“‘The Tale of Kiyū’--Texts, Print Media and Publishing in 19th Century Japan” by Saeko Suzuki

Hello everyone. I am Saeko Suzuki from the University of British Columbia. I study the publishing and print culture of early modern Japan.

In this video, I will introduce how “The Tale of Kiyū,” which was passed down orally in Yokohama in the Bakumatsu era of the mid-1800s, eventually came to be published as literary products.

In the Edo period, individual copyright was not as clearly recognized as in modern times. Under such circumstances, publishers (*hanmoto)* played a significant role in literature production.

Publishers developed a variety of books and differentiated them through size and appearance.

These products continued to be appreciated by readers after the start of the Meiji era.

In the late Edo period, the Tokugawa shogunate strengthened its control over the publishing industry, which caused the publication of popular literature (*gesaku*) to stagnate.

This industry was also damaged by its traditional patrons’ loss of economic power beginning in the Meiji Era.

In this video, I showcase how publishers commercialized and modified “The Tale of Kiyū” during the transitional period from the Edo to Meiji eras, comparing and analyzing not only the plots, but also the size, writing style, and illustrations of the woodblock-printed books (*hanpon*) made in the 1870s that recorded this story.

After watching this video, you will understand the environment of literary media through which “The Tale of Kiyū” was transformed.

You will also be better able to appreciate the political, social, and economic factors behind such publications.

Now, let’s move on to “The Tale of Kiyū.”

First, I’d like to introduce the farewell poem attributed to Kiyū just before her suicide.

[reading the poem.]

As Makiko Ikenushi translates the *waka* poem, “Even a dewdrop of rain bothers Japanese prostitutes. I will not let the rain from America wet my sleeves,” the poem depicts her rejection of a foreign client.

There are several keywords included in this poem. “Yamato” is the old name of Japan.

“Amerika (America)” is one of the five great powers that sought to open Japan. Finally, “ominaeshi” is a flower which symbolizes a Japanese woman.

What kind of female protagonist did you imagine after reading this? What kind of situation did the poem make you imagine?

The main characters are: Kiyū, Kiyū’s father, Irūsu, and the unnamed owner of the Gankirō Brothel-house.

In 1846, Kiyū was born to a medical doctor in Edo (present-day Tokyo).

In 1855 Kiyū, was sold to a brothel because of poverty, which was caused by the Ansei earthquake and her father’s long-term illness.

Kiyū moved into the Gankirō House in Yokohama after a successful courtesan career in Yoshiwara, Edo.

As a courtesan, Kiyū specialized in servicing Japanese clients, but the brothel owner forced her to serve Irūsu, an American client because the owner wanted to receive the large sum of money offered by the client.

As a result, in 1862, Kiyū composed a farewell poem before taking her own life in protest of the owner’s demand for her to service Irūsu.

Some people believe this was a true story, while others argue that it was fiction.

However, the question of “fact” vs. “fiction” is not relevant in this presentation.

Instead, this presentation focuses on the following questions: Why did an anecdote of a prostitute’s suicide in Yokohama during the Bakumatsu era appear in print media after the Meiji era? Why was this anecdote divided into two texts: “historical record” and “fiction”?

To answer these questions, let’s look at the historical background in which the rumours regarding Kiyū were born.

Here is a map of Yokohama made in 1861, immediately after the opening of the port.

The Tokugawa shogunate built the Miyosaki Pleasure Quarter both to promote trade with the great powers and to encourage socialization between Japanese and foreign people.

Where is the Miyosaki Quarter?

Let’s look a little closer. On the edge of the port town you will find the Miyozaki Quarter.

You can see cherry blossom avenue.

Let’s go inside the Miyozaki Quarter.

Many people come and go along the cherry blossom avenue.

The Gankirō House – where Kiyū was said to have worked – was a prosperous brothel in this district.

This *ukiyo-e* print depicts a banquet between women and men from the five great powers (i.e., the United States, Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Russia) and a Chinese man in the well-known guest room, The Room of Fans, within the Gankirō House.

The Tokugawa government bowed to pressure from these five countries. The government ended its seclusion policy (*sakoku*), signed unfair treaties, and opened the port of Yokohama.

As a result of opening the country, some, like the Gankirō, benefited financially from the resulting foreign trade. However, the anti-Tokugawa factions were upset at what they saw as diminished local control caused by weak-kneed diplomacy.

The anti-Tokugawa discourse absorbed notions of xenophobic patriotism, which would cause the Meiji Restoration, and later become one of the driving forces for the establishment of the modern empire.

Under those unstable political circumstances, "The Tale of Kiyū" was first published.

Let me now discuss the sequence of events.

The Port of Yokohama and the Miyozaki Quarter opened in 1859, Kiyū committed suicide in 1862, and the Meiji Restoration took place in 1868.

What I'd like you to pay attention to are the events during the early Meiji era. The first book of "The Tale of Kiyū" was published just two years after the government proclaimed, "The Three Articles for Standardizing of Indoctrination Policy of 1872."

The Meiji government, in an attempt to establish a modern empire rooted in its Shintō-based ideology, established the position of preacher (*kyōdōshoku*). These individuals were tasked with indoctrinating people – especially members of the non-elite class – into their political belief system.

However, the number of Shintō priests employed for this purpose was insufficient to achieve such indoctrination, and so authors of popular literature and storytellers began to fulfill this role.

These *gesaku* authors and publishers, who had been suffering from low production since the late Edo period, jumped at this opportunity, and began to produce products for the national indoctrination policy, specifically educational books for non-elite readers; it is not hard to imagine their excitement at this chance.

As I showed you earlier, these are the sizes of books which publishers commonly used during the Edo period. Publishers used different book sizes for different content. For instance, the largest

book was used for academic materials, the next in size for educational books, then for guidebooks or romantic novels, and finally the smallest book was for glossaries or comic novellas.

The two sizes shown in the middle were used for publishing "The Tale of Kiyū."

In 1874, the publisher Bunsuke Tsujioka, inspired by "The Indoctrination Policy of 1872," published seven volumes of *Kinsei kibun* series.

The *Kinsei kibun* was the first book to contain "The Tale of Kiyū."

There are three key takeaways from *Kinsei kibun*:

First, as you can tell from its size, *Kinsei kibun* was intended as a history book for educational purposes.

Second, it was in this book that the notion of "Kiyū as a political and historical figure" – that is to say, as "a xenophobic patriot courtesan (*sonnō jōi*)" – was born.

In fact, the author of this book emphasized in the text that "The Tale of Kiyū" was a true story based on examination of historical sources.

Third, the publisher selected an appropriate author Nobufusa Somezaki, a highly educated writer from a privileged class, and illustrator, Eitaku Kobayashi, a painter who trained in the prestigious Kanō school, for the creation of this educational product.

The slightly formal writing style and vocabulary, along with the layout of text and images suggest it was intended for intermediate readers.

In this book, Kiyū is heralded as a proud Japanese woman who refused to bow to pressure from the great powers.

I would say that the publishing boom of "The Tale of Kiyū" began with the *Kinsei kibun* series, and that the subsequent Kiyū works (*Kiyū-mono)* were derived from the original narrative found in *Kinsei kibun*.

After this, Bunsuke Tsujioka, the publisher of the *Kinsei kibun* series, published *Giretsu kaiten hyakushu* as a spin-off work in the same year.

The author and illustrator of this book are the same as those of *Kinsei kibun*.

However, because the size is smaller than *Kinsei kibun*, and it is only a single volume, it was intended as an inexpensive book for beginners, not for intermediate readers like *Kinsei kibun* was.

The title *Giretsu kaiten hyakushu* can be translated as *One Hundred Sonnō jōi Poets Anthology*.

The book contains the work of each poet, a short biography of them, and their portrait, all on a compact page. As such, readers could learn the Bakumatsu history through concise sentences and illustrations.

I would say that this poetry selection served as a history book for beginners and a collection of patriotic propaganda rather than an anthology based on the artistic value of the poems.

The two volumes of *Hōkoku Yamato damashii* published the following year are the same size as *Giretsu kaiten hyakushu*, and the title had the same patriotic tone as *Giretsu*.

It is thought that the publisher was Tetsujirō Kobayashi.

Looking at this work, you will notice the graphic novel-like layout, meaning the text surrounds the illustrations.

As with the two previous works, *Kinsei kibun and Giretsu*, the author is Nobufusa Somezaki.

However, this work was illustrated by Yoshitora Utagawa, an *ukiyo-e* artist who created many paintings around the theme of "Yokohama prostitutes and foreign males" during the Bakumatsu era.

His illustrations in *Hōkoku Yamato damashii* may have reminded readers of the "apolitical image of prostitutes in Yokohama" before the birth of "the politicized Kiyū" ideology.

Compared to the illustrations in *Kinsei kibun* and *Giretsu kaiten hyakushu*, Yoshitora's illustrations are more in line with the style of *ukiyo-e*, and so do not emphasize realism as much as those in the previous texts.

Comparative analysis of *Kinsei kibun* and *Hōkoku Yamato damashii* suggests a trajectory for publishers of *Kiyū*: publishers initially produced "propagandist Kiyū works" that serve the Meiji government's indoctrination policy. After this, they gradually increased publication of Kiyū works as casual reading to meet non-elite readers' demands in an expanding market.

The tendency toward entertainment in publications of Kiyū can be seen more prominently in the early modern romance novellas called *Ninjōbon*.

Ninjōbon was a woodblock-printed romantic novella developed for female readers during the Edo period.

It is reminiscent of today's Harlequin Romance series.

The central theme of the genre was love, and it included information about the trendy customs and fashion of the townspeople living in Edo.

In 1876, Oshimaya Den'emon, who ran a publishing and lending library business, issued seven volumes of a romance novella called *Harusame bunko*.

This work is the turning-point where depictions of Kiyū clearly moved from representing her as "a xenophobic patriot" to representing her as "a filial daughter."

Kiyū was transformed in this way largely because the *sonnō jōi* philosophy was already anachronistic in the 1870s, whereas the ideal of Confucian filial piety was being revived as a paragon for citizens to live by. In addition, publishers seemed to think that the concept of "the melodrama of Kiyū who became a prostitute because of poverty and filial piety" could more easily win over the non-elite market than "the propaganda for nation-state building" could.

Just like the *Kinsei kibun* series, *Harusame bunko* was published in seven volumes. The small size, decorative cover, and multicoloured illustrations and frontispieces show that *Harusame bunko* was intended for entertainment more so than *Kinsei kibun* was.

However, the publisher did attempt to attract readers by creating a sort of docu-fiction, which combined reality with creative license, rather than simply creating a highly fictional drama outright.

For example, just like the *ukiyo-e* which I showed you earlier, this illustration depicts the actual banquet hall, the Room of Fans, in the Gankirō House.

Kiyū, who had a happy childhood, was sold to a brothel due to poverty, where she became a high-ranked courtesan. However, she met with a tragic fate. *Harusame bunko* narrates this story in such sentimental tones.

In *Harusame bunko*, Kiyū rejected the foreign client to keep a promise with her parents, while in *Kinsei kibun*, Kiyū rejected this client because she was a "xenophobic patriot courtesan."

These representations of the "two deaths" are not necessarily the same.

I'm now going to talk briefly about the media mix through which Kiyū was produced.

"The Tale of Kiyū" was performed in 1878 as a *kabuki* drama, entitled *Tate to Yokohama kōshi no shin'ori*.

It appears that other *Kiyū* plays were made, but as far as I could tell, almost no screenplays or performance records have been identified. This is a topic for further consideration.

Let's briefly review the origins and transformations of the texts of Kiyū:

Where did the anecdote of Kiyū come from?

What political, economic, and cultural background did Kiyū originate from?

After the Meiji Restoration, what unique varieties of Kiyū did publishers produce at the request of the new government?

After that, what other products did the publishers create to meet the readers' needs?

How was Kiyū represented in those books?

The depictions of Kiyū in these texts can be broadly divided into two types: Kiyū as "the political and xenophobic patriot courtesan" and as "the apolitical and filial courtesan."

Nevertheless, a single book can sometimes portray Kiyū in both ways, so the world of Kiyū texts is more complicated.

In this video, we have explored the trajectory of Kiyū texts in the woodblock printing media, looking through the related publishing activities.

Kiyū's suicide itself may have been just a rumour that spread amongst the people in Bakumatsu-era Yokohama.

However, the political, social, and economic demands during the transitional period between the early modern and modern period affected publishing activities, and correspondingly, publishers were encouraged to produce various versions of "The Tale of Kiyū."

The transformation of her image reveals that the ideal image of citizens – or the female role of citizenship – is by no means a fixed concept, but rather is constantly changing.

It also shows that a single literary text changes and divides over time.

In the 1970s, Sawako Ariyoshi wrote the play *Furuameri ni sode wa nurasaji*, which appears to be a contemporary interpretation of "The Tale of Kiyū."

This drama is still being performed as of June 2022.

If you created a Kiyū story today, what kind of narrative would you want to create? What kind of media would you use for your work, and how would you want to publish it?

The website of *Sex and Migration in the Transpacific Underground (1860-1923): Japanese Primary Sources* contains depictions of Kiyū from the Meiji era. Those colourful *ukiyo-e* prints may help you come up with some good ideas to produce your own version of Kiyū.