# Style and function of female images in prints by Keisai Eisen (1790–1848) ideals of beauty and gender in the Late Edo Period consumer society

Takemura, S.

# Chapter Two

# Perceptions of Women in Edo History: The Ideal and the Reality

## The Historical Setting

In the last chapter, we learned from Eisen's 1833 autobiographical *Mumei-ō zuihitsu* that he takes great pride in his reputation as a leading *ukiyo-e* designers who could boast that "demand for his images was greatest during the Bunka and Bunsei eras [1804–1830]" and who, along with Hokusai, "have their works published in the three metropolitan cities [of Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto]." He promoted himself in this as an expert on the demimonde who was an owner of houses of ill-repute. This insider knowledge helped him become a *bijin-ga* specialist who, "excelled at the depiction of courtesans in the green pavilions [Yoshiwara]" with a "manner of portraying the style of customs and manners specific to each brothel does not resemble [portrayals of] the antics of actors." Perhaps due in part to unabashed self-branding and the desire that he be regarded as a trendy and eccentric artist who is blasé about living outside the law and all too familiar with women of the demimonde, a number of *ukiyo-e* researchers have dismissive of Eisen's *bijin-ga*. Early modern scholars apparently classified his *bijin-ga* images as "decadent" due to his deviant lifestyle and this label has reminded mostly unchallenged up to now. The historical context of the depicted images, the purpose or function of the images, and the social, economic, and cultural environment under which the images were made has not been investigated. This chapter will attempt to provide some of that context, focusing on the social roles and lifestyles of commoner women who became both subject and object of Eisen's *bijin-ga.* Toward this end, I will bring into play the larger question of the social perceptions and realities of being female during the Edo period.

The Edo period (1603–1868) was marked by a long and prosperous peace without the wars and social upheaval that had plagued the country during the previous Sengoku period (ca. 1467–ca. 1600). The long peace was ruled by the Tokugawa shogunate, established by Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1543–1616), who was designated the country's top political authority or *shogun* with the title *Seii taishōgun* 征夷大将軍 (barbarian-quelling generalissimo) by the imperial court in 1603. Ieyasu established his headquarters, the *bakufu*, in the new capital of Edo. The Tokugawa family maintain their grip as the ruling shogunate for the next 250-odd years. Throughout its rule, the Tokugawa sought to establish and maintain a firm hierarchical social order in line with the teachings of Neo-Confucianism. Guided by Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583–1657), the teachings of Neo-Confucianism became the basis for government. Various Confucian texts known as the *shisho gokyō* 四書五経 (Ch. *Sishu Wujing*, Four Books and Five Classics), including the *Daigaku* 大学 (Ch. *Daxue*, Great Learning), Chūyō 中庸 (Ch. *Zhongyong*, Doctrine of the Mean), *Rongo* 論語 (Ch. *Lunyu*, Analects) and *Mōshi* 孟子 (Ch. *Mengzi*, Book of Mencius), which illuminate the core value and belief systems of Confucianism, were published and recommended for study by the government. The teachings spread even to commoners due to the development of commercial publication and distribution routes in the expanding economy and the natural aspiration toward learning and higher culture. Books of Neo-Confucian teaching were also published for women to study and emulate including *Onna shisho* 女四書 ( Ch. *Nü shishu*, Four Books for Women). A prime example was the popular and influential booklet, *Onna daigaku* 女大学 (Great Learning for Women) that I shall discuss in greater detail later in this chapter.

The *bakufu* also put into place a strict patriarchal family system as a way of regulating society for effective and lasting rule. It was based on Neo-Confucian tenets and aimed to maintain order and stability of all families in the realm, regardless of class. As Sugano

Noriko points out, the ruling *bakufu* emphasized the importance of filial piety to parents and of loyalty to the samurai class from commoners. Sugawara argues that under the patriarchal system, women were regarded as dependents of male family members, and often described as *musume* 娘 (daughters).[80] The creation of a male-dominated society was also partly influenced by Buddhism, and although the investigation of the position of women in Buddhism is beyond the scope of this study, it should be noted that certain Buddhist sects saw women as inferior to men. For instance, according to Ushiyama Yoshiyuki, the *Hokekyō* 法華経 (Ch. *Fuhua jing*, Lotus Sutra), one of the seminal texts in Mahayana Buddhism, states that women are harmful and impure. For that reason they cannot be true followers of Buddha.[81] The point here is that the subjugated social position of women had a long history in Japan before the advent of the Edo period.

Under the patriarchal social system, women were supposed to be under the male family head's control and decisions. In other words, a woman's life and fate was in the hands of a male family head. The Tokugawa government allowed male family heads to sell daughters into licensed brothels when there was a financial emergency in the household. The first licenced quarter in Yoshiwara was established, in the northwestern outskirts of Edo in 1617. It was in this manner that poor commoner girls, in the name of filial piety, got sold into the sex trade and landed near the bottom of society. Such girls were often praised as filial daughters for saving their impoverished families, but this must have been a small comfort for the unfortunate girls, many of whom were sold into the sex trade as young as seven to ten years of age. The luckier ones were often apprenticed to high-ranking courtesans in the legal

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[80] Sugawara Noriko, "Bakuhan kenryoku to josei 幕藩権力と女性," Kinsei joseishi kenkyūkai 近世女性史研究会編, comp. *Ronshū kinsei joseishi* 論集近世女性史 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1986), 12-13.

[81] Ushiyama Yoshiyuki 牛山佳幸, "Josei to shūkyō" 女性と宗教, in *Shiryō ni miru Nihon josei no ayumi* 資料にみる日本女性の歩み, ed. Sōgō Joseishi Kenkyūkai 総合女性史研究会 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2000), 69.

district of Yoshiwara, where they might acquire skills in the performing arts or even inherit the rank of their mentors. The less lucky girls sometimes ended up as adopted daughters in "good" homes, only to be later sold into brothels by their foster parents for a huge profit. Or they were sold to unlicensed quarters as low-class prostitutes with few prospects and protections.

By the time of Eisen in the late Edo, an increasing number of women became involved in prostitution outside the designated quarters that were licensed by the government. This included higher-level sex workers like skilled geisha who periodically engaged in prostitution as a side business in order to make ends meet or to accrue extra earnings. This appears to have been a cause of concern for male elites, who viewed the unregulated lower-class districts with alarm (being off the books, they generated no tax revenue) and the free-lance sex workers as sources of social and moral corruption. As we shall see, it is the images of these commoner women and the environment in which that they lived and worked that are reflected in the "decadent" prints of Eisen.

Furthermore, Edo-period society was strictly controlled by a system of customs and regulations that were intended to promote and maintain public order under the ruling samurai or warrior class. The ruling samurai who constituted the Neo-Confucian Tokugawa regime divided society into four basic social classes: warriors (*shi* 士), farmers (*nō* 農), artisans (*kō* 工), and merchants (*shō* 商). Asao Naohiro suggests that in practice, this meant that the three occupational categories of farmers, artisans, and merchants became subjects of the shogunate and engaged in production, while warriors became the ruling class who enjoyed the fruits of their labor.[82] Ooms argues that this social system was meant to validate, legitimize, and

[82] Asao Naohiro 朝尾直弘, "Kinsei no mibun to sono henyō" 近世の身分とその変容, in *Mibun to kakushiki Nihon no kinsei 7* 身分と格式,日本の近世 7 (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1992), 15.

reinforce the Tokugawa's dominant position. They owned the weapons and thus the power to subjugate. As the ruling class, the samurai maintained order and set a high moral standard for commoners to follow that was based on a mix of Shinto, Neo-Confucianist, and Buddhist beliefs.[83]

Fukaya Katsumi explains that the imperial family, aristocrats, as well as Shintō and Buddhist clergy, remained outside this system and were entitled to privilege, protection, and financial support from the warrior class. There were also outcasts, including the *eta* 穢多 (social pariahs) and *hinin* 非人 (literally, "non-humans"), who were engaged in various types of ritually polluting work including dealing with dead bodies, the slaughtering of animals, leatherwork, the execution of criminals, physical labor, and so on.[84] Samuel L. Leiter suggests that kabuki actors and other types of street entertainers, collectively called *kawaramono* (literally, "people living on dry riverbed"), belong to the *hinin* group and also faced discrimination during the Edo period despite their tremendous appeal among the populace.[85] This is noteworthy because by late eighteenth century, so-called *hinin* like the kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjūrō V 五代市川團十郎 (1741–1806) had achieved extreme popularity and admiration through all social classes. Many upper-middle class townswomen (*chōnin*) took pains to imitate the fashion, makeup, and hairstyles of popular *onnagata* actors 女形 (female impersonators), which points to a culture in flux and a fissure in the ideal social hierarchy expounded by the Tokugawa. In other words, the world became upside down by the late Edo period.

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[83] Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology,* 288.
[84] Fukaya Katsumi 深谷勝己, *Taikei nihon no rekishi 9: Shi nō kō shō no yo* 大系日本の歴史 9 : 士農工商の世 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1988), vol. 337–40.
[85] Samuel L. Leiter, *Kabuki Encyclopedia An English-Language Adaptation of Kabuki Jiten,* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1979), 184–185.

Under the patriarchal system, male household heads commonly had the right and power to maintain the family line; younger males of the household were subordinate to the head under the Tokugawa social system.[86] However, it should be pointed out that a household can only have a head if the family owned a house, land, and other types of material assets. In other words, without any assets, it is assumed that there was no point to worry about maintaining the family line as there was no property to hand down. Such households lived from day- to- day, never knowing the source of the next meal or shelter. Although in the Tokugawa social system, women were subordinate to men and regarded as inconsequential, there were some exceptions. Some historians of Japanese women's history such as Wakita Osamu and Miyashita Michiko have demonstrated that in relatively affluent merchant and farmer families, the wives, together with their husbands, often took charge of servants and all nature of domestic affairs,[87] and therefore possessed a degree of power. Women could also head households if there were no male successors.[88] Moreover, some commoner women gained freedom after retiring from their roles as wife and mother, as in the case of Numano Mine 沼野峯 (1771–1817). Mine was the wife of a wealthy merchant in Wakayama Prefecture. She was literate and left a diary, the *Nitchiroku* 日知録, in which she recorded the daily activities and special events that took place in her family.[89] In the diary, Mine enjoys male pursuits like reading best-sellers after dinner and composing classical poems. We will

[86] Wakita Osamu 脇田修, "Bakuhan taisei to josei"幕藩体制と女性, in *Nihon Joseishi kan 3 Kinsei* 日本女性史巻３近世,ed. Joseishi sōgō kenkyūkai 女性史総合研究会 (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppan, 1982), 18.
[87] Miyashita Michiko 宮下美智子, "Nōson ni okeru kazoku to kon'in" 農村における家族と婚姻, in *Nihon joseishi 3* 日本女性史巻３近世,ed. Joseishi Sōgō Kenkyūkai 女性史総合研究会 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppan, 1982), 39.
[88] Wakita, "Bakuhan taisei to josei," 18.
[89] Numano Mine 沼野みね, *Nitchiroku* 日知録 (1791-1825). Reprinted in *Wakayama-shi shi 2 kinsei* 和歌山市史 [History of Wakayama City 2], comp. Wakayama-shi shi hensan iinkai 和歌山市史編纂委員会 (Wakayama: Wakayama-shi, 1989).

return to Mine's story later in this chapter. It can be conjectured from this that women's social roles were not monolithic. It varied according to the family's economic status, social rank, age, and time within the Edo period as well as the districts where they resided. As argued by Yabuta, in reality, many women were chosen or destined to be family heads, indicating they were valued enough for their personal abilities to be put on equal footing as male successors to the family.[90]

However, in general, lower-class commoner women needed a male household head to represent her interests in public and to assume responsibility for her welfare. Stanley suggests that the shogunate viewed households as microcosms of the state and a strict hierarchy of interpersonal roles was maintained. A wife's loyalty to her husband and a daughter's filial piety mirrored the subject's obedience to his ruler.[91] Although Japanese society before the Edo period had also been male-dominated, the authority of husbands and fathers over their female family members was reaffirmed and legitimized by the Tokugawa govenment.[92] All family members, younger males included, had to obey the male household head. In return, a male household head was expected to be benevolent, to protect, and to provide for all family members in exchange for their absolute loyalty and obedience to him.[93] Hence, each person's duties and rights were set by gender and seniority.

Within the patriarchal system, women were expected to contribute to the maintenance of the family and assigned diverse work tasks, which varied over the course of the Edo period

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[90] See YabutaYutaka 薮田貫, "*Sōka to josei"* 商家と女性,in *Mibun no naka no josei 4* 身分の中の女性, ed.Yabuta Yutaka and Keiko Yanagiya (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2010), 8-33. Nishitani Saku (b.1842) in Kawachi is known to have succeed to the family business and managed it as head of house.

[91] Amy Stanley, *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2012), 54.

[92] Nagano Hiroko 長野弘子, "Bakuhan hō to josei" 幕藩法と女性, in *Nihon Joseishi* kan 3 Kinsei 日本女性史巻３近世,ed. Joseishi sōgō kenkyūkai 女性史総合研究会 (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppan, 1982), 163–191. See also Stanley, *Selling Women*, 54.

[93] Stanley, *Selling Women,* 54.

depending on the family's social class, economical situation, and circumstance. In peasant families living in extreme poverty, for instance, wives and daughters were expected to help out in the fields in addition to household chores. As argued by Stanley, for women of this class who lived in extreme poverty, the easiest way for her to help her family was to earn money through the sale of her sex. It was not uncommon for impoverished families to sell their daughters to brothels for large sums of money. Selling women as commodities was actually allowed by the government if done in the disguise of indentured service. Girls from impoverished families had no rights to reject the combined patriarchal force of family and government to be sold like property into sex work that often had to be performed under horrible conditions. They had no choice but to work as sex slaves living outside of the normal social order. That they were paradoxically considered filial daughters was a small comfort. Later in the chapter we will discuss the Tokugawa's role in licensing legal brothel quarters in Edo (1617), Kyoto (1640) and Osaka (1624–1644) at the start of its founding as a new government. Also from the start, the Tokugawa government viewed lower-class girls as unfortunate commodities that could be traded and sold like property by their male owners for profit. Truth be told, the government as patriarchal overlord also gain financially from this scheme of not enfranchising women as it collected tax revenue from the girls, as long as they labored in licensed brothels and did not go astray to free-lance in unlicensed houses of ill repute.

By the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, many commoner women, with sex workers at the forefront, did go astray and became freer of male dominance through the sheer power of earning money outside the home in Edo's expanding economy.[94] This new-found

[94] A number of scholars have reported on Edo's expanding economy and the jobs it provided, particularly for women. See Stanley, *Selling Women.*; Sugano Noriko 菅野則子, "*Kakaa denka*" かかあ天下, in *Nihon joseishi* 日本女性史, edited by Wakita Haruko 脇田晴子, Hayashi Reiko 林玲子, and Nagahara Kazuko 永原和子 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987).; Nagano Hiroko 長野弘子, "Josei no yakuwari to shosō" 農村女性における女性の

financial independence worried many upstanding male members of society who felt that commoner women had become social deviants because their economic advancements embolden them to take on social and cultural privileges that ideally had been accorded only to male members of society. Although the demand for female workers was largely due to the developing cash economy and the majority of working women were working to help support their families, as argued by such scholars as Sugawara and Stanley, they were still criticized as a source of moral corruption or greed due to their new, indeed revolutionary, role as producers and sometimes main breadwinners for their families. Such women often needed to be literate to navigate the outside world and in the next section we will discuss a new social development in the Edo period— literacy for commoner women and the new opportunities it afforded them in the new environment of an expanding economy.

New Environment, Opportunities and Literacy for Women

The expansion of the Edo economy brought such unprecedented changes to traditional society that by the late eighteenth century some members of the ruling elite started regarding it -as a corrupted period that needed reform and new governance to meet the new challenges. Due to the promotion of commerce by edicts enacted by the senior councilor Tanuma Okitsugu 田沼意次 (1719–1788) and his son Tanuma Okitomo 田沼意知 (1749–1784),

役割と諸相. In *Nihon josei seikatsushi dai san kan kinsei* 日本女性生活史第 3 巻近世, (Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1990).；Yabuta Yutaka 薮田貫, *Joseishi to shiteno kinsei* 女性史としての近世.（Tokyo: Azekura shobō. 1996).; Yokota Fuyuhiko 横田冬彦 "*Onna daigaku saikō*" 女大学再考, in *Jendā no Nihonshi* ジェンダーの日本史, ed. Wakita Haruko 脇田晴子 and S.B. Hanley (Tokyo: Tokyo University, 1995).; Usami Misako 宇佐美ミサ子, *Shukuba to meshimori onna* 宿場と飯盛女. (Tokyo: Dōseisha, 2000).

which included the cultivation of new land and foreign trade with China, Korea, and Europe through designated ports, some merchants accumulated enormous wealth and a degree of social power. They did this at the expense of the lower ranks of samurai who became economically worse off than middle-class merchant and artisan *chōnin*.[95] The economic system of the Tokugawa was based on fixed rice stipends for samurai, which was not as fluid as currency in the cash economy under which merchants and artisans operated. A considerable number of samurai in the city of Edo had to rely on wealthy money-lenders (*fudasashi* 札差) to exchange their rice stipends for the cash needed to purchase food and other daily necessities. As the financial power of the merchant class surpassed that of the ruling warrior class, society no longer resembled the ideal envisioned and put into place in the early days of Tokugawa rule.

Between 1550 and 1700, Japan became one of the most urbanized societies in the world due to the development of cash economy. Reported by Nobuhiko Nakai and Janes L. McClain, by the year 1700, four new Japanese communities (Edo, Osaka, Kyoto, and Kanazawa) had populations that exceeded 100,000 residents, of which Edo had a population of about one million and Osaka close to 400,0000 with approximately five to seven percent of all Japanese living in those large cities. In comparison, only two percent of the total population of Europe lived in urban areas. Only the Netherlands and England-Wales had cities that surpassed Japan in urban concentrations. Edo had become the largest city in the world by the end of the seventeenth century, and the populations of Osaka and Kyoto approached those of London and Paris, the two largest cities in Europe.[96]

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[95] Marius B Jansen, "Japan in the early Nineteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, ed. Marius B Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), vol. 5: 50.
[96] Nobuhiko Nakai and James L. McClain, "Commercial Changes and Urban Growth in Early Modern Japan," in *The Cambridge History of Japan,* ed. John Whitney Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) vol. 4: 519–595.

The urbanization of Edo was spurred by the *sankin kōtai* 参勤交代 (alternate-year residence system) that the first shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, placed on *daimyō*, or subordinate lords of each domain in his realm. The wives and families of *daimyō* were also required to live in Edo as hostages of the shogun, and this brought a huge retinue of retainers and servants as well as merchants into the city to provide the upper-class goods and services needed to ensure a pleasant stay in the capital city. Accordingly, the expanded urban consumption had a ripple effect that stimulated the growth of a market economy throughout Japan. The increased demand for goods and foods were met by local artisans and provincial farmers who increased their growing yields. Advancements in agricultural techonology, in fertilization, in farming tools, and irrigation systems also greatly improved yields. Moreover, investments in important infrastructure such as the east-west Tōkaidō road, meant that more goods (cotton, silk, ramp seed, rice, fruits, and vegetables) could be sold in urban area such as Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto on a larger scale and at a faster rate. Business travel increased between rural areas and cities for the trade of goods and the exchange of mercantile ideas and culture. The local economy at each post or way station and each farming village shared in the flourishing country-wide economy and culture. Under this new environment, lower-class commoner women were in demand as farm hands in rural areas and as shop girls, maids, cooks, washerwomen, nannies, and hairdressers in towns and cities.[97]

Japan's market economy continued to boom into the early nineteenth century. Seeing this flourishing economy, a growing number of urban *chōnin* and some farmers took the opportunity to start businesses or to develop cottage industries to increase their livelihoods. The rise in small-scale retail and cottage industries in agricultural communities as well as urban centers lead to increase demand for laborers to work in the new enterprises. The

[97] Toshio Furushima and Janes L. McClain, "The Village and Agriculture during the Edo Period." In *The Cambridge History of Japan,* ed. John Whitney Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), vol. 4: 478–518. Doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521223553.011.

demand for wage workers provided new employment prospects for commoners throughout the country, particularly for women, as their labor was less costly than that of men.[98] More and more women started working outside the home, leading to a critical mass of women wage earners for the first time in Japanese society. Townsmen started businesses like umbrella making, confectionary shops, *geta* 下駄 (sandal or clog) shops, medicine shops, tea shops, and restaurants. Publishing houses and book shops proliferated. Successful writers and publishers began side businesses selling tobacco, smoking accessories, women's cosmetics, and *ukiyo-e* prints. Such small business employed both male and female workers. In the countryside, farmers like the Ishikawa family in Shinshū 信州 (present-day Nagano Prefecture) developed cottage industries making soy sauce and sake, which employed a half dozen male and one female worker. A closer-in farming family in Bushū 武州 (a part of present-day Tokyo, Saitama, and Kanagawa prefectures) expanded into sericulture, silk reeling, and the manufacture of coal briquettes.

In order to obtain jobs in some retail and service industries, basic reading and math skills became essential. The literacy women had to acquire to perform their job duties lead to a rise of the general educational level of females, followed by a corresponding elevation in the social and economic standing of commoner women by late Edo times. Bit by bit, commoner women were working outside the home, becoming more independent and acquiring income of their own. Bit by bit, as commoner women became better educated, their chances for better jobs and marriages increased, as we shall explore below.

In the later Edo, more ordinary commoners were sending their sons and daughters to schools or into apprenticeships, as literacy and skills would enable them to secure jobs and

[98] Nobuhiko Nakai, "Commercial Change and Urban Growth in Early Modern Japan," in *The Cambridge History of Japan,* ed. John Whitney Hall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), vol.4: 579.

earn more money in a high-value trade or craft. By the end of the eighteenth century, the number of *terakoya* 寺子屋 (private elementary schools) for commoners was on the increase throughout Japan. Every administrative block of the city of Edo had several *terakoya*.[99] Urban of the middle- and lower- classes as well as some peasant children were able to acquire basic literacy and mathematical skills. The *Nōjutsu kanseiki* 農術鑑正記 (Models of Agricultural Technology) of 1723 by Sunagawa Yasui 砂川野水 (act. 18th century) reports that "When farming is not [in the] busy [season], children should learn to read and write. Without learning, they are no better than animals."[100] A certain level of education was thus considered necessary even for the lower social classes. Even commoner women began to acquire some literacy and math skills. With more financial prospects and stability, women of the commoner class, especially those living in urban areas where there were opportunities to earn wages, became a new market for publishers of popular books to target.

According to Peter Kornicki, the figures commonly cited for literacy rates in the early 1870s are 40% for males and 15% for females. These estimates may be low, as they fail to take into account other educational systems like private apprenticeships where basic reading and math were taught as part of the training process. Kornicki's figures also do not account for variations between urban and rural areas or for data collected in early the Meiji period (1868–1912), when the government enforced a new education system.[101] Indeed, Kornicki

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[99] Hachijūkyūsai rōfu 八十九歳老父, *Asukagawa* 飛鳥川 (1810). Reprinted in *Shin enseki jisshu* 新燕石十種, ed. Kokusho Kankōkai 国書刊行会 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1913), vol.1: 9.

[100] Sunagawa Yasui 砂川野水, *Nōjutsu kanseiki* 農術鑑正記 (1724). Quoted in Hayashi Reiko 林玲子, "Shomin josei no kyōiku" 庶民女性の教育, in *Nihon joseishi* 日本女性史, ed. Wakita Haruko 脇田晴子, Hayashi Reiko 林玲子, and Nagahara Kazuko 永原和子 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987), 150.

[101] Peter F. Kornicki, *The Book in Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 275. See also his "Women, education, and literacy," in *The Female as Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan*, ed. P. F. Kornicki, Mara Patessio, and G. G. Rowley, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Japanese Studies, 2010.

suggests that since literacy was more useful in urban areas for employment, for leisure activities, and for occasions requiring the reading of written laws and rules, male literacy in cities like Edo was much higher than 40% and the female literacy rate was not much behind. However, literacy in rural area lagged far behind that of cities.[102] A test given to measure the literacy level of 882 males in the rural village of Tokiwa 常盤 in Nagano in the year 1881 showed that as many as 312 males could read and write nothing and that a further 363 could only write their names and addresses. The rest, just 207 males or 23% of the sample, had some degree of literacy. Kornicki concludes that rural women's literacy level was even lower, although the test was never conducted for women.[103] The test clearly shows lower literacy rates in rural areas as recent as the end of the nineteenth century.

However, literacy rates varied even in rural areas and there are instances of highly literate women living and working in the provinces. For instance, there is the case of Tamura Kajiko 田村梶子(1785–1862) in Kiryū 桐生, Jōshū province 上州 (present-day Nagano Prefecture), who managed the Shōseidō school 松声堂 with over one hundred students, both boys and girls. She had been in service as an attendant in the women's quarters (*ōoku* 大奥) of the shōgun's castle in Edo from the age of seventeen, but returned to her hometown when she was thirty-one to marry. She subsequently inherited the family business and opened her school.[104]

The aforementioned merchant's widow Numano Mine, is another case in point. She inherited a pawn shop in provincial Wakayama from her husband who had been the sixth shop head and a prominent town leader. Mine's diary, the *Nitchiroku*, records two years of her life, from the fourteenth day of the fourth month in 1791 to the end of that year and from

[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Wakita Haruko 脇田晴子, Hayashi Reiko 林玲子, and Nagahara Kazuko 永原和子, eds. *Nihon joseishi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987), 153.

the first day of the eighth month of 1825 to the end of that year. From her writings we learned that she studied *waka* with Motoori Ōhira 本居大平 (1756–1833), a *kokugaku* 国学 (national learning) scholar and a disciple of the more eminent Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801). She also records that she read the most popular book (*yomihon*) of her time, the *Suikoden* 水滸伝, along with other popular titles after dinner.[105] Even in rural areas, women from wealthy families could be well educated.

In urban areas, many middle- and lower- class commoner women worked as wage earners or as indentured servants to support their families. Urban women of families in retail or trade acquired basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Being literate was a significant advantage in finding good marriage partners given the importance of women's labor in retail businesses.[106] A rising number of urban commoner women, even of the lower class, were therefore eager to acquire some level of education. Ten percent of the 498 *terakoya* schools in the city of Edo employed female teachers.[107] This is also evidence that girls attended *terakoya*, since female teachers typically taught female students.[108]

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[105] Numano Mine 沼野みね, *Nitchiroku* 日知録 (1791-1825). Reprinted in *Wakayama shi-shi 2 & 5: Kinsei shiruō 1* 和歌山市史二 &五: 近世資料一, comp. Wakayama-shi shi hensan iinkai 和歌山市史編纂委員会 (Wakayama: Wakayama-shi, 1989 & 1975). Also see Makita Rieko 牧田りゑ子, "Machiya josei no seikatsu" 町家女性の生活. In *Shiryō ni miru nishon josei no ayumi* 史料にみる日本女性のあゆみ, comp. Sōgō joseishi kenkyūkai 総合女性史研究会 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2000), 110–111.

[106] Makita, *Machiya josei no seikatsu*, 273. Also see Umehara Tōru 梅原徹, *Kinsei no gakkō to kyōiku* 近世の学校と教育 (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1988).

[107] The number is from the *Nihon kyōikushi shiryō* 日本教育史資料 (Tokyo: Monbushō [Cultural and Educational Agency of Japan], 1868). See Sugano Noriko 菅野則子, "Terakoya no onna keieisha" 寺子屋の女経営者, in *Nihon joseishi*, 151–152.

[108] Ibid. The *Nihon kyōikushi shiryō* records that the majority of these 498 *terakoya* opened during the Tenpō era, which is only some twenty years earlier. It can be assumed that the *terakoya* run by female owners in the first year of Meiji were also started earlier by female owners during the late Edo period.

Another historical document, the *Kōgiroku* 孝義録 (Record of Filial Piety) of 1801, compiled by order of the senior Tokugawa councilor, Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 (1759–1829), records the relatively high literacy level among lower-class commoners in urban areas as well as the existence of female consumers of popular literature. *Kōgiroku* lists awards bestowed onto lower-class townspeople for their acts of filial piety and good deeds. One record states that a young woman named Iwa, the daughter of a certain Denbei, was a 1795 awardee for her filial piety. Her elderly father was bedridden due to palsy and Iwa sold tofu to support herself and her father. Since her father was fond of popular *yomihon*, Iwa borrowed the books from neighbors and read aloud to him. This record demonstrates that even a lower-class woman could read, indicating the relatively high literacy and cultural level of *chōnin* during the late Edo period.[109] The rising female literacy rate must have been new and astonishing to the upper–class eyes, who up to that time had a near monopoly on education.

Lower- to middle- class women in urban areas who loved to read books but were unable to afford even inexpensive *yomihon*, saw a change in their situation in the early eighteenth century when lending libraries called *kashihon-ya* 貸本屋 became common throughout Japan. The Japanese literature scholar, Nagatomo Chiyoji, has suggested that they first emerged during the Kan'ei era (1624–1643), following the introduction of a new printing technology known as *seihan insatsu* 整版印刷, which can print a large number of pages using one wooden plate. This launched the possibility of mass publication, and could be construed as a major factor in producing a revolution in the literacy of commoners, particularly among youth and women who, given their lower literacy levels, were avid

[109] Nishiyama Matsunosuke 西山松之助, *Kinseifūzoku to shakai* 近世風俗と社会 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1985), 408. See also *Kankoku kōgiroku* 官刻孝義録 (1801) compiled by the Tokugawa government reprinted in Sugawara Noriko ed., *Kankoku kōgiroku zen sankan* 官刻孝義録全３巻 (Tokyo: Tōkyodō shuppan, 1999).

consumers of popular titles and picture books containing *ukiyo-e* illustrations.[110] He observes that "it was common to read books borrowed from lending libraries instead of purchasing them, and this was true even for inexpensive books. This was especially the case for popular literature, including *gesaku* 戯作 (playful writings) and *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 (puppet theatre) books."[111] Although it still remains unclear when and where *kashihon-ya* libraries first originated, they developed rapidly in the early seventeenth century when an increasing number of people took to reading popular literature, particularly in urban areas and this included women. The rising literacy rate among commoner women became a new phenomenon that somewhat deviated from the social ideals set by the Tokugawa government. Knowledge is power and the *bakufu* did not expect the commoner women to have the leisure to read and acquire this power. The all-male *bakufu* was also alarmed by the rising class of wealthy farmers and urban *chōnin* who, due to the expanding cash economy, now had the means to learn through popular publications how to aspire to upper-class culture through the purchase of goods and social activities that once belonged only to the samurai. Hence, in eyes of the male elite in the eighteenth century, the country had seemingly entered into a period of decadence and corruption and it was their job to rise the alarm. This led to a proliferation of texts by male cultural authorities inside and outside of government to issue books on the virtues of a proper and moral life for the education of children and women based on the Neo-Confucian tenets upon which the Tokugawa regime was founded.

Toward this end, a number of books were published on morals and proper conduct for women based on the government's interpretation of Neo-Confucian thinking on women, known collectively as *joyōmono* 女用物 (Books for women) or *jokunsho* 女訓書 ( Books of

[110] Nagatomo Chiyoji 長友千代治, *Kinsei kashihon-ya no kenkyū* 近世貸本屋の研究 (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1982), 7.
[111] Ibid., 19–20.

morals and proper conduct for women). These publications cannot technically be considered books on Confucianism, nor are they scholarly works. They are a part of the literary genre known as *kanazōshi* 仮名草子, consisting of popular fiction, practical guides, and self-help books designed for women that were sold principally in *ezōshi-ya* 絵草紙屋, shops specializing in the sale of popular books, particularly illustrated books and *ukiyo-e* pictures. In other words, as suggested by Yokota Fuyuhiko 横田冬彦, the content of *joyōmono* and *jokunsho* can be considered a popular social discourse on the wellness, lifestyle, and ideal behavior for all women to have or emulate.[112] Women purchased and devoured the books, but they were all written by elite men and published by large, successful male publishing houses like Hachimonjiya 八文字屋 (ca. 1688–1772) of Kyoto, Suharaya 須原屋 (ca. 1662–1895) of Edo,[113] and Kashiwaraya 柏原屋 (ca. 1819–1834) of Osaka. Some publishers even took their books on the road as portable lending libraries to suburbs and villages.[114] The widely circulated *Onna daigaku* 女大学 (Great Learning for Women) belongs to the *joyōmono* and *jokunsho* genre of popular books, as narrowly speaking it was not connected to any contemporary school of thought or religious affiliation. Its widespread readership among women of all classes merits close study for the understanding of societal perceptions of womanhood during the Edo period. These perceptions were put forth as ideals for an Edo woman to attain if they want to live a happy and fulfilling life befitting her gender in the patriarchal society that was Japan at the time. Needless to say, the life of the "ideal woman" as espoused in the text was achievable only by women of well-to-do households. The orthodox image of womanhood as described in the *Onna daigaku* also contrasts sharply with

[112] Yokota, "*Onna daigaku saikō*" 女大学再考, 367.
[113] Andreas Marks, *Publishers of Japanese Woodblock Prints: A Compendium* (Leiden and Boston: Hotei Publishing, 2011), 295.
[114] Yokota, "*Onna daigaku saikō*" 女大学再考, 367.

Eisen's subjects, who were women of the lower classes and primarily sex workers. Both types of women co-existed and were admired in the social complexity that was the late Edo period. To understand the one is to understand the other.

*Onna daigaku* (Great Learning for Women) and the Ideal Women

The *Onna daigaku* was first published in 1716 by the Osaka publisher Kashiwabara and widely disseminated by him in the period of 1716–1736. Its author is unknown but its popularity was likely due to its not being an academic text, yet captured the essence of how to be a proper woman of the time told in simple mixed script (vernacular Japanese interspersed with easy kanji 漢字 characters). As such, it was easily understood by women, with their lower education level. The upper-class man who wrote it might have written it to remind women of his class of the appropriate behaviors and attitudes that society expected of them. But upper-class women didn't need reminding, they already knew how to behave properly in the prevailing patriarchal society as they learned it as part of growing up. The female audience that the booklet most affected was most likely commoner women, particularly aspiring lower-class women living in urban areas (poor *chōnin* or rural peasant girls sent to work in towns and cities) who were acquiring basic reading skills as was part of their job requirement. Parts of the *Onna daigaku* were excerpted from the writings of the Neo-Confucian scholar, Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒 (1630–1714), particularly the *Nyoshi wo oshiyuru hō* 教女子法 (Teachings for Girls), which is volume 5 of his larger *Wazoku dōshi kun* 和俗童子訓 (Teachings for Children) that was posthumously published in 1716–36. The latter publication was a how-to-do-it guide for educating youth in proper behaviors and etiquette to live an ideal life in Neo-Confucian society. Popular publications such as these were used by all classes to as guides to good living from cradle to grave. Advances in printing technology made it possible for such texts to reach widely into the commoner class.

This leads to the behaviors, attitudes, and images printed on the pages of these popular books spreading quickly through society and becoming public norms. As noted, the Neo-Confucian-based behaviors for women contained in the *Onna daigaku* were practiced by literate women of all classes.[115] Presumably, illiterate women modelled their social behavior on their betters, resulting in the text's teachings becoming the public norm for women in Japan from the mid to late Edo period. *Onna daigaku* was printed in the form of a booklet. However, it was originally a part of a larger text, the *Onna daigaku takara bako* 女大学宝箱 (Great Treasury of Learning for Women), which saw its first printing in 1716 by the aforementioned publisher Kashiwabara of Osaka. The *Onna daigaku takara bako* contain not only the *Onna daigaku* but also other Neo-Confucian-inspired texts, fifty-four poems from chapters of the *Tale of Genji*, one hundred poems with practical advice on medicine, and illustrations of women in various occupations. Yokota argues that the importance of contextualizing other parts of *Onna daigaku takara bako* into the understanding of the *Onna daigaku.*[116] In Japan today, *Onna daigaku* is often considered outdated writing about women's unequal treatment by, and submission to, men in traditional society. However, a few historians of Japanese women's history in Edo period, among them Yabuta Yutaka have pointed out the novelty and radical aspects of the *Onna daigaku* in its historical context.

Yabuta Yutaka suggests that the *Onna daigaku's* teaching was at first aimed at women of the ruling class (samurai), but gradually permeated down to commoner women of the merchant and farming classes by the early nineteenth century.[117] Due to its core focus on the value of maintaining a patriarchal family (*i.e.* 家) system, the *Onna daigaku* was essential to the authority of the male household head and thus became important for all classes of

[115] See Yokota Fuyuhiko 横田冬彦, "Ekiken hon no dokusha" 益軒本の読者," in *Kaibara Ekiken* 貝原益軒, ed. Yokoyama Toshio 横山俊夫 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1995).
[116] Yokota, "*Onna daigaku saikō,*" 365.
[117] Yabuta, *Joseishi to shite no kinsei,* 187.

people.[118] The text's teachings promoted the ideal roles for all family members to assume and clearly defined the tasks and jobs women must fulfill to maintain a harmonious patriarchal family. The fourth article states:

> 婦人は夫の家を我が家とするゆえに、唐土には、嫁入りを「帰る」という。我が家にかえるという事なり。（中略）一度嫁いりしては其の家を出でざるを女の道とすること、古、聖人の訓えなり。（後略）[119]
>
> A wife should consider the husband's home as her own. Hence in China, marrying into a family is called "returning." It means "returning to your own home."... Once a woman marries, not leaving the home where she has married into is the proper way, this is the teaching of the ancient sages...[120]

The passage demonstrates the importance placed on women to maintain family unity. In the patriarchal system, maintaining a bloodline through legitimate children (sons in the case of samurai families) was the most critical duty. I assume that this legitimacy could only be ensured if women did not venture out. Yabuta argues that as the monetary economy grew in the nineteenth century, an increasing number of farmers who had become wealthy through the cultivation of the new crop of cotton and the establishment of cottage industries began to follow the ways of the samurai and adopted the Neo-Confucian family system of maintaining family assets through a patrimony-based bloodline. Thus, it could be said that the teachings of *Onna daigaku* became widely accepted by all families in the realm who aspired to the ways of fine samurai, but perhaps more so in families with some wealth due to the expanding economy as they now had family assets to protect. Hence as Yabuta suggests, practicing the

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[118] Ibid., 185.
[119] Anonymous, *Onna daigaku takarabako* 女大学宝箱 (1716). Reprinted in *Onna dagaku shū* 女大学集, comp. Ishikawa Matsutaro 石川松太郎 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977), 34.
[120] My translation.

chauvinist ideals of womanhood expounded by the *Onna daigaku*, once attainable only by the women born into samurai families, now became attractive to the newly-risen class of wealthy farmers and *chōnin* who aspired to the refined lifestyles of samurai.[121]

In one of her earlier publications, the *Kafuchōsei to shihonsei* 家父長制と資本制,[122] Ueno Chizuko argues that the subjugation of women in pre-modern patriarchal societies owes to the rise of capitalism and its practices. In other words, women became oppressed through systems of capitalism that prioritize ownership and disposal of private property, even in domestic settings. Women and children became assets akin to property, whose fates were determined by the male head of household. Women commonly also did not in engaged in production but in reproduction. Hence, women's liberation could only be achieved only through the reconstruction of capitalist economy, where much of women's labor in the home is not compensated. Economic circumstances and opportunities prompted women to labor outside the home and earn wealth like men. This study allows us to understand late-Edo society, when Japanese women as a group first began to make socio-economic advances. According to Amy Stanley, such pioneering women who worked outside the home and achieved financial power along with the social and cultural freedoms that came with that power were considered "deviant" (*tadagoto de nai* 只事でない)[123] and therefore a "social problem" by city and town magistrates, men who became alarmed because the social ideal of women as subjugated to men and anchors of stable family life as put forth by the ruling class was being challenged by women in the work force.[124] Ueno's study suggests that gender

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[121] Yabuta, *Joseishi to shite no kinsei,* 185.
[122] Ueno Chizuko 上野千鶴子, *Kafuchōsei to shihonsei*: *Marukusu shugi feminizumu no chihei*
家父長制 と 資本制 : マルクス 主義 フェミニズム の 地平 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1990).
[123] See Hachijūkyūsai rōfu, *Asukagawa* (1810).
[124] Stanley, *Selling Women,* xiii.

roles in Edo times were closely associated with things material, such as making money or owning high-value products.

Under the patriarchal system, women's sexuality became something to be controlled and regulated for the maintenance of family bloodlines. After Neo-Confucianism was adopted as the foundational creed in early Edo, there was a gradual transformation in societal notions of sex. Throughout history, many Heian classics such as the *Tale of Genji* had been recommended reading for women. Even during the Edo period, many books for women, including the *Onna daigaku takara bako*, contained tales, poems, or digests derived from classical sources because they were considered good for the cultivation of a wide range of sensibilities for women. By the mid-Edo period, however, the Heian classics came under attack by some neo-Confucian scholars who questioned the efficacy of such readings on women's education. They found some Heian classics immoral in their praise of free love and promiscuity and took issue with the expression of overtly romantic emotions.[125] From reading such classics, commoner women were learning the attitudes, sentiments, and behaviors once held by female nobility. According to Nakano Setsuko, one of the most ideal trait that a classy woman could possess was *yasashii* 優しい. She argues this point by reproducing a section of the illustrated *Onna shinasadame* 女品定 (Classification of Women) in the *Onna chōhō ki* (Figure 14), depicting different classes of women down through the ages, from Heian court ladies to empresses to low-class prostitutes. In the center of the illustration, there is a large flower vase in the shape of the kanji character *kokoro*/*shin*, meaning "heart." A *waka* poem above the vase states:

しなかたち
つかさくらゐは
かわるとも

[125] See Peter F. Kornicki, "Unsuitable Books for Women? *Genji Monogatari* and *Ise Monogatari* in Late Seventeenth Century Japan." In *Monumenta Nipponica* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 147–193.

心ばかりはみなやさし
かれ[126]

…Despite different appearances and social classes,
Every woman should have a heart that is *yasashiki*/*yasashii*.[127]

Figure 14. Illustration of *Onna shinasadame* 女品定 (Classification of Women), in the *Onna chōhō ki* 女重宝記 of 1692. Reproduction taken from *Onna chōhō ki Nan chōhōki* edited by Nagatomo Chiyoji.

The modern meaning of *yasashii* is kind, soft, and sweet. However, Nakano points out that the meaning of *yasashii*/*yasashiki* in the Edo period was different and has gradually changed since then. It used to be that *yasashii/yasashiki* was associated with *en* 艶, meaning voluptuousness, affectionate, and passionate.

[126] Kusada Sunbokushi 艸田寸木子[Namura Jōhaku 苗村常伯],*Onna chōhō ki* 女重宝記 (1692). Reprinted in *Onna chōhō ki Nan chōhōki* 女重宝記 男重宝記, ed. Nagatomo Chiyoji 長友千代治 (Tokyo: Gendai Kyōyō Bunko, 1993), 14–15. See Nakano Setsuko 中野節子, *Onna wa itsukara yasashiku nakunattanoka: Edo no joseishi* 女はいつから優しくなくなったのか (Tokyo: Heibonsha shinsho, 2014), 55.
[127] My translation.

There are many other examples of *yasashii*/*yasashiki* as a feminine ideal listed in books for women from the Edo period. The *Honchō onna kagami* 本朝女鑑 (Exemplary Japanese Women) of 1661 is a collection of twelve volumes attributed to Asai Ryōi 浅井了意 (1612–1691). Ten volumes are about exemplary Japanese women. Unlike the original Chinese version entitled *Retsujo den* 烈女伝 (Ch. *Lienu zhuan*, Heroic Women), which was imported to Japan in the early seventeenth century, almost all the women depicted in the Japanese version have a beautiful appearance and display deep compassion.[128] As Nakano indicates, the Japanese version surprisingly includes three courtesans, or sex workers. All three are praised for their sensibility and sincere love and kindness toward others, mainly men. In the traditional Japanese view, a woman's amorousness or promiscuity was not necessarily regarded as negative. Rather, a courtesan's compassion and acceptance of a man's solicitations were highly praised. For this reason, although they were sex workers, some courtesans are included in lists of ideal women in the *Honchō onna kagami*. Moreover, the preference for women with sensuality and compassion had originated in the aristocratic culture of Heian Japan. Returning to the discussion of the lingering importance of Japanese classical literature, *waka* poems and traditional tales are infused with passionate feelings of love and filled with pathos for things and relationships gone awry. The story of the poet Ono no Komachi 小野小町, (Date unknown) a historical figure of the mid–9th century, who was considered a "femme fatale" is a case in point. She was known to be so beautiful that Fukakusa no Shōshō 深草少将 fell in love with her and visited her every night for ninety-nine days without achieving his goal of unity with her. In the tale, Komachi intended to meet

[128] Nakano, *Onna wa itsukara yasashiku nakunattanoka: Edo no joseishi*, 64.

him on the hundredth day. But he died on that day. Hence Komachi was considered a beautiful but heartless woman who did not respond to a man's pure love for her.[129]

In contrast, the stance taken in *Onna daigaku* is against promiscuity in women's and for chastity and submission to husbands. That the *Onna daigaku* functioned as a device to curb women's promiscuity through all social classes is a view taken by Yokota Fuyuhiko. He points to the new situation of women working outside the home, particularly in the flourishing cotton industry from the seventeenth century onwards, as the reason for the societal need to deploy a text like the *Onna daigaku*. According to Yokota, there was a social discourse in popular texts such as the *Shikidō ōkagami* 色道大鑑 (1678) that suggested women who worked outside of their home would surely become the types who would sell sex for money in addition to working their jobs.[130] However, this is a social discouse and not the actual situation on the ground for many outside female workers. The *Onna daigaku* itself separates the sex provided by wives from that provided by sex workers, in the Madonna versus Whore manner of patriarchal societies in the West. The role of wives's was to manage a family home, give birth, and raise heirs. The role of sex workers was to provide sexual pleasure outside of the household.[131] As the number of commoner women who worked outside the home increased, so did the tendency for male members of the society to regard them as sexual beings unprotected by a male guardian and thus free game for the picking. The *Onna daigaku* functioned like a device for women to remember the importance of chastity as they ventured out in the world.[132]

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[129] Sarah M. Strong, "The Making of a Femme Fatale. Ono no Komachi in the Early Medieval Commentaries." In *Monumenta Nipponica* 49, no. 4 (Winter 1994), 391–412.
[130] Yokota,"*Onna daigaku saikō*," 380.
[131] Ibid. Also see William R. Lindsey, *Fertility and Pleasure Ritual and Sexual Values in Tokugawa Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).
[132] Ibid.

Women needed basic literacy and arithmetic skills as they entered the workforce. In addition to teaching women ethical behavior, the *Onna daigaku* also functioned as a writing manual for learning proper Japanese sentence construction and penmanship. Nakano points out that *Onna daigaku* contains more kanji characters than similar books published previously. Since knowing kanji was not traditionally required of women, Nakano sees here a transformation in the abilities and expectations of women in society. As a whole, *Onna daigaku* can be regarded as both a warning for women to remain chaste for the good of the family and a call for them to become literate and useful to the developing early modern economy. As Nakano indicates, its exhortation to not continue being the *yasashii* woman of old might have been welcomed by many commoner women, including sex workers who had to accept men against their will.[133]

The emergence of female wage earners, especially those living in urban areas was a new development in Japanese society, a revolution led by women of the demimonde who earned the highest average wages. This development occurred at the same time as the dissemination of the Neo-Confucian inspired teachings which normalized the view that there are two types of women—those who became virtuous wives that stayed at home and obeyed their husbands and those who worked outside the home and disregarded societal rules and restraints. The latter were considered immoral women. Texts like the *Onna daigaku* solidified such a view by teaching women about the proper ways to live and behave in a patrimonial system upon which the Tokugawa was founded. The hierarchal practices of patrimony filtered down into the commoner classes as families acquire wealth and assets that need to be protected through a stable and legitimate bloodline. As a result, women's sexuality came to be controlled and confined within the household, but flourished freely outside it. Although there were many other texts of teachings for women such as *Onna imagawa* 女今川 (1687),

[133] Nakano Setsuko, *Kangaeru onnatachi—kanazōshi kara onnadaigaku,* 176.

*Onna chōhōki* 女重宝記 (1692), *Onna teikin gosho bunko* 女庭訓御所文庫 (1767) and so on throughout the Edo period, it was the *Onna daigaku* that became standard reading for knowledge regarding proper manners and life styles of women. Its popularity spread widely through all classes and locales, including upper-middle class farmers, and became a prominent discourse about women.[134] Despite the popularity of *Onnadaigaku,* a teaching of upper class women's manners and roles, an increasing number of commoner women began to work outside households. These working women including sex workers were seemingly depicted and eroticized in *ukiyo-e* and viewed in a certain way by social authorities.

Occupations and Social Status of Commoner Women in the late Edo

There was a collapse in the hierarchal Tokugawa social order that was based on an economic system of rice stipends in the early nineteenth century, the heyday for Eisen as an *ukiyo-e* artist. The samurai continued to rule in the late Edo, but it was merchants operating under a parallel cash economy who became the most economically and socially powerful force in society. Life for ordinary women was also gradually changing due to growing market demand. As the historian Amy Stanley observes:

> By the end of the eighteenth century, the expansion of commercial agriculture and the proliferation of cottage industries had forced commoners and samurai alike to grapple with the phenomenon of women participating in profit-making enterprises outside the households.[135]

[134] Yokota, *Onna daigaku saikō,* 384.
[135] Stanley, *Selling Women*, 6. See also Fukaya, *Shi nō kō shō no yo Taikei nihon no rekishi: Shi nō kō shō no yo*, 337–340. Also see Sone Hiromi 曽根ひろみ, *Shōfu to kinsei shakai* 娼婦と近世社会 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003) and Usami, *Shukuba to meshimori onna.*

As the island nation became increasingly dependent on a cash (market) economy, the warrior class whose incomes was based on rice payments (which could be manipulated) lost socio-political power. Despite their status at the top of the social hierarchy, the samurai progressively faced financial difficulty. In the eyes of the warrior class, therefore, this must have appeared as an unsettling, corrupted period, as they saw lower-ranked merchants displacing them in socio-economic power in real terms.

At this time, more women were beginning to work outside the home, and some gained socio-economic agency within the family. These working women should be differentiated from the daughters of extremely poor family who were sold into prostitution. In certain industries, women became important sources of income for their families, and their position in the household, in particular, and in society, in general, gradually changed. More working women were no longer under constant male supervision as they had been at home, and they also came to have a degree of sway within the family. The diminished ruling elite viewed this development as a corrupting influence that destabilized the Neo-Confucian hierarchy of society.

Figure 15. Kitagawa Utamaro. *Joshoku kaiko tewaza gusa* 女織蚕手業草(Women Engaged in the Sericulture Industry 6)*,* ca.1801. Reproduction taken from an exhibition catalogue, *Kitagawa Utamaro* (1995), compiled by British Museum and Chiba City Museum of Art, cat.no. 325.

Figure 16. Kitagawa Utamaro. *Kamiyui* 髪結 (Hairdresser), from the series *Fujin tewaza jūnikō* 婦人手業拾二工 (Twelve Types of Women's Handicrafts)
ca.1797–1798. New York Public Library

Figure 17. Kitagawa Utamaro. *Araihari* 洗張り (Washing and Stretching Kimono) from the series *Fujin tewaza jūnikō* 婦人手業拾二工, early 19th century. Tokyo National Museum.

To the dismay of the chauvinistic members of the Neo-Confucian hierarchy, women steadily began to work at occupations outside the home in greater numbers from the mid Edo period onwards. Illustrated books with full-color *nishiki-e* of various types of women's occupations appeared from the early eighteenth century onwards. For example, the two-volume picture book, entitled *Hyakunin Onna shinasadame* 百人女郎品定 (One Hundred Women Classified According to Their Rank) of 1723 by Nishikawa Sukenobu 西川祐信 (1671–1750) illustrates various classes of women from an empress to female farm hands in the first volume. The second volume illustrates different types of female sex workers. It should be noted, however, that the first volume focuses on social class from high-ranking wives of the warrior class down to wives of the merchant class, while the second volume

focuses on the occupational rank of women in the sex trade, from high-ranking courtesans down to low-class prostitutes. Partly following in the footsteps of this earlier illustrated social and economic ranking of women, later Edo *nishiki-e* and book illustrations of Eisen's time in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century) were also published depicting commoner women at work in popular or high-value skilled jobs such as sericulture and hairdressing that indicate their prominence in the society as well as buyers' interest in this type of images.

In mid-to late eighteenth century, Utamaro designed *ukiyo-e* featuring women at work in sericulture (figure 15) and in twelve other popular occupations for women (figures 16–17) in early nineteenth century. Sericulture was one of the most flourishing businesses in Japan during the Edo period. Japan had been importing silk threads from China in exchange for gold, silver, and copper. However, the government became apprehensive about the hemorrhaging of precious metals from Japan, and some domains initiated sericulture with support from the Tokugawa government. By the end of the Tokugawa period, silk floss had become one of Japanese's main export items. For example, the domain of Yonezawa (current Niigata prefecture) went all out on sericulture, and even retainers' wives and daughters were engaged in raising silkworms, making silk floss, and silk textiles.[136] When more women began to appear in public for work, they were often subjected to eroticization by some male onlookers.

It is known that by the mid-nineteenth century, Eisen and Kunisada each illustrated a book about women's occupations. Eisen illustrated the *Kyōka fujin imayō sugata* 狂歌婦人今様姿 (Kyōka Anthology of Contemporary Ladies) in 1825.[137] His *kyōka* group ran a poetry

[136] Yoshinaga Akira 吉永昭 and Yokoyama Akio 横山昭男, "Kokusan shorei to hansei kaikaku" 国産奨励と藩政改革. In *Iwanami koza Nihon rekishi* 11 kinsei –3 岩波講座日本歴史. 第 11, 近世. 第 3, ed. Ienaga Saburō 家永三郎 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1976), vol. 3.
[137] This book was compiled by Umenoya Kakushi 梅の屋鶴子 (dates unknown).

contest on the subject of various types of female workers, including washerwoman (Figure18), nanny (Figure 19), fan maker (Figure 20), and so on. In other words, it is a record of entertainment industry that is interested in certain jobs of women. Kunisada illustrated the *Hanagatachi onna shokunin kagami* 花容女職人鑑( Flower Shapes: Paragons of Female Workers) of 1818–1830, also an anthology of *kyōka* poems co-compiled by Sairaikyo Mibutsu 西來居未佛 (d. 1831) and Hōrai Sanjin 蓬萊山人 (also known as Utei enba II 烏亭焉馬二世, 1792–1862). Sairaikyo was a doctor of samurai origin who became a popular writer and *kyōya* poet. His co-compiler Hōrai, was a close associate of the leading cultural figure of the day, Ōta Nanpo, and a retainer in the Takasaki 高崎藩 domain of Lord Matsudaira Ukōtayū 松平右京太夫 (1827–1860). In the *Hanagatachi onna shokunin kagami* series, Kunisada depicts images of women in all kinds of occupations—from teachers of shamisen, calligraphy, and *waka* poetry down to skilled silk weavers, tailors, and fan designers and lowly vendors of vegetables, fish, and firewood.

We could regard these popular prints by mid to late Edo *ukiyo-e* designers such as Utamaro down to Eisen and Kunisada as visual interest of the many occupations that women engaged in besides the sex industry. In many ways, the jobs these women held are in the service industries. In that way, late Edo women's paid work could be considered a harbinger of the exponential increases in urban service industries that Japan would see more of as she entered the modern age after the Meiji Restoration. According to Sugano Noriko, there were many daily wage jobs for women to earn money outside their households. As the demand for workers increased, the wage gap between men and women diminished.[138] Accordingly, working women as a group steadily gained financial independence and acquired discretionary money of their own. This did not go unnoticed by *chōnin* and other business-minded

[138] Sugano Noriko 菅野則子, "Kōki no nōson josei" 後期の農村女性.In *Nihon joseishi*, ed. Wakita, Hayashi, and Nagahara, (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987), 149.

commoners who began to target women as a new market for consumer goods and services and to notice the market demand of depiction of such working women. At the same time, some elite men regarded working women as deviants in a society that was ideally based on neo-Confucian teachings and norms and they raised the alarm in writing, as we will see later in this chapter.

Figure 18. Keisai Eisen. “Washerwomen,” Illustration in the *Fujin imayō sugata* 婦人今様姿 ( Kyōka anthology of Contemporary Ladies), 1825. Gerhard Pulverer Collection, Freer/Sackler Gallery, National Museum of Asian Art.

Figure 19. Keisai Eisen. “Nanny,” Illustration in the *Fujin imayō sugata* 婦人今様姿 ( Kyōka
anthology of Contemporary Ladies), 1825. Gerhard Pulverer Collection, Freer/Sackler Gallery, National Museum of Asian Art

Figure 20. Keisai Eisen. “Fan Maker.” Illustration in the *Fujin imayō sugata* 婦人今様姿 ( Kyōka anthology of Contemporary Ladies), 1825. Gerhard Pulverer Collection, Freer/Sackler Gallery, National Museum of Asian Art.

As previously mentioned, some popular late Edo publications began to voice social concern about women working outside the home. Many of these publications were written by authors of samurai origin. To the eyes of these social critics, the new women who were

emerging in public were seemingly enjoying cultural activities and consuming goods and services that were once the privy of men. Some of the women were from wealthy families; others were working-class women who had become financially independent. According to the neo-Confucianism ideal life path for woman expounded in the *Onna daigaku*, a decent girl was supposed to marry and stay sequestered to serve for husband and family. That was the ideal, but the reality was that an increasing number of commoner women of all economic levels began to work outside the home. Many commoner girls from urban *chōnin* as well as agricultural families took jobs as indentured *buke bōkō* 武家奉公 (service attendants) in samurai mansions or wealthy merchant homes as part of their domestic training before marriage.[139] They took care of samurai ladies' everyday chores such as preparing gifts, helping with ceremonies, writing letters, organizing guest lists, and so forth. Some stayed on and married into samurai or wealthy merchant families. After retirement from service, many *buke bōkō* became teachers who gave lessons to children in basic writing and math. Retired *buke bōkō,* together with retired *geisha*, also became teachers of calligraphy and writing, of song, dance, and music (shamisen) to young girls whose goal was to find work in upper-class households, to become high-class *geisha* or simply to marry well. Lower-class commoner women worked as wage laborers at all kinds of jobs. They worked on farms, in sericulture, or in the cotton industry. Some were able to earn the same wage as men for their labor. In urban areas, lower-class girls entered crafts industries, such as fan-making. Others started small business peddling foodstuffs and everyday items. Still others became nannies, wet-nurses, sewing ladies and laundry women. Also in those days, people bought old kimonos and it was the job of sewing and laundry ladies to take the garments apart, wash, recut, and sew them into a new kimono. An even more lucrative service job was hairdressing. Wealthy

[139] Hayashi Reiko 林玲子, "Machiya josei no sonzai keitai" 町や女性の存在形態, in *Nihon joseishi* 日本女性史, ed. Joseishi Sōgō Kenkyūkai 女性史総合研究会 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1982), 118.

townswomen paid dearly to have their hair done up in the latest style worn by popular kabuki *onnagata*. Some hairdressers made enough cash to support their spouses and family. The modern historian Hayashi Reiko argues that ordinary women in urban service industries were now earning enough to support not only themselves but also their families.[140]

For the girls from the poorest families with little or no education and no marketable skills, their only feasible job option was sex work. If the girls landed in a licensed quarter like Yoshiwara, they were considered filial daughters entering a lucrative trade to rescue their families from poverty. If the girls were less fortunate and landed in unlicensed quarters, they were less praised but they still earned money. In other words, jobs for women were plentiful and more women started leaving home to fill them. Below we will explore some of the industries and service jobs that women entered in the time of Eisen, who brilliantly captured in his prints one sector of the expanding market economy where women were the prime workers—the sex trade.[141]

As explained, in the patriarchal Neo-Confucian scheme of things, women were not supposed to be financially or socially independent. Accordingly, society (i.e., the ruling male elite) began to see the increase of financially independent females—not only prostitutes and geisha but other independent female workers in city areas—as a threat. As an anonymous essay of 1810 entitled *Asukagawa* 飛鳥川 (Asuka River) laments:

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[140] Ibid.

[141] It should be noted that a small group of prostitutes consisted of young males (*wakashū* 若衆) serving both male and female clients during the Edo period. However, female prostitutes were much more demanded in terms of numbers and physical location. The *Kikunosono* 菊の園 (Chrysanthemum Garden) of 1764 reports that there were 12 brothels of male prostitutes in the district of Yoshichō 芳町, totaling some 55 male prostitutes. The *Morisada mankō* 守貞謾稿 (1837) states that the main clients of male prostitutes were Buddhist monks. See also Joshua S. Mostow, *The Gender of Wakashu and the Grammar of Desire* in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Marybeth Graybill (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2003), 49–70. Ikeda Asato, "Introduction," in *A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Edo-Period Prints and Paintings 1600–1868,* exh. cat. (Ontario: The Royal Ontario Museum, 2016).

後家の一人ぐらし御法度の由承る（中略）然るに近来は素人の町家、後家の方くらし能と見へて、多くの町々に有り、女筆指南も多し、只事にあらず。

"...it is illegal for a concubine (*goke* 後家) [142] to live by herself. However, there are many all over the city... an increasing number of townswomen are being admire for their luxury lifestyles. There are also numerous female calligraphy masters. It is out of the ordinary…"[143]

It is interesting that the author lists a concubine with female calligraphy teachers as though they were in the same occupational category. This demonstrates that women working and living independently were regarded with suspicion and perceived as a disruption to the natural order.

One sector of the Japanese labor market that had long been considered women's work was the textile industry, although up until now women had only produced this commodity for domestic consumption. The historian, Yokota Fuyuhiko explains, however, that the introduction of cotton to Japan from China in the sixteenth century led to more opportunities for women due to "a variety of specializations in spinning and weaving, the development of subcontracting, and the establishment of large-scale textile factories in the cities."[144] In addition to cotton, the silk industry— sericulture, silk reeling, and weaving — also required a large, predominantly female, labor force. Raising the *bombyx mori* silkworm from infancy to cocoon was time-consuming and laborious work, as the caterpillar had to be feed the young leaves of the mulberry tree every few hours for 25 to 28 days under ideal

[142] *Goke* means a widow. However, it also points to a concubine who disguised as a widow.
[143] Hachiūkyūsai rōfu, *Asukagawa* (1810) in *Sin enseki jisshu 1*, comp. Kokusho kankō kai, 1913. Quoted in Seki, *Edo kōki no onnatachi*, 35.
[144] Yokota Fuyuhiko, "Imaging Working Women in Early Modern Japan," in *Women and Class in Japanese History,* ed. Hitomi Tonomura, Anne Walthall, and Wakita Haruko (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1999), 163.

temperatures before cocooning. Each cocoon produces a single filament of 600 to 900 meters, several filaments have to be reeled together to form a single silk thread. It takes 9,000 cocoons to produce enough silk to make one Japanese kimono.

In the early nineteenth century, women emerged as the main work force behind the commercial production of textiles.[145] Female textile workers subsequently began to enjoy better economic standing within their households. "*Kakaa denka*" かゝあ天下, a term from the Jōshū area (present-day Nagano Prefecture) denotes "a wife's world," and refers to the wife's power in a peasant home. When wives were occupied with weaving and reeling, it was common for husbands to do household chores and care for the children. Furthermore, husbands had to be careful about protecting their wives' hands, which were valuable tools for generating income.[146]

The historian Sugano Noriko points out that the growing number of female workers and their significance in the running of the economy was one of the important causes for the fall of the Tokugawa feudal system.[147] Within the earlier patriarchal order, women were meant to be protected and supervised under male authority. However, as industries evolved and economic circumstances changed, some women became crucial breadwinners and were no longer subordinate to men. As encapsulated in terms like *kakaa denka*, the reality was that some households had become a "wife's world." During the Tenpō Reforms of 1841, the *bakufu* attempted to regulate the rising wages for female workers engaged in silk reeling and weaving because they believed that this was pushing prices up. This chauvinistic male take on the rise in silk prices is evidence that women were highly-valued workforce in the silk

[145] Ibid, 163.
[146] Sugano, "*Kakaa denka*" かゝあ天下, in *Nihon joseishi*, 171.
[147] Ibid.

industry, to the point where the fair market price paid for their labor was seen as a threat to the fundamental social order.

Meaning of Geisha's Artistic Skills to Commoner Girls in the Expanding Economy

Eisen's *bijin-ga* depicts a number of geisha. What did geisha mean to viewers? In addition to gaining literacy, a growing number of ordinary girls were also taking shamisen, dancing, and singing lessons starting from a young age in order to qualify for better jobs or to climb the social ladder. When grown, such girls, from comfortable but not wealthy middle-class households, usually found employment in samurai mansions, where they served and learned appropriate feminine deportment and acquired the knowledge and skills of a refined lady. In essence, serving as a maid in a good samurai family functioned like a finishing school for young women, and many parents enrolled their daughters in "finishing" lessons as well as instruction in basic reading and writing in the hope that they will secure better employment opportunities, which typically led to superior marriages. *Morisada mankō* 守貞謾稿 (Morisada's Rambling Writings), an encyclopedic record on the fashion and manners of the period from 1837–1867 by the historian Kitagawa Morisada 喜田川守貞(1810–?) states that:

> 女子三絃·浄瑠璃を専らと習うこと既に百余年前よりの習風也。今世　益此風にて、女子は七、八歳よりこれを学ぶ。母親は特に身心を労して師家に遣る。江戸は特に小民の子と雖も必ず一芸を熟せしめ、それを以て武家に仕え

しめ、武家に仕えざれば良縁を結ぶに難く、一芸を学ばざれば武家に仕えること難し。これに依り女子専ら三絃·琴の類を学ぶ.[148]

"Learning the shamisen and *jōruri* singing has been a custom for girls for the last hundred years. This trend is getting more popular now. Girls aged around seven- to eight-years old have begun taking lessons. . . . In the city of Edo, even lower-class families try to have their girls acquire one artistic skill, which would help them to get work at a samurai mansion. The job experience would lead to a good marriage, which is considered the height of a woman's success. That is why girls endeavor to acquire music skills such as playing shamisen, *koto* 琴 [zither], and so on."

The passage above demonstrates that an important role of a daughter was to marry into a good family so as to elevate her family's social class. Money spent on a daughter's education or artistic trainings was a practical investment for financial gain through marriage into a wealthier family. During the Edo period, marriages were contracted and arranged between families, not by individuals. Marriage thus became an essential way for commoner women (and their families) to climb the social and economic ladder.

However, it should be noted that middle- and upper-middle class commoners' perceptions and requirements for appropriate knowledge, artistic skills, and deportment in women were the same as those required for popular female entertainers, or geisha. The late seventeenth-century textbook for women, *Onna chōhōki* states:

[148] Kitagawa Morisada 喜田川守貞, *Kinsei fūzokushi 3 (Morisada mankō)* 近世風俗志（３）（守貞謾稿), ed. Usami Hideki (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1999), 436.

三味線は琉球国よりわが朝に渡りたれども、その音淫乱にして、楽器に入らず。遊女のわざとなれり。ゆめ/\引習ひべからず。されどもその所/\の名は、覚へ給ふべし[149]

The shamisen originally came from the kingdom of Ryūkyū [present day Okinawa]. However, the sound can be considered salacious. Hence it is not a part of appropriate music instruction for ladies. It is for women of the demimonde. Certainly, [ladies] should not play it, but should know the names of each part of the instrument.

Despite such warnings from social censors, skills like playing the shamisen, which were commonly the privy of geisha were, in practice, very much part of the aspirational life direction of middle-class commoner women. Yokota asserts that the Neo-Confucian inspired *Onna daigaku* differentiates appropriate roles for married women (or women destined to become wives) from those assigned for *yūjo* 遊女(literally, women for play). However, this distinction could not override that reality that since the courtly time of Heian, one of the most important characteristic of an ideal woman (wife or courtesan) in Japan was the ability to console and comfort men with artistic performances of song, dance, and music. This ideal has long been operative in Japanese attitudes on desirable traits for women to possess and was not eclipsed by imported Neo-Confucian ideals of femininity as espoused in the *Onna daigaku*. That this native perception of the ideal woman persisted into late Edo times is recorded in the *En'yūki*, (宴遊記) a diary written by Yanagisawa Nobutoki (柳沢信鴻) (1724–1792), a retired landlord to Yamato Kooriyama 大和郡山 who lived in Edo. When interviewing applicants seeking positions as maids, he asked each to demonstrate their artistic

[149] Kusada, *Onna chōhō ki,* 1692, 129.

accomplishments including singing, dancing, and shamisen playing.[150] This suggests that even in upper-class samurai families (who were supposed to be living paragons of the values set forth in tomes like the *Onna daigaku*), the artistic skills of geisha were still in favor for women. It also can be said that for men of the upper social stratum like Yanagisawa Nobutoki, ideals of femininity were still associated with female values of Heian aristocratic culture, and the artistic skills of the geisha, if not the morals of the geisha, were still highly valued.

Girls from the lower classes also sought to obtain the artistic skills of geisha, although this did not normally include dancing, perhaps because of the higher lesson fees.[151] Their poorer financial situation also did not permit them to work in well-to-do samurai mansions due to the high cost of the required clothing and bedding that had to be paid upfront or come out of future wages.[152] Some worked instead as servants in middle-class merchant households. Others entered the sex trade as prostitutes or concubines in order to support themselves and their families. Becoming a geisha was the most appealing option, as geisha were not normally required to provide sex to their clients. Having artistic performance skills led to better job oppotunities, marriages, or concubinages that provided financial stability for lower-class women and their families. Accordingly, a geisha-type woman in appearance, deportment, and artistic skills became the aspirational ideal for girls and women of the lower classes. To commoner women, and as we will in the next chapter, commoner men, the

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[150] Yanagisawa, Nobutoki 柳沢信鴻, *Enyūnikki* 宴遊日記 (1773-1785).Reprinted in *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei dai jūsan kan* 日本庶民文化史料集成 第 13 巻, comp. Geinōshi kenkyūkai 芸能史研究会(Tokyo: Sanichi shobō, 1977), vol. 13. Also see Takeuchi, "Shimin bunka no naka no Edo" 市民文化の中の江戸. In *Nihon no* kinsei 14: *Bunka no taishūka*: 日本の近世１４：文化の大衆化 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1993), 13–14.

[151] Sone Hiromi 曽根ひろみ, *Shōfu to kinsei shakai* 娼婦と近世社会(Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003), 132.

[152] Walthall, Anne, "The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945,* ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991), 48.

successful geisha, like the movie stars of today, had it all—beauty, fashion, luxury, glamour, and freedom from conventional social mores. The fact that geisha, along with other sex workers as well as most women who worked outside the home, came to symbolize a morally bankrupt society in the eyes of the samurai ruling elite was of no concern to these aspirational girls. In the imaginations of these aspirational girls and commoners in general, the new feminine ideal seems to have been specifically embodied in the geisha image and other independent working women. These are the women visualized in the *bijin-ga* of Eisen, and as we shall see in the following two chapters, also fictionized in the popular literature of the day, and dramatized on the kabuki stage by *onnagata*.

To better understand the forces on the ground that lead to Eisen's visualization of the *geisha* as the model for the updated female images in his *bijin-ga* production, it is helpful to examine the Edo's red light districts, the transformation of the sex trade was over time, and the changing societal views of women who worked the trade. In the previous era, only samurai and other men of wealth could afford to visit pleasure quarters in Yoshiwara, but in the expanded economy of the late Edo which put discretionary money into the hands of commoners, it became possible for lower status men to patronize prostitutes. They could not afford the licensed brothels in the Yoshiwara and their high-class courtesans and service, so cheaper and more casual houses of ill repute with lower-cost sex workers sprung up in unlicensed quarters of the city to meet the sex demands of more ordinary men.

## The Establishment of Licensed and Unlicensed Quarters

As noted earlier, the government made it legal for commoners to sell their women into the sex trade to alleviate family poverty or debt. The ruling elite was able to do this because they assigned two binary gender roles to women, that or wife or whore, based on a rather loose interpretation of Neo-Confucian teachings. Wives were meant bear offspring and

prostitutes were meant for men's sexual pleasure.[153] Both wives and prostitutes played equally important roles in the patriarchal society of Edo. However, as we will later see, attitudes toward prostitution gradually changed over the course of the Edo period. Let us observe how prostitution had been developing in the Edo period and the logic behind their establishment by the government.

The ideology of the Tokugawa government was largely grounded in the belief that government—as head of the country's "household"—should be benevolent toward its subjects, including women.[154] It therefore needed to devise a plan to protect women from the humane trafficking that had earlier prevailed unchecked. According to 1720 record of Shōji Katsutomi 庄司勝富 (1668–1745), his grandfather Shōji Jinuemon 庄司甚右衛門 (1575–1644), saw the potential in the prostitution industry and petitioned the Tokugawa shogunate as early as 1612 to allow him to construct a licensed brothel quarter in the Edo suburbs, stating that he would maintain public order in this special area. Jin'uemon was not shy of moralizing in his petition, explaining that he could save "young girls from 'good' families who [might] be kidnapped and sold to brothels," and that he could uncover plots by rebellious samurai hiding in courtesans' private apartments, "as well as merchants' [naïve] apprentices squandering their wages carousing with women."[155] He stressed the perils of having a burgeoning, unregulated sex market and proposed that the shogunate grant him a plot of land and a monopoly on the sex trade. It was thus that the licensed Yoshiwara pleasure quarter came into existence in 1617.

The government permitted men to sell their daughters into temporary indentured service as prostitutes (*yūjobōkō* 遊女奉公), but only in the cases of dire financial emergences

[153] Lindsey, *Fertility and Pleasure,* 4.
[154] Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology,* 66–69.
[155] Ibid.

or family desitution. The government used the term "indentured service" (*hōkō* 奉公) instead of "prostitution," perhaps in part, to disguise the reality that the trafficking of women and selling women was now officially sanctioned.[156] It was legal for a male head of household to send his daughter to work as a prostitute for a fixed period of time, but only if it were done under this system of indentured servitude in a licensed brothel.[157] As Stanley says, it was only within this context that the government considered prostitutes as filial daughters who could claim protection from the Tokugawa as official sex workers. As Japan's benevolent, yet paternalistic, ruler, the Tokugawa government thus imposed certain limits on the commodification of women. Prostitution was not prohibited during the Edo, but it was permitted under certain conditions.

The government in fact welcomed the taxes generated from the licensed brothel quarters, as it was important revenue for the maintenance of the state. Impoverished families and brothel keepers received financial stability through the sale of filial daughters into brothels, and the government profited through the taxes collected from brothels. The system of licensed prostitution was a win-win situation for the government, the brothels owners, and the households in poverty, but not for the girls who were sold.

It should be remembered that it was horrible for the young girls sold into prostitution. They often endured dreadful living conditions such as lack of sleep (as little as two hours daily), malnutrition (a little bowl of rice gruel daily), venereal disease such as syphilis and gonorrhea and forced abortions. A text of the early nineteenth-century, the *Yoshiwara jūnitoki* 吉原十二時 (Twelve Hours in Yoshiwara) of 1804–1817 by Ishikawa Masamochi

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[156] Shimojū Kiyoshi 下重清, *Miuri bōkō to josei* 身売り奉公と女性, in *Mibun no naka no joei* 身分の中の女性, comp.Yabuta Yutaka and Keiko Yanagiya (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2010), 121.

[157] A contract was normally ten years, although this varied. Some women's contracts were bought out by wealthy clients, while others worked for more than ten years to pay off their debts to brothel keepers.

石川雅望 (1754–1830) describes a typical day of courtesans in Yoshiwara.[158] They wake up at 4 am and make preparations to send their client off by 6 am. They then go back to bed until 10 am. They take breakfast and a bath. At noon, they begin their make-up and put on an appropriate kimono. They write notes to clients. At 2 pm, the brothel opens up for day business, with most clients arriving around 4 pm. At 6 pm, the brothel opens for night business. Around 8 pm, courtesans start hosting parties for clients. Around 10 pm (but known to extend until midnight), the brothels close for the night, and courtesans retire to bedrooms with their client.[159] This text was meant to demonstrate the leisurely and glamorous lifestyle of the Yoshiwara and its courtesans. However, it also reflects challenges faced by courtesans—their lives were highly regimented with hardly a moment of real privacy.

There were also instances of physical danger and ill-treatment of prostitutes by brothel owners and clients. In 1849, Umemotoya Sakichi (梅本屋佐吉), a brothel owner tortured a courtesan named Fukuoka to death. He put her in a cellar pit, tied her up with iron chains and poked her with iron rods. He blamed Fukuoka for not working hard enough to earn her keep. It was well known that on his sex workers' day off, Sakichi only fed them once for the entire day.[160] When sex workers contacted venereal disease, the treatment differed depending on the courtesan's popularity (income) and degree of illness. Many prostitutes were known to die in Yoshiwara while still in their twenties and buried at the nearby Jōkanji temple in Asakusa. According to the mortality records at the temple, the

[158] A popular writer and poet of *kyōka* 狂歌 (mad verse).
[159] Ishikawa Masamochi 石川雅望, *Yoshiwara jūnitoki* 吉原十二時 (1804–1817). (Waseda University Japanese and Chinese Classic Database, #ヲ 06 04141)
[160] Miyamoto Yukiko 宮本由起子, "Yūjo no sekkan" 遊女の折檻, in *Nihonshi shōhyakka Yūjo* 日本史小百科遊女, comp. Nishiyama Matsunosuke 西山松之助（Tokyo: Tōkyodō shuppan, 1994), 167. Regarding the amount of meal and sleeping time, see Buyō Inshi, *Seji kenbunroku*, 320.

names of 21,056 prostitutes are listed between 1743 and 1801.[161] The death of young Yoshiwara sex workers most likely stem from venereal or other occupational illness. Prostitutes were among the lowest-ranking members of society, regarded by some as work animals. As such, once they became diseased, little effort was made to save them. Nonetheless, the *bakufu* could claim that it was protecting, providing for, and stabilizing society under this structured system of indentured servitude of female sex workers. That men were able to make major life decisions regarding the lives of their female children is proof of the power imbalance between men and women in Edo society. However, this new environment for women was arguably much more humane than in previous eras, and was, in that sense, an improvement. Before the establishment of the licensed brothel quarters, inhumane trafficking of women happened and no enforcement was in place to punish those responsible. Now, when girls were sold, their names were placed on a register and parents could trace them. Although the situation for girls sold for sex had improved and the trade was now regulated and controlled, lower-class sex workers continued to be treated inhumanely into the mid-nineteenth century.

[161] Tokyo-to Taitō-ku comp., *Shin-Yoshiwara shikō* 新吉原史考 [Historical Study of the New Yoshiwara] (Tokyo: Tokyo-to Taitō ku, 1960). See also Seigle, *Yoshiwara,* 212.


Map of Edo's Red-light Districts. Based on a map of Edo city (1818). Tokyo metropolitan Archives. https://twitter.com/tokyo_archives/status/1002051605124956160/photo/1

**Okabasho: Unlicensed Brothel Districts**

As noted, the expanding cash economy of Edo put money for play into the hands of ordinary men and made it increasingly possible for them to experience the charms of inexpensive and casual brothels of illegal red-light districts. By the start of the eighteenth century there were already several illegal or unlicensed brothel districts in Edo, the three most famous were Shinagawa (the gateway of the Tōkaidō road going southward), Nezu (to the north of Edo castle in today's Bunkyō-ku), and Fukagawa (to the east of the castle in today's Kōtō-ku). Of the three, the most popular was Fukagawa. Such unlicensed districts

were generally called *okabasho* 岡場所 (literally, "hilly place") and were customarily located near famous temples or shrines on countrywide sightseeing circuits. The lack of strict regulations in *okabasho*, as well as the high cost of Yoshiwara prostitutes, made the unlicensed quarters extremely popular. Concurrently, the wealthy clients of Yoshiwara, many of whom were of the warrior class or money lenders to the warrior class, had their wealth depleted after the enactment of Matsudaira Sadanobu's Kansei reforms of 1787–1793, so they gravitated toward cheaper *okabasho* for sex and entertainment. By the early nineteenth century, *okabasho* became the vortex of novel fashions and entertainments, especially among the economically rising class of ordinary *chōnin*, or townsmen.[162]

While there were plenty of comely prostitutes in *okabasho*, it was the fashionable geisha, who, as noted, often sold sex on the side, who became the most sought-after woman in unlicensed districts. Geisha had originally been, earlier in the Edo, male entertainers who performed in licenced quarters such as the Yoshiwara. They accompanied courtesans at banquets, playing musical instruments, singing, and dancing. During the mid-eighteenth century, however, accomplished townswomen began to imitate these male entertainers in skill and appearance. They don men's jackets (*haori* 羽織) and begun entertaining at private gatherings. It was not long before the women became more popular than the male geisha they emulated. Ultimately, geisha became a female-only profession in the 1770s and 1780s.

Female geisha working in *okabasho* — *machi* geisha or "town geisha"— were known for selling sex.[163] As Stanley argues, a huge issue regarding this town geisha was that it was difficult for local magistrates to investigate such illegal activities by *okabasho* geisha and/or brothel owners, as unlike professional courtesans, a geisha's decision to sell sex was

[162] Takeuchi Makoto 竹内誠, ed., "Shimin bunka no naka no Edo," in *Nihon no kinsei*: *Bunka no taishūka* 日本の近 :文化の大衆化 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1993), vol. 14: 7.
[163] Stanley, *Selling Women*, 67.

spontaneous and sporadic.[164] The concern was obviously not the morals of the geisha or the society but rather the loss of revenue for cities and towns from the taxes that could not be collected from the sex industry in unlicensed *okabasho* houses as such they thrived in the shadows. Local governments in both cities and villages keenly felt this losses as they depended on the taxes generated from the country's thriving sex industry, which subsumed inns, teahouses, and restaurants in brothel areas to sustain the local economy and government.[165]

It should be noted that although trained geisha were nominally financially independent because they worked professionally as free agents without having to sign contracts with brothels or geisha houses, many were in reality working to support their families. Under such circumstances any woman who acquired the required skills could become a geisha, and many did out of financial necessity. A 1798 Edo city law mentions geishas and their socio-economic situation:

> …一躰軽き者の中には実に親族を扶助のため　唄浄瑠璃三味線等を教　女芸者と唱（後略）
>
> Female geisha from the lower- and middle-classes in town teach singing and playing of the shamisen in order to support their family…[166]

The reality was that many geisha were working to support their families and hailed from the lower- to middle-classes of commoners.

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[164] Ibid, 62–63.
[165] Usami, *Shukuba to meshimori onna*, 22–23.
[166] Ōta Nanpo 大田南畝, *Zōtei Hannichi kanwa kan no 25* 増訂半日閑話巻之二五 (1788–1822). In *Shokusanjin zenshū sankan* 蜀山人全集三巻 (Tokyo: Nihon Tosho sentā, 1979), 452. Cited in Sone, *Shōfū to kinsei shakai*, 131.

Despite the hierarchical Neo-Confucian codes of social and economic roles that the samurai-class Tokugawa government promulgated with the expectation that the lower classes would follow to ensure a harmonious society, ordinary people began to find various ways of breaking out of their assigned occupational class to earn more money. The reality was that the Tokugawa financial system, based on rice stipends, proved to be unstainable. It caused tax burdens resulting in extreme poverty and unstable populations, especially in agricultural areas where there were short crop yields due to bad weather and other natural causes. Although most women working as courtesans or geisha did so out of necessity to rescue their poor families, the distinctive hallmarks of their trade—extravagant makeup and dramatic fashions—seems to have endeared them to ordinary people and aspirational young women who looked with awe and admiration on their display of material success. Otherwise, why would they purchase mass- produced *bijin-ga* of geisha-type woman by *ukiyo-e* designers like Eisen to take home as keepsakes of their admiration for such female images, in the same way that today's mass audiences consume visual depictions of beautiful models or starlets? The fact that successful geisha could be construed as symbols and indirect enablers of conspicuous consumption by the public at large while others were in need displeased the conservative watchdogs of society. They began accusing working geisha of seducing family men and causing marital problems.[167] For the geisha, the skills, fashions, and deportment they were using to "trap" men were the only means through which they and their families, as members of the lower classes could ever hope to ascend the social ladder to a better life. Becoming a geisha was a realistic way for female offspring to secure economic and social independence and many poor families prepared their daughters for sale into the demimonde in search of that goal. The spunky girls who became successful geisha were the heroines of

[167] *Hirakatashi shi 3* 枚方市史 (1800). In Yabuta (1996), *Joseishi to shiteno kinsei*, 207.

the demimonde. Their stories became the stuff of fiction, their dramas appeared on the kabuki stage, and their beauty, make-up, and fashions were celebrated by Eisen in his extensive *bijin-ga* oeuvre.

**Connecting to Illegal Brothels outside Metropolitan Areas**

In the metropolitan areas, geisha and other sex workers could plied their trade either in illegal lower-class *okabasho* or in the licensed quarters of the Yoshiwara in Edo, the Shimbara (島原) in Kyoto (est. 1640) and the Shinmachi (新町) in Osaka (est.1624–1644). From these urban hubs, there was a network of unlicensed brothels that carried the sex trade to the provinces, linking the pleasure quarters of the country together into one vast web of resting stations were men could find comfort women while on the road conducting business in the expanding economy. The expansion of the sex trade throughout the country occurred in part as a consequence of new developments in the agricultural sector. Farmers were meeting their increasingly heavy tax obligations to the government by making money in cottage industries that produced finished or semi-finished goods such as *saké* and silk, cotton, hemp and ramie textiles to sell to urban markets and at way stations along the major highways known as the "Five Routes" (Ōshū kaidō, Nikkō kaidō, Kōshu kaidō, Nakaasendō, and Tōkaidō) as well as secondary roads for trade and commerce that crisscrossed the country in Edo times. The emergence of a culture of travel (for business as well as leisure) among commoners, already seen in the early eighteenth century, led to the establishment of post or way stations filled with many inns and restaurants. As a side business, many stations offered sexual services along with food and lodgings.[168] As the commercial transportation of goods became more frequent between producers in agricultural provinces and consumers in

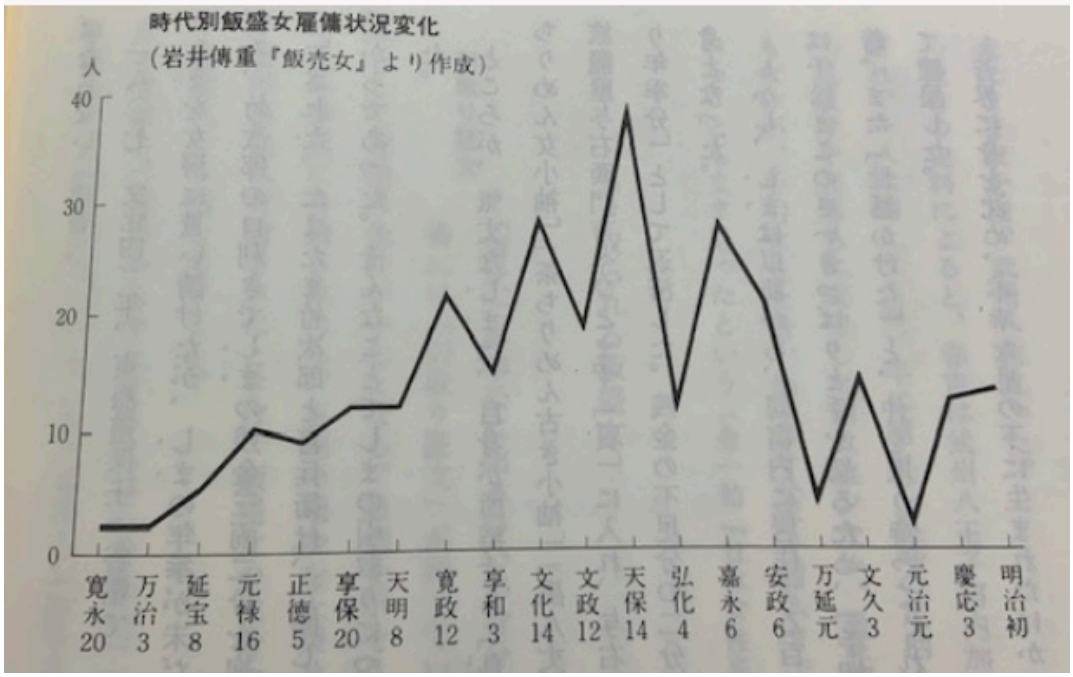
[168] Constantine Nomikos Vaporis, *Breaking Barriers: Travel and the State in Early Modern Japan.* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1994), 81.

towns and cities, the number of inns and restaurants at each *shukuba* 宿場, or main way station also increased. Inns at *shukuba* were staffed by female servants, commonly called *meshimori onna* 飯盛女(female food servers), who moonlighted as sex providers. The modern historian Usami Misako reports that local magistrates treated *meshimori onna* as regular employees (not as sex workers) in order not to break the Tokugawa's ban on prostitution except in government-licensed brothels. *Meshimori onna* were commonly young daughters, wives, and mothers from impoverished peasant families.[169] It is known that local magistrates at many way stations overlooked the illegal sex sold by the women due to their need for the unreported revenues they collected from inn owners in order to run their jurisdictions.[170]

Originally, way stations were built to lodge the *daimyō* and his retinue during their alternate-year *sankin kōtai* travel to Edo and to shelter samurai traveling on official business. The cost of food and lodging for such official stays were free of charge for the visiting higher-ups. Hence, many stations' finances went into a state of financial embarrassment as visits and business meetings by government officials increased in volume over the years. To balance their books, stations took to taxing the sale of women as they would any local product or commodity, and the illicit practice was tolerated by the central government whose officials receive free room and board while in transit. In other words, the sale of female sex became an integral part of the financial revenues of the Tokugawa government at both the national and the local level. For this reason, the number of female sex workers greatly increased over the years. Graph A demonstrates the increasing number of *meshimori onna* hired by the government from the Tenmei to Kōka eras (1781–1848).[171] In the case of the

[169] Usami, *Meshimori onna* 飯盛女, 39–70.
[170] Shimojū, *Miuri no nihonshi* ,166.
[171] Usami, *Meshimori onna*, 68.

way station built in the village of Mitsuyamura 三矢村 in Hirakata 枚方 along the Kyōkaidō 京街道 (a road connecting Kyōbashi 京橋 in Osaka to Kyoto), a total of only three men but as many as 150 women were hired into local government service as indentured workers in 1840.[172] Many of the women were likely engaged in prostitution, in addition to their manual labor as maids, servers, and cooks. In other words, the female servants were important commercial items for attracting paying male clients to the inns and restaurants of the rest stop when it was not being used for official business.




Graph A Tenmei 8 Kōka 4
Number of *meshimori onna* at *shukuba*

Not only male travelers but also male farmers in villages began to frequent the semi-brothels at nearby way stations to buy women for sex, which was known to cause much marital discord.[173] For example, in 1832 and 1834, the government proprietors of Kumagaya

[172] *Hirakata-shi shi* 3 枚方市史 3 (Hirakata City History, volume 3) Quoted in Yabuta, *Joseishi to shite no kinsei*, 205-6.
[173] "Nakajimayama-mura yogozaemon musume rien sashisawari deiri sumikuchi shōmon (1776-77)." In *Ōta shishi shiryō hen Kinsei 3* 太田市資料編近世３,ed. Ōta-shi (Tokyo: Ōta-shi,1984–87), vol. 3: 600.

station along the Nakayamadō road attempted to hire more *meshimori onna* to generate more revenue for the jurisdiction. However, their petition were denied by residents of the local village. The reason of the resistance is recorded:

> （前略）宿内は言うに及ばず、周辺の村むらから、若者たちが旅籠屋に宿泊し、
>
> 無駄な金銭を浪費し、博奕に興じて金品を使い果たす。（後略）[174]
>
> … Not only male youth in our village but also outside the village stay at the inns, … It needs no saying that young men from neighboring villages stay at the inns, wasting a lot of money, gambling [for fun], and using up their wealth. …[175]

In the minds of the village residents the corrupt behaviors of male youth could be blame on the *meshimori onna* who staffed the inns. Under such circumstances, the sex workers in the guise of servants who worked at these inns (*hatagoya*) were condemned as wicked women and the young men were their victims. The male customers desiring "extra" services from *meshimori onna* were not criticized. The reality was that in the patriarchal society of Edo Japan, the position of men far surpassed that of women, who became scapegoats for most of society's ills.

In light of the fact that the illegal sex trade was operating throughout Japan along well-trodden trade routes, a print series such as Eisen's 1842 *Bijin Tōkaidō* 美人東海道 (Beauties along the Tōkaidō), which depicts sensual female images in the manner of modern pin-ups for each of the fifty-three stations along the east-west Tōkaidō highway, becomes

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[174] *Nonaka-ke bunsho* 野中家文書 (Nonaka Family Records, kept in the Saitama kenritsu bunshokan 埼玉県立文書館 Library). See Usami, *Shukuba to meshimori onna, 80*–81.
[175] My translation.

easily understood. In one print from the set, *Ōiso* 大磯 (Figure 21), a woman with breasts exposed and soft, tantalizing hair in each armpit washes the nape of her neck, traditionally viewed as an erogenous zone. Her pose is twisted and unnatural, as if she is attempting to seduce an unseen viewer. Visible in the background is the row of inns and eateries that line the thoroughfare at Ōiso. The woman is perhaps a *meshimori onna* at one of the inns who serves food, *saké*, and for an extra price, sex. Her kimono is of the casual type worn by commoner women or female servants. The *Bijin Tōkaidō* series was produced partly to advertise the female sex workers at each station in the manner that *meibutsu* 名物 (famous local products), a term commonly used for rice cakes, *saké*, tea, and other commercial goods are advertised to this day in Japan. The business interests in Ōiso who put up the money for this series of advertisements were in the serious business of attracting male travelers to stay at their rest stop. *Ukiyo-e* designers such as Eisen thrived on designing salacious *bijin-ga* prints like this to help businesses advertise the charms and availability of female prostitutes.


Figure 21. Keisai Eisen. *Ōiso* 大磯 from the series *Bijin* tōkaidō 美人東海道 (Beauties *of the Tōkaidō*), 1842. Reproduction taken from Chiba City Museum of Art. Reproduction taken from, *Keisai Eisen* (2012), compiled by Chiba City Museum of Art, Cat. 327.

Some girls were also sold and sent faraway to serve in way stations along major trade routes. Such girls, far away from the watchful eyes of parents, were too often regarded as independent sex workers rather than as filial daughters sold into sex to assist their struggling families.[176] Wearing fashionable kimono and makeup to attract male clientele also gave the impression that they were free agents who enjoyed the wanton consumption of [gaudy]

[176] Stanley, *Selling Women*, 108–109.

luxury items.[177] They appeared financially independent, wicked, and expert at flattering and cajoling men into corruption.

Perceptions on Freelance Sex Workers: A Cause of "Social Corruption" or a "New Type of Woman"?

Eisen's contemporary, Buyō Inshi 武陽陰士[178] (act. early 19th century) raises a serious social issue in his 1816 *Seji Kenbunroku* 世事見聞録 (Matters of the World: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard) — the unprecedented number of illegal prostitutes floating around the country. The era of Eisen and Buyō witnessed an increasing number of women engaged in prostitution outside government-licensed quarters. Freelancers who were geisha, also periodically engaged in prostitution as a side business in order to make ends meet or to accrue extra earnings. This remarkable transformation in the sex industry beginning from the middle- to late- eighteenth century, when the number of sex workers, both licensed and unlicensed started to rise dramatically, even in provincial areas. Buyō saw the increasing number of Yoshiwara and unlicensed sex workers (including geisha) throughout Japan as a sign of social corruption. He notes in the *Seji kenbunroku*:

> しかるに今は吉原町の売女の数三、四千人に及びし。また芸者と唱ふるもの三、四百人ありといふ。[179]

[177] Ibid.
[178] It is not resolved who Buyō Inshi was. Mauris B. Jansen suggests that he may have been an Edo rōnin 浪人 (masterless samurai). See Mauris B Jansen, *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), vol.5: 178.
[179] Buyō Inshi 武陽陰士, *Seji kenbunroku* 世事見聞録, Eijirō Honshō 本庄栄治 and Tatsuya Naramoto 奈良本辰也 eds. (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko Shoten, 2010), 334. See also Mark Teeuwen and Kate Wildman Nakai, eds., *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption: "An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard" by an Edo Samurai* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 334.

…Prostitutes in Yoshiwara count three to four thousand, and there are three to four hundred geisha there.[180]

この遊芸者といへるもの、また売女も同然の業をするものなり。三都は右の趣にて、そのほか奈良·堺·伏見·下関·長崎などを始め、国々宿々·津々浦々の売女の数、幾万人なるべきか。すべて今日本国中にある所およそ十万人を越すべし。かくの如く国々繁昌するに随ひ、右体子を売るもの出来、人の妻娘を誑かし取るものも出来、勾引などの悪党出来、また懸かり子を取られて難儀に及ぶ爺婆もあまた出来るなり。また、この道、国々に流行するに随ひ、しきりに淫犯のこと起り、あるいは虚労を煩ひ、あるいは瘡毒を請けて廃人になるものも多く出来、天命を過まるものも多く出来るなり[181]

...These entertainers are the same as prostitutes. Besides the three cities [Edo, Kyoto and Osaka where the licensed quarters were located], in Nara, Sakai, Fushimi, Shimonoseki, Nagasaki and other places, prostitutes in Japan [now] number over 10 million. As many provinces [have] flourished, illicit practices [have] increased, including the tricking of wives and daughters and the kidnapping girls. Many parents suffered the loss of their girls. There is much criminal behavior accompanying this situation. Some [girls] grow weak from illness or get syphilis. Such conduct surpasses [goes against] the will of Heaven.

[180] Miyamoto Yukiko 宮本由起子 reports that between the Kyōhō era (1716–1735) and the beggining of the Kansei era (1795–1801), sex workers in Yoshiwara numbered around 2000 to 3000. Buyō Inshi's numbers were from around 1813. However, it is not sure how he came up with the number. See Miyamoto Yukiko, "Yūjo no tōkyū" 遊女の等級. In *Nihon Joseishi*, ed. Wakita and et al., 132.
[181] Buyō Inshi*, Seji knbunroku*, 336

わづか十四、五年の間にその風俗の崩れ移り替わりし事、世の下りゆく事を察知すべし。[182]

…In only fourteen to fifteen years, the social and moral disturbance [in our customs] is obvious. We should realize the decline of our society.

Buyō may have exaggerated the number of sex workers, but it is nevertheless clear that prostitution was skyrocketing, and this was a large concern for some upstanding men in terms of public morality.[183] It should be noted that the Kansei reforms of 1787 to 1793 shuttered many unlicensed quarters, forcing lower-class prostitutes such as *kiri* 切り (cut-rate), *kashi* 河岸 (moatside) and *teppō* 鉄砲 (firearms) to move into the legal quarters of Yoshiwara. Hence, when Buyō wrote his cautionary tale, these relocated lower-class prostitutes might have caused the bump in the sex worker population of Yoshiwara. It is known that the new arrivals numbered 1,274 individuals out of the total population of 2,921 women counted in the legal quarter.[184]

By the early nineteenth century, with a thriving sex industry practically at their doorsteps, a growing number of ordinary *chōnin* began to see that they could make a good return on investment in one commodity of the sex industry─ the geisha. Although geisha were not technically considered sex workers as their primary task was to entertain clients with their music playing, dance, and conversation, they occasionally engaged in selling sex.[185] Seeing a business opportunity, townspeople started to groom their own daughters to become geisha, or adopted unrelated girls who could be later sold or hired out as geisha.[186]

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[182] Buyō Inshi*, Seji knbunroku*, 371–372.
[183] Buyō Inshi*, Seji knbunroku*, 334-335.
[184] Miyamoto Yukiko, "Yūri no seiritsu to taishūka 遊里の成立と大衆化." In Takeuchi ed., *Nihon no kinsei* 14 *Bunka no taishūka*, 216.
[185] See Sone Hiromi, *Shōfu to kinsei shakai*.
[186] Ibid., 130–131.

Once trained, these real or adopted daughters were hired out to brothels to entertain at banquets and thus earn money for the parents without the signing of contracts or the relinquishing of parental rights. Thus, the profit-minded parents were able to circumvent the requirement that the trafficking of minor females had to be conducted through licensed brothel quarters. Adopting unrelated girls and sending them out as "geisha" did not appear to break the law.

Concurrently, there was a parallel trend among townspeople to place daughters, adopted or otherwise, into open-ended liaisons as concubines to townsmen, farmers, monks, and other wealthy men. Concubines with the ability to sing, dance, and play the shamisen like the geisha were in high demand in red light districts, and their families benefitted the greatest from their work. Buyō again observes:

> 依つて末々町人は、娘さへ持てばまづ遊芸を仕込み、実子なきは養女などいたしてよき娘を　ふる事を欲し、たとひ困窮人といへども歌浄瑠璃三味線踊り狂言　鼓　太鼓　胡弓などの稽古致させ、生い育つを遅しと待ちかね、いまだ年の至らざるに、あるいは遊芸者といたし、あるいは囲ふものとする事を急ぐなり。娘どももかねてその積りに心得、人の寵愛に誇り、ジュ弱安泰に暮らさん事を願ひ、旦那を取るというてよき男を選びて身を任すなり。そのよき男といふも、貴人かまたは美男などをいふにあらず.[187]

> …If *chōnin* [townspeople] have daughters, they try to get them trained in the arts so they could be employed as a geisha or a concubine. If they do not have one [a daughter], they would make one through adoption. A financially distressed family

[187] Buyō Inshi, *Seji kenbunroku*, 365–66.

would likely do this. . . the daughters of townspeople like a peaceful life without financial worries or purpose . . . they respect most all men of wealth, regardless of their appearance or even if they are of low social status.

Possessing musical skills generate the most profit for women of the demimonde, as performance art was in high demand by the male elites of society, a phenomenon perhaps related to the latent Heian classical ideal of *yasashii* that has been already noted by Nakano, which is that the greatest virtue in a woman is her ability to console and comfort men with her gift of music. Even after retiring from a career as a geisha or concubine, women with performance skills often continued to earn a steady income as a teacher of singing and music to support herself and her family. For families in poverty, daughters often proved to be their most valuable asset as girls could be turned into profitable commodities and it was a practice sanctioned by society.

Under the hierarchical Neo-Confucian-based patriarchy of Edo Japan, children were supposed to obey their parents, while parents were supposed to protect their children. However, this symbiotic human bond was being corrupted or viewed as such. Buyō again laments:

以前は、卑賤の末々までも愛情の見過ぎはことごとく忌み嫌ひてけるに、今は常のことになり、侍すら忍びて、娘の陰、町人の陰にて取り続くものある程の事なれば、卑賤の賊はなおさらの事、右体の業に付く事をこの上もなき手柄といたし、娘もそれを自慢に心得、他人もこれを羨み、よき娘あれば鼻高く、人の気請も格別よろしく、また娘を見当に金銀・衣類をも心安く貸しくるる者も出来る程のこと故みな男子を女子を好み、容貌よき娘あれば親族

一統の宝とするなり (省略)娘も己が力にて父母兄弟を養い（省略）おのづから心に慢じ我儘いっぱいにはびこり、（省略）いつとなく娘を主人の如く心得、つひに親子の見境ひもなくなりゆくなり.[188]

…In older times, it was shameful for a family to send a daughter into concubinage. However, it now seems that many people are invested in sending daughters away to be concubines or geisha in hopes of earning extra income through them. Nowadays, even daughters are boastful about the situation. People want to have daughters more than sons in order to make a profit. In this situation, some daughters in concubinage are known to act like household heads because they are the bread winners . . . parents also gradually come to regard the daughter [who supports the family by selling entertainment and/or sex] as the head of household.

Buyō sees a decaying society, a disharmony in the natural order of things when townsmen were no longer doing their parental duty to protect their daughter's virture but instead were promoting illicit sex to provide income for the family. As suggested by Sone, it should be noted that some of these abusive parents were foster parents. They adopted and trained unrelated girls to be send out as geisha or concubines for profit.[189] The intention of the foster parent was to earn money from the girls' hosting of customers at banquets and sporadic sale of sex. They were masquerading as legal guardians of the girls, but the reality was that it was a serious business for them. Whether putting up daughters to labor in the sex trade was done by actual parents or by foster parents (business people), all involved relied on the girl's earnings.[190] As Stanley demonstrates, however, to the eyes of city and town magistrate as well as village authorities, the existence of an illegal sex trade was a problem to

[188] Buyō Inshi, *Seji kenbunroku*, 366–68.
[189] Sone, *Shōfu to kinsei shakai,* 131.
[190] Ibid.

be laid at the feet of the girls, not those who put them up to the crime.[191] It can be said that the daughters did not have any say in their choice of occupation. Although as breadwinners they became nominally household heads, they were still not liberated women as they did not have legal parity with men in society. The ruling late Edo elites only saw working women, as personified in sex workers, as the agents of societal corruption and lamented that the lower classes cared only about money, not about the moral codes that the Tokugawa government promulgated and still expected society to uphold.[192] At the same time, I would suggest that the change in ordinary women working outside the home demonstrated that women could survive on their own without constant supervision and protection by male family members.

It was prescient of upper-class samurai thinkers like Buyō to see the situation of daughters becoming breadwinners as a sure sign of an overturning of the old hierarchal social system. But for the women involved, particularly those working in the lucrative sex industry as geisha; their artistic skills, high fashion, elaborate coiffeurs, graceful deportment and so on, had now become standards of feminine beauty for women at large to envy and emulate as represented in Eisen's *bijin-ga*. I assume that for aspirational commoners, raising daughters to become geisha or be geisha-like was a ticket to a better life.

Sone Hiromi has argued that the increased in numbers of sex entrepreneurs and clandestine prostitutes in early modern Japan resulted from the development of a commercial and monetary economy.[193] During the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the Japanese economy was rapidly changing due to the development of commercialized agriculture such as

[191] Stanley, *Selling Women,* 99
[192] Buyō Inshi, *Seji kenbunroku,* 366–68.
[193] Sone Hiromi, "Prostitution and Public Authority in Early Modern Japan," in Tonomura Hitomi, Anne Walthall and Haruko Wakita, eds., *Women and Class in Japanese History* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies The University of Michigan, 1991), 183.

cotton and silk production.[194] The demands for those commercialized items first grew in large cities like Edo and Osaka. Because of the establishment of public infrastructure such as the Tōkaidō road and its stations as well as designated ports for trade throughout Japan, many regional areas also thrived and had money to expand and engage in interstate trade. In other words, Japan in the time of Eisen was moving into the stage of proto-capitalistic and industrial society as farmers began to take on commercial agriculture and businessmen eagerly invested in inn and restaurants on highways. Not only men in urban hubs, but also those in the provinces now had money to spend on goods, services, and entertainment, including prostitutes. Simultaneously, many state-owned way stations on the highways faced financial difficulty due to their obligation to cover all of the cost of official trips such as the alternate-year-in-residence *sankin kōtai* mentioned several times above, in addition to the year-round lodgings and transportation of functionaries as well as the handling of official deliveries, etc.[195] In order to meet their many official obligations, inns and eateries at way stations hired more *meshimori onna* as service workers who were expected to provide sex on the side. As mentioned, this environment provided male farmers in regional areas with access to prostitution for the first time in history. We will again take up the *meshimori onna* situation later in this chapter.

There might be another factor contributing the bump in female sex workers starting in the late eighteenth century. A series of natural disasters causing poor harvests and had devastated many peasants' lives, leaving them no choice but to sell their daughters into the sex trade. It would be one less mouth to feed and would bring a great sum of money in one go. One of the worst famines, commonly known as the *Tenmei no daikikin* 天明の大飢饉

[194] Nakamura Satoru, "The Development of Rual Industry," in Nakane Chie and Shinzaburō Ōishi, eds., *Tokugawa Japan: the Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1990), 81–96. Also see Jansen (1989), 579.
[195] Usami, *Shukuba to meshimori onna*, 24.

(Great Tenmei famine), occurred in the Tōhoku 東北 region from 1782 to 1788. Much of the population in this large region fell on hard times, notably those living in the domains of Hirosaki 弘前 (Aomori 青森), Morioka 盛岡 (Iwate 岩手), Sendai 仙台, and Yonezawa 米沢 (Niigata 新潟). The Tōhoku region had already been experiencing unusual weather conditions since the 1770s. Additionally, Mount Iwaki 岩木 located in Hirosaki erupted on April 13, July 6, and August 3 of 1783, and Mount Asama 浅間, located between what are now Gunma and Nagano, also followed suit and erupted. Volcanic ash covered a large swath of agricultural land, causing massive crop failures. The poor harvests brought on a significant number of peasant demonstrations against tax increases.[196] Populations lived in extreme poverty, the number of daughters sold into prostitution increased dramatically.

Sugita Genpaku 杉田玄白 (1733–1817), a doctor of Western medicine, records in his *Nochimi-gusa* 後見草 (Looking back at the Past) of 1760–1787 that people died from starvation all over Japan. It is also known that an increasing number of peasants left their families and travelled into cities to seek employment,[197] and it is certain that many others sent their daughters into prostitution since, as previously noted, the easiest way for illiterate low-class women to earn the most money to help their families was through selling their sex. Impoverished peasant families thus sold their daughters to brothels for a large lump sum of money. In times of hardship, it was the most vulnerable or the lowest-ranked members of society who were sacrificed first. In late Edo Japan, this assignation was bestowed on lower-class commoner women.[198] For women of the lower classes, prostitution thus became one of

[196] Furushima, Toshio, "Land-tax Revenue and Government Finances." In Cambridge History of Japan Vol.4, 497.
[197] Sugita Genpaku, "Nochimigusa." (1760–1787). In Iwamoto, Sashishi 岩本佐七 comp., *Enseki Jisshu nishū* 燕石十種二輯, (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai kankōsho, 1907–1908), 440–441.
[198] It should be noted that about a smaller group prostitutes were young male (*wakashū* 若衆) both for male and female clients during the Edo period. However, female prostitutes were

their assigned roles in times of financial emergency. As mentioned, this assignation was officially sanctioned by the Tokugawa government with the establishment of officially licensed brothel quarters practically at the start of its regime.

Once again, women sold into the sex trade were considered filial daughters by the ruling class because they were alleviating their families' poverty. The government legalized this human trafficking early in the Edo period by making the sale of sex legal and granting its providers certain rights and protections as indentured workers who carried out their trade in government-licensed red-light districts regulated by city and town magistrates.[199] One of the greatest concerns of the government was to generate a steady source of tax revenue from licensed brothel quarters, something it could not do with clandestine brothel operations. However, by the early nineteenth century, more female commoners began to work as sex workers at unlicensed urban brothels and regional way stations. Some of them had retired from licensed quarters to earn more as free-lancers. They had become financially independent enough to live apart without supervision from brothel owners and parents, but dutifully continued to sell their charms and bodies to help their families back home. Some even became the main breadwinners for their families. To judgmental onlookers who knew nothing of their hard climb out of poverty and only saw their gaudy makeup and showy fashions, such women appeared to be vixens who lead good family men into sexual temptation and financial ruin. Once again, this reality was contrary to the government idea of an ideal society founded on the teachings of Neo-Confucianism where those born female, as portrayed in texts like the *Onna daigaku*, were meant to first serve their parents and later their

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much more demanded in terms of numbers and area. According to the report in *Kikunosono* 菊の園 (Chrysanthemum Garden, 1764), there were 12 brothels of male prostitutes in Yoshichō 芳町, a total of 55 male prostitutes. *Morisada mankō* (1837) states that the main clients of male prostitutes were Buddhist monks.

[199] Stanley, 99. Also see Sone, *Shōfu to kinsei shakai* and Shimojū Kiyoshi, *Miurino nihonshi.*

husbands and raise progeny in the seclusion of a family home. Accordingly, working women who exist independent of men in outside world were considered social deviants who were a corrupting force in society.

Interestingly, what really concerned the government most was not moral corruption, as the ruling elite were not sexual Puritans. Rather, what concerned them was the sex worker's motivation for staying in the trade once their period of indentured servitude was up and their families were nominally out of financial danger. Thus, what really worried governmental watchdogs was that an increasing number of prostitutes, including geisha, went freelance and continued working, particularly outside their control in unlicensed quarters. They seemingly achieved financial independence and were living alone, long after they had entered indentured service to save their impoverished families.[200] Prostitution was perhaps the highest paying job and one of the few avenues of employment outside manual labor for lower-class women without literacy. But women, literate or otherwise, were not supposed to be financially or socially independent. So it must be galling for the male ruling elite to see women of the lower classes achieving this on their own. Perhaps even more galling for the male watchdogs was that the phenomenon was being celebrated in popular fiction, on the kabuki stage, and in the *bijin-ga* of Eisen for consumption and, heaven forbid, emulation by women in the general population. To add insult to injury, the wages earned in unlicensed quarters went untaxed as there was no mechanism for the government to collect taxes from clandestine sex parlors. Coupled with the societal ideal of womanhood outlined in the *Onna daigaku*, social critiques, local magistrates and other authority began to see the growing

[200] Sone, *Shōfu to kinsei shakai*. 100–101. Her research demonstrates that among a total of 46 *shakutori onna* 酌取女 (equivalent to geisha) in the Miyazu 宮津 area of northern Kyoto in 1862, 41 women were from Kyoto's brothel towns such as Gion 祇園 and Kiyamachi 木屋町. Sone explains that the number means girls who became *shakutori onna* were adopted into geisha houses from provinces and sent to regional brothel houses.

number of financially independent females—not only prostitutes and geisha but other independent female workers —as a threat.

In the eyes of the male ruling elite, their ideal perception of prostitutes as dutiful daughters who sold their virtue in order to save their families has been replaced by disturbing images of women from the lower-classes living in the demimonde who a decadent and corrupting force of nature tough enough to live as free agents in a man's world. Male social authorities seemed bewildered by the growing popularity and increased numbers of lower-class women, particularly geisha, floating around in the brothel quarters. The women's anomalous social status as autonomous economic actors was an affront to their male-centric model of an-orderly, stable society where everyone had an assigned role and stayed put in it for life.

Consumption of Consumer Goods by Women

As noted above, Buyō Inshi's *Seji kenbunroku* was written by an upper-class male to sound the alarm against a critical mass of commoner women who had achieved, for the first time in Japanese history, the economic power to live independently contrary to the prevailing Neo-Confucian ideal of womanhood as presented in the *Onna daigaku*. Buyō considered these independent women, whose images form the nucleus of Eisen's *bijin-ga*, a cause of social corruption. The ideal class structure, with its strict social hierarchy and occupational divisions of the Tokugawa had perhaps deteriorated beyond repair by Buyō's time. Nowhere is the battle between the ideal woman (nurtured in upper-class homes) and the real woman (out in the world fending for herself and her commoner family) fought more valiantly than in the realm of women's lifestyles and material consumption.

In the *Seji kenbunroku*, Buyō minces no words in criticizing the lifestyle of wealthy townspeople, which, he feels, reflects the abnormal and corrupt state of society.

(前略)女房は大家の奥方の如く、倅は若殿の如く、娘は姫·上臈の如き気象なり、昔は町人の娘はとかく武士の妻になる事を好みけるゆゑ、御制禁にもなりたがる程なるが、今は、武家の妻女になる事などは風上にも嫌ひ、また昔は武家の風体を羨み、武家の風体を見習ひたるが、今は己れが花麗に余りて、武家の風儀は不風流なりとていみ嫌ひ、全ての町人のなり姿を、武家の妻·嫁·娘等が好き用ゆる事になりゆき、もつとも前にいふ如く、衣服·髪飾り·物見遊山·川涼み·船遊び·芝居見物などのなり姿、武家よりもよほど立ち昇りたる風情なれば、これを羨みてこの真似をするももつともの事なり。[201]

... Wives of the wealthy merchant class act like wives of great family, sons of the wealthy merchant class act like young princes, and daughters are unyielding just like princess or court ladies. In the past, the daughters of *chōnin* preferred to become wives in samurai families. Now they do not like to be wives of samurai. They used to admire the style of samurai [women] and imitate it. Now they take to [the latest] fashion, and don't like the appearance of samurai [women]. Meanwhile samurai's wives, daughters-in-laws, and daughters all prefer the appearance of *chōnin* women. As already mentioned earlier, the practice of townspeople's style in clothing, hair decoration, [and their] sightseeing, cooling off at riverbanks, boat riding, going to see kabuki plays have become more fashionable than [more lofty] samurai activities. It has become reasonable [acceptable] for the samurai to imitate *chōnin*.

[201] Buyō Inshi, *Seji kenbunroku,* 268–269.

Here Buyō describes the flourishing lifestyle the townspeople, a lifestyle that was, to his disdain, being admired or imitated by the ruling samurai class. The ideal society set by the Tokugawa government was no longer functioning as it should.

Womanly attempts to seek beauty was considered virtuous throughout the Edo period. However, beauty should be tasteful, not garish. An early comprehensive volume on the education of women, *Onna chōhōki* (Women's Treasury) by Kusada Sunbokushi 艸田寸木子 (also known as Namura Jōhaku 苗村丈伯, act. mid to late 17th century) states:

> （前略）我より上様の人の心ばえ・風俗を見習ひ給ふべし。仮にも下様の心ばへ風俗に習ふべからず。風俗とは立ち振舞の事なり。結構なる衣装を着給ふといふにあらず。衣装もそれ/ \の位に過ぎぬをよしとす。[202]
>
> … Women in general should follow the way of the upper class, including their good heart as well as fashion. They should not follow the ways of the lower class. Fashion means deportment. It is not about wearing gorgeous outfits. Their fashion should be appropriate to their social class.[203]

As in Buyō's later *Seji kenbunroku*, Kusada's *Onna chōhōki*, is lamenting─ only a hundred years into Tokugawa rule─ that it has become vogue for women to emulate the fashions of the lower classes, particularly kabuki *onnagata* actors.[204] Although the *Onna chōhōki* warns against following the kabuki actors' fashion, the trend of imitating the stage costumes of

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[202] Kusada, *Onna chōhō ki* (1692), 19. In *Onna chōhō ki*, *Nan chōhō ki*, ed. Nagatomo Chiyoji,
[203] My translation.
[204] Kusada, *Onna chōhō ki,* 47.

*onnagata* by women of the demimonde or vice versa was already in full play as early as the late seventeenth century. The upper-class male author of the *Onna chōhōki* bemoans the extreme popularity of kabuki in his time that was causing even decent women to waste money on gaudy (and expensive) stage fashions. By Eisen and Buyō's time in the early nineteenth century, even samurai women took to imitating the fashion style of wealthier townswomen, who in turn, were imitating the stage fashions of kabuki female impersonators. This scenario of art-imitating-life and life-imitating-art is the more paradoxical as, if we may recall, kabuki actors were classified *hinin* (outcasts) in Edo society.

Women's financial autonomy or purchasing power was gaining traction in urban marketplaces to the extent that business-minded people, notably well-known writers and *ukiyo-e* designers began to market popular products like cosmetics and books to capture the considerable discretionary spending of women. For example, the popular writer Shikitei Sanba 式亭三馬 (1766–1822) began to promote a skin toner for ladies called *Edo no mizu* 江戸の水 (Edo Water) at his store, advertising its efficacy in in-house publications for women like *Edo no mizu saiwaibanashi* 江戸水福話 (Happy Tales from *Edo no mizu*), published in 1812.[205] Also, the popular writer and *ukiyo-e* designer Santō Kyōden 山東京伝 (who also went under the name Kitao Masanobu 北尾政演, 1761–1816) opened a tobacco store that likely had a female clientele, since smoking and smoking paraphernalia had become elegant and luxurious indulgences for women. Yet another large publisher, Suharaya Mohei 須原屋茂兵衛 (whose shop was in business since1658 and continued operations into the 1870s) and his relatives began to sell medicine in the late 1820s for pre- and post-natal women, along with other remedies. Suharaya socialized with the intellectual and cultured luminaries of his day as well as powerful landlords and upper-class samurai as part of his publication

[205] Eisen's close business partner Tamenaga Shunsui was apprenticed to Sanba.

business.[206] Thus, the influential Suharaya had no dearth of prospective buyers for his side business of selling lucrative feminine products.

Moreover, a self-help make-up manual aimed at women was written in 1813 by Sayama Hanhishimaru 佐山半七丸 (dates unknown) in Osaka with illustrations by Hayami Shungyōsai 速水春暁斎(d.1823), a local *ukiyo-e* designer. The text of the manual had been in print for about a century. It illustrates not only makeup techniques but also hairstyles and also describes ways to care for skin breakouts as well as how to tie different *obi* sash styles and how to maintain proper deportment while wearing kimono.[207] The manual belongs to the genre of *joyōmono* lifestyle texts for women not unlike the previously discussed *Onna daigaku takarabako and Onna chōhōki.* The big difference is that most of the paternalistic moralizing of the earlier texts is gone. The focus is now solely on the details of how to care for one's skin and hair and how to apply face powder. The point of this later text is no longer how to *behave* like a woman, but now to *consume* like a woman. This attests to both an increase in the number of female consumers and an increase in the number of commercial items produced exclusively for them. It also requires a certain level of literacy to follow the written instructions of the manual, which attests to the overall rise in women's education levels by the early nineteenth century.

According to Takahashi Masao, it was in the early to mid-seventeenth century that women's cosmetics were mass-produced and reached ordinary consumers for the first time. *Shokoku kaimono chōhōki* 諸国買物調方記 (Lists of Shops in Various Provinces) of 1692 gives the names famous women's cosmetic shops in the three large cities of Edo, Kyoto and

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[206] See Imada Yōzō 今田洋三, *Edo no shuppan shihon* 江戸の出版資本, in comp. Nishiyama Matsunosuke, *Edo chōnin no kenkyū* vol 3 江戸町人の研究　第 3 巻 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1973) 181–182.
[207] Sayama Hanhishimaru 佐山半七丸, *Miyako fūzoku kewaiden* 都風俗化粧伝 (1813), Takahashi Masao 高橋雅夫 ed. (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1982).

Osaka. There were specialty shops for face powder (three in Edo, eighteen in Kyoto, and twelve in Osaka), for hair oil shops (five in Edo, two in Kyoto, and six in Osaka), and for scents and incense (three shops in Edo, two in Kyoto, and six in Osaka). Notably, some cosmetic stores were owned by popular kabuki actors. In 1771, there were 18 *aburamise* 油見世 (purveyors of rouge, face powder, hair oils, etc.) owned by kabuki actors in the city of Edo.[208] As kabuki actors were often the fashion leaders of their era, they had a built-in customer base when staring businesses in the beauty and fashion industries to earn extra income.

Among the products for women, the face powder Bien senjokō 美艶仙女香, a product name derived from the moniker (Senjo, or "nymph") of Segawa Kikunojō V was frequently advertised in popular books and *ukiyo-e* prints, including Eisen's *bijin-ga*.[209] Eisen in fact produced a series of *bijin-ga* prints entitled *Bien senjokō* sometime around 1824. The face powder was known to be sold commercially by 1819.[210] It appears that there was a female demand for the face powder by the 1820s that there was fueled by pictorial advertisements promoting its sale. The memoir, *Aga hotoke no ki* 吾佛乃記 (A Record of Things Special to Me) of 1823–1844 by the popular author, Takizawa Bakin 滝沢馬琴 (1767–1848) mentions a *nanushi* 名主 (city official) named Wada Genshichi 和田源七. Takizawa's short description of Wada refers to him as a functionary responsible for approving the content of popular books and *ukiyo-e* prints as well as a purveyor of the [Bien] senjokō face powder advertised in the publications he approved. Several decades later in

[208] Ibid., 266. See also *Shinkoku yakusha zensho* 新刻役者綱目 (1774). info: ndljp/pid/255438.
[209] Ellis Tinios, "The Fragrance of Female Immortals: Celebrity Endorsement from the Afterlife," *Impression* 27 (2005–2006): 43. For a further discussion of this product, see pp. 324-328.
[210] See *Edo kaimono hitori annai* 江戸買物独案内 (1824). info:ndljp/pid/8369320

1901, the popular early Meiji publication *Tokyo meibutsu shi* 東京名物誌 (History of the Famous Products of Tokyo), a Mr. Sakamoto (whose shop was located in the Kyōbashi area of Ginza) is identified as an inspector of popular publications. Ellis Tinios suggests that Sakamoto and Wada are the same person, and questions whether he subsidized popular books and *ukiyo-e* in order to advertise his face powder or exploited his office to ensure that no face powder but his would be advertised.[211] If Tinios is correct, we have to conclude that an inspector of popular media and an upstanding business leader of a ward, had abused his socio-political power to profit from an exclusive hold on the sale of a consumer product. Needless to say, by the early nineteenth century, there existed a critical mass of women consumers who purchased products made especially for them. Moreover, consumer items made especially for women had become a big enough business for their producers and sellers to pay for pictorial advertisements of them in women's publications and specialty shops so as to market them as widely as they could be transported throughout the country. Manufactures of women's products wishing to sell to audiences outside their locales turned to *ukiyo-e* artists, the mass media producers of the day, to make prints to advertise their products. As is the case in mass media today, pretty women are used to sell products. To judge from the visual record, the *geisha*-like women who populated Eisen's *bijin-ga* must have been considered the beauty *du jour* in Eisen's time, and he should be considered of one of the major illustrators behind the marketing of consumer products to women late Edo

[211] Tinios, "The Fragrance of Female Immortals: Celebrity Endorsement from the Afterlife," 43-44.

Figure 22. Keisai Eisen. “Bien senjokō and Bigenkō 美玄香 Face Powders,” from the *Hōnen Mutsu no hanabusa* 豊年武都英 (A Fruitful Year: The Glory of Bushū), 1839. Reproduction from *Ezōshiya Edo no ukiyo-e shoppan* by Suzuki Toshiyuki, p.106.

Interestingly, shops selling *ukiyo-e* were venues for the marketing of commercial items for women, particularly popular books and cosmetics. The *Hōnen Mutsu no hanabusa*, a woodblock book written by Temae Kan’iki 手前翰謂喜 (dates unknown) and illustrated by Eisen (Figure 22), shows a woman customer sitting on the veranda of an *ukiyo-e* shop in deep consultation with a clerk. Two signboards visible on the right advertise Bien senjokō and Bigenkō 美玄香, two brands of face powder for women; the customer has selected the

Bien senjokō brand and a set of three actor prints.[212] As mentioned previously, the name Bien senjokō is connected to Segawa Kikunojō V, whose nickname was Senjo 仙女 (nymph). The implication is that users of the powder would partake of some of the beauty and allure of the fashionable Kikunojō V, who was known in real life to be high-spirited. This *onnagata* was famed for portraying *iki*-type women on stage and he apparently lived as his female persona in real life as well. Shunsui might have based the fictional Yonehachi character on Kikunojō V in an attempt to profit from the actor's celebrity status.[213] A number of commercially-produced consumer items for women like [Bien] senjokō face powder were produced by *chōnin*, endorsed by actors, and sold by popular book writers and publishers in the late Edo period. The scene illustrated in figure 23 strongly suggests women possessed enough discretionary purchasing power in urban areas for men to commission specific illustrated advertisements with the aim of parting women from their money.

[212] Suzuki, *Ezōshiya Edo no ukiyo-e shoppu*, 106.
[213] Satō Satoru 佐藤悟, "Gesaku to kabuki—Kaseiki ikō no Edo gesaku to yakusha nigao-e" 戯作と歌舞伎—化政期以降の江戸戯作と役者似顔絵, *Ukiyo-e geijutsu* 114 浮世絵芸術 114 (1995): 26.

Figure 23. Unidentified Artist. Painted Envelope for Tooth Powder, 19th century. Collection of the Volkenkunde, Leiden. # Leiden 1-1742.

Figure 24. Keisai Eisen. *Shigatsu* 四月 (Fourth Month) from the series *Ukiyo bijin jūnikagetsu* 浮世美人十二箇月(Modern Beauties: Twelve Months) published by Sanoya Kihei 佐野屋喜兵衛 around 1825 (Bunsei 8). Reproduction taken from *Kōki ukiyo-e* (1965) by Oka Isaburō and Suzuki Jūzō.

The Ethnology Museum (Volkenkunde) in Leiden, Netherlands has in its collection what appears to have been a small paper envelope for holding tooth powder decorated with a printed image of a woman (Figure 23). The style of the face, hairdo, demeanor and upper robes of this female image resemble that of the female boathouse proprietor from the "Fourth Month" print by Eisen (Figure 24). Matsuda Misako has recently discovered that Eisen had designed an illustration to decorate a paper envelope to hold women's face powder (Figure

25).[214] Selling to women was therefore part of Eisen's job as a *bijin-ga* artist and this rare surviving print attests to his powers as a designer of packaging for commercial products aimed at women. Although Matsuda does not specifically refer to a female audience for Eisen's *bijin-ga* in her study, it is likely that the maker of the face powder was aware of the popularity of Eisen's *bijin-ga* among women and decided to employ him to create the design for the packing and marketing of the product.

Figure 25.

Keisai Eisen. Painted Envelope for Face Powder, early 19th century. Reproduction taken from *Ukiyo-e Art* (Jan, 2019) edited by International Ukiyo-e Society.

As these illustrations indicate, in the late Edo period, ordinary women had their own money to spend and producers started to market consumer items exclusively to them through women's publications and specialty shops. The urban phenomenon also spread to the

[214] Matsuda, Misako 松田美沙子, "Keisai Eisen no 'shiroko zutsumi' 渓斎英泉の「白粉包み」" *Ukiyo-e Art*, (Tokyo: International Ukiyo-e Society, 2019, Jan), 26-31.

provinces. For example, a petition to the local magistrate in Ikaruga 斑鳩 in Yamato 大和 (today's Nara) records that female cotton weavers were now applying make-up to their faces, something that had not been done in previous times. The new habit started as a result of their earning more money than they would have in indentured service as farm hands. Female cotton weavers now worked indoors and could afford luxuries that were once out of their pay grade. Other agricultural women in the area became afflicted with the desire to be fashionable and now sought work as cotton weavers. No women wanted to stay on farms.[215] This case demonstrates again that in the eyes of male authority, woman's financial autonomy should be considered a corrupting force in society that upsets the natural order of things. Farm girls made up to look like fashionable townies, indeed! Why would they not stay put on the farm with their families to produce the food needed to feed the country?

Despite the social authorities' negative view on lower-class women who work outside the home, the women continued to do so and in the process helped to create a new paragon for Japanese women—strong, assertive and independent. This new paragon came into play fully in the late Edo and was pictorialized by *bijin-ga* designers like Eisen and spread through popular books, kabuki, the sex trade and other entertainment industries. In manner and appearance, the new women were modeled on the geisha or other lower-class women of the demimonde. In Eisen's case, this updated female image was used to promote profit in an intricate web of business interests among the publishing, sex, entertainment, and specific consumer products for women. My research thus far has unearthed one category of commercial products for women— face and tooth powders— that shows Eisen's use of the updated female image, based on a geisha-type beauty, in *bijin-ga* of the late Edo. In the next chapter we will take up how the new feminine ideal was partly conceived in the fictional

[215] *Ikaruga-chō shi* 斑鳩町史. See Yabuta, *Joseishi to shiteno kinsei*, 207–208.

world of kabuki and how Eisen came to be involved in one of the major productions of the pictorial form she would eventually take.