

**Great Pleasures for Women and
Their Treasure Boxes
& Love Letters and a River
of Erect Precepts for Women**

Two Erotic Parodies of 18th-Century
Japanese Conduct Books

Onna dairaku takara-beki, c. mid-1750s
Onna shimegawa oeshi-bumi, c. 1768

by Tsukioka Settei

Introduced and Translated by

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an episodic festschrift for Howard Hibbett

Japanese literature
of the Edo period (1600-1868)
rendered into English
by his former students
of which this is
the nineteenth volume

INTRODUCTION

The publication of illustrated erotic books (*kōshoku-bon*, *shunpon*, *ehon*, *enpon*, *makura-ehon*, *warai-e*) was extensive in 18th and 19th-century Japan, with estimates today of well over 1000 titles.¹ We have, however, as yet little research on this vast corpus that until the 1990s had disappeared from both popular and scholarly memory, and what we do have is mostly focused on colour-printed books produced in Edo from the late 18th century onwards. The two texts translated here are sections from two books published in Osaka. They are erotic versions of didactic conduct books (*ōraimono*) for women's moral, practical and aesthetic education. The

¹ Shirakura Yoshihiko, *E-iri shunga ehon mokuroku*, Heibonsha, 2007.

passages parodied are the core moral treatises in two of these popular conduct books, which continue to be cited by social historians when discussing the situation of women in the Edo period. It is remarkable that there are never any references in scholarly writing to the parodies of these seminal texts.

Parody (*mojiri*) and satire (*fūshi*) are common elements of popular literature of the Edo period. Such texts are often very funny, but it would be wrong to think of the parodies here as just being light fun or of making jest of a serious text, the more common view of what a 'parody' is. It is more accurate, I think, to see the many erotic books (*shunpon*) as forming a parallel discourse in relation to other non-explicitly erotic genres. We can argue, I believe, that these books must be taken 'seriously' if we are to understand the complexity of public and private life in the Edo period.

Shunpon were not, as might be imagined, by any means esoteric or exotic. Erotic books circulated widely as popular items in the inventory of itinerant lending library (*kashi-hon'ya*) agents, who peddled their wares at private homes where

women usually took the orders.² Lending libraries were not prosecuted for distributing *shunga*. These parody texts are not simply making fun of the Confucian moral texts; they present an alternative view of conjugal relations in Tokugawa Japan, a parallel discourse in relation to the didactic texts.

Bakufu government censorship of erotic books began in earnest in 1722 as part of the Kyōhō Reforms. The censorship edict, in fact, did not stop production for long, but it did have the consequence that *shunpon* thereafter were printed without the name of the author, artist or publisher, or the date. Recent work has given us some firm attributions for artists, but we have less knowledge of who wrote the texts.

The 1750s-1780s saw the publication of several erotic versions of women's textbooks. The most important of these are attributed to the major Osaka artist Tsukioka Settei 月岡雪鼎 (1726-1786). We do not yet know whether he also wrote the texts or collaborated with others. It was common for illustrators and writers to collaborate.

² Nagatomo Chiyoji, 'Shunpon no dokusho', *Bungaku*, 10.3 1999, pp. 74-82.

Nishikawa Sukenobu (1671-1750) and Ejima Kiseki (1666-1735) are known to have collaborated on *shunpon*. Settei's erotic versions are the same size, format and style of the original works, and cleverly parody them in great detail, both the texts and illustrations, including the poems, to create fascinating books. Two Settei masterpieces in this genre are listed below following the original they parody:

Onna daigaku takara bako 『女大学宝箱』

(The Treasure Chest of Great Learning for Women, 1716, 1751)

Onna dairaku takara-beki 『女大楽宝開』

(Great Pleasures for Women and their Treasure Boxes, c. mid-1750s)

Onna imagawa oshie-bumi 『女今川おしへ文』

(The Imagawa Admonitions for Women and Letters for Teaching, 1768)

Onna shimegawa oeshi-bumi 『女令川おへし文』

(Love Letters and a River of Erect Precepts for Women, c. 1768)

Other erotic parodies thought to be illustrated by Settei are:

Onna teikin gejo bunko 『女庭訓下所文庫』
(Womanly Virtue and a Library on the Private
Parts, 1768)

Bidō nichiya johōki: 『艶道日夜女宝記』
(a parody of a popular medical text, late 1760s)

Tōsei minyō: konrei hiji-bukuro 『当世民用 婚礼秘事袋』
(A Bag of Secret Tricks about Marriage for
Everyone in Modern Times, c. 1770)

These few texts alone form a considerable alternative discourse on sexuality in the Edo period.

The Treasure Chest of Great Learning for Women was first published in Osaka in 1716, with further editions (new blocks) reissued regularly every twenty years or so into the Meiji period. The text was attributed to the Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekiken (1630-1714), but is considered today to be a compilation of the publisher from various sources. It is hard to overemphasize how important this text has been from the Edo period to modern times. It has continued to be essential for scholars, both social historians who use it to imagine women's lives in the Edo era, and

feminists who use it as a whipping block to condemn the patriarchal society it represents. Basil Hall Chamberlain recognized its significance and translated the key moral treatise section as early as 1878 in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (New Series, Vol. 10), which was included with some changes in his *Things Japanese* in 1890. The parody *Great Pleasures for Women and their Treasure Boxes* is thought to have been published in the 1750s after the second edition of *Great Learning for Women* was released. The text is subversive in the sense of making the conjugal pair the most important element of a household. Parents and parents-in-laws, who are prominent in the didactic original, are virtually absent. The text challenges the notion, still far too commonly held among historians, that in the Edo period sex among married couples was only for procreation, and that only men experienced sexual pleasure, not at home but in the brothel quarters.

The Imagawa Admonitions for Women and Letters for Teaching was published in 1768 in Osaka, but the core moral treatise section 'Imagawa Admonitions for Women' (*Onna Imagawa*) was first published in the late 17th century and was included in numerous didactic books for women

thereafter. Chamberlain also translated this text in 1878 in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (New Series, Vol. 10). It is thought that the erotic version *Love Letters and a River of Erect Precepts for Women* was published in tandem with or soon after the original.

After the translations of the erotic versions, I have included Chamberlain's translations (with some changes) of the original texts for reference. His high Victorian language suits the tone of the Confucian conduct books. The erotic (and original) texts are found in: Kōzu Shujin, ed., *Onna dairaku takara-beki, Onna daigaku takara-bako*, Tokyo, Taihei Shooku, 1998; and C. Andrew Gerstle, *Onna shimegawa oeshi-bumi*, (Kinsei Enpon Shiryō Shūsei, vol. IV) International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, 2007.