

The Pleasures of Knowledge

Informing Sexuality in Edo Japan

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BASIC QUESTIONS

- What did ‚sexuality‘ mean in the Edo period?
- Why were these meanings produced?

SEXUALITY

Biological vs. Social
Reproduction vs. Pleasure
Sexual behaviour vs. Sexual desire

THEORETICAL STANCE

- Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality*
- Gender and Queer Studies

Sexual mores vs. **Sexual knowledge**
[Ethnographical approach] [Humanities]
Sexual customs/ *fūzoku* vs. Discourse
Actual Behaviour vs. Models/Values

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Sex Information Literature

as part of ‚Edo’s Information Library‘ (Mary Elizabeth Berry) : boom of textbooks, manuals, encyclopedias...

Jap. *Seiten* 性典
Shikidō shinansho 色道指南書

Nakano Eizō 中野栄三 - 性文学入門
Takahashi Tetsu 高橋鉄 - 日本性典大鑑
徳川性典大鑑

3 DISCOURSES

- MEDICAL WRITINGS ON „NURTURING LIFE“ (YOJO 養生) - SEXUALITY AND HEALTH
- POPULAR SEX GUIDES – SEXUALITY AND PLEASURE
- SEX INFORMATION LITERATURE FOR WOMEN - SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Progress

Sexuality and Health

Yōjō 養生

- Health and lifestyle guides
- Regulation of everyday activities (eating, drinking, sleeping, sex...)
- Confucian didacticism
- Aimed at broad reading public

Works

Figures: ca. 120 throughout the period (Takizawa)

延寿撮要	曲真瀬玄朔	(1599)
養生主論	名古屋玄医	(1683)
養生訓	貝原益軒	(1713)
老人養草	香月牛山	(1716)
養生訓	三浦梅園	(1760s)
長命衛生論	本井子承	(1813)
淫事戒	高井伴党	(1815)
養生隨筆	河合元頌	(1827)
蘭説養生録	高野長英訳	(1827)
老の教	松平定信	(1829)
道三翁養生物語	曲真瀬道三	(1832 print, early 17th cent.)
養生要論	鈴木朗	(1834)
養生訣	平野重誠	(1835)
養生弁	水野義尚	(1842)
養生法	松本良順	(1864)

Results – A Very Brief Q & A

1. Medical views on sexuality

Q: How was sexuality thought to affect the body in Edo-period medicine?

A: Sexuality was generally seen as a loss of the limited life energy that people received at birth. Sexual fluids were considered to be a form of life-giving substance that was lost during intercourse.

2. The model of sexual behaviour in writings on Nurturing Life

Q: Based on this, what was the medical advice doctors gave people on how to lead their sex lives?

A: Generally sexual moderation was the norm of sexual behaviour recommended in manuals on Nurturing Life. Complete abstinence, *coitus interruptus* and especially sexual excess, were seen as harmful to the body.

3. Theory and Practice

Q: Was this a wide-spread model? To which extent did it pervade society? Were people actually following this advice?

- Matsudaira Sadanobu in *Shugyōroku* 修行録

As far as intercourse is concerned, I forsook ejaculation for about one and a half years when I was 30. After that I felt a slight improvement in my health and physical stamina, and ejaculated twice a month. From the time I was approaching 50, I ejaculated 5 or 6 times a year. From the start, even in my younger years, I refrained from intercourse (不淫 *fuin*) during the coldest and hottest days of the year.

- Yamamoto Tsunetomo in *Hagakure* 葉隠

Illnesses and the like become serious because of one's feelings. I was born when my father was seventy-one years old and was hence a rather sickly child. But because I have had the great desire to be of use even in old age, when the chance came I improved my health and haven't been sick since. And I have abstained from sex and have consistently taken moxa cautery. There are things I feel that have definitely had effect.

- Saikaku – An example from popular literature
Kōshoku ichidai otoko, as they are sailing off towards the Island of Women:

We may die of sexual excess and be buried there, but what of it? All of us here happened to be born to live our whole lives without ties or families. Really, what more could we ask for?

譬えば腎虚してその土となるべきこと、たまたま一代男に生まれての、其れこそ願ひの道なれ