Early Modern Songs from the Pleasure Quarters:
A Study of *Nagebushi*

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In this paper I examine *nagebushi*, songs that were popular in pleasure quarters of the Edo period (1600–1868), and their texts. It is said that *nagebushi* were first sung by women entertainers in the Shimabara district of Kyoto in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Concerning the possible origins of the songs, three accounts are often cited. One points to the owner of an inn in the pleasure quarters while another refers to a blind priest who was part of the Tódóza, a mutual-aid organization for blind men; a third account points to a Tsukushi koto performer from Kyushu. Texts for 64 *nagebushi* are recorded in *Tósei Nagebushi*, a collection of songs that were popular in the Osaka Shinmachi pleasure quarters.

Words referring to love appear frequently in the texts, and their frequent repetition appears to be a characteristic of the songs. We can surmise that the women entertainers, singing to the accompaniment of shamisen, were inviting their guests into the "world of love."

In the *Tósei Nagebushi* collection, four illustrations appear along with the lyrics to the 64 songs and chords for shamisen accompaniment. They show entertainers of various classes, such as *tayû* and *tenjûn*, elaborately dressed and walking along the main street of the pleasure quarters; we also see a banquet in a luxurious brothel where *nagebushi* songs were sung. Here we come to understand that the text is a collection of songs that also served as a kind of guide to the pleasure quarters.