

Social Critique in Edo-period Japan

The project aims to analyse Edo-period works of social critique from the perspective of conceptual history.

About the project

In 1816, an anonymous samurai finished a voluminous work about the corruption of "customs" among all layers of the populace, from the warrior elite at the top down to farmers, townspeople, pariahs and prostitutes at the bottom. This work, entitled *Seji kenbunroku* ("Matters of the World: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard"), is an outstanding example of a new genre, in which writers offer their own analysis of society as a whole, often shaded by an acute sense of crisis.

Objectives

This genre has rarely been the focus of research for the reason that it has been regarded as "semi-intellectual", lacking both literary and intellectual quality. This project, however, looks on texts of this type as excellent sources for analyses of understandings of society, use of terminology, and conceptual history.

So far, the project has resulted in a full, annotated translation of *Seji kenbunroku* (Teeuwen & Nakai, red., *Lust, Commerce and Corruption: "An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard" by an Edo Samurai*, Columbia University Press 2014), as well as articles and a book chapter that analyse central concepts in this work and others in the same genre.