talking to. But there is more to that. To fully appreciate the culture of laughter in Japan, we need to turn to look at history.

Hiroshi Inoue, in his essay *Osaka's Culture of Laughter*, provides us with a good account on the tradition. According to Inoue, there are two "cultures of laughter" in Japan: one is

“accepted by the samurai (warrior) folk of Tokyo,” and the other is the “daily culture of laughter cultivated by the merchants of Osaka,” the latter being the more prevalent and influential (27).

Inoue first gives a brief account of the history of Osaka: that while Japan’s political power shifted away from the city to Nara, Kyoto, and eventually Tokyo, Osaka remained an important “gateway to foreign culture and trade,” a business center. Especially during the Tokugawa Shogunate period (a.k.a. Edo period), Osaka was the spearhead of Japan’s economic development. Because of this specialization in business, Osaka shares less of the strict hierarchical social structure that characterizes most Japanese cities such as Tokyo (then Edo); instead, due to the Osaka business-people’s relatively low rank in social hierarchy and their massive social power, social structure in Osaka is more horizontal. Inouye argues that laughter is more easily developed in a horizontal society, “since people do not care as much about differences in status” (28). This means that Osaka citizens worried little about their social class, and instead worked with and got to know each other better. Besides this, it is also the case that the merchants believed that in order to promote business, they need to cultivate harmonious human relations; it is therefore not surprising that “humor and laughter came to play a central role in daily merchant life.” Furthermore, Inoue also argues that merchants need laughter for their personal lives as much as they do for their business. Businesses fail, and in order to retain the spirit to stand up again, merchants need the ability to laugh at themselves, as a means to “release human beings from their burdens” (29).

These are the elements that help create Osaka’s “love of laughter.” This is not to say that, in Japan, a love of laughter is unique only to Osaka citizens; however, they are more willing to

express their real feelings (*honno*), possibly through laughter in public, than many other regions.

2.2 An Introduction to *Manzai* and Its History

It is often believed that today's *manzai* bears huge influence from the Osaka laughter culture (Stocker, 51). Joel F. Stocker questions this belief in his essay, *Manzai: Team Comedy in Japan's Entertainment Industry*, noting the *manzai* as we know it is “dominated by a commercial entertainment giant, Yoshimoto Kōgyō Inc.” Borrowing from his insightful essay, we shall now commence on an introduction to and a brief history of *manzai*.

According to Stocker, *manzai* started in the Middle Ages as a rite that combined “auspicious (芽出度い; 目出度い *medetai*) rituals with laughable (可笑しい *okashii*) acts,” performed by “pairs of traveling entertainers” (52). While there existed a court *manzai* during the Heian period (794-1185), it was the “folk *manzai* (民間万歳 *minkan manzai*)” that likely gave rise to today's *manzai*. This rite, performed during New Years, features two men: one called the *tayū* (太夫), and the other *saijō* (才藏). The *tayū* would wear a ceremonial hat, an elaborate coat, hold a fan in hand, and would “sing blessings and dance in a dignified manner” in return for some rice or money; the *saijō*, a “buffoonish fellow” wearing similar clothes as the *tayū*, would beat a hand drum. Then, at the end of their performance, the *saijō* would throw some humor in, and the *tayu* would “verbally rebuke him and whack him on the head with his fan;” it was thought that laughing in New Year would bring good fortune. Although a rite, elements of this performance, especially the exchanges at the closing stage, unequivocally resemble the instances of *boke-tsukkomi* interaction, which we have seen in Chapter I.

Since then, *manzai* was performed along with many regional varieties, but did not become

popular as an on-stage performance until the nineteenth century. Osaka had sixty-five variety halls by 1900, where a variety of entertainments were performed, including *manzai*; yet by 1912, the beginning of the Taishō period, *manzai* performers “were still primarily singers and chanters,” although, by that time, they had a greater variety of material and modes of expression to choose from (54).

Tamagoya Enatsu, considered to be the founder of modern *manzai*, combined the *gōshū ondo* (江州音頭), a type of folk singing of which he was a singer, with banter of Nagoya-*manzai*, and created a performance that, “for the first time, emphasized the laughable (おかしみ *okashimi*) over the auspicious (目出度さ *medetasa*).” Sunagawa Sutemaru, another important figure in shaping stage *manzai*, created his style of *manzai* called the “high-class *manzai*” (高級萬歳 *kōkyū manzai*), by introducing a dressing style including a seal-imprinted *kimono*, a formal coat, a skirt, a drum for himself, as well as a *shamisen* for his performing partner. This “dignified-looking double act,” where jokes go hand in hand with dancing and singing, set himself apart from other performances, which only wore a *kimono* but without the formal coat and skirt. This became the representative style of *manzai* performers in the *Kansai* region (which includes Osaka) by the late 1920s, and was well-received in Tokyo as well. Stocker includes an excerpt from a performance by Sutemaru (S) and his performing partner Nakamura Haruyo (H), which he suspects was aired in the 1960s. (Haruyo was an elderly lady at this time.) This great example of Sutemaru and Haruyo’s *manzai* which nicely resembles what we see as *manzai* today is reproduced below (the translation is Stocker’s):

S: あんたなんですって

S: Who'd you say you are?

H: わたしか

H: Who, me?

S: はい

S: Yes.

H: お宮

H: Omiya.

S: 「お宮」?

S: “Omiya”?

H: おおっ

H: Ah-uh.

S: ほう、お寺みたいやか

S: [Chuckling] Haha, like an *otera* [temple]!?

(観客が爆笑する)

[Audience laughs loudly]

H: 「お寺」? (観客の笑い声にかき消される)

H: “O-tera”?! [Her voice is lost in audience laughter]

H: 「お寺」あほいうな、バカもの!

H: Don't call me an “*otera*” you idiot!

S: 今年のお宮は出来が悪い お宮とはしらんが、顔にいっぱいしわがある

S: This year's Omiya are poorly made. I'm not sure if you're an Omiya, but your face is sure wrinkled. (56)

The performance is called “*Owarai Konjiki Yasha*” (with “*Owarai*” meaning “laughter” or “funny”), a “funny version” of the traditional love story *Konjiki Yasha*, where *Omiya* is its beautiful heroine. Meanwhile, the word *omiya* also means “shrine,” which, as Stocker notes, is more “delicate and temporary,” as opposed to an *otera* (temple), which is more “weather-beaten and permanent” (56). In this way, Sutemaru points to both Haruyo’s “physically imposing” appearance as resembling a temple more than a shrine, and her wrinkles as less than resembling the original *Omiya* character.

If we think in terms of *boke* and *tsukkomi*, then in this excerpt Haruyo plays the role of *boke* by asserting herself to be *Omiya*, while Sutemaru delivers a *tsukkomi* that points out how she physically dissembles *Omiya*. But their type of performance, dressed in traditional attires, is

still a few steps away from modern *manzai*.

Starting in the 1930s, a decisive change in the shaping of modern *manzai* occurred when a newly launched double act, Yokoyama Entatsu and Achako, started playing *shabekuri manzai*, with *shabekuri* (喋くり) meaning “dialogue.” This version of *manzai* differed from previous versions in two important ways. Firstly, it adapted its antics more “to the fast pace of modern life in urban Japan” (57), and Entatsu and Achako also changed from traditional Japanese clothing to Western suits. Secondly, it formally established the two roles of the performers, namely the fool and the smart guy, who engage in “friendly, complementary antagonism.” Furthermore, as we can see from the name “dialogue *manzai*,” the focus of performance has, for the first time, shifted from a mixture of dialogue with singing and other performances to dialogue alone. The company that sponsors *manzai*, Yoshimoto, decided to promote this style of *manzai*, and before long *shabekuri manzai* became the style that most performers applied. This was also the time when Yoshimoto, in 1933, announced that the kanji used in the term *manzai* would be changed from 「萬歳」 to 「漫才」 (from “long live” to “comic talent”), considered to be a more modern name that bears the same pronunciation.

Shabekuri manzai went famous through various channels, including stage performances, radio, scripts, and in later years televisions and the Internet. Many of the performances by Entatsu (E) and Achako (A) have been preserved through these media, and that gives us the opportunity to appreciate the following excerpt that centers on a 1933 baseball game between Waseda University and Keiō University, abbreviated into the shorthand “*Sōkeisen*” (「早慶戦」, *sen* 「戦」 meaning “battle”) by taking the first kanji from both universities (*sō* 「早」 from

Waseda 「早稲田」 and *kei* 「慶」 from Keiō 「慶応」). Once again, the translation is done by Stocker.

E: 早慶戦、何と言っても絶対のもんですな

E: The Sōkeisen... it's, whatever's said about it, something else.

A: まったく、文字通り天下の早慶戦ですな

A: Indeed, it's THE Sōkeisen.

E: しかし、あれ、相手はどこでしたかいな？

E: But who's the opponent?

A: えっ、相手？いえ、早慶戦の話をしてるんですがな

A: Huh... opponent? No, we're discussing the Sōkeisen.

E: 早慶戦は分かっていますけど、その相手ですがな。つまり早慶対どこそことか。。。

E: I understand--"the Sōkeisen." But what about their opponent? In other words, Sōkei versus someone or other...

A: 頼りない人やな。早慶戦はやね、早稲田と慶応が試合をするから、「早慶戦」というんやないか

A: You're impossible. The Sōkeisen is called the Sōkeisen, ya see, because Waseda and Keiō are matched up.

E: それはわかってるよ。それがわからずに何を見に行くのや

E: I understand that. Without understanding that, what would I go to watch?

A: そんなら、早慶対どこそこや、なんて情けないことをいうな

A: Then don't say stupid things like "Sōkei versus someone or other."

E: ちょっと洒落をいうてみたんです

E: I was trying to do a little play on words.

A: そんな洒落は通らん

A: That doesn't pass as a play on words.

E: 洒落がわからんのやから、本当に君は扱いにくい

E: You're really a hard one to deal with because you don't get wordplays. (60-61)

Stocker notes that these *shabekuri manzai* performances are set up by having the fool, or *boke*, to bring up crazy thoughts, and the clever guy, or *tsukkomi*, to point them out (61). The *boke* takes "reality" and distorts it with absurd interpretations; the *tsukkomi*, while often times listening to and agreeing to the *boke* by uttering small filler words, shoulders the task of "digging into" (*tsukkomu*) the *boke*'s logical fallacies and stupidity. Because of this, the *tsukkomi* role "tends to be the one who frames the overall routine and its progress, acting as the

commonsense voice of social order in the face of the trickster-like *boke*'s chaotic utterances and behavior which upset that order." At this point, the *boke-tsukkomi* interaction in *manzai* can already be said to closely resemble today's daily-life *tsukkomi* interpersonal interactions, which we introduced in Chapter I.

A remarkable trait of this dialogue-based *manzai* is, as Stocker notes, that performers generally "perform themselves." While there was also a special type called skit *manzai* (コントマンザイ *konto manzai*) that gained popularity since the 1980s, in which costumes and props are used and performers assume specific personalities in each skit, the typical *manzai* still involves performers acting as themselves, changing little of their stage personalities from one show to another. This allows them to bring their personal stories and experiences into performances, often leading to rewarding effects.

A good example given by Stocker for the importance of "personal experience" is the duo of Nakata Kausu and Nakata Botan, formed in 1969 when they were teenagers. "Kausu" is a variant of *kafusu* (カフス), meaning "cuffs," and "Botan" (ボタン) is the Japanese way of saying "button." The two words combined, 「カフスボタン」, means cufflinks. According to Stocker, the two artists originally focused on tailoring their shows to attract middle school and high school girls, but were forced to struggle in an attempt to appeal to a wider audience once one of them became married and they lost the interest of their original audience base. The duo's career struck a low point when one of the artists, Botan, "was arrested on suspicion of gambling" (62). This did not ruin the duo, however. Quite to the contrary, as Stocker observes, the duo was given a second life by this incident, as the artists proceeded to perform routines that poke fun at

this and other personal experiences that they have undergone:

After the Yoshimoto Corporation suspended Botan for three months, Kausu turned this apparent setback into a win by employing the incident in their routines. On a talk show featuring the life story of the duo, Kausu said that, for a *manzai* comedian, “one’s faults are one’s greatest asset” on stage, because they humanize the performers and provide the public with entertaining firsthand accounts of their “life story.”... Their appearance has consistently featured two working-class Osakan men going through the ups (as young idols) and downs (as criminals, bad husbands, poor drunks, and so forth) of life. (62-63)

They were eventually able to gain popularity again. The following is an excerpt from their television show, *Kamigata Manzai Ōkoku*, translated by Stocker, which exemplifies how their style of *manzai* works. K stands for Kausu and B stands for Botan.

K: はい、どうもようこそお越しいただきました！

K: Yes, thank you very much for coming.

B: ありがとうございます。ほんまにね。。。ほんまに

B: Thank you, really, truly...

K: そこからここまで出てくる間に、客席をパッと見てどんな話しが合うのかをあたまの中で考えているんでっせ。

K: In the moment it takes to get from there to here [the mike], we glance at the audience and think over what kind of conversation will be appropriate.

B: そうでっせ。私たちが出てきて好きなことだけを喋って帰っているわけではおまへんねんで。

B: That’s right. Don’t think that we just appear, say whatever we please and then leave.

K: お客様の雰囲気に関わしたネタせんやあかんね。

K: Ya hafta do a routine that matches the feel of the audience.

B: そう、そう、そう。一番大事なのは客席に合わすということやろうね。

B: Yes, yes, yes. The most important thing is to adjust to the audience.

K: パッと客席を見て頭良さそうなお客さんが多いと思う時は政治経済の漫才をせんやならんの。

K: When we think there’s a lot of audience members who appear to be smart, we’ve gotta do *manzai* about politics/economics.

B: ほんまに。

B: You bet.

K: ね。

K: Yup.

B: ちょっと堅い目の話をね。

B: Talk that's a little serious...
K: ご婦人の方が多き時は、家庭生活の話しが喜ばれますし。
K: When there are a lot of wives, they enjoy talk about household matters.
B: ええ、気使うなあ。
B: You're so considerate.
K: 当たり前やないかい、プロやんけ。
K: Of course: I'm a pro.
B: まあ、今日のお客さんやったら、どういふお話しがええかなあ？
B: Well then, what topic of conversation would be good for today's audience?
K: 今日のお客さんは、年輩のお方が多ございますから、
K: Since there's a lot of elderly folks today...
B: そうですね。
B: Yes, there are...
K: 失敗のない墓石の選び方で行こうと（観客が笑う）
K: The sure-fire choice would be gravestones. [Audience laughs]
B: ちょっと待って
B: Wait a minute... (64-65)

This excerpt also shows another trait of stage *manzai*: that it often addresses its audience directly, “acknowledging their particular existence.” This is in part because *manzai* performers have to perform for a broad range of different viewers, so it is only natural that they need to tailor to each audience. Meanwhile, if a show is televised, the audience at the show serves as a stand-in for TV viewers.

According to Stocker, *manzai* has changed little as an artistic style since the times of Enatsu and Achako; it still centers on the humorous dialogues between the *boke* and the *tsukkomi* today, as it always has been since in the 1930s. Nevertheless, an enormous change on a different front has occurred: today's *manzai* comedians have “increasingly become multimedia entertainers” (65). While stage performances continue to be popular, lots and lots of *manzai* performers appear in television shows, either quitting their stage *manzai* career altogether or doing both jobs at the same time. They may also host television or radio shows,

become singers, or even politicians. A shift in focus is complete: *manzai* performers now have to “perform where the money is,” and in the process they lose the time to invest in “developing their craft,” which partly explains why the style has changed so little.

A final change that contributed to shaping today’s *manzai* occurred in the early 1980s, when Yoshimoto created the New Star Creation (NSC) school, and training in *manzai* turned into a “one-year vocational schooling process,” as oppose to the “long-term apprenticeship” of the past (66). This allowed *manzai* fans to interact more closely with the art at a lower cost; they may even have a chance at becoming a *manzai* star themselves.

In the meantime, Yoshimoto also took “parallel moves” in television programming, where, as has been noted before, *manzai* fits perfectly well. Many of the graduates of the NSC proceeded to become TV show hosts, where they would perform a less intense, relatively loose version of *manzai*, as well as turning their shows’ guests into *boke* and poking (friendly) fun at them. An example of these artists is a duo called DownTown, whose members Matsumoto Hitoshi and Hamada Masatoshi were the first graduates of the NSC in 1983 (67). The following 1998 excerpt, translated by Stocker as usual, comes from a long-running television show called *Not a Task for Kids* which they hosted, and discusses Matsumoto’s new “monk” hairstyle, which drew public attention during the time. In it, the interactions between the two comedians are less intense than in a regular *manzai* show, and the atmosphere is somewhat friendlier instead. M stands for Matsumoto, whereas H stands for Hamada.

M: 色んなことに対して「だめだよ」と言えるようになりましたよ。
昔は何にでもオラァーと叫んでましたが、今は何にでも「ダメだよ」と軽く
言っています、よ。

M: I've gotten so that I can say "No" to many things.

In the past I'd blow up, but now it's just a light "No."

H: 何を言ってるの？人に何か言われた時でも？文句をつけられた時でも？

H: What are you trying to say? Even when someone says something about you in complaint?

M: なんかちょっと仏の心が目覚めてきましたね

M: The spirit of the Buddha has sort of awakened within me.

H: あららら。前の頭の時には「まっちゃんちよっこわい」というイメージがあったけどね

H: Ohhh. Your past look gave you the image of "Matchan's kind of scary."

M: でもね、今はこんなにかわいいですからいいことしますよ。「一日一善」、ね

M: But now that I've become this cute... I'm going to do good: "one good deed a day." (67-68)

(Note: "Matchan" is Matsumoto's nickname, formed by attaching to the starting sound of his name "matsu" with the diminutive suffix "chan.")

Unlike in a standard *manzai* performance, however, the two comedians do not perform such routines alone in their show. They also read postcards from fans, among other things, and of course, as noted, they also bring in guests and "dig-into" the latter at every chance in order to create a good laugh for the television viewers.

In the final section of his essay, Stocker summarizes his stance on the suggestion that "*manzai* originated in the Osakan culture": he finds that the early precursors to *manzai* bore no particular relation to Osakan culture, whereas it was the company Yoshimoto, headquartered in Osaka, that "popularized it in the late 1920s by gathering *manzai* performers in Osaka, training them there and in Kobe and Kyoto, then sending them to Tokyo and elsewhere" (70). In other words, the art did not necessarily originate in Osaka; instead, it was re-crafted into an "Osakan art" that went on to become well known throughout Japan.

Stocker also makes a final observation on the pervasiveness of *manzai*, or humor in general,

in today's Japan, and the consequent impossibility to clearly define *manzai* as an art style:

Mahadev Apte noted in 1985 that in the United States “it appears that the mass media have made humor ubiquitous and diverse... humor appears to have pervaded every walk of life. Comedy shows dominate television programs.” The same is clearly now true for Japan, and *manzai* is an integral part of that invasion. The *manzai* today, like that of the past, is difficult to appraise on its own as an oral performance art. Influences such as the impact of the large corporate comedy schools and the concomitant decline of intimate master-apprentice training, the forces of Japan's media entertainment world... the sheer number and ubiquity of television programming... all these make it impossible to be definitive about the genre... (70)

Stocker then proceeds to argue that these “variegated linkages” among the performers, producers, and fans through the media are precisely why *manzai* has become immensely popular, a social phenomenon that English-language Japanese studies should not overlook. Based on his observation, however, this author makes an argument that answers the core question of this chapter: that the enormous popularity and ubiquity of *manzai* likely played an important role in the spread of the idea *tsukkomi* in everyday life in Japan. When *manzai* and *tsukkomi* appears and recurs in every television show, it naturally follows that *tsukkomi* is picked up and perceived by the ordinary Japanese as a powerful tool in daily conversation, and starts to bear its own life as a social phenomenon.

Chapter III

In Chapter II, we came to understand the popularity of *tsukkomi* as a result of the prevalence of the stand-up comedy *manzai* in Japan's popular culture. Now, in this chapter, we turn to look at imaginative applications of *tsukkomi* that ordinary Japanese people encounter or execute in their daily lives; in other words, we now examine *tsukkomi* that is no longer confined

to well-defined *manzai* performances, whether found on a stage or in a television show, or to the professional *manzai* artists. In order to do this, we will introduce two popular books published in Japan that are designed to help Japanese people understand and utilize *tsukkomi* better in two situations: in everyday interpersonal communications, and in advertising.

3.1 How to Become a Well-Liked Person

3.1.1 Jokes Used in Daily Life in Japan

Prior to introducing the book that explains the importance of *tsukkomi* in creating humorous conversations, we need establish, through another English language study, the fact that Japanese people do make use of jokes in their daily conversation. In Chapter II, we only partially accounted for why we can reject the stereotype which disproves of Japanese people's ability to joke by citing a study on the Osakan tradition of laughter. Now we look at another study titled "Conversational Jokes in Japanese and English," a cross-cultural study done by Takekuro Makiko, through which we can assure ourselves that jokes are indeed used in daily life by ordinary Japanese people.

In this study, "impromptu conversational jokes" are defined as "impulsive speech behaviors in which participants spontaneously create something humorous, ironic, and witty in order to provoke amused laughter" (86). *Tsukkomi*, with their often witty punch lines, should have a secured place in the category of "jokes," and can certainly be further categorized as an "impromptu conversational joke" when it naturally occurs during a conversation.

The goal of Takekuro's study is to understand if and when jokes emerge in conversations in Japanese versus American English. To achieve this end, Takekuro collects "three Japanese

movies, six Japanese television dramas, six American movies, and two hours of conversation among friends in both Japanese and English,” and while selecting the movies and television dramas, she also takes the care to exclude those whose jokes are not likely to happen in real life. In addition, Takekuro also makes sure that her samples incorporate situations of varying levels of formality.

What she finds through quantitative analysis is significant. While it turns out that fewer jokes are uttered in the Japanese samples than in the English ones, controlling for their respective total lengths (in minutes), jokes are nevertheless found in Japanese. More importantly, she also finds that, in Japan, jokes are very sensitive to both how close the speakers are related, and how formal the situation is. In Japan, jokes are exchanged mostly among “friends, partners, and family members rather than between business partners, new people, or strangers” (89). On top of that, she also finds that no single joke is uttered in her samples where the context is formal. Both of these findings contrast sharply with the American practice: jokes can be exchanged among people of any level of proximity, and in situations of any level of formality.

In other words, we can now bust the stereotype about Japan with full confidence: the Japanese people do know how to joke. In fact, as we have seen in Chapter II, the industry of television shows in Japan that specialize in selling laughter is at least as popular and thriving as its American counterpart, if not more so, and it certainly has its share of influence on ordinary Japanese people.

We can also see from the study above that the discrepancy between stereotype and reality probably lies in the rigorous requirements for formality imposed by the Japanese culture. A

typical foreigner in Japan may not immediately encounter any joke at all, and is instead treated always with a measured, if somewhat distant, politeness by the locals; this may have contributed to the said stereotype. Nevertheless, it is after one gets close enough to a Japanese person that jokes start to kick in. Takekuro further characterizes “the Japanese construal of self” as constituting distinctive domains, notably *uchi* (内, “in-group”), *soto* (外, “out-group”), and *yoso* (余所, “out-group of out-group”), where *uchi* refers to people closest to the self, such as family and friends, *soto* refers to people that one encounters in some frequency but does not include in the “in-group,” such as colleagues, and *yoso* refers to those that are complete strangers, or those that one rarely ever gets in contact with (95). On the other hand, the West does not appear to define these strict categories for closeness to other people. Granted, family and close friends weigh more than a distant acquaintance for a Westerner as well, but less can be said about when a person clearly drops out of the Westerner’s personal “circle.” As a result, the Japanese tend to joke mainly with those that they feel the most comfortable with: those in the *uchi*. Similarly, cultural requirements on formality finds jokes improper in formal settings, thus making them a rare sight in the eyes of a typical foreigner in Japan, who is more likely to find herself/himself in situations that are considered to be formal.

3.1.2 Why Is Your Conversation Boring?

With the doubt on joking in daily Japanese conversations cleared, it is now time to examine the suggestions by a professional on the use of “funny language,” including *tsukkomi*, to make one’s interpersonal communications successful. The book we are looking at is titled “Why is your conversation boring?”, or 「なぜ、あなたの話はつまらないのか？」 (the book itself

provides both a Japanese title and an English one). It is authored by Minobe Tatsuhiro, a TV show scriptwriter, and was published in 2013. According to Minobe, people suffer a devastating loss, in terms of living meaningful lives, from speaking in a boring manner. Whether in a school, at a company, or attending a wedding ceremony or funeral, the ability to strike up an interesting conversation is a universally welcomed talent (4). Meanwhile, Minobe notes that, in an age where families no longer eat dinner together at the dinner table, and where everyone contacts everyone else through electronic devices, people are losing the skills of speaking. Because of this, Minobe argues, people need to study and regain these techniques by themselves.

There are many people who consider the skills of speaking to be inborn talents that not everyone can attain. To this, Minobe argues otherwise, maintaining that any person can strike up amusing conversations, as long as they learn the necessary techniques and take some time to practice, in the same way knowing the tricks of cooking, coupled with practice, allows anyone to be able to cook delicious dishes (6). Next, he argues that these “tricks,” or techniques, are hidden in his profession, TV show scriptwriting. According to Minobe, the reason why newly debuted idols and other participants in TV shows who are not professionally trained humorous entertainers can frequently arouse volcanic laughter in the audience is precisely because of the techniques that Minobe and other scriptwriters put to use. Therefore, in writing this book, he hopes that more people can learn these techniques, polish their speech to make it attractive, and thereby change their lives for the better.

One of these techniques, of course, is *tsukkomi*. In particular, Minobe discusses *tatoe tsukkomi* (*tsukkomi* by comparison), which is a type of *tsukkomi* that we have previously

discussed in Chapter I, as a method for “succeeding [in the battle of interpersonal communication] with originality” (180). This is Section 5 of Chapter 4 in his book, titled “The Method of *Tsukkomi* by Comparison,” where Chapter 4 is titled “Secret Techniques to Make Your Speech Even More Interesting,” an addition to topics discussed in the first three chapters, which develop Minobe’s theory on how “funny speech” works in general, and how to construct it in an everyday dialogue. (We will discuss more of this later.) In other words, he regards *tsukkomi* as one of the more specific tools that one can utilize to stir up an entertaining conversation.

Here is what he says about *tsukkomi* in general:

The role of the *tsukkomi* is, when faced with the *boke* who utters something funny, to point out what is funny and correct it.

Because the act of *tsukkomi* serves to turn the *boke*’s words, which is already amusing enough by itself, into something even more amusing by means of a follow-up remark, it is often referred to as the “follow-up.” (180)

This is exactly what we have come to understand as the standard function of *tsukkomi* in Japanese popular culture.

While Minobe acknowledges that many of his readers may already be actively using *tsukkomi* in their daily life, he thinks that, as the use of entertaining language becomes so prevalent today, normal *tsukkomi* will not be able to help its speaker stand out and leave an impression in people. Therefore, he proposes the use of “*tsukkomi* by comparison,” which is a technique that “does not simply use a *tsukkomi* when confronted with the *boke*’s funny remark, but rather compares it to something else and then *tsukkomi*” (181). This serves as a review of our discussion of “*tsukkomi* by comparison” in Chapter I.

To illustrate why “*tsukkomi* by comparison” can be particularly powerful, Minobe cites applications of this technique by *manzai* comedian Gotō Terumoto, who he regards as a master at it. Gotō, born in 1974, is a member of the comedy duo “Football Hour” (フットボールアワー). Here are the examples Minobe cited:

1. When Gotō’s partner brings up a joke but receives no reaction from the audience (who fails to find it funny), Gotō reacts by saying:

「おまえ、よくそんなギャグ出せたな。陶芸家やったら割ってるヤツやで！」

I can't believe you just threw that joke out. If you were a ceramics artist, you would've smashed that one!

2. After hearing the story of a student who, after initially failing the college entrance exam upon high school graduation, has subsequently challenged the same exam for eight consecutive years, failed eight times, and is preparing to embark on the ninth challenge, Gotō remarks:

「9年！？ 当時生まれた犬がぼちぼち死ぬ頃やん！」

Nine years!?! Even a newborn puppy back when he started would have come close to its final days, no?

3. Commenting on a wonderful singing voice, Gotō says:

「鳥肌すごかったですよ！ ニワトリ6羽分くらい鳥肌立ちましたよ！」

I had so many goose bumps! As many as those from six chickens combined!

4. To say that his stomach is so full that it would not admit any more food, Gotō uses the following expression:

「1LDKに15人住んでるよ！」

I've got 15 people living in a single apartment!

5. When his stage partner (a male) does something manly, he remarks:

「四捨五入したらオスですよ！」

If I round you [as in “round to the nearest tenth”] I'd get a male!

6. When there is something lost that simply cannot be found again, Gotō remarks:

「校庭でコンタクトレンズ落としたときくらい見つからないわ！」

This is as impossible as finding one's contact lenses dropped in a schoolyard! (181-182)

Minobe, our book's author, comments that, while regular *tsukkomi* would only go as far as “I can't believe you just threw that joke out” and “Nine years!?” etc, we can strengthen our *tsukkomi* by devising creative comparisons like “If you were a ceramic artist...” and “Even a newborn puppy back when he started...” (182).

Indeed, these examples supplement our introduction to “*tsukkomi* by comparison” in Chapter I, and vividly demonstrate why making a comparison pumps extra energy into a *tsukkomi*. Pointing out the funniness of an amusing statement may well be equally amusing, given the right wording, tone, and facial expressions; yet such a *tsukkomi*'s life almost entirely relies on the level of absurdity of the amusing statement itself, and being the ones who want to deliver a *tsukkomi* upon hearing a *boke*, we may not be able to produce anything laughable should the *boke* be a mediocre one, thus failing our purpose of impressing our listeners. On the other hand, if we perform quick-thinking and come up with an imaginative comparison to accompany the *tsukkomi*, our original input gives the *tsukkomi* a life of its own, free of any restriction imposed by the *boke*'s quality, once and for all: in other words, as long as something

remotely noteworthy presents itself during a conversation, it is possible for us to *tsukkomi* it using “*tsukkomi* by comparison,” and enjoy the reward of creativity that comes as a result.

An important question remains, however. How do we apply this technique to everyday conversation? Gotō is a professional comedian, so he likely has the wits to improvise using “*tsukkomi* by comparison” even if no script is prepared beforehand; yet we common people are not equipped with comparable skills. To this, Minobe argues that, even if our *tsukkomi* do not end up being as splendid as Gotō’s, there is still an easily available method that can help us devise successful “*tsukkomi* by comparison” (182). The method, which Minobe previously introduced in Chapter 2 of the book, is called the “Empathy Pyramid” (共感のピラミッド).

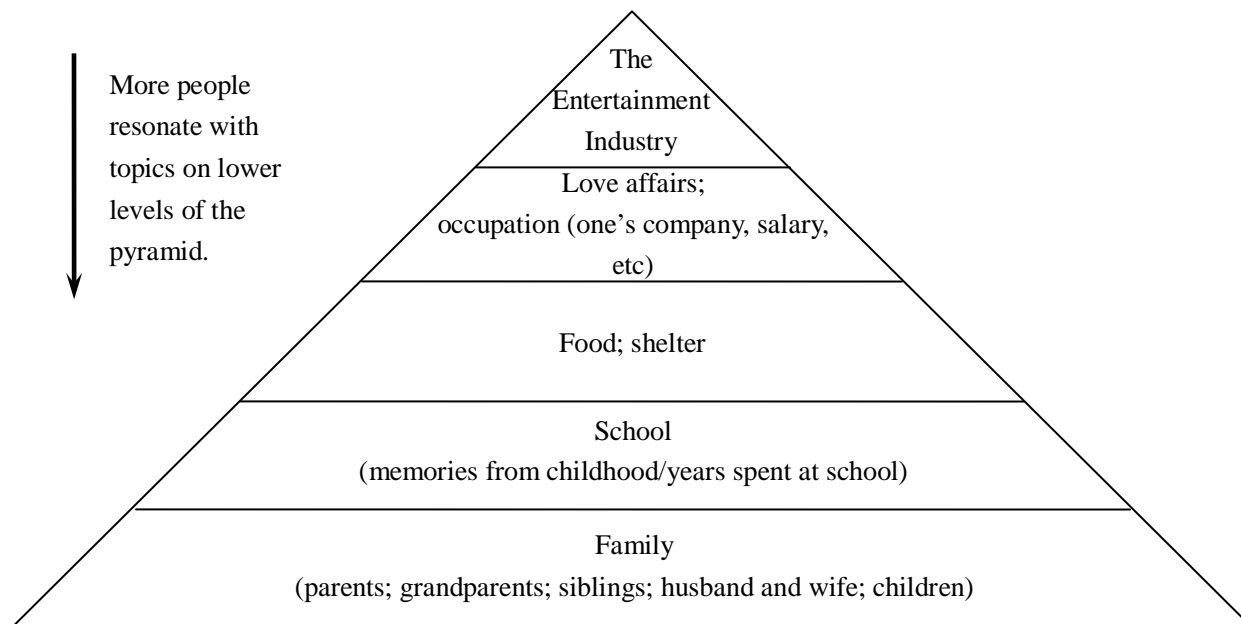


Figure 1: The Empathy Pyramid (共感のピラミッド), Page 73

This idea is based on Minobe’s theory that the easiest and most effective way to make one’s words full of wits and fun is to search for joke material (ネタ *neta*) that as many people as possible can resonate with (72). He summarizes the topics that Japanese people are most likely

to empathize with into the “Empathy Pyramid,” which is reproduced and translated here in Figure 1. For example, stories about families are easy to resonate with, because most people have close feelings for their families. Consequently, Minobe argues that the best way to have a successful conversation with a stranger is to start with such topics as family, and then move gradually up the pyramid, looking for what the person likes to talk about.

Now let us return to Minobe’s section on “*tsukkomi* by comparison.” According to him, while we may not reach the same level as master comedians in creating *tsukkomi*, we can pick an appropriate piece of joke material from topics in the pyramid that we deem likely to arouse empathy in other people, and use this material to assemble our “*tsukkomi* by comparison” (182). In particular, he observes that childhood/school-life-related comparisons can effectively arouse in the listener favorable emotions such as “That was well said!” and “That was an interesting comparison!” For example, if one smells something or someone stinky, and wants to *tsukkomu* that, usually one would say things like:

「臭ッ！」

So smelly!

「鼻が曲がる！」

Such a funky smell!

「風呂、入ってるの!？」

Did you take your bath?

With joke material drawn from the “School” category of the Empathy Pyramid, however, one can instead say:

「給食の牛乳拭いたぞうきん、思い出すわ！」

You just reminded me of dust cloth that's been used to clean up spilled milk!

「夏休みに行ったおじいちゃん家の臭いか！」

What's this smell, the one I got when visiting grandpa's house during summer?!

「ザリガニ死んでるぞ！」

The crawfish is dead! [Note: Pupils in primary schools in Japan often raise small animals, such as a crawfish, as part of the education.] (184)

When one uses such comparisons, not only do they emphasize the *tsukkomi* being intended, they also introduce certain types of odor that listeners can easily relate to through personal experience, thereby making it easier for them to resonate with the *tsukkomi* (185). In this way, one has created a *tsukkomi* that stands out in a crowd and serves the ultimate goal of becoming an interesting person that people would like to see around and talk to.

Of course, it is not the case that every time one senses a chance for *tsukkomi* he/she can always manage to match it up with the most appropriate joke material and pull off a masterful *tatoe tsukkomi*. Because of this, Minobe reminds his Japanese readers that technique needs to be coupled with practice. His recommendation is for one to regularly try and think of comparisons that best arouse empathy, stock in mind the “materials” that emerge as a result, and, when the right moment comes, use them to achieve unimagined impact.

This is a Japanese TV show scriptwriter's guide to the use of *tsukkomi* in daily conversations. Admittedly, *tsukkomi* is not the single trick that will turn his readers into socializing geniuses; yet the fact that it is formally treated as one of Minobe's tricks already

tells us how prevalent the idea has become in Japan. As we proceed to examine other Japanese writers and their thoughts on *tsukkomi*, however, the concept will continue to take on further weight.

3.2 *Tsukkominication*

Our second author, Takahashi Makoto, expands *tsukkomi*'s social significance in his 2013 book, "*Tsukkominication: The Art of Advertising by Treating Ordinary People as Manzai Partners*" (ツッコミュニケーション：生活者を「相方」にするボケとツッコミの広告術). Takahashi is a professional copywriter. According to him, the one hundred and twenty million ordinary Japanese people can no longer be treated as amateurs in terms of appreciating humor in advertisements; they are, in fact, "professionals" (3). Why is this so? Takahashi quotes a description from Makita Yūji's book "An Era of *Tsukkomi* for Every One of the Hundred Million People" (一億総ツッコミ時代, a book we will also be discussing in Chapter IV) to explain: "Whether at work, at drinking parties, on the Internet, or talking to friends, somehow people seek to mimic an air of TV variety shows. Everyone seems to be required by each of the situations to deliver a punch line. In fact, for things that only comedians needed to heed in the past, such as issuing a *tsukkomi*, playing *boke*, succeeding with a joke, failing at one, etc., regular people have also come to heed them now" (4).

Takahashi argues, as many of the other authors we discussed also did, that it was the professional comedians often seen on television that trained all Japanese people into such comedians themselves. In fact, people not only better appreciate humor now than before; they try to put it to practice it as well (5). In addition to the social phenomenon described by Makita,

Takahashi raises another example of an attempt to *tsukkomu* on a major scale: the *Nico Nico Dōga* (ニコニコ動画) video site. A special feature that sets this video site from traditional ones is a “live commenting” system, allowing users to add *danmaku* (弹幕, literally “barrage”) comments that, rather than staying in a comment section below the video frame, flies across the frame in a single line, right to left, at the point of time you post the comment, which everyone else watching the video later will also see. This system is not actually “live” in the strict sense of the word, but it creates an environment where every viewer can *tsukkomu* a funny scene in the video, together with all past viewers who did the same, as if they were watching a live performance together. In this way, the viewers share the *tsukkomi* role together, and enjoy issuing and viewing *tsukkomi* more than the videos themselves. Attempts to play *boke* are made as well. According to Takahashi’s observation, in order to attract comments (and thus popularity), video uploaders try to make their videos as suitable for *tsukkomi* as they can, essentially playing the *boke* role in this online mass-scale *manzai* exchange.

To use Takahashi’s words, “comedy-esque communication” (お笑いのなコミュニケーション) is becoming ever more popular and wide spread in Japan. Considering this, he asks the following question: how have companies been attending to the tastes of a people so well-trained in “comedy-esque communication”? The answer seems less than satisfactory. According to him, because of the vast importance of advertising as “the company’s face,” an advertiser’s ingenious advertising plan can end up requiring approval from multiple authorities in a Japanese company, which is not only a time-consuming process, but may easily involve some individuals who do not possess a proper taste for advertising, leading to the plan not receiving approval (7). When

this happens, Takahashi argues that the advertisements issued by such companies will not be well received by the “one hundred and twenty million comedians” (8). In other words, they could be ignored by their intend audience.

This is why Takahashi writes this book -- by focusing on *manzai*-esque information exchanges, he hopes to help Japanese corporations develop a way to communicate their ideas effectively, without being ignored by their audience. This he refers to as “*tsukkomunication*,” a combination of *tsukkomi* and communication.

In Chapter 3 of his book, Takahashi defines *tsukkomunication* in the following way: “*Tsukkomunication* is a model of communication based on *manzai*’s laughter-arousing mechanism” (90). In particular, the *boke* in his model is not necessarily an absurd statement; instead, it is the very experiences that happen to ordinary people, the very things that they do and think, and the very topics that they discuss, in their daily lives. Life is full of absurd, sometimes not-so-absurd occurrences; by spotlighting these occurrences with sharp *tsukkomi*, a company will be able to arouse *manzai*-style laughter in people, making itself a popular topic in the process. In this model of communication, a notable feature is repeatedly stressed by Takahashi: that the ordinary people are not merely “viewers” of the “*manzai* show” here, but are instead actively participating performers, whom companies must treat as their “performing partners”. A company is doing *tsukkomunication* if it pays attention to and “reacts” to the thoughts and actions of people in a *manzai*-esque manner.

The opposite of *tsukkomunication* is not “*boke-communication*” (91). Takahashi reminds us that *tsukkomunication* is not an idea separate from the *boke*, but is rather a company’s reaction

to the myriad of *boké* that already permeate everyone's daily life. Then what is the opposite of *tsukkomunikation*? Takahashi considers that to be the more commonly seen type of communication where the company fails to treat ordinary people as performing partners, and instead "does its best to perform on a stage of its preference, in order to satiate itself" (90-91).

The contrast between these two models is obvious. How will people react to a company whose advertisements arouse interest in no one other than itself? They likely will not notice its advertisement, its products, or its brand, thereby causing the company's advertising plan to fail. On the other hand, when *tsukkomi*, the humorous tool that is the central focus of this thesis, is applied to the field of corporate communication in Japan, it can serve the roles of attracting viewers' attention, inciting resonance in them, and leading the company's advertising campaign to a success. All these can happen because a culture of laughter and *tsukkomi* has become so prevalent; we will address this formally in Chapter IV.

Takahashi summarizes four key ideas in conducting successful *tsukkomunikation* that he learned from *manzai* performers, which this author shall also introduce here, as they pertain to applying *tsukkomi* in real life, while going beyond the individual level and entering a societal scale. The first key idea is: "*Tsukkomunikation* is 'reaction'" (93). In a traditional advertising project, the company takes "actions," and the people passively receive them. The company needs to analyze the market, determine its target consumers, and design an advertisement that fit as closely as possible to these consumers. Doing all of these things takes a lot of time; plus, releasing the advertisement also costs a lot of money, so the company will be even more hesitant in making decisions, thus making it difficult to react to a newly-emerged chance for

advertising.

On the other hand, *tsukkomunikation* is “reaction” (94). The hot topics and things people care about at the present moment are already determined, and what an advertiser needs to do is to find out what these things are, which will become the joke material (*neta*) that he / she can put to use. The process of finding the right material to react upon requires prudent execution. On the one hand, *tsukkomi* must avoid focusing on topics that have already fallen out of people’s attention, and the various forms of Internet media, especially those that involve user generated content, provide the advertiser with contents that are less likely to be out of favor; on the other hand, while traditional news media like newspapers and television news programs report trend with a lag that could hurt the trend’s relevance, these institutions have better trained personnel to filter out trivial occurrences not worth reporting on, while focusing only on events that many people care about. This contrasts with the situation on the Internet, where anything trivial could become a trend for a short period, but may not appeal to a general audience. Therefore, there is a trade-off to be made. When picking material from traditional news media, the advertiser needs to ensure that the topic concerned is still highly relevant; when picking material from the Internet, the advertiser needs to evaluate each piece material by looking at factors such as its amount of retweets (as in the case of Twitter content), its amount of “likes” (as in the case of Facebook content), etc. In this way, the advertiser shall be able to find the ideal piece of joke material that the company can react to in its *tsukkomunikation* (96).

The company also needs to consider where to react, and who delivers the reaction in the advertisement. Concerning the first question, Takahashi’s idea is that it need not be restricted to

paid news media, and can include many of the free services available on the Internet, such as Facebook, Twitter, online forums, and video sites like YouTube and *Nico Nico Dōga*. As for the second question, Takahashi warns of the different impressions that the same phrase can give people, when spoken by different people. He raises the example of 「馬鹿 (野郎)」 (*baka (yarō)*), a word meaning “stupid person” or “idiot.” While it can often be considered a curse word, the different people who say it (and the different situations in which they say it) alter its connotation greatly (98). Here are three situations that Takahashi mentions. First, if a man accidentally runs into another in the street, and the latter shouts at the former:

「馬鹿野郎！」

Are you stupid?!

This is a clear sign of the latter man wanting to escalate the situation. In a different, romantic setting, if a woman says to a man:

「もう、馬鹿ねえ～」

How stupid you are~

The same word now turns into a flirtation. Lastly, if the word is used by an old friend during an alumni reunion:

「あの頃、馬鹿やったよなあ」

We did so many stupid things back in the days!

It is still the same word being used, yet this time it helps arouse one’s cherished old memories. By the same token, if an advertisement pays the wrong person to deliver its *tsukkommunication*, the company could receive criticism from the public. Takahashi’s advice is

that people most suitable for this job are those who both “possess persuasive power” and are “well-liked personalities” (99).

The second key idea that induces successful *tsukkommunication* is “speed” and “timing,” which according to Takahashi are the “life” of *tsukkommunication* (100). Because people pay attention to a certain popular trend for only a short period before moving on to the next popular trend, it is critical that the company completes its entire process of determining, designing, and delivering the *tsukkommunication* in that period. How short could that period be? According to Takahashi, even for the hottest topics that spread across the entire Japanese nation, it can only stay suitable for *tsukkomi* for no longer than a week to half a month. Such a short time period undoubtedly puts pressure on the institution seeking to take advantage of the most popular topic, which cannot react as promptly as a *manzai* comedian can during a performance. The question of how an institution can overcome this difficulty is answered in detail in Chapter 5 of Takahashi’s book, where ways for companies to organize into structures that are optimized for *tsukkommunication* are considered. We shall skip this question, as it is not related to *tsukkomi* used in contemporary Japanese people’s daily lives.

The third key idea is the ability to keep an observant eye on both the performing partner (*boke*) and the audience (104). In other words, the company or institution has to always look for the newest information and react accordingly, while also making sure that only relevant information, not trivial things, is addressed. Just as the *manzai* duo performers need to understand each other’s considerations by tacit communication as well as read the audience’s reaction to jokes and adjust accordingly, the company also needs to stay vigilant and flexible in

order to succeed in its advertising campaign.

The last key idea, interestingly, is that *tsukkomunikation* is not about criticizing, but rather about “love” and “laugh” (108). Although *tsukkomi*’s common form involves one person “nitpicking” on things that another person does “wrong,” Takahashi reminds us that real *tsukkomi* is rather about love and laugh: its aim is not to hurt the partner’s feelings. Instead, precisely because *tsukkomi* can be easily conceived as a “violent” action, *manzai* performers have to carefully design their interactions and fill them with love and consideration. The same goes for *tsukkomunikation*. There will always be positive and negative reactions to a *tsukkomunikation*, just as every citizen does not like a well-liked personality, and every citizen does not approve of a governmental policy, observes Takahashi (110). The company can design its advertisement’s wording to lessen potential criticism, but more importantly, what the company should do is to pour into the advertisement its love for the people, its ambition to make the world a better place through its product, and if possible, it can also add a flavor of humor. Love is more important than even humor, as Takahashi suggests against devoting energy only to finding “ways to make people laugh” and end up with something unnatural. Once a loving, humorous *tsukkomunikation* is successfully released, even if some negative sentiments do grow, more people will surely receive the company’s goodwill with goodwill, and are happy to defend the company against criticism from others.

This is Takahashi’s theory on using *tsukkomi* in public communication. We shall now look at two of the real-world cases of successful *tsukkomunikation* that he lists, in order to further appreciate the power of *tsukkomi*.

Let us begin with an example that took place outside Japan; in fact, it happened in the United States. On August 30th, 2007, a 35-second video was uploaded to YouTube bearing the title: “Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08 Jesus Shot.” Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08 is a PC video game developed by the video game company Electronic Arts, and was first released on August 28th, 2007. As the title suggests, it is a golf game that features the famous professional golfer Tiger Woods. Two days after the release, the uploader of the above-mentioned video apparently found a glitch in the game: even though the golf ball fell into a pond, the virtual Tiger Woods was able to stand on the water’s surface and hit the ball into the hole. Takahashi notes that the “Jesus Shot” phrase in the video’s title has two layers of meanings: firstly, “Jesus” is used as slang for incredible things, so “Jesus Shot” means “incredible” or “unearthly shot.” In addition to that, Jesus Christ is said to have walked on water, so the video uploader also used “Jesus” in a sarcastic way (135). Takahashi also argues that glitches in games are the last things that game developers want to get *tsukkomu*-ed about, because the more famous a glitch gets, the more likely people will consider the game to be a terribly made one.

A year later, in response to the video, Electronic Arts issued a *tsukkomi* of its own, which turned into a remarkably successful instance of *tsukkomunication*. What did it do? A few days before the August-26th release date for its new game title Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09, on August 19th, 2008, the company uploaded a video of its own to YouTube, titled “Tiger Woods 09 - Walk on Water.” This video first shows excerpts from the 2007 video by using a video recorder to record a computer screen playing the old video. Then the screen turns black, and the following caption shows up:

Levinator 25 [name of 2007 video's uploader],

You seem to think your Jesus Shot video was a glitch in the game.

What appears on the screen next is a real-world video clip, showing a pond with lotus leaves floating in it, and a golf ball that fell onto one of the leaves. Then, the real Tiger Woods emerges with a club held in hand. He walks up to the pond, sits down beside it to take off his shoes and socks, stands up again and puts on his gloves, and then starts walking on water toward the golf ball. Once he reaches the ball, he hits it with his club and sends it right into the hole, just as what the virtual Tiger Woods did a year ago. Finally, as Tiger Woods walks out of the pond, a new caption emerges:

It's not a glitch. He's just that good.

This advertising campaign was a huge success. Currently (as of April 2015) the video has received over seven million views, plus an overwhelming twenty-two thousand three hundred “likes,” as opposed to the one thousand “dislikes.”

The campaign was successful for several reasons. One of them is the company's observant eye. People at Electronic Arts were well aware of the glitch and the old video, and would react appropriately at the right timing. Secondly, they put their love for their users and their game into this *tsukkomi*. When the game user reported a glitch, the company not only did not blame the user or try to force the user to retract the video, it actually invited Tiger Woods to shoot a video for this user. Although one can argue that the response took too long to come, it was in fact planned as an advertisement for the company's upcoming new game, so making use of a glitch reported in the past year is right in time. In Takahashi's words, “A *tsukkomi* of love and

humor is far more likely than Requests for Deletion or excuse-like news releases to lead to positive results” (138).

A second example put up by Takahashi concerns the Hollywood movie “The Avengers” that hit Japanese movie theaters in 2012, and a Japanese film that was released at around the same time. According to Takahashi, when “The Avengers” was released, the following slogan was used for advertising:

「日本よ、これが映画だ。」

This is called a film, Japan.

For understandable reasons, this arrogant, provocative slogan caused considerable controversy in Japan (134). If this slogan alone were our example, then it must have been one that shows us the hazards of not keeping one’s audience in mind when advertising.

Yet the story does not end here. A Japanese film that was released contemporarily, “The Kirishima Thing” (「桐島、部活やめるってよ」), decided to *tsukkomu* the Hollywood slogan by releasing a slogan of its own:

「ハリウッドよ、これが日本映画だ。」

This is called a Japanese film, Hollywood.

As Takahashi describes it, this slogan received “overwhelming acclamation from film lovers.” This is an excellent example of the advertiser’s awareness of what people currently think and talk about, the capability to immediately seize the opportunity and turn it into an actual advertisement, and the wits and love to craft a resounding line of *tsukkominication*, which any film lover in Japan that had felt insulted by Hollywood’s slogan would find to be

heartwarming.

Chapter IV

As we have seen in Chapter III, *tsukkomi* can be applied to both an individual's interpersonal communication as well as an institution's public communication, such as advertising. The authors we looked at also seem to suggest that *tsukkomi* has become a social phenomenon with far-reaching influences. In this chapter, we will first look at an author who analyzes *tsukkomi* as such, i.e., a social phenomenon. Through his analysis, we shall better understand how *tsukkomi* and other elements of the Japanese stand-up comedy *manzai* have come to play an important role in Japanese society. Thereafter, we will examine the work of another author who questions the over-proliferation of *tsukkomi* in Japanese society and proposes his solutions to the problem that he perceives. It may seem like *tsukkomi* is all about the good and the virtuous per the works we have encountered so far; but this perception alone cannot account for the full picture. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to explore *tsukkomi*'s reality as a social phenomenon, so that by the end of this chapter, we will finally be able to say that we understand what a Japanese *tsukkomi* is.

4.1 The Society Laughs

We begin by learning from Ōta Shōichi's work, "The Society Laughs: Interpersonal Relationships Based on *Boke* and *Tsukkomi* - Augmented Edition" (社会は笑う・増補版：ボケとツッコミの人間関係). Born in 1960, Ōta is a sociologist with a focus on theories of television. The book's title has "Augmented Edition" in it because it was originally published in

2002, whereas eleven years later, Ōta incorporated new developments in the phenomena he studied into an additional chapter and published a new edition of the book in 2013. We will, however, focus on the main part of the book, which appears to be more or less the same as the 2002 version.

An important aspect of Ōta's study is an observed shift in Japanese people's treatment of laughter / humor (笑い *warai*). To understand this shift, though, we first need to look at a TV variety show that Ōta mentions. It was launched in 1975 by Hagimoto Kinichi, titled 「欽ちゃんのドンとやってみよう！」 (*Kin-chan no donto yatte miyō!*, which is abbreviated as 「欽ドン」 *Kindon*, and which is roughly translatable as “Kin-chan's ‘Let's Give It a Try!’ Show”), and quickly became a hit in Japan. Indeed, several other shows by him or by other TV entertainers that were subsequently made also received considerable success, and these performers even received a collective name: “the Kin-chan family” (欽ちゃんファミリー *Kin-chan family*) (7).

What does Hagimoto do in his *Kindon* show? It turns out that, before each show, he collects from viewers postcard submissions of funny short stories that feature characters like a “good kid,” a “bad kid,” and a “normal kid” (8). During the show, he and other participating performers introduce these submissions one by one by acting them out in front of the audience in their studio. While performing, he also observes how the audience reacts to the story and determines how well the story is received, or how *ukeru* (ウケる, literally meaning “well-received” and translatable as “popular”) it is. Then he puts each postcard into one of three categories: *baka-uke* (バカウケ, “humongously popular”), *yaya-uke* (ややウケ, “somewhat

popular”), and *docchirake* (ドッチラケ, “What popular?!”, meaning it was not well received). (Recall from Chapter I the powerful conjunctive form *renyōkei* in Japanese. Here, *uke* is the conjunctive form and noun form of the verb *ukeru*, in the same way *tsukkomi* is the noun form of the verb *tsukkomu*.) Then, at the end of each show, Hagimoto will pick the best short story and give it the “*Kindon Award*.”

The word *ukeru* is commonly used in Japan today to say that something is “well-received,” such as an impressively humorous show, or a well-liked person. According to our author Ōta’s observation, while this word has been around for a long time as a jargon of entertainers who evaluate whether their show has been successful, the word’s acceptance into general daily usage likely coincided with Hagimoto’s 1975 show.

What attracts Ōta’s attention, however, is a recent (as of circa 2002) trend for people (especially young people) to frequently use the word *ukeru* as a response, in addition to laughing, when they hear a joke or other things that are meant to arouse laughter (8-9). This usage makes him feel something unnatural. Normally people respond to jokes by laughing, sometimes accompanied by simple, subjective remarks such as 「おかしい」 *okashii*, 「おもしろい」 *omoshiroi*, both meaning “That’s so funny!” However, Ōta notes that *ukeru* is different. It is an *objective* description of the joke. It is as if the person is remarking on the joke from a disinterested, third-person perspective.

To further illustrate this incongruity, Ōta once again puts to use Hagimoto and his famous show. In the show, Hagimoto needs to reproduce for his audience the humor of the short stories by acting them out; meanwhile, as the audience laughs, he observes the laughter (or lack

thereof), and as a disinterested party who “does not laugh,” he evaluates the popularity of the story (10).

Similarly, Ōta argues, the unconventional response “*Ukeru!*” to humor, which we discussed above, can be viewed as a phenomenon in which “both a subjective and an objective evaluation are expressed simultaneously.” This is, of course, not a particularly harmonious situation. On the one hand, the person seeks to immerse himself / herself in the joke and enjoy it; on the other hand, he / she also tries to take a step back from the humor and be a distanced “receiver” (受け手 *ukete*) of the humor (10).

Ōta also invites us to view this change through another perspective: the decline of *rakugo* (落語), another form of Japanese comedy in which one lone performer sits and entertains. The word *rakugo*, which according to the trusted Japanese dictionary *Kōjien* was originally pronounced using its “Japanese” pronunciation *otoshibanashi*, literally means “story which makes one fall” (Shinmura Izuru Kinen Zaidan). As such, an important concept of *rakugo* is *ochi* (落ち), literally meaning “the fall.” According to Ōta’s description, in *rakugo* the performer is the one who “makes people fall”, and the “receiver,” or audience, is the one who is “made to fall” (12). In other words, during a *rakugo* show, the comedian will first use his performing techniques to take his “receivers” on a tour into the world of his story, making the latter forget about the real world. Then, at the end of a story, he will apply an *ochi*, pulling the “receivers” back into reality. The concept of *ochi* has also been accepted into popular usage, and we have previously translated it generically as “punch line,” which is indeed how the word is used in Japanese today, not necessarily referring to the comedy which gave birth to it, *rakugo*.

In a *rakugo*-style performance, the comedian assumes absolute control, and an *ochi* is necessary to its success. However, consider the trend in people that Ōta has observed: people now tend to mix their subjectivity with an outside, objective view. While they laugh at a joke, they are also able to assume a disinterested perspective, and comment that the joke can be considered well-received, or *ukeru*. This type of “receiver” of humor is fundamentally different from the “receivers” in a *rakugo* theater. Instead of wholeheartedly following the performer’s storyline and wandering into a fantastic world, the present-day “receivers” can distance themselves from the story and resist being sucked in (12).

Ōta thereby argues that, while *rakugo*’s increasingly archaic references to the way of life of the Edo period certainly contributes to its decline, a more important cause is the shift in the way “receivers” of humor behave. When they reject being unconditionally drawn into *rakugo*’s imaginary world, the *ochi* loses its power because there is no heightened place from which the “receiver” can “fall.” As a result, *rakugo* as a form of humorous performance finds itself harder to work (13).

One may wish to ask, at this point, what the TV show *Kindon* and the decline of *rakugo* have to do with *tsukkomi*. The answer, as can be expected, is that the new type of “receiver” that Ōta used these two examples to delineate is very closely related to *tsukkomi*. In fact, Ōta argues that *ochi*, or punch line, is no longer required to create humor, and this is because “the right to make a final judgment on [the quality of] a piece of humor has moved to the ‘receiver,’” who is now responsible for approving and turning an intended piece of humor into actual humor (13).

As a classic example of “humor led by ‘receivers,’” Ōta mentions the “natural *boke*” (天然

ボケ *tennen boke*), who does not in any way intend to arouse laughter, but certain aspects of whom “naturally” cause laughter. These aspects themselves are not sufficient, however; it is the “receiver’s” remarks regarding them that turn them into humor. In other words, it is the active participation of the “receiver” that ensures, or in fact creates, a successful “natural *boke*.”

Since the word *boke* has already emerged, it should be pretty clear what Ōta considers to be the comedy form closest to the new reality of humor that he has described. You’ve guessed it, it is *manzai*. In his words, “our world of ‘humor’ is not one of *rakugo*-style humor, but one of *manzai*-style humor” (14). It is more than a shift in favor of *manzai* in the realm of humorous performing arts. In fact, this focus on *manzai*’s style has permeated humor in general as well as how communication is achieved. We have seen ample examples of these in Chapter III. Because the “receivers” are now at the core of humor, their application of *tsukkomi* can be said to be an active search for humor. Indeed, people no longer sit back and play the role of “receivers”; instead, they constantly evaluate the humor they receive, as well as actively participate in the reshaping or even producing of humor. This *manzai*-style search for *boke* and *tsukkomi*, according to Ōta, “has transcended the realm of performing arts and become a model of communication for the society” (15).

When did this shift from *rakugo* to *manzai* begin? Ōta argues that it happened following the “*manzai*-boom,” which is a boom in the popularity of *manzai*, especially on television (as we have seen in Chapter II), that happened in the 1980s. According to Ōta, while this boom rose and ebbed quickly like any other, it undeniably changed how people and society understood humor (14). The boom even caused a permanent rise in the importance of humor and comic

performers in television programs in general; but more importantly than that, the new type of actively engaging “receivers” of humor were born thanks to this “*manzai*-boom” (15).

Ōta’s analysis proceeds with detailed examples of aspects of *manzai*-esque social communication, which we shall skip, because we have already seen plenty in our Chapter III. His analysis also digs further into the matter and argues that this new type of humor is linked to the Japanese society’s self-sustenance and resistance to change; we shall skip this part as well, since it goes beyond the focus of this thesis. In fact, we have already learned enough information from Ōta to formulate in our minds the kind of place that *tsukkomi* occupies in the Japanese society. *Tsukkomi*’s universal applicability (which we have seen in Chapter III) already hints at this, but now we formally understand: since the “*manzai*-boom” in the 1980s, *tsukkomi*, along with the *manzai* way of thinking, has entered the Japanese psyche and given people a second personality who is constantly withdrawn from the immediate world and making evaluations. While everyone still enjoys laughing, the self can now evaluate and comment (*tsukkomu*) on ordinary things so as to add hilarity to them, it can evaluate an intended joke and sneer at its mediocrity, and it can even *tsukkomu* this mediocre joke to make fun of it (literally). In a sense, Japanese society has become one of *tsukkomi*.

4.2 An Era of *Tsukkomi*: For Good or for Bad?

As we have noted at the opening of this chapter, not every Japanese thinker believes in *tsukkomi*’s laudability alone. The last piece of literature we will be looking at, which we briefly touched on in Section 3.2, is one that considers the faults of an era in which everyone seeks to *tsukkomu* everyone and everything else. The book is titled “An Era of *Tsukkomi* for Every One

of the Hundred Million People” (一億総ツッコミ時代), which was published in 2012 and was authored by Makita Yūji. Besides writing, Makita has been working as a professional comedian for 15 years (as of 2012) under the stage name “Makita Sports” (マキタスポーツ). According to him, the reason why he wants to write this book is because he feels in the society around him both “unnaturalness” (違和感 *iwakan*) and “suffocation” (閉塞感 *heisokukan*) (4, 5). What is being so unnatural and suffocating? That everyone has become a *tsukkomi*. Makita in particular strongly senses this “unnaturalness” because he is a practicing comedian himself. Here are a few examples that he gives:

「あいつ、サムいな」

That person's joke is so corny.

「そこはツッコまないと」

I've got to tsukkomi this one!

「あ、いま、スベりました？」

Ah, did I just tell a lame joke?

「ハードル上げないでくださいよ」

Don't raise the difficulty so high (for me to tell my joke)! (22)

These are not examples of dialogues in a typical *manzai* performance or television show.

These are, according to Makita, dialogues that people use in their daily lives. He describes this phenomenon with the following words, which we also quoted in Section 3.2:

Whether at work, at drinking parties, on the Internet, or talking to friends, somehow people seek to mimic an air of TV variety shows. Everyone seems to be required by each of the situations to deliver a punch line (*ochi*).

In fact, for things that only comedians needed to heed in the past, such as issuing a *tsukkomi*, playing *boke*, succeeding with a joke (*ukeru*), failing at one, etc., regular people have also come to heed them now. (22)

In fact, Makita was able to observe, during his 15 years of career, the continuous rise of the importance of humor (and Japanese humorous performances) in the entertainment industry, thanks to the efforts of Yoshimoto Kōgyō Inc., the “leading company” in the industry which we also introduced in our Chapter II, as well as those of the many ingenious artists that emerged (3). This concurs with Ōta’s description of the aftermath of the “*manzai*-boom,” which we looked at in Section 4.1. However, because of the spread of the popularity of humor across all of Japan, everyone starts being required to show some *manzai*-esque humorous wits in their daily lives, which makes life more stifling and less interesting, turning things upside-down (23). In particular, Makita notes that as humor and humorous performances gain their lofty popularity, something that used to be different has changed: “being interesting” (面白い *omoshiroi*) has now become a “standard equipment” for the well-liked people, and everybody consequently wants to become an “interesting” person (24-25). Minobe’s book on ways to become more interesting, which we discussed in Section 3.1.2, undoubtedly serves this need of the Japanese people. In this sense, Makita is directly attacking Minobe’s approach to becoming interesting, because the former calls for people to stop thinking of humor or *manzai* when they are eager to improve their interestingness (27). As long as people expect each other to end a story with a funny *ochi*, or throw in a *tsukkomi* now and then in conversations, the suffocating uneasiness Makita describes will not dissipate.

But there is a more serious problem than the pressure on everyone to show off

manzai-esque talents; this more serious problem has something to do with *tsukkomi*. As we have already mentioned, everyone has become a *tsukkomi* in Japan. But not only that, people also begin to *tsukkomu* every tiny detail around them in which they find humorous value. The term mentioned by Ōta, “natural *boke*,” is an extreme case of such inclination to *tsukkomu*. While person A has done absolutely nothing to attract laughter, someone else, B, who finds humorous value in some aspects of A, can nevertheless *tsukkomu* A to arouse laughter, turning him / her into a “natural *boke*.” Makita gives another example: *kamu* (噛む, literally “to bite”), which is a *manzai* jargon that describes a performer who fails to clearly utter what he / she wants to say, possibly because of a bitten tongue (4). In *manzai* or in TV variety shows, someone who “bites his / her tongue” often gets *tsukkomu*-ed. In real life, however, the majority of Japanese people’s constant nitpicking on other peoples’ infinitesimal and trivial glitches such as “tongue-biting” is problematic in Makita’s eyes. One simple reason as to why this is problematic is that these glitches are not actually anything serious; yet there are more reasons that are followed by grave ramifications, which we will discuss later.

Before discussing the ramifications, we first look at a few causes for *tsukkomi*’s popularity introduced by Makita. One of them is its simplicity as a communicational skill. As an example, he reports meeting and talking to many young girls as part of his job (35-36). According to him, these young ladies rarely react to the content of what he talks about, but whenever he “bites his tongue,” they will happily respond with:

「あ、いま噛みましたね！」

Ah, you just bit your tongue, right?

It seems to him that, while the content of his speech may be too hard for the girls to comprehend, a simple *boke* can be responded to with a simple *tsukkomi*. Because potential *boke* can be found everywhere in our lives without effort, the simplicity of *tsukkomi* contributes to its prevalence. (It is not necessary to always construct a clever, original *tsukkomi* on the spot; pointing out simple glitches like a bitten tongue requires little to no skill.)

Another cause for *tsukkomi*'s popularity is that it is extrapunitive (他罰的 *tabatsu-teki*); i.e., punitive of an external body (40). In other words, when a person feels frustration in life, he uses *tsukkomi* to criticize others as a cathartic measure. Recall that, in theorizing *Tsukkcommunication*, Takahashi warns against using *tsukkomi* for criticism, stressing that *tsukkomi* is all about love and laugh. Unfortunately, however, in practice many people apparently apply it as a simple-to-use tool to criticize or even attack others, according to Makita. In addressing this urge, Makita urges people not to be someone who uses *tsukkomi* to laugh at others, but to become those who can “bring laughter to people around them by themselves” (41).

A third reason for *tsukkomi*'s popularity is “excessive self-defense” (44-46). In order to hide one's weaknesses from being *tsukkumu*-ed and exposed under derision, many people opt to strike first with a *tsukkomi* of their own, resulting in “excessive self-defense,” which only serves to further proliferate *tsukkomi*.

Due to these and other causes, *tsukkomi* becomes the popular weapon that anyone can wield and hurt others, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It is the dire consequences of this *tsukkomi* popularity that leads Makita to find it problematic and to write this book, hoping to arouse people's awareness of the problem. What are the dire consequences, though? Firstly

and mostly obviously, this causes an overflow of *tsukkomi*. Conversely, there is too little *boke*. The big problem with having too much *tsukkomi*, though, is that it makes life exhausting and suffocating, because everyone needs to guard against the extrapuntness of everyone else (55). In addition, it also causes everyone to end up fearing any deviation from norms, which can easily get one *tsukkumu*-ed (4). *Tsukkomi* obviously is not the sole reason for Japan's social formality, but according to Makita, it exacerbates people's fear of any mistake and the stigma of being *tsukkumu*-ed that is sure to ensue. This era of every single person in Japan *tsukkumu*-ing is what Makita calls the "Era of *Tsukkomi* for Every One of the Hundred Million People," which is the title of the book.

In confronting the current state of affairs, Makita proposes two solutions to his readers that can help them live through this stifling "Era of *Tsukkomi*." One of them is to switch from an "intention to play *tsukkomi*" (ツッコミ志向 *tsukkomi shikō*) to an "intention to play *boke*" (ボケ志向 *boke shikō*) (8). What are these two concepts? As has been discussed, *tsukkomi* often is not used with love for the *boke*, but rather as a tool to criticize miniscule mistakes by others, sometimes for the purpose of catharsis, sometimes for the purpose of (excessive) self-defense, among other possible reasons. Some Japanese people may reject the idea by saying that they do not play any *tsukkomi*, yet Makita argues that *tsukkomi* is even more prevalent than people consciously think: for example, commenting on a friend's uncommon actions in person, commenting on a news report and posting the comment on social network services like Twitter... All of these are signs of an "intention to play *tsukkomi*." Formally, Makita argues that the "intention to play *tsukkomi*" refers to people who "does not take any action by themselves, but

comments on, and sometimes criticizes things that other people do” (9).

Conversely, an “intention to play *boke*” is “the way in which people who subjectively take actions think.” This refers to people who ignore other people’s eyes and keep on living their lives in a way of their desire. Makita argues that these people, people who become devoted to what they love to do and become the *boke*, lead far more interesting lives than those who *tsukkomu* them (93). After all, what could be more meaningful than devoting oneself to doing one’s favorite things? Makita asks a simple question in the title of the relevant section:

「御輿に乗るか、乗っている人を写メするか」

Will you take a ride in the palanquin, or will you take out your cell phone and take pictures of people sitting in it? (93)

It is pretty obvious which option is the more interesting one. Makita hopes that more people can come to understand the value of an “intention to play *boke*”; when more people stop *tsukkomu*-ing and start playing *boke*, not only themselves, but the entire Japanese society will benefit, because there will be less criticisms flying around under the name of *tsukkomu* to suffocate people.

The second solution is to switch from a “*meta*” (メタ) style of life to a “*beta*” (ベタ) one (10). The word *meta* used by Makita here is homogenous with the English prefix “meta-”; therefore, similar to its meaning in English, here it refers to someone who takes an objective, “one-step-back” way of looking at things. Meanwhile, *beta* does not refer to the Greek letter β, but is instead a Japanese word with such meanings as “filled up without seam [as with a surface],” “sticky,” and “completely” (Shinmura Izuru Kinen Zaidan). Makita defines it as the

attitude to always “take actions and enjoy life” (10-11). In other words, *beta* is not so different from the “intention to play *boke*,” but they address different reverse sides. “Intention to play *boke*” tells people to stop thinking of *tsukkomi* all the time and take action, whereas *beta* specifically refutes the idea of only watching from a side, like those who take pictures of the people in the palanquin, and urges people to “stick to life” and enjoy it.

This is the call Makita makes to his compatriots. Interestingly, in addition to objecting to Minobe’s use of *manzai* as a way to become well-liked (discussed in Section 3.1.2), Makita is also confronting Ōta’s summary of *tsukkomi*’s social status in Japan (discussed in Section 4.1). Both men make similar observations, but Makita takes an opinion on it, asking his fellow Japanese to avoid the objectivity and suffocation of *tsukkomi*, take actions, and live the life of a happy *boke* instead.

How do we make sense of this conflict? In *tsukkomi*’s defense, this author shall say that, as we have learned, there is no doubt that *tsukkomi* possesses the power to incite laughter in people, whether it is used on a *manzai* stage, on a television show, among friends, or while designing an advertisement. Meanwhile, the limitations of *tsukkomi*, pointed out by Makita, shall not be ignored, either. When practicing *tsukkomi* in real life, we should remember Takahashi’s advice that it should never be used to hurt others, and should be used out of affection for its recipient instead. In addition, as Makita reminds us, living one’s life by taking actions is at least as enjoyable as, if not more so than, commenting on the actions of others.

Conclusions

This thesis examined *tsukkomi*, a popular concept in Japan that literally means “digging into” and is essentially an act of humorously pointing out a certain aspect of something or someone else, from various perspectives. We have learned the meaning of the word *tsukkomi* in Japanese, along with a brief introduction to basic conventions of the Japanese language; we have learned the definition of the popular concept of *tsukkomi* and its classification; we have examined the concept of *tsukkomi* as a role in the Japanese double-act stand-up comedy *manzai*, and, following a study of the history of *manzai*, have come to appreciate the roots that the popular concept of *tsukkomi* has in *manzai*; we have appreciated popular applications of *tsukkomi* on both interpersonal and mass communicational levels; finally, we have looked at Japanese thinkers who observe *tsukkomi* as a social phenomenon, and compared their opinions. Hopefully, by reading this thesis as well as going through the abundance of actual examples of *tsukkomi* compiled in it, thanks to the various sources available to us, the reader has gained solid conceptual and empirical understandings of the concept, which is the ultimate goal of this author, because most English language literature do not treat *tsukkomi* as a separate concept with social ramifications, merely mentioning it when studying Japanese humor or the stand-up comedy *manzai* in particular. This author would be privileged if this thesis has at least partially accomplished its goal, such that more people can come to appreciate the fun, the power, and the limitations of *tsukkomi*.

At least one question remains unanswered, however. Due to its limitations, this thesis has not been able to conduct a comparative study on whether or not concepts similar to *tsukkomi*

exist in other cultures. In the United States, an exact equivalent does not seem to exist; interestingly, the concept of *tsukkomi* includes a critical aspect, and critical thinking is a concept that is perhaps more deeply entrenched in the U.S. than in Japan. Perhaps the lack of an equivalent of *tsukkomi* in American English is due to the fact that critically evaluating a statement is more taken for granted in the U.S., therefore making a specially designated term less of a necessity; however, conjecture cannot become theory until further study is completed. Besides, to say that Japan “needed” such a specially designated term is to ignore the richness of culture behind *tsukkomi*; for this reason, the comparative study on *tsukkomi* between Japan and the U.S. should probably choose an argument more refined than the crude one proposed above. Meanwhile, a comparative study on *tsukkomi* between Japan and greater China could also be a potentially rewarding one. Unlike in American English, in Chinese, a word that probably started off in the 2000s purely as an internet slang, *tǔcáo* (吐槽), has assumed virtually identical meaning as the Japanese *tsukkomi*, short of the cultural roots in *manzai*, and has gained wide recognition by the people in greater China, as well as institutions like news agencies that operate there. What prompted a special word to be born for the *tsukkomi* concept in Chinese? Why has American English not coined a word for the same concept in a similar manner? Hopefully these questions will find their answers in future studies.

Bibliography

- Aiba, Akio. *Manzai nyūmon hyakka* [An Introductory Encyclopedia of *Manzai*]. Tokyo: Kōbun Shuppan, 2001. Print.
- Davis, Jessica Milner, ed. *Understanding Humor in Japan*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006. Print.
- “Double Act.” *Wikipedia*. Wikipedia Foundation, Inc., 2015. Web. 22 Mar. 2015. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Double_act>.
- EA SPORTS. “Tiger Woods 09 - Walk on Water.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 19 Aug. 2008. Web. 17 Apr. 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZ1st1Vw2kY>>.
- Ganso Bakushō Ō, Tetsuya Matsumoto, and Ichirō Ōkuma. *Manzai nyūmon: ukeru warai no tsukurikata, zenbu oshiemasu* [Introduction to *Manzai*: Teaching You Everything about How to Create Jokes That Are Well-Received]. Tokyo: Rittor Music Inc., 2008. Print.
- Inoue, Hiroshi. “Osaka’s Culture of Laughter.” Davis 27-35.
- Levinator25. “Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08 Jesus Shot.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 30 Aug. 2007. Web. 17 Apr. 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h42UeR-f8ZA>>.
- Makita, Yūji. *Ichi oku sō tsukkomi jidai* [An Era of *Tsukkomi* for Every One of the Hundred Million People]. Tokyo: Seikaisha, 2012. Print.
- Mazzarino, Paolo. *Tsukkomiryoku* [The Power and Allure of *Tsukkomi*]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2007. Print.
- Minobe, Tatsuhiro. *Naze, anata no hanashi wa tsumaranai no ka?* [Why is your conversation boring?]. Tokyo: Asa Shuppan, 2014. Print.

- Ōta, Shōichi. *Shakai wa warau - zōhoban: Boke to tsukkomi no ningen kankei* [The Society Laughs: Interpersonal Relationships Based on *Boke* and *Tsukkomi* - Augmented Edition]. Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2013. Print.
- Shinmura Izuru Kinen Zaidan. *Kōjien dairokuban DVD-ROM-ban* [*Kōjien*: Sixth Edition, DVD-ROM Version]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2008. DVD-ROM.
- Stocker, Joel F. “*Manzai*: Team Comedy in Japan’s Entertainment Industry.” Davis 51-74.
- “Subject–object–verb.” *Wikipedia*. Wikipedia Foundation, Inc., 2015. Web. 22 Mar. 2015. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subject%E2%80%93object%E2%80%93verb>>.
- Takahashi, Makoto. *Tsukkcommunication: Seikatsusha o “aikata”ni suru boke to tsukkomi no kōkokujutsu* [*Tsukkcommunication: The Art of Advertising by Treating Ordinary People as Manzai Partners*]. Tokyo: ASCII MEDIA WORKS, 2013. Print.
- Takekuro, Makiko. “Conversational Jokes in Japanese and English.” Davis 95-99.
- “Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08.” *Wikipedia*. Wikipedia Foundation, Inc., 2015. Web. 17 Apr. 2015. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger_Woods_PGA_Tour_08>.
- “Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09.” *Wikipedia*. Wikipedia Foundation, Inc., 2015. Web. 17 Apr. 2015. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger_Woods_PGA_Tour_09>.
- “*Tsukkomi*.” *NICO NICO PEDIA. Mirai Kensaku Brazil*, 2015. Web. 24 Mar. 2015. <<http://dic.nicovideo.jp/a/%E3%83%84%E3%83%83%E3%82%B3%E3%83%9F>>.