Breaking the Disciplinary Boundaries: Collaborative Research in Early Modern Japanese Arts and Literature

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Having agreed to speak on the state of my field, I find it difficult to describe in a nutshell what my field is. Let me call it gesaku 歌作 studies, taking the Japanese term in the widest sense possible. In the traditional Japanese definition, gesaku refers to specific types of popular literature of the later Edo period. I propose to use the term to include all “playful” types of arts, whether literary, pictorial, or theatrical, but I will limit my discussion to the study of playful arts based in the city of Edo during the later Edo period since this is where gesaku-esque features are most conspicuous. The systematic overview by Professor Totman of the state of the study of Edo period history was in keeping with the rhetoric of his discipline. I ask you not to expect anything so dignified for the next 15 minutes: there won’t be any clear categories or balanced evaluations. If his presentation was of kangaku 漢学 style, mine will be a sort of gesaku 歌作--fragmentary, self-referential, and biased. Such an approach may not be unsuitable for describing the development of gesaku studies in Japan and in the U.S., which can be characterized by fragmentariness and self-doubt, rather reflecting the nature of gesaku itself.

I began as a comparativist specializing in Edo gesaku and its counterparts in English and French literatures. My realization that literature of the 18th and early 19th centuries both in Japan and in the West could not be studied in isolation from the other arts (particularly painting, theatre, music, and architecture) led me into the even more suspicious waters of comparative arts. To mix and confuse categories is universal to bourgeois cultures: like their Western counterparts, Edoite artists bent traditions to invent their own genres and conventions. Edo gesaku, however, is an extreme case. We cannot even talk about “literature” knowing that books were intermingled constructs of pictures and texts; “author” does not seem to be an adequate term for one who not only wrote stories but drew illustrations (or at least drafted pictures for the artists to complete) and designed the entire production of the book; nor does the term “texts” in the traditional sense do justice to a large body of Edo creations that were not in a written form or to kabuki 戲曲 scripts, for example, which were subject to instant changes according to the gossip in town or to the inclination of the star actor. In addition, the production and the reception of Edo culture cannot be separated since the response of the reader/viewer/audience was inherently anticipated in the creation of texts, written or unwritten, because of the topical nature of products and of the closeness of communication between artists and their audience in the forms of friendly circles, correspondence, and reviews, as well as of publishers’ sensitivity to the changing tides of the market and censorship. Hence, Edo culture must be discussed in terms of “performance” (not merely on stage), “production” (including book-making, for instance), “story telling” (even in songs and advertisements), and “reception” (readership, audience, and patronage) quite beyond the traditional generic distinctions according to which Japanese culture was described for a long time. The pressure is on all of us to step into fields of study for which we are not adequately trained, but the good news is that Edo culture, seen in broad context, is an inexhaustible treasure house of materials, methodologies, and arguments, yet to be discovered or explored: none of us will be out of our jobs for a few centuries to come.

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For the purpose of this workshop, I will omit a survey of individual achievements in translation and scholarship in favor of concrete examples of collaborations, referring to my own experience, in order to put a spotlight on current struggles and directions for the future. I will also give you a glimpse of my life to illustrate how a gesaku specialist might fit in the curriculum and program of an institution. Peculiarities of gesaku studies, as loosely defined here, derive from the facts that (1) it is still a new field of study, (2) available original materials are numerous and continue to be unearthed, (3) much training is needed to decipher the variety of literary, pictorial, and calligraphic styles of original texts, (4) much knowledge is required to understand the linguistic, pictorial, and other jokes rampant in many of these materials, (5) contemporary Edoites themselves have left us with their own views of their cultural production (ratings, reviews, and parodies), which need to be examined not only as reference materials but also as texts in their own right, and, in addition, (6) the generically mixed nature of the culture of the period challenges scholars to examine all of its aspects, for which literary critical or art historical approaches alone will not be sufficient. We are masochists, indeed, but also ambitious adventurers, to choose for our keep this nebulously complicated area of scholarship.

In Japan, serious studies of the popular arts and literature of Edo are a relatively recent phenomenon (kabuki since Kawatake Shigetoshi 河竹繁俊, ukiyoe since Suzuki Juzo 鈴木重三, and literary gesaku since Noda Hisao 野田寿雄 and Nakamura Yukihiko 中村幸彦, for example). The early specialists set the groundwork for us essentially in naming and mapping the Edo arts—that is, in categorizing and establishing terms for various creative forms and techniques, and in identifying authors and subjects, in addition to arranging the artists and genres into genealogical trees. Thanks to them, Edo studies acquired respectability. Prejudice had been particularly strong in academia against gesaku. I was told that even at Waseda University, the most prestigious in Edo literature and distinguished for the gesaku specialists on the faculty, the students of gesaku were advised to write theses and dissertations on Saikaku or other more widely acceptable subjects for the sake of their careers. Some of this sort
of prejudice still persists, but in Kinsei Bungakkai 近世文学会 and in the journals of the field, gesaku and other types of later Edo writings occupy a prominent place. For the reasons described below, however, gesaku is yet to be firmly situated in the general understanding of the history of Japanese arts and literature.

The chief reason is the tradition in academia of narrow specializations not only in terms of authors and genres but also in the emphasis on scrupulous revisions of existing biographical and historiographical data and on minute commentaries on texts. Currently, because many texts still call for modern transcriptions and commentaries, much energy is being spent in introducing materials and producing definitive editions. The phenomenon is very like that of a few decades ago in English literature when anthologies and collections of chief Eighteenth century authors appeared in definitive editions with abundant notes. Judging from the number of hitherto untranscribed texts in gesaku, there is no end to the need for, and enthusiasm in, this type of activities. A Japanese colleague once declared that there were three levels of scholarship, in the order of importance: (1) discovering new materials and introducing them (i.e., publicly announcing their existence), (2) making materials accessible to the public by honkoku 翻刻 transcriptions and chūshaku 注釈 commentaries, and (3) interpreting texts, which, my friend judged to belong to “criticism (kyōron) rather than scholarship (gakumon).” Although the seemingly reversed ranking shocked me at the time, I came to recognize its validity while studying in Japan recently. In the first place, if the ultimate approach to Edo culture is by reenacting its linguistic structure (George Steiner once remarked that the highest form of literary criticism is sheer recitations of poems), then the conservative Japanese trend certainly recreates the fashion of kōshō 孝詠 method (historical and bibliographical studies) and kottō 骨董 taste (archaism) in Edo not only in scholarly jugaku 僑学 and wagaku 和学 but also in gesaku and other popular parts of city life. There are practical reasons as well. Because much of Edo culture has become a respectable object of study only recently, currently active Edo specialists are under a great pressure to unearth original materials and publish definitive honkoku editions. In the case of classical literature, for instance, there is not much chance left for scholars to discover hitherto unknown original texts, releasing them to the open arena of interpretive scholarship. Edo specialists seem to agree instinctively on a joint venture of unearthing all existing texts before the whole body of Edo materials can be submitted to categorizations and methodologies. This will not be accomplished during the for loosening up the rigid boundaries of academic fields. The phenomenon is accelerated publications of books explaining for the general audience specialized and quaint corners of Edo history, society, and arts; and, on the other, encouraged new, and often theoretical, studies from such perspectives as architecture, economics, semiotics, and folklore. Rapidly proliferating studies, aimed at the general reading public, on print-making, book publishing and lending, city developments, and such topics are bound to influence literary commentators of texts.

In short, there are two parallel trends in Edo studies in Japan now. The traditional approaches, consisting of bibliographical, biographical, and honkoku/commentary activities, are dominant not only in classroom training but also in the Kinsei Bungakkai and academic publications. Along with these approaches, there has been, since the early masters mentioned above, a strong current of synthetic and interpretive scholarship, which forms part of training at universities. Jinbo Kazuya’s 神保五形 seminars at Waseda University, which I had occasions to observe, seemed to reflect these currents proportionally consisting largely of deciphering original texts with occasional critical comments and discussions. His last seminar dedicated to critical examinations of existing studies of later Edo culture seemed to be an unusual experience both for the teacher and the students. The theoretical/critical approaches find their place more in the general book market than in academic conferences or university-based journals. Authors of the latter type of studies are largely academics who are considered to be “critics” rather than “scholars” by the conservative group. There are commercial publishers and journals (Perikansha and its quarterly Edo Bungaku 江戸文学, for example) who specialize in idea-oriented Edo studies and others who publish generally theory-oriented books and journals in hermeneutics, semiotics, psychoanalysis, and ideology often including studies of Edo. Theoreticians are not the only ones who are responsible for loosening up the rigid boundaries of academic fields. The popular curiosity which fuels the ongoing “Edo Boom” seems to have inspired new fields of study. Let me cite one example. The “Edo Boom” enthusiasm appears to be behind the support by the city and ward offices and the cooperation of land owners and construction companies in “archeological” investigations of
construction sites in Tokyo. A Jōmon-Yayoi 素文弥生 archeologist may work with a historian or another kind of Edo specialist in unearthing and identifying objects buried several layers below Tokyo's surface. Kinsē kōkogaku 近世考古学 (early-modern archeology), which would have been a contradiction in terms according to traditional divisions of learning, has now emerged as a new field to attract popular and scholarly attention. Newly emerged fields like this will allow all of us to be specialists and amateurs at the same time: opportunities are many for us to contribute our expertise while learning something from scratch. Quite clearly, traditional boundaries are loosening up encouraging us to develop a common language beyond the individual disciplinary jargons.

What we should not overlook is dilettante studies of Edo. Much in the tradition of hyōbanki 評判記 and other types of casual criticism during the Edo period, the task of textual transcriptions and descriptions of Edo culture was, for a long time, in the hands of amateurs or in the form of scholars' pastime. This tradition still prevails in certain types of texts, especially in the erotic category. Currently, creative writers aggressively take part in research on Edo: historical novelist Sugimoto Sonoko 杉本苑子, detective story writer Takahashi Katsuhioko 高橋克彦, and science fiction writer Ishikawa Eisuke 石川英輔, for example, provide us with interesting angles for looking at our subject. The comic illustrator Sugiiura Hinako 杉浦日向子 is brilliant in recreating images of Edo and novelist Inoue Hisashi 井尾実 is one of the most learned critics of gesaku. Walls between experts and beginners as well as those between academics and non-professionals seem to be completely down in many collaborative study groups now active in Tokyo: I profited from attending Nobuhiro Shinji's 延広真治 kibyōshi group where members coming from various universities helped one another with reading texts and pictures requiring different kinds of expertise. I also heard of another group of kibyōshi readers including Edo-style musicians and chanters. I know of two major tegami no kai for deciphering hand-written letters. In the one I attended, a curio dealer was the greatest authority from whom academics learned. A group for senryū 川柳 reading, led by a physician, Yagi Keiichi 長柳克一, known also as collector and commentator of Edo materials, mixed people of all ages and walks of life. In Suzuki Jūzō's 絨絨 nazo workshops, housewives, retired people, librarians, and academics collectively indulged in interpreting complex and esoteric picture puzzles. I was not a regular participant in any of the groups, but I believe they would provide foreign scholars a practical opportunity for training with the aid of eager and kind colleagues in a non-threatening atmosphere.

Critics speak of the “superficiality” and “danger” of the Edo Boom, but the phenomenon is largely to our advantage. Exhibitions are constantly mounted in museums and department stores ranging from a representative selection of the world’s famed collections (such as one of the British Museum) to a rare showing of specialized materials (such as Bakumatsu photographs or biidoro ビードロ glassware). Theatres and museums offer educational programs including performances and demonstrations. (The Kabuki Kyōshitsu 歌舞伎教室 at the National Theatre, for example, includes excellent introductions and, sometimes, backstage tours.) The radio and television almost daily offer a wide range of performances, demonstrations, lectures, and discussions on Edo culture. Some are superficial attempts at making Edo familiar—the announcer referring to “Bashō-san” and “Yonosuke-san” to the rhythm of the obliging nods of the uncomprehending female companion. By and large, however, the media are learning faster than the academia to mix specialists with qualified amateurs. A dialogue between an economist and a rakugo narrator on the topic of money in common-class life in Edo, for example, revealed much more than either could have within his own jargon. The media’s technique can give us ideas for collaborating across disciplinary boundaries and with non-academic specialists.

Another product of the efforts to “Discover Japan” is enthusiasm for regional culture. Local governments and businesses invest in improving and enlarging the holdings and facilities of museums and libraries as well as promoting festivals, arts, and crafts of their communities. In this area, the media’s coverage is largely nationwide, and the influence of the opinions of listeners/viewers is strong. Under the public’s pressure, even the NHK Broadcasting Company is making an effort to correct its Tokyo-centered perspective and its insistence on a “standard” language. Both in scholarly and commercial sectors, numerous publications and other types of productions are on regional culture are shedding new light on the creation of the city of Edo, the city’s life and language, and the forms and styles of Edo arts. For example, some of Hokusai’s 北斎 last works are traced to Obuse 小布施 in Nagano, the architectural features of Edo period theatres can be seen when the TV introduces Kompira 金毘羅 kabuki, and Edoesque playfulness in architecture is most vividly illustrated in journal photographs of Sazaedo 桜蝶堂 in Aizu Wakamatsu. All in all, the study of Edo culture has never been so lively and widespread; now is the best time for Edo specialists to study in Japan.

In this country, the study of Japanese literature came to flourish during the late fifties and the sixties thanks to the work of eminent translators and literary historians. The American scholars, however, were too much occupied by the urgent task of introducing the established canon of Japanese literature to correct the canonical prejudice against gesaku. The focus, by Donald Keene, Ivan Morris, and others on Bashō, Chikamatsu, and Saikaku tended to leave the latter half of the Edo period blank in the general understanding of Japanese literature in this country. Those of us who became
interested in gesaku in the seventies or earlier worked in isolation—not only from the main current of Japanese studies in the U.S. but also from one another, from related disciplines, and often from the texts in their original form.

There was also the problem of methodology in literary criticism. Howard Hibbett’s book on early Edo fiction could have been followed by an outburst of translations and studies of later Edo genres, but it is often not for the domination, during the sixties and seventies, of New Criticism and its companions (iconography, psychoanalysis, archetypal criticism, and comparative literature). In some ways the dashing methodology was beneficial: its pseudo-scientific approach made it possible, for the first time, to analyze non-Western literatures outside the confines of influence and above the superficiality of thematic similarities. Now Japanese literature was on equal footing with the canonical Western literature—or so we thought at the time. In fact, we had to justify gesaku by squeezing the works into periods, genres, archetypes, and such recently defined Western categories. The ardent New Critical search for “meaning” made scholars favor Bashō’s haiku and “Zen” painting, mistakenly identified as “symbolic,” to the neglect of the larger body of Edo arts, which quite obviously declared themselves to be without meaning. Applying all the available strategies for reading “meaning” behind sounds, images, symbols, and metaphors, gesaku could not be categorized as epic, tragedy, novel, or even romance, and its meaning invariably turned out to be nothing more than “Life is silly, isn’t it?” Even as comedy, gesaku seemed to lack all necessary components such as “character,” “plot,” and “theme.” In the mid-seventies, my esteemed New Critic teacher was morally obliged to advise me to choose “something more important” to occupy my critical talent for a dissertation. The formation, in 1979, of a gesaku group under the leadership of Howard Hibbett vastly advanced gesaku studies, not to speak of easing our anxiety about specializing in an uncertain and strange field that defied the standard critical apparatus of the West. During the past 13 years, the members of the group have developed common areas in terms of texts while working on individual topics and specific approaches. Hibbett has investigated the general subject of the theory and practice of humor, William Sibley has applied Bakhtin to comic senryū poetics, Haruko Iwasaki has examined group activities of the Edoite literati, Robert Leutner has translated Shikitei Sanbē into kanbun-style gesaku, Andrew Markus has specialized in Ryūtei Tanehiko’s gōkan 合巻 as well as in the history of popular culture, Ellen Widmer has analyzed Kyōkutei Bakin’s曲亭馬琴 creative work and theory in relation to Chinese models, and I have operated as a semiotic in interpreting the verbal and pictorial sides of gesaku. Among recent members of the group, Timothy Clark has combined art theory and art history in his study of Nakazu 中津, and T.B.M. Screech has focused on representations of “Dutch” learning (rangaku 落学) in artistic images. Some of us have books already published or forthcoming, and many of us have written articles in Japanese as well as in English. The group’s collaborative research will come out soon as a volume under Sibley’s editorship. Since the late eighties, the field has attracted many younger scholars. Those who come to my mind in relation to my own collaborations are: Earl Jackson, Jr. and Paul Schallow, each on homoeroticism, Charles Inoue with his theory of “pictocentrism,” Roger Thomas on late Edo waka 歌 and its poetics, Shelley Fenno Quinn with her current research on the nō能 in relation to kabuki, Eiji Sekine on irotoko 色男 in Saikaku and Tamenaga Shunsui 為永春水, Takashi Wakui with his study of bodily pain in Kobayashi Issa 小林一茶, and Fumiko Togasaki on the relationship between the visual and the verbal in kibyōshi. In short, gesaku is finally receiving the sort of scholarly attention it deserves.

It goes without saying that scholars in Japan are most helpful for our training and writing. The traditional Japanese approach in the academy is in fact vital to us since we need more help than our Japanese colleagues in coping with the complexity and difficulty of our texts. Chishaku scholars offer far more in personal conversations and seminars than in their printed commentaries. More interpretive types of scholarship which now flourish in Japan can inspire us. Involved exchanges of views between Japanese and American scholars of literature did not take place until recently. Earl Miner has made particular effort since the seventies to bring together scholars from both sides of the Pacific. Among his cross-national projects, I recall an adventurous one on Japanese literary theory and practice consisting of three symposia in 1980 and 1981, in which Noguchi Takehiko 野口武彦 and I were the Edo persons. In addition to the difficulty of bilingual discussion, sometimes relying on interpretations by a few of us, the differences in research agenda and scholarly custom between the Japanese and American sides made our exchanges difficult and frustrating. The discussion leaders and editors of the resulting books in the two languages (Miner, Konishi Jin’ichi 小西甚一, and Nakanishi Susumu 中西進) must have expended even more painful energy than the rest of us in synthesizing the differences.

Cross-cultural exchanges can never be easy as habits and beliefs have a strong hold on our ability to listen to others. Some of the conditions, however, have improved during the past decade. Although Edo specialists in Japan have not become any more proficient in English, at least American scholars are much better trained than before in spoken and written Japanese. Thanks to widespread opportunities, offered by various grant agencies in Japan and in the U.S., for studying and teaching abroad, we are familiarizing ourselves with each other’s academic customs.
American universities seem to be far more active than their Japanese counterparts in exchanges of scholars across the Pacific, but several national research institutions in Japan (such as Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryoukan, Kokusai Nihon Bunka Kenkyū Sentā, and Tokyo Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo) promote their motto of internationalization of Japanese studies in the forms of symposia, conferences, and publications. At the same time, the art of simultaneous translation is far more advanced than before, particularly in Japan, so that a lack in language proficiency is no longer a barrier to cross-national collaboration. I was impressed, two years ago, by a multinational and multidisciplinary conference, chaired by James McClain, on the cities of Paris and Edo/Tokyo. Communication seemed remarkably smooth considering the size of the conference and the range of disciplines and languages. As for research work in print, Japanese translations of writings in foreign languages on topics concerning Japan are appearing little by little, and they are occasionally cited by Japanese scholars. On our side, some of the important studies by Japanese scholars ought to be translated, but a more immediate task is to introduce, in our own work, the original literary texts.

Without crossing the ocean, any collaboration should be efficient and effective if we cross the disciplinary lines. My earliest experience was the “Tokugawa Spaceship” panel in 1985 conceived of by architecture specialist Ann Cline and chaired by Conrad Totman. Ronald Toby’s examination of village space and mine of money in gesaku did not seem to fit comfortably into the general scheme. I, for one, understood the topic of the panel only when I listened to the exchanges between Totman and Herman Ooms, discussant. Nevertheless, it was a start in the right direction. Edo culture is full of topics that would benefit from combinations of disciplinary perspectives. The event made me very conscious of the need of a conceptual framework for working with specialists of disciplines outside literature and arts, for which purpose more exposure would be the best means. Historians may be traditionally more adept at conceiving of issues in multidisciplinary perspectives and at making use of scholarship in other disciplines; literature scholars have tended to flock around themselves. Mary Elizabeth Berry held a conference in 1988 on play in Japanese culture, in which the Edo period was represented by Howard Hibbett and Donald Shively. By the thematic organization of the history of play from the medieval to contemporary times seen from historiographical, sociological, literary critical, and other perspectives, gesaku was simultaneously shown in horizontal as well as vertical schemes of Japanese culture, widening my perspective. It is my hope that gesaku studies are included more and more in collaborative projects outside the fields of literature and arts, whether the topic is government policies, city planning, finance, demography, or literacy.

Mutual consultation and collaboration among Edo specialists of all disciplines are necessary to give justice to the multi-media nature of Edo culture. Pictures are as important in telling a story as verbal portions of texts. Pictures imitate and allude to kabuki scenes, ukiyoe prints, and social events just as verbal texts do, while kabuki actors imitate pictures and act out stories in books. And yet, both in Japan and in this country, scholars have tended to guard their disciplinary territories. For example, kibyōshi and gōkan books, with large proportions of verbal text, are left to literary commentators while other types of ehon books, with more space occupied by pictures, and individual ukiyoe prints are the responsibility of art historians. Commentaries on the former genres refer to the details of illustrations for the sake of understanding the verbal story, while on the latter, commentaries mention literary sources as backgrounds and use the verbal text chiefly as means for identification. The 1979 conference chaired by Theodore Bowie on surimono prints revealed methodological differences among historians, literature scholars, and art experts and collectors. Much as I learned from Matthias Forrer, Jack Hillier, and Suzuki Juzo, the few days of the conference were not enough to provide me with a springboard for stepping into art criticism. An opportunity came to me very recently while conducting research in Tokyo. Besides Haga Toru 方賀徹, my chief advisor in comparative arts, art historians Kobayashi Tadashi 小林忠, T.B.M. Screech, and Henry Smith gave me some basic training by passing on references and ideas, identifying pictures and their sources, and even giving lessons in photographing art works. More importantly, we had ample occasions to meet, hear, and read one another.

“Ways of Seeing in Late Edo Culture,” a panel for the AAS meeting last year, was the first fruit of our interdisciplinary collaboration. As implied by our panel, the issue of “reading” of pictures seems to be effective because it reveals disciplinary differences in interpreting techniques, which are mutually suggestive for a better understanding of Edo materials.

Tetsuo Najita proposed in 1978 that we, American scholars with less access to and capacity to read Edo materials than specialists in Japan, ought to understand “metaphorically” a limited number of texts in our power. This was, as I recall, the first proposal for the theoretical study of Edo. Innovative studies of this kind have been done by specialists of intellectual thought, but few in literature and arts have followed their lead. Various “post” theories (post-structuralism, post-Freudian revisionism, and the theory of the postmodern, for example) began to replace New Criticism during the seventies without affecting specialists of Edo literature. The NEH summer institute in 1979 on theory and curricular models for Japanese literature, directed by Earl Miner and Masao Miyoshi, was an eye-opening experience. For the first time, established Western categories and hierarchies of genres and periods as well as notions of the nature of literary texts were put to test against Japanese language and literature. The participants
were constantly challenged to rethink their own notions of "literature," "story," "narrator," and "text." Some of us were inspired to present a pair of back-to-back panels on "Literary Theories and the Study of Japanese Literature" during the AAS meeting in 1980. The structuralist theories available at the time were still limited for analyzing Edo literature, it seemed, and we had trouble weaning ourselves from our old methods. Our uneasiness which accompanied both the summer institute and the panels is characteristic of any venture into the unfamiliar.

The advantage of the "post" theories is that they release Japanese literature from the peripheralized position of an anomaly in relation to Western literatures. We are no longer obliged to justify it by showing how it may fit the Western requirements of literature or how it may relate to Western texts (either in "influence" or as "parallel" phenomena). The Western "center" is gone as Western theory has ceased to believe in any central meaning. In fact, Japanese literature can be shown as an important case of modernity as in the "Postmodernism and Japan" issue of the South Atlantic Quarterly. (Incidentally, the journal Hihyō/Kukan, published by Fukutake shoten in Tokyo, is an interesting case of cross-national and theoretical collaboration of basically the same Jamesonian group of American and Japanese critics.) De-centered notions of literature destroy canonical prejudices. Even Gothic romance can be made equal to Greek tragedy at the hands of post-Freudian feminist criticism. It is time to show that Hiraga Gennai 平賀源内, Santō Kyōden 山東京傳, Tsuruya Nanboku 鶴屋南北, Ichikawa Danjūrō V 五代市川団十郎, Yosa Buson 谷山高子, Matsushita Hokusai 難波北斎, and all the rest of great gesaku artists are equal in literary history to Saikaku, Chikamatsu and Bashô. Another advantage is that these theories have already removed disciplinary walls by mixing methodologies of linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, historiography, anthropology, hermeneutics, and literary and art criticism. They aid us in our individual study of texts in much wider perspectives and enable us to collaborate with scholars in other disciplines. A theory of any kind, however, has the danger of universalizing phenomena too easily. I would still like to show Edo by differences: the whole of Japanese literature should not be labelled "postmodern" nor all of Edo writings "subversive."

Several years ago, Naoki Sakai and I formed a group of teachers and students at the University of Chicago and at Indiana University in order to create an ongoing dialogue between specialists of different disciplines. Since the Indiana members were solely based in comparative literature and comparative arts, we learned much from the intellectual historians such as Sakai himself and Susan Burn as well as anthropologist Kentaro Tomio. Over the years, we have had symposia (at Chicago and at Indiana) and conferences (during AAS and MCAA meetings), the last one being a joint workshop with critics of modern culture, chaired by Sakai, Brett De Bary, and Victor Koschmann. Particularly the ideological critics, including Harry Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi, challenged us, old-fashioned literary types, with our obsession with the "Edo period" as distinct from the Meiji and the rest of modern periods. We also found that there was much to learn from a scholar to whom Edo was a totally unfamiliar entity. It was inspiring to watch Norman Bryson who, with all the anxiety of an outsider yet with the power of the knowledge of Western art, comment, on the spot, on ukiyoe and other types of unfamiliar images flashed before him. Objections were raised, to be sure, by a trained art historian from Japan, but the experiment worked to lead us to see Edo arts in a very different light. Bryson, in turn, was influenced by us sufficiently to step deeper into Japanese arts, a topic of his latest research. To the goal of placing our kind of literature and arts in the world canon, it is not enough for us to squeeze them into the national and international organizations in our disciplines. We ought to attract scholars of other cultures to Japanese concepts and materials, for which Edo seems the richest and newest port of entry.

Even in comparative arts and literature, we have been so engrossed in "East-West relations" as to neglect comparative investigations into the relations within Asia. As seen in the works of Aso Isoji 麻生義次 and others, there is a long tradition among Edo specialists in Japan of studying sources and common motifs of between Chinese and Japanese literatures. American scholarship, with its own critical tools, should be able to contribute much by studying what can be termed gesaku in East Asian literatures in general. Because of linguistic requirements, however, few have stepped into other Asian literatures. In our gesaku group, Ellen Widmer brings in the perspective of her specialty in Chinese literature, and Robert Campbell focuses on kanshi and kanbun where Chinese and Japanese literatures are joined. Ronald Toby's study of images of Koreans in popular Edo arts is instructive to us. David Pollack, specialist of the high genres of kanshi and kanbun, attracts our attention as he examines shunga 春画 prints during this AAS meeting. In comparative studies on Asia, collaboration seems particularly necessary and appropriate. A conference last year, chaired by Earl Miner, on the invention of modernity in East Asia, combined scholars of early modern to contemporary literatures--Chinese, Korean, and Japanese--with faculty members of Princeton's English Department as discussants. As is usually the case, the conference did not reach any conclusion: our arguments on the validity or invalidity of speaking of modernism as a synchronic matter (i.e. disregarding the historical time), for example, were left unresolved. The important thing is that the mixture of literary fields allowed us to reexamine theories of modernism and postmodernism in the light of literary texts and methodologies of the varied fields.
A few words ought to be said about teaching. The mecca of gesaku studies outside Japan is Harvard University, where many specialists have been trained by Howard Hibbett, Gen Itasaka, and Donald Shively, and more recently by Haruko Iwasaki and Rigine Johnson. The collections of the Yenching Library and Fogg/Sachler museum are unrivaled. Gesaku has slipped into the curriculum at other institutions as well, either as specialized courses or, more often, as part of general culture or literature courses. Except for the Harvard collections and the Mitsu Bunko of the East Asiatic Library of the University of California, Berkeley, university libraries in the U.S. hold only slim collections of original Edo books. However, some hold, in microfilms, important collections such as Ebar Bunko 豊原文庫, Ozaki Bunko 尾崎文庫, and Waseda Meiji 早稲田明治 collection. The Maruzen 丸善 microfilm series of the entire collection of the National Diet Library in Tokyo of materials published during the Meiji period, one set already installed at Harvard Yenching Library, will be donated to six other university libraries (one of the sets being split between two institutions). The collection should contain many reprints, transcriptions, and studies of Edo materials. Computer search, copying, faxing and other services on the part of the libraries will facilitate and promote our research immensely. As for current studies, the quantity and speed of publication in Japan are forbidding for any university library budget. Besides Harvard and Berkeley, where books and journals in our interest are purchased efficiently, some of the universities with focus on Edo period studies are making effort in collecting newest materials.

Among state universities, Indiana University has a strong concentration on multidisciplinary Edo studies. There are five Edo specialists on the East Asian faculty: Laurel Cornell specializing in Edo period society and demography, Jurgis Elisonas in the cultural history of Sengoku and early Edo periods, Richard Rubinger in the history of Edo period education and literacy, George Wilson in late Edo and Meiji intellectual thought and myself in later Edo literature and comparative arts. In addition, emeriti Kenneth Yasuda and Theodore Bowie are consulted for their respective expertise in haiku and Edo garden design and in ukiyoe art. All of us have joint appointments/titles, obliging us to split our teaching load between two departments. In my case, my repertoire covers Japanese language (modern and classical) and premodern literature (having been recently relieved from classics by the addition of Edith Sarra to our faculty) for the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures and various elementary and graduate courses on theory and technique of criticism as well as on East-West literary relations for the Program in Comparative Literature. This means that I have the chance to dedicate a whole course to later Edo literature and arts only about once every two years so that training of students in my special field is largely left to independent reading and thesis/dissertation advising. Gesaku instructors all over the country are spending much time in this sort of one-to-one training as the reading of texts requires the knowledge of classical wabun 和文 and kanbun, with which the students are not necessarily equipped, as well as the acquisition of Edo colloquialisms and the idiosyncratic styles of Edo authors. In teaching Europe-based comparative literature, the trick is to squeeze Edo literature into all possible crevices even in elementary world literature courses and seminars on theory. Here, however, works in translation are so few that the instructor must wrack her brains to translate selected passages and to explain the intricacies of the original texts. In this regard, I am eagerly looking forward to the completion of an anthology being edited by Regine Johnson and John Solt.

My teaching is often supported and supplemented by modern Japan specialists: Yoshio Iwamoto in literature, Gregory Kasza in political science, and Natsuko Tsujimura in linguistics. Interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaborations are a must in teaching gesaku. Among Sinologists in our department, Susan Nelson, a specialist of traditional landscape painting, and Lynn Strove, a Ming historian, have worked most closely with us. Comparative Literature, Religious Studies, Folklore, Anthropology, Theatre, Women’s Studies, and Philosophy, as well as English and foreign language departments abound with historians, theoreticians, and critics whose expertise and interest relate to our own. It is my policy to invite speakers from other disciplines and departments to my courses as well as my students’ thesis committees. Once every two or three years, I have a chance to team-teach a course with one or more colleagues. This semester, the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures has been generous in spending the labor force of two faculty members for the benefit of five graduate students. “The Formation of ‘Edo’” is a seminar taught as a dialogue between Jurgis Elisonas and myself with student members as involved discussants. Debates revolve around differences of methodology as well as oppositions in opinion (whether ‘Edo’ was a growth of earlier Kamigata conventions or it was a separate invention, for example). I believe the students profit from the rather extraordinary and uneasy position of being arbitrators and judges of two strong-minded teachers presenting contrasting positions and tastes on shared materials. Laughter pervades this class as Elisonas’ penchant for punning is contagious.

This brings us to the final dimension of the study and teaching of gesaku. Edoites are playful and witty: their writings are full of parody, allusion, and other stylistic variations. Every time I face my Macintosh, I recall Jay Rubin’s complaint about the stylistic dullness of my dissertation. Accustomed to dissecting texts as stationary objects, the critic having the upper hand, it took the death of New Criticism for me to discover that my texts were something fluid to which the critic had to submit herself by
learning to swim in them. If we are to do justice to the nature of our texts, we must not wear any stiff mask of whatever scholarly methodology and rhetoric we choose. Among Japanese scholars, there are creative wits—Nakano Mitsutoshi’s 中野三敏 kyōbun 狂文 and Noguchi Takehiko’s kyōsha 狂詩, for example, could have been included in Ota Nanpo’s 大田南朋 reviews and Hanawa 滑谷一’s Gunsho Ruijū 墨書類従. In scholarly writing, our field seems to attract those with sophisticated personal culture, who create polished writing styles. In this country, the leaders and a few other fortunate members of the gesaku group are true wits but the rest of us tend to be hopeless in explaining Edo texts. I heard a joke many years ago about the distinction between Harvard men and Yalies: the former were bright enough to appreciate jokes while the latter could make them. The punch line was that Yalies made them without knowing it. (I am sure this was not the version told at Yale.) We cannot all be makers of jokes but we must be good readers of jokes. We need to strive at finding a scholarly style in which the modes of Edo culture can be conveyed more attractively and convincingly. This is the hardest part of our task; and here, too, we greatly benefit from brainstorming with colleagues.

Gesaku was a culture created in circles, by collaboration, and in combination with many different worlds. It mixed writers with illustrators and actors, scholars with artisans, and bushi with chōnin. We can approach it best with a similar attitude. Three decades ago, René Etiemble insisted that comparative literature required an encyclopedic knowledge of human culture, for which purpose he called for multi-national and multidisciplinary collaborations. We cannot subscribe to his proposal of unifying the language for scholarly communication worldwide (Chinese was suggested by him) nor to his dream of erecting a world center to collect and dispense all knowledge. When, however, the study of gesaku is growing as comparative literature was at Etiemble’s time, it seems useful to recall his plea for collaborations. What we need is an uninstitutionalized network for exchanges of information and ideas. If you are being brilliant all by yourself in some hojō 方丈 hut, you ought to come out and work with the others. If you are forming a disciplinary or ideological faction, you ought to knock down the walls. Joining the Early Modern Japan Network would be a good start.

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