

IHARA SAIKAKU THE NOVELIST OF GENROKU PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693) is one of the greatest writers of Japanese literature. The master of short stories, Saikaku, who in his works embodied the unique, new artistic ideas about the world and the place of man in the 17th century, remained in Japanese literature as the founder of the ukiyozoshi prose. The article is devoted to the analysis of Ihara Saikaku's oeuvre as a novelist of Genroku period and its prose works. Through the analysis of Saikaku's works the author illustrates the stages of development of his novels and their poetic features.

Keywords: Genroku period, urban townsmen literature, Ihara Saikaku, ukiyozoshi, koshokumono, bukemono, choninmono.

INTRODUCTION

Genroku period, from 1688 to 1704, was a flourishing period of Japanese urban literature. The middle class of Japanese society, consisting of samurai, farmers, craftsmen and merchants, began to take an active part in all spheres of the country's development. Literature has emerged as an art form that can be enjoyed not only by the aristocrats, but has become a favorite pastime of townsmen. Genroku literature was formed by representatives of this middle class. By Genroku literature, most literatures refer to the literary heritage of three figures such as the novelist Ihara Saikaku, poet Matsuo Basho and dramaturg Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Among them, Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693) made a name for himself in all Japanese literature as an artist who fully reflected the lives of the people of his time from various angles, and with his realistic short stories laid the foundation for the "ukiyo-zoshi" (stories of the floating world). The aim of the work is to analyze the prose oeuvre of Ihara Saikaku, a brilliant representative of the literature of Genroku period, its stages of development and their characteristic features. The task of the work is illustrate the ideas and themes put forward in them through the analysis of the author's works. Based on the goals and objectives set out in the article, the methods of cultural-historical, biographical analysis were used.

MAIN PART

Ihara Saikaku was born in 1642 in the Yariyamachi area of Osaka to a merchant family. His real name is Hiroyama Togo, pen-name Saikaku ("Western Crane") and Ihara is thought to be the surname of the writer's mother. Saikaku's parents seem to have been wealthy and he inherited control of the family business at early ages. His first association with haikai or short 17-syllable short poems began when he was fourteen and by the age of twenty he became an expert in this art form. Saikaku has published several haikai collections until 1682, as the disciple of haikai master Nishiyama Soin (1605-1682), founder of the Danrin ("Talk Forest") school of haikai.

Ihara Saikaku, who had been active in haiku poetry for many years and was considered a skilled poet, turned his attention to prose in 1682. The poems that consist of 17 syllable were too short to express the writer's views on townsmen life and led to this important turning point in his

oeuvre. Saikaku started to write novels from the age of forty one, a little later than most writers, and continued publishing collection of novels until 1693, the end of his life.

In the early stages of his career as a novelist, Saikaku began to create love novels on favorite topics of readers of his time, such as romantic adventures, life in gay quarters, love stories of courtesans and samurai. The author's first prose work *The Life of an Amorous Man* ("Koshoku ichidai otoko") published in 1682, was a brilliant example of this. The word *koshoku* in the title of the work, which literally means "to love love," refers to a person with conspicuously amatory interests. The novel which consists of 54 independent chapters, tells the love life of the protagonist - Yonoske, a rake of the townsman class of the Genroku period. The events from Yonoske's greedy interests, which began at an early age, to his determination to sail to an island inhabited only by women when he was in his sixties are told in interesting detail. The atmosphere of the book is lively and optimistic, and the author's focus is on highlighting the pleasures of love. Being Saikaku's first prose work, *The Life of an Amorous Man*, the stylistic influence of haikai poetry is extremely marked and it may be called a work that reflects romantic fantasies of a middle class townsman.

Great Mirror of Various Amours ("Shoen Okagami", 1684), a sequel to *The Life of an Amorous Man*, also deals with the lives of wealthy townspeople who emulate aristocrats and the lives of gay quarters' courtesans. The novel of 32 independent chapters is the most perfect work in the genre of *yujo hyobanki* [4] of kanazoshi prose. *The Story of Wankyu's Life* ("Wankyu Issei no Monogatari"), published in 1685, is based on a true story. It tells the story of Wankyu, an Osaka merchant who fell in love with one of the courtesans in a gay quarters and how he became poor by squandering all his property, and went mad and eventually drowned himself. This time Saikaku uses a real prototype to create the novel for the first time.

Saikaku's next work, *Five Women Who Loved Love* ("Koshoku gonin onna", 1686), is a collection of five independent short stories based on life events from that period, same as *The Story of Wankyu's Life*. The incident of 1685, when the wife of a barrelmaker committed adultery and killed herself, gave rise to the novel. This tragedy which took place in Osaka served as material for the second story of the collection. The third story tells about Osan, the wife of an almanac maker from, and her lover the clerk named Moemon. The guilty pair who entered the path of adultery were crucified and executed in 1683 in Kyoto.

In the novel *Five Women Who Loved Love* Saikaku for the first time found his heroes outside the gay quarters. Young women belonging to the merchant class were the main characters of the five stories. This was the reason for the success of the work, as the author portrayed women from the merchant family as the protagonists for the first time, not courtesans, who were the constant heroes of that time's literature. Saikaku shows that these women, who are usually described as loyal, unconditional obedient to family rules, were in fact, dear sisters of courtesans; they were women who, under the influence of the same passions ready to die for their love, obeying the command of the heart, like courtesans who have committed suicide with their lover. The novel emphasizes the meaning of the concept of *koshoku*, not gallantry, but romantic love, and its protagonists sacrifice their respectability in the name of their love. With the exception of the last chapter in the novel, all stories end tragically. The conflict, which is of great importance in the literature of the Tokugawa period - the conflict between human passions and social reality, obligations within the framework of morality - is the main theme of the work. Therefore, in *Five Women Who Loved Love* we see a complete change in the atmosphere that prevailed in the earlier works of Saikaku. The protagonists no longer move within the gay quarters that are a little further away from real life and isolated from the outside

world, but instead challenge the ruthless laws of feudal society despite the threat of the death penalty. Unique dramatic effect and tragedy that dominated in the stories turned *Five Women Who Loved Love* into a masterpiece of Saikaku's love novels.

Four months after the publication of *Five Women Who Loved Love*, Saikaku published *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (Koshoku ichidai onna, 1686). This work is the most perfect example of Saikaku's *koshokumono*. Here the concept of *koshoku* is manifested in the sense of lust, which is absolutely far removed from the romantic and sentimental aspects of love, which inspired the heroes of the previous work. In his work, Saikaku draws on the genre of medieval Japanese literature (*zangemono*) and imitates examples of *kanazoshi* prose such as *Seven nuns* (Shichinin bikuni, 1643) and *Two nuns* (Ninin bikuni, 1663). The protagonist of the novel is a woman who was one of the courtesans of the gay quarters in the past, but is now much older. Through her confession to two young men about her life and past, for the first time in Japanese literature, readers become intimately acquainted with the thoughts and feelings of a woman living on a gay quarter. Chapter 25 of the novel describes the lustful main character's constant pursuit of sensual pleasures and at the same time his gradual degradation as a result of his efforts to make a living as a lonely woman in a harsh feudal society. Saikaku no longer depicts the life of courtesans in bright colors and uplifting spirits, but rather the gay quarters are actually portrayed as a place where money rules the day. As her beauty fades over time, the female courtesan gradually steps downward the stairs of the hierarchy. Starting her sensual life from being a daymo's lover, then the courtesan in the gay quarter, the priest's secret mistress, the maid in a townhouse, and eventually becoming a streetwalker, the main character morally degrades. In the example of this work, the author showed the hard life and fate of women (of this type) who were condemned by the society of that time, reflecting the dark aspects of *koshoku*.

Beginning in 1685, the writer's prose oeuvre entered a new stage. Saikaku began to create a collection of short stories that covered a variety of topics and contained stories about ancient local legends, court cases, and about samurai. The great treasure of classical literature and national folklore has become a source of inspiration for Saikaku. In his works of this period, we observe examples of Japanese and Chinese classical literature, a strong influence of early medieval prose literature, especially *setsuwa* collections. The emergence of such tendencies in Saikaku's prose work is explained as a result of his frequent travels around the country.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of such travels, his next two major works *Saikaku's Tale of the Provinces* (Saikaku *shokoku banashi*, 1685) and *A Portable Writing Kit* (Futokoro *suzuri*, 1687) were published. Saikaku collected samples of folklore from different regions, classic novels (both Japanese and Chinese) about the wonders of centuries-old traditions, and recent events in them. *Saikaku's Tale of the Provinces* consists of thirty short stories, each of which has a title with the names of the provinces and cities, such as "Stories at Nara Temple" or "Stories on the First Highway in Kyoto". The stories in collection covers a large part of Honshu Island and the northern regions of Kyushu Island, indicating that the author has traveled extensively throughout the country. While it is clear that some of the short stories are based on examples of Japanese folklore, the themes of others go back to Japanese, Chinese, and even Indian literature. Saikaku not only connects each story with a specific geographical area, but also gives authenticity and veracity to each of them with the help of carefully selected details and realistic images.

Saikaku's *A Portable Writing Kit* published in 1687, was a sequel to *Saikaku's Tale of the Provinces*. In *A Portable Writing Kit* Saikaku also refers to the genre of fantastic novels, which is widespread in medieval Japanese prose. Most of the works in this genre are expressed in the

form of stories of a pilgrim priest who tells about what he saw, heard or experienced during his travels to different parts of the country. Saikaku's work is no exception, and the content of his short stories consists of wonderful and interesting stories told by a "half-priest, half laity man". In this collection, the author also interpreted the fairy tales and legends of the ancient Japan as an alternative to their time and gave them a new life.

At this stage of his career, Saikaku began to use sources from Chinese literature as well as Japanese literary heritage for his works, and created his own collection of short stories, *Twenty Cases of Unfilial* (Honcho nijū fuko). Published in the eleventh month of 1686, the most productive year of his career, the collection is reminiscent of *Saikaku's Tale of the Provinces*, and is based on individual stories collected from different parts of Japan. However, the work is considered as a new interpretation of the Chinese didactic collection *Twenty four Examples of Filial acts* (Ershisi xiao, the 13th century), which became very popular in Japan and led to the emergence of many imitation works. Through the modification of old Chinese stories filling it with true stories on the subject Saikaku created completely new work.

Twenty Cases of Unfilial is a negative version of a didactic work in Chinese literature about children who respect and honor their parents. If the actions of the heroes of the Chinese collection are entirely aimed at the implementation of the principles of Confucian doctrine of filial piety, Saikaku's heroes directly break these principles. Breaking of the filial piety by the younger generation of the writer's period is comparable to the rules of etiquette of the past. The content of the collection is reflected in its introduction: "*The young shoots of bamboo Meng Tsun sought in the snow, can be found now at any greengrocery. The carp that Wang Xian struggled to catch from the river is in the tank at each fishmonger's. Even if we cannot hope for conduct that goes beyond the call of normal duty, it is proper for people to be diligent in their respective family businesses and to use the income to keep their households in order and to carry out to the full the teachings. But decent people of their kind are rare, and bad people are many. Any human being ignorant of the Way of Filial Piety will surely incur the punishment of Heaven. Instances I have heard about all over the country reveal the unmistakable guilt of unfilial people. I have had them printed in the hope they will be helpful in encouraging filial conduct.*"

Although the protagonists of most of his works are townsmen, Saikaku is also interested in the moral norms of the samurai, and in 1677-1678 he wrote about the samurai class *The Transmission of the Martial Arts* (Budo denraiki, 1687), *Tales of Samurai Duty* (Buke giri monogatari, 1688). All of these samurai themed works, referred to as "bukemono" (tales about samurai) in Saikaku's work, are devoted to traditional themes such as self-sacrifice, honor and vendetta. However, these themes are presented realistically in a new interpretation, so that the reader is not surprised by not only the glorious, but also the sad and tragic aspects of the rules of etiquette of the samurai.

In 1687, Saikaku published *The Transmission of the Martial Arts* as the first example of his novels about samurai. The collection has a subtitle entitled *Vendettas in the Various Provinces*. In fact, most of the thirty two short stories are devoted to this very topic. However, some of the grievances that have become the causes of the bloody revenge narrated in these novels are so insignificant that the reader wonders why the pride of the samurai demanded a one-on-one fight in such situations. While the heroes know they are guilty, they take revenge for their family's honor or their own reputation.

Saikaku's next collection of collection of novels on samurai, *Tales of Samurai Duty*, was written in 1688 and tells the story of the samurai's commitment to their duty, instead of praising vendetta. Contrary to the samurai's blind and thoughtless responses to trivial grievances in *The Transmission of the Martial Arts*, gratitude, compassion and generosity are emphasized as the most essential qualities of samurai in Saikaku's *Tales of Samurai Duty*. After the ill-considered examples of vendetta described in the collection *The Transmission of the Martial Arts*, the prudence highly prized in *Tales of Samurai Duty* was an unexpectedly pleasant situation. Inspired by the stern code of vengeance of samurai, it can be assumed that Saikaku, had realized that the actions appropriate for wartime were no longer necessary.

Although Saikaku's tales about samurai were not as popular as his love novels, we notice the emergence of a strong didacticism in them that was felt in the last stages of Saikaku's oeuvre. By the example of the samurai's actions, which can serve as an example of higher concepts such as duty and honor, Saikaku sought to establish virtues in his readers. Nevertheless, it is accepted as a sad fact for the writer that samurai could easily sacrifice their lives for the cause of duty or the necessity of a situation. This, in turn, is a testament to how humanist Saikaku is.

After publishing collections of tales about samurai, in 1689 Saikaku created one of the first detective works in Japanese literature the collection of novels *Parallel Cases From Under the Cherry Tree* (Honcho oin hiji, 1689). The work is based on the traditions of the genre of court stories in Chinese literature and includes some of the plots of the collection *Parallel Cases From Under the Pear Tree* (Tang Yin Bi Shi, 1207) by Gui Wanrong (1125-1200), which dates back to the Song dynasty. The collection of forty four short stories tells of the wise judgments rendered by two judges, apparently Itakura Katsushige (administrator in capital city Kyoto from 1601-1619) and his son Shigemune (administrator in capital city Kyoto 1619-1655). Although the example of Chinese literature, in which the protagonist is a shrewd judge, has long been known in Japan, Japanese writers only began to challenge themselves in the genre in 1660. Saikaku, on the other hand, was the first writer to give it artistic significance. The novels in the Saikaku collection are as interesting and sharp as in the Chinese author's short stories, and are marked by a well-formed contradiction based on the crime and its subsequent investigation.

Saikaku, who has traveled a long way and published a number of works on various topics and genres, did not ignore the *meishoki* [5] genre of *kanazoshi* prose. He incorporated the knowledge and experience he gained during his travels into his travelogue *The Open Road at a Glance* (Hitome Tamaboko, 1689). It depicts the scenery of the road from northern Japan to the south, from Hokkaido to Nagasaki, various information about these places - the name of each city, map, ruler (daimyo), famous products, gay quarters, legends, anecdotes and songs. *The Open Road at a Glance* is not only a practical guide for tourists, but also a literary work of artistic value.

When Saikaku reached the final stage of his career, he turned his attention to the issue of the urban townsmen class and their economic life. *The Eternal Treasure of Japan* (Nihon Eitaigura, 1688), *This Scheming World* (Seken mune sanyo, 1692), *Saikaku's Some Final Words of Advice* (Saikaku oridome, 1694) and *A Miscellany of Old Letters* (Yorozu no fumi hogu, 1696) introduced the genre of "choninmono" - "books about the townspeople" in Genroku literature. Saikaku created them as a unique textbook that embodies the wisdom of life, showing through concrete examples how to live a prosperous life in this world.

In his tales about townspeople - the whole life of the Japanese cities of the 17th century is described in colorful details. The worries and pleasures of townsmen life are brought together

along with holidays, customs. Saikaku narrates the customs of the people living in different parts of the country, highlighting the real people of his time and the events that actually took place. Streets, clothes, currency, all sorts of details of everyday life - the material signs of the time create a background in his novels where fiction and reality seem inseparable.

The writer's field of vision is wide. He can see not only the lavish courtyard of a successful merchant, but also the poor hut of deprived people. His novels reveal real-life conflicts through irony and humor.

The first example of this genre is the collection of short stories *The Eternal Treasure of Japan*, published in 1688. The collection is Saikaku's greatest work about the merchant class. It tells the story of the poor who became rich due to ingenuity and hard work, but also of the merchants who were impoverished because of indecision and squandering money. The subtitle of *The Eternal Treasure of Japan* is entitled *The Millionaire's Gospel Modernized* (Daifuku Shinchoja-kyo), which suggests that it was created under the influence of the kanozoshi *The Gospel of the Rich* (Choja-kyo), published in 1627. Although *The Gospel of the Rich*, which is less than ten pages in size, cannot compete with works of artistic excellence, it emphasizes that anyone who works diligently and continuously can become rich. The idea undoubtedly had a strong effect on Saikaku.

The creation of a series of collections, *The Eternal Treasure of Japan* and *Tales of the Samurai Duty*, suggests that Saikaku was interested in the exemplary behavior of the two classes during this period. The atmosphere of the *The Eternal Treasure of Japan* collection is more familiar and closer to Saikaku than its samurai tales. In this work his humor is fully manifested; all of the characters depicted in thirty short novels are more vivid, real, and long-lasting in the reader's memory than the images described abstractly in tales about samurai. Each of them sometimes begins with exemplary and instructive sentences that take up half of the story. In these passages, Saikaku gives advice on how to live a good life in this world. Unlike the stories of the samurai, each piece of this work, no matter how humorous, is an echo of the truth; instead of the same constant repetition of the theme of vendetta or duty.

The author's next work on the subject was a collection of short stories, *This Scheming World*. The collection tells about the stories that happened on the last day of the year, a difficult period when most of the merchants and townsmen are unable to pay their bills or return their debts. In contrast to *The Eternal Treasure of Japan*, the collection *This Scheming World* focuses on middle-class and poor townsmen as the protagonists. Despite of the grim nature of characters (angry debtors and accusers of debt evaders), the characters are dominated by cheerful emotions. Even in *This Scheming World* the story usually begins with a long introduction to the exhortation, followed by a short story. In one story, the story is told only in the last stanza of the work: it is preceded by a long piece of advice on the advantages of spending time with family rather than squandering money in gay quarters.

The collection, entitled *Saikaku's Some Final Words of Advice* is another work on the life of the townspeople, published after the writer's death by his disciple Hojo Dansui (1663-1711). Written around 1688 and published only in 1694, the collection consists of 25 short stories and is divided into two parts, *The Mirror of Japanese Townsmen* (Honcho Chonin Kagami) and *Hearts of Men* (Yo no hitogokoro). The collection's title have been derived from Saikaku's preface, which concludes: "With the help of my brush, I selected interesting events in our country, combined them and titled them "Hearts of Men in This World" This must surely be a fabric woven by the weaver bird of Naniwa". The preface to the collection was written by

Dansui, explains that writer intended to create trilogy consisting of *The Eternal Treasure of Japan* (Nihon Eitaigura”, 1688), *The Mirror of Japanese Townsmen* (Honcho Chonin Kagami) and *Hearts of Men* (Yo no hitogokoro). As the last two works were not completed, Dansui combined them and published as one book. In *Saikaku’s Some Final Words of Advice*, writer also depicts the hard life of the poorest representatives of the middle class.

In addition to *Saikaku’s Some Final Words of Advice*, Saikaku left many other manuscripts, including *Saikaku’s Parting Gift* (Saikaku okimiyage, 1693), *Saikaku’s Rustic Miscellany* (Saikaku zoku tsuredzure, 1695), *A Miscellany of Old Letters* (Yorozu no fumi hogu, 1696) and *Saikaku’s Fond Farewell* (Saikaku nagori no tomo, 1699) were published by Hojyo Dansui.

These works are radically different in content. *Saikaku’s Parting Gift* is the author’s latest work in the series of *koshokumono*, *Saikaku’s Rustic Miscellany* and *A Miscellany of Old Letters* are the last examples of writer’s tales about townsmen *choninmono*, while *Saikaku’s Fond Farewell* is a collection of interesting stories and anecdotes about poets.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to say why so many unpublished books remained after Saikaku’s death. Saikaku’s participation in the poetry of *haikai* tournaments in 1690, and after a long hiatus in poetry, publication new poems in *haikai* collections again, is explained by the fact that he had an eye affliction; it was not necessary to strain the eye as much as in prose to create poems. Probably, Saikaku was not able to finish most of his works due to this disease. When his eyesight improved a little, the writer devoted all his energy to his last great work, *This Scheming World*. Apparently, the versatile writer died while working on his collection, posthumously published in 1693, under the title *Saikaku’s Parting Gift* with his portrait and valedictory *haikai* poem.

Undoubtedly, Ihara Saikaku is one of the most prolific writers in Japanese literature. His prose work is distinguished by its diversity. In the first stage of his 12 year career as a writer, Saikaku wrote about the romantic life of the townspeople and created “*koshokumono*” - “tales about love” and in the middle stage described the ideals among samurai, together with the vendettas of the warrior class through his tales about samurai “*bukemono*”. In the final stage, publishing his “*choninmono*” Saikaku turned his attention to the economic and social life of the middle-class townspeople. A few Saikaku’s works that differ in genre, such as fantastic and detective novels, novels in epistolary form, travelogue lie outside this pattern, which represents a valid outline of his changing interests and changing personality during twelve years of his live as a novelist.

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