

# International Workshop: Performing Gender and Place in Early Modern and Modern Japan – A Material Perspective

8 September 2018

- **Sawako Takemura Chang (Leiden University), *Beyond the Male Gaze: Images of Beauties By Keisai Eisen (1791–1848)***
  - This study examines the emergence of a new type of female image in ukiyo-e (literally, “pictures of the floating world”) in the early to mid-nineteenth century (late Edo period), with a focus on the *bijin-ga*, or “pictures of beautiful people,” designed by Keisai Eisen (1791–1848). Compared to many *bijin-ga* produced before his time, Eisen’s *bijin-ga* express a more sensuous, sexually charged sentiment and sense of resilience in portrayal of his subjects. My research demonstrates that female images are also viewed by women for their own purposes. As Judith Butler suggests that a gender is a construction through repetitive performances, I will argue that Eisen’s *bijin-ga* offered examples to women of this period about how to perform/act in society in order to have new and better life opportunities.
- **Julie Nelson Davis (Penn State University), *Writing and Picturing the Yoshiwara***
  - In 1804, a new book illustrating the Yoshiwara came on the market, featuring text by Jippensha Ikku and illustrations by Kitagawa Utamaro. It was such a hit it was published in both monochrome and color impressions. In this talk, I will address issues of authorship and representation in the format of the book, paying close attention to ways materiality, text, and image intersect.
- **Mio Wakita-Elis (Heidelberg University), *Geisha in the age of visual modernity: geisha and her image in Meiji visual practices***
  - This paper explores the evolving image of geisha in Meiji visual practices by focusing on three key issues: 1) socio-cultural transformation of geisha; 2) geisha and the emergence of modern visualising media; 3) ubiquitous geisha image and the problematic of unlimited access to female image.
- **Ewa Machotka (Stockholm University), *Marketing Modernity: Women in Japanese Pre-war Beer Posters***

Even a cursory look at Japanese pre-war commercial posters reveals that women were a major subject. This popularity of female images in modern material culture has commonly been explained in the context of their role as representations of particular discourses on art, gender and nation state. However, as will be demonstrated in this paper, the imagery of women is characterized by conceptual promiscuity grounded in the materiality of modern mediascape, a fact which demonstrates that images are not social mirrors. In this context, “woman,” as a category, functions as a Laclauian floating signifier which participates in the struggle for hegemony between diverse discourses on modern femininity. Rather than the products of a certain socio-cultural context or intermediaries that can transmit that context to the viewer Japanese modern posters should be seen as mediators in a complex network of actors forming this context. It becomes clear that although these images of women cannot be reduced to cultural texts, they were a direct practical locus of social and political control underlined by the narratives of modernity, which stood in the centre of the global imaginary at the time.

- **Angelika Koch-Low (University of Ghent), *The Body as Gendered Space in Early Modern Japanese Medicine***
- This paper explores Japanese medicine of the early modern period (1600-1868), tackling the issue of what place sex and gender, respectively, held in this medical system as ‘movable’ markers that differ across time and cultures. How did medical thought and representation at the time delineate female and male bodies? Did it create sexual difference, in what form, and how did this relate to what we would now call gender? The Sino-Japanese case is of particular interest as a tradition in which anatomical structures, including genitalia and sex organs, generally played a subordinate part and seem to have had intriguingly little bearing on medical constructions of gender. Given this peripherality of genital markers of sex, I discuss how the space that was the body became gendered, with a particular focus on male bodies and their representations throughout the period. Drawing on medical texts and images from the 17th into the early 19th century, the paper addresses both received Sino-Japanese attitudes towards the sexed/gendered body, as well as first encounters and negotiations with new, Western-inspired anatomical insights from the mid-18th century onwards.
- **Naoko Gunji (Independent Scholar), *The Transformation and Non-transformation of Ōhara gokō Paintings***
- One of the highlights of *Heike monogatari*, or the Tale of the Heike, is its final scene, *Ōhara gokō* (Imperial visit to Ōhara). In this scene—which was thought to be a fiction, but which recent studies show is based on a historical event—Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa pays a clandestine visit to a hermitage of his daughter-in-law, Kenreimon’in, who withdrew to the remote village of Ōhara after the Genpei War eliminated her family. Folding screens depicting this scene were produced since the mid-sixteenth century, and in the early Edo period, the theme came to be paired with another female character from *Heike monogatari*, Kogō. Nevertheless, several incoherent features between this pair—in terms of composition for instance—have been pointed out in previous scholarship, suggesting different courses of development for the two themes of paintings. In this talk, I will discuss the historical process that led to *Ōhara gokō* as one of this incoherent pair of depictions of women. I will trace back the pictorialization of *Ōhara gokō* to its origin as a picture of events (*gyōji-e*), in which the protagonist was indeed the retired emperor. This prestigious origin of the *Ōhara gokō* theme, on the one hand, prevented its iconography from changing for centuries. On the other hand, developments in representations of *Heike monogatari*, and in performing arts in particular, led to the former imperial consort’s takeover of the protagonist role in *Ōhara gokō* paintings, transforming them into a representation, paired with Kogō, of the virtues, suffering, and prayers of women.
- **Naama Eisenstein (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), *Poetic Battlefields: Ujigawa senjin and Edo Period Warriors’ Self-Image***
- The River Uji and its bridge have long been celebrated in Japanese culture as places of beauty and poetic imagery, appearing in literature and as *utamakura* already in the Heian period (794-1180). As an important junction in the path to the capital, Uji Bridge was also the location of several military confrontations, a number of which took place during the Genpei War (1180-1185). One of these confrontations, the scene known as *Ujigawa Senjin*, is the most widely found single scene in Genpei imagery made during the Edo period (1603-1868), appearing on a surprising number of formats. *Ujigawa senjin* is not the best known Genpei tale, nor the most dramatic, as it focuses on a battle of honour between two Minamoto warriors who race to be the first on the battlefield across the river. I suggest that the immense popularity of *Ujigawa senjin* imagery, especially in the arts of the elites, was closely connected with the poetic associations of Uji. The amalgamation of poetic and military history of Uji made this scene a perfect emblem for the newly developed self-image of Edo warriors.

- **Gerald Groemer (Yamanashi University), "Musician, Woman, Outcaste, Blind Man, or Candy Vendor?": Conflict Among Discriminated Groups in Late Tokugawa Japan**
- This presentation utilizes material concerning an incident occurring in the Matsushiro domain (today Nagano-shi) in 1846. Documents compiled by domanial authorities relate that the blind daughter of a candy vendor (*ame-uri*) wished to join a group of blind female performers (*goze*) active in the area. These women were, however, under the domination of the local guild of blind men (*tōdō*), which considered candy vendors outcastes and thus refused the daughter entry into the organization. This incident provides considerable insight into the dynamics governing the relation of various discriminated groups in late Tokugawa Japan. It indicates not just that groupings and communities were useful for fortifying the social status of members, but that they simultaneously fostered forms of exclusion that served the regime in upholding an irrational and ultimately unsustainable social order.
- **Doreen Mueller (Leiden University), *Uncanny Specter, Pitiabie Creature, or Opportunistic Beggar: Hinin (non-persons) in the Grotesque Imagination in Nineteenth-century Japan***
- In 1830s' Japan historical realities were bordering on the grotesque: in the old capital of Kyoto, townspeople were no longer able to discern the difference between a normal person and a beggar. Nationwide famine, food shortages and inflation had caused many townspeople to lose their homes. Becoming displaced also meant the loss of personhood. Hinin, non-persons, were perceived as uncanny because they did unhuman things like eating strange foods, wandering aimlessly and begging for alms. Non-persons were often depicted in grotesque situations with exaggerated physiognomies resembling hungry ghosts. In 1837, a group of concerned townspeople in Kyoto decided to leave a visual legacy of the conditions of the displaced. They produced picture scrolls to warn future generations. Although moral admonishment through pictures was an established practice in East Asia, admonishing by encouraging the viewer to project the gaze of an empathetic witness of historical conditions was novel. This new position of the viewer as a concerned witness challenged established ways of looking at non-persons as uncanny specters. Through detailed visual analysis, this paper will demonstrate how the combination of the grotesque imaging of non-persons with an empathetic gaze generated uncanny moments of looking, encouraging the viewer to enter the world of the picture, thereby amplifying the viewer's sense of witnessing actual historical realities.