

Lecture 05: The Idea of the Floating World

I. Definitions

- a. *ukiyo* (浮世) = “floating world”
derived from Buddhist metaphor for the impermanence of life to denote the world of (momentary) pleasures. What originally signified a sadness of impermanence (captured in the homonym *ukiyo* meaning “sorrowful world”) was turned to valorize capturing and enjoying in the moment what pleasures one can within the ephemeral material world.
- b. The contrasted meanings as captured by Asai Ryô's intro to *Ukiyo monogatari* (1666).
Look at passage.

2. Conditions of possibility

- a. Less regard for Buddhism and its sense of *ukiyo*?
- b. The strictures of Confucian-based social classes (from which to escape)
- c. 𠄎 among *chônin*. As rice-brokers, merchants, and moneylenders, they acquire the requisite wealth.
- d. An established cultural establishment to emulate and to exceed
- e. A fashion system
- f. Gendered participation

3. Coming of age: The Genroku Period (1688-1704; 1680-1740)

- a. See chapter I of *The Floating World in Japanese Fiction*.
- b. Kyoto-Osaka, then Edo excels. As a new city of fast growth, it is primed to become the haven for sites of the floating world.
- c. The “Genroku spirit” acc. to Howard Hibbett (p. 10): “Its essence was an unreflective enjoyment of the moment—a moment valued for present pleasure, but to be savored with discrimination.”
- d. Discrimination = connoisseurship & etiquette = a new set of social strictures