



University  
of Stavanger

**NAOMI AASE**  
SUPERVISOR: MALIN KRISTINE GRAESSE

# The Celebrated and the Condemned

Hypocritical Depictions of Edo-Period  
Courtesans as Seen in Contemporary  
*Ukiyo-E*

Bachelor thesis, 2024

BA in History

Faculty of Educational Sciences and Humanities

Department of Cultural Studies and Languages

Kitagawa, Utamaro. *Courtesans of the Matsubarō: Nakagawa, Utagawa, Matsukaze*. ca. 1799. Woodblock print triptych, ink colour on paper. 37,7 cm x 75,9 cm. Harvard Art Museum. Retrieved from:  
<https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/71798?position=71798>



Wordcount: 7445

# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
1.1 Background, Motivation and Selected Material .....	2
1.2 Objective .....	2
1.3 Feminist and Gender Theory .....	3
<b>2.0 Historical Context</b> .....	<b>4</b>
2.1 The <i>Sakoku</i> Policies and the Edo Period .....	4
2.2 <i>Ukiyo</i> - the “Floating World” and the <i>Yūkwaku</i> .....	6
2.3 <i>Yūjo</i> , <i>Tayō</i> and <i>Geisha</i> .....	7
2.4 <i>Ukiyo-E</i> - “Pictures of the Floating World” .....	9
<b>3.0 Discussion - Sexuality, Gender, and Power in <i>Ukiyo-E</i></b> .....	<b>10</b>
3.1 The Disparity in Representation Between Courtesan and <i>Geisha</i> .....	10
3.2 Celebration and Condemnation: <i>Jigoku Dayū</i> - the “Hell Courtesan” and the Demoness, Ibaraki-dōji .....	13
<b>4.0 Summary</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix B</b> .....	<b>29</b>

## 1.0 Introduction

*Geisha are not courtesans. And we are not wives. We sell our skills, not our bodies. We create another secret world, a place only of beauty. The very word 'geisha' means artist and to be a geisha is to be judged as a moving work of art.*<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Background, Motivation and Selected Material

There seems to be quite a large amount of studies surrounding Edo-period courtesans and their depictions. However, I have found fewer works tying in the legend of the “Hell Courtesan” (*Jigoku Dayū*) and her depictions in *ukiyo-e*, which was what largely inspired this thesis. The materials that I have selected for this paper are from a large range of the Edo period, from both the 18th and 19th centuries. The woodblock prints are also from a variety of artists, with only two of the nine prints having the same painter. There are two prints, “*The Enlightenment of Jigoku Dayū*” (figure 3) and “*Hell Courtesan*” (figure 4), which are dated to the very beginning of the Meiji period (the 1870s-1890s), yet they stylistically and thematically still fit within the Edo period.

Most of my text regarding the courtesans, *geisha* and the pleasure districts are based on the book “*Nightless City, or The History of the Yoshiwara Yūkwaku*” by De Becker. This book is rather old, being written in 1899, however, it is still very relevant in the research field surrounding courtesans and the pleasure districts. Some of my other sources, like “*The Riddles of Ukiyo-E: Women and Men in Japanese Prints 1765-1865*” by Uhlenbeck and Dwinger, base some of their information on De Becker’s book, showing it is still very relevant despite its old age. But, this forces me to be aware of the advances made in the historic field since the book was written, like the development of feminism and the influence of Japonism.

### 1.2 Objective

The artworks called *ukiyo-e*, or “pictures of the floating world,” from the Edo period are both captivating and distinct. With themes focused on the day-to-day life in the pleasure quarters and *kabuki* theatres, these woodblock prints depict courtesans, *geishas* and *kabuki* actors. The objective for this study will be as follows: to look at a select *ukiyo-e* and determine if they can provide insight into the contemporary attitudes towards courtesans in Edo-period Japan.

---

<sup>1</sup> Marshall, R (Columbia Pictures). “Memoirs of a Geisha.” Film. 2005.

This study will be conducted in three parts. Firstly, it will compare the representation and societal sentiments surrounding courtesans and *geishas*. Secondly, it will analyse prints featuring *Jigoku Dayū* and other demonised courtesans. Finally, it will examine woodblock prints through questions of gender and power.

### 1.3 Feminist and Gender Theory

This study will use a feminist lens to analyse various aspects of *ukiyo-e* depicting courtesans and *geishas*. To achieve this will I examine their interactions with other characters in the artworks, as well as investigate how these representations reflect gender norms and stereotypes, such as the idealisation of beauty and the objectification of women's bodies. I will also apply the concept of the “male gaze” to analyse how *ukiyo-e* prints catered to male viewers and portray courtesans as objects of male desire.

Some of the theories and methodologies I will be using in this study include Laura Mulvey’s “male gaze,” John Berger’s investigation of the European nude and the feminist art history debates introduced by Chino Kaori as explained by Ayako Kano.

Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" is an important idea in film theory and feminist film criticism. It refers to how visual media is centred around a heterosexual male perspective, which objectifies women and presents them primarily as objects of desire for male characters and viewers. Mulvey also points out that this perspective not only influences the representation of women on screen, but also shapes the way viewers are encouraged to identify with male characters and view female characters as “other” or different. This reinforces traditional gender roles and power dynamics, preserving inequality and reinforcing the dominance of the male perspective in society.<sup>2</sup>

Similar to Mulvey's concept, although he does not use that exact term, Berger also delves into the idea of the “male gaze.” He discusses how traditional art, particularly the nude, has been constructed from a male perspective, inviting the viewer to gaze upon the female body as an object of desire and possession. Berger critiques this perspective and calls it hypocritical, arguing that it objectifies women and reinforces gender inequalities.<sup>3</sup>

Kaori was one of the first to introduce Western feminism and gender theory to Japanese art history, however, she was met with a great deal of disagreement within the Japanese academic field for institutionalise such foreign concepts. She argued that the value

---

<sup>2</sup> Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Film: Psychology, Society, and Ideology*. London: Sage, 1999. P. 808-810

<sup>3</sup> Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972. P. 46-51

of gender theory is not diminished by its origin, and she emphasized the neglect of gender issues in Japanese academia.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, feminist art historians participating in the debate underlined three key points:

*1) feminist critique intersects with critiques from other perspectives such as class and race, and while it is certainly not the only valid critical perspective, it is a particularly important one given the status quo of the art history studies in Japan; 2) the fact that feminist criticism and gender theory originated abroad do not discredit them; 3) there is no sacred realm of art that is impervious to critique.*<sup>5</sup>

While acknowledging the Western origin of feminism and gender theory, Kaori pointed out its potential to provide new, valuable insight into Japanese art and history, including representations of courtesans.

## **2.0 Historical Context**

### **2.1 The *Sakoku* Policies and the Edo Period**

The era between the beginning of the 17th century until the mid-19th century<sup>6</sup> is both called the Edo period (Edo being the previous name for modern-day Tokyo and the new headquarters of the *Shōgun*<sup>7</sup>) and the Tokugawa period (Tokugawa being the family name of the *Shōgun* who ruled during this time period).<sup>8</sup> An event that heavily coincides with the Edo period is the *sakoku* edicts/policy, *sakoku* translating into “locked country.” The primary role of the Tokugawa *Shōgun* was to keep the country safe from foreign attacks, and as such the third *Shōgun* of the Tokugawa dynasty, Iemitsu, implemented these *sakoku* edicts in 1639, bringing forth a period of peace, political stability, and economic growth.<sup>9</sup> The edicts were introduced due to fear of xenophobia against European Christians (especially the Portuguese

---

<sup>4</sup> Kano, Ayako. “Women? Japan? Art?: Chino Kaori and the Feminist Art History Debates.” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003. P. 27

<sup>5</sup> Kano. “Women? Japan? Art?”, P. 29

<sup>6</sup> I.e. 1600/1603-1868. There are some disagreements regarding when the Edo/Tokugawa period began, with some saying 1600 since that is the year Tokugawa Ieyasu won the Battle of Sekigahara. While others argue it began in 1603 because that was the year the Tokugawa family gained control as *Shōgun*.

<sup>7</sup> A *Shōgun* was the military leader of Japan.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) P. 9

<sup>9</sup> Gordon. *A Modern History of Japan*. P. 17-18

Jesuits). The *Shōgun* worried that the increase of Christian converts would lead to an uprising amongst the Japanese.<sup>10</sup> As such, Tokugawa Iemitsu closed the borders of Japan to any foreigners wishing to enter the country and banned any Japanese citizens from leaving. With a few exceptions.<sup>11 12</sup>

There were also changes to the political hierarchy during this time. Because the *Shōgun*, as mentioned earlier, was originally a military leader and nothing more, it was the Imperial family that governed over Japan and had the ultimate power. However, before the beginning of the Tokugawa period there was discord throughout the country with distrust towards the *bakufu* (i.e. the military government), resulting in local and regional lords warring amongst themselves for power. Obu Nobunaga was one of the *daimyō* (i.e. the vassals serving the *Shōgun* and the aforementioned regional lords), who managed to establish some form of control over central Japan. His successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, spread that hegemony further until it reached all of Japan. Hideyoshi's rival, Tokugawa Ieyasu, conquered the regency council left by Hideyoshi and established himself as *Shōgun* in 1603, and so marked the beginning of the Tokugawa period.<sup>13</sup>

This first Tokugawa *Shōgun* was known to rule both harshly and strictly. Ieyasu also refined and implemented many institutions surrounding ruling and governing, many of which were originally institutionalised by his predecessors, Nobunaga and Hideyoshi.<sup>14</sup> However, the most significant changes were made in regard to the *daimyō*. In *Shōgun* Ieyasu's attempt to gain more control over his vassals, he implemented strict laws regarding their lives and conduct; these included restrictions such as permitting only one castle per domain and overseeing and approving marriages between *daimyō*. Additionally, he demanded oaths of loyalty sworn directly to him, effectively preventing his vassals from forming alliances amongst themselves. To ensure compliance, inspectors were dispatched to monitor the *daimyō*. Through these strategies, Tokugawa Ieyasu effectively centralised authority and minimised potential threats to his rule.<sup>15 16</sup>

Furthermore, Ieyasu's grandson, Tokugawa Iemitsu, continued his grandfather's legacy and expanded on his control over both the *daimyō* and the Imperial court. In regards to

---

<sup>10</sup> Clements, Jonathan. *A Brief History of Japan: Samurai, Shogun and Zen: the Extraordinary Story of the Land of the Rising Sun*. (Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing. 2017) P. 153-154

<sup>11</sup> Clements, *A Brief History of Japan*, P. 154

<sup>12</sup> Gordon. *A Modern History of Japan*. P. 17

<sup>13</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, P. 9-11

<sup>14</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, P. 10-13

<sup>15</sup> Clements, *A Brief History of Japan*, P. 150

<sup>16</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, P. 13

the *daimyō*, Iemitsu made it possible for himself to transfer land from a potentially disloyal vassal to one of his more loyal ones.<sup>17</sup> As mentioned earlier, the *Shōgun* title and role is normally granted by the Emperor, however, *Shōgun* Iemitsu managed to garner some control over the Imperial family by keeping the royals out of poverty by supporting them economically, but he also kept an imperial prince hostage at one of the Tokugawa family's shrines in Nikkō and placed one of his deputies near the Imperial palace in Kyoto to monitor the court.<sup>18</sup> This, combined with *Shōgun* Iemitsu implementing a new set of laws for the nobles, granted the *Shōgun* the ability to make court appointments and grant land income, furthering his control and alleviating his status to be more on par with the Emperor.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.2 *Ukiyo* - the “Floating World” and the *Yūkwaku*

*Ukiyo* is a term with Buddhist roots and can be translated into the “floating world,” originally used to call something an illusion or refer to its vainness. During the beginning of the Edo period, the concept of *ukiyo* took on a new meaning. *Ukiyo* became the name of the place people would go to escape the real world and its responsibilities. During the Tokugawa period there was strict control surrounding what people thought and did, there existed strict societal norms and moral codices that was expected to be followed. *Ukiyo* was a reaction to this strict everyday life. This meant that the pleasure districts were places where one could indulge in things like women and alcohol. It offered a space where one's social status mattered less than the size of their wallet.<sup>20</sup> The brothels and *kabuki* theatres within the pleasure districts became closely associated with the “floating world”, as evidenced by the large quantity of art and literary works depicting these institutions from the Edo period.

In 1589, Toyotomi Hideyoshi allowed one of his *daimyō* to establish the first pleasure quarter in Kyoto. The subsequent pleasure quarters, like the famous Yoshiwara in Edo, were established later in the early Tokugawa period. These pleasure quarters were characterised by the walls surrounding them, separating the district from the rest of the city.<sup>21</sup> In order to establish the Yoshiwara pleasure district in Edo it was required to segregate the workers of the district from the rest of the city, meaning that courtesans were required to remain within the confines of these designated areas, known as *yūkwaku* or red-light districts. Officials

---

<sup>17</sup> Gordon. *A Modern History of Japan*. P. 13

<sup>18</sup> Gordon. *A Modern History of Japan*. P. 14

<sup>19</sup> Gordon. *A Modern History of Japan*. P. 14

<sup>20</sup> Kalland, Arne. *Japans Historie: Fra Jegersamfunn til Økonomisk Supermakt*. (Oslo: Cappellens Forlag AS, 2022). P. 214

<sup>21</sup> Kalland, *Japans Historie*, P. 215

overseeing these districts had to report any instances of prostitutes straying outside their boundaries. This was all necessary for the districts to be allowed in Edo.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, strict regulations were implemented in regard to the Yoshiwara *yūkwaku*, varying from the aforementioned segregation of prostitutes to guests not being allowed to remain in a brothel for more than twenty-four hours, but also interestingly that prostitutes were not allowed to wear clothes with gold or silver embroidery. These regulations also mention that if a courtesan was requested at a location outside the limits of the pleasure districts, these requests were to be dismissed and not complied with.<sup>23</sup>

Within the pleasure districts, there existed an ever-changing systematic hierarchy, where classes of prostitutes could either be added, removed or merged. These classes were implemented to assign a courtesan to the class deserving of her beauty, and as a result, her monetary worth. In the very beginning of the Yoshiwara district, there were two different classes of courtesans: *tayō* and *hashi-jōro*. *Tayō* were the higher-ranking and more beautiful courtesans, while *hashi-jōro* were those of lesser beauty and skill. Some classes came and went over the years, like the *tsubone-jōro* and the *hashi-jōro*, however, some classes that entered after the initial opening of the pleasure district remained. These were classes like *kōshi-jōro* and *sancha-jōro*, to name a few, whose names were the only changes made to them (like how *sancha-jōro* and *tayō* became *oiran*).<sup>24</sup> The next chapter will go more in depth regarding the most relevant classes of courtesans.

### 2.3 *Yūjo*, *Tayō* and *Geisha*

Firstly, it is imperative to establish the difference between a *yūjo*, *tayō* and a *geisha*. A *yūjo* and a *tayō* are what is most commonly associated with the word courtesan, *yūjo* being the Japanese word for courtesan, or “woman of pleasure”, and being the collective term.<sup>25</sup> These women were prostitutes confined within the pleasure districts, serving those who could afford them. They came from all sorts of backgrounds, from *samurai* families to common peasant girls. However, it is important to note that the women of *samurai* lineages were considered of higher rank than the ones of common descent. Women from *samurai* families had their own

---

<sup>22</sup> De Becker, Joseph, E. *Nightless City: Or the History of the Yoshiwara Yūkwaku*. (Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing. 2012). P. 34

<sup>23</sup> De Becker, *Nightless City*, P. 34

<sup>24</sup>There is multiple more classes of courtesans throughout the history of the Yoshiwara pleasure district, however, I cannot name them all here. For further reading see: De Becker, Joseph, E. *Nightless City: Or the History of Yoshiwara Yūkwaku*. (Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2012.) P. 86-101

<sup>25</sup> Uhlenbeck, Chris. and Jim, Dwinger. *The Riddles of Ukiyo-E: Women and Men in Japanese Prints 1765-1865*. (Brussel: Ludion Publishers. 2023.) P. 14



rank; *yakko*, and were typically in the pleasure district as some form of punishment for breaking the *samurai* honour code (or *bushidō*), which during the Tokugawa period had become formalised into law<sup>26</sup>. To repent for their lapse from virtue they would serve three to five years in the *yūkwaku*.<sup>27</sup>

A *tayō*, or *oiran*, depending on the time period, is also a courtesan, however, these were the higher-ranking prostitutes, comparable to modern-day celebrities. They served only the most elite clientele and were able to mostly refrain from offering sexual services, unlike their lower-ranking counterparts. *Tayō*, the term for the highest-ranking courtesan, was originally described to be a position at court, however, it was later replaced by the new label *oiran*, also known as *sancha-jōro* which originally were illegal prostitutes brought to the pleasure district, around the mid-18th century.<sup>28</sup>

It is also important to note the extensive training that future courtesans had to undergo before they could begin offering their services. Many young girls were recruited when they were between the ages of five and seven and would begin their training in the arts of conversation, music, song, dancing and poetry (the more skill and beauty the girl possessed, the greater their training would be).<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that these young girls attended to their seniors and were called *kamuro*, which originally was the name for child attendants serving at the Imperial Court. In the small time frame when *tayō* and *sancha-jōro* existed at the same time, each of them had their own *kamuro* attending them.<sup>30</sup> However, the *tayō* were entitled to two or three, while the *sancha-jōro* were only entitled to one. According to De Becker's "*Nightless City: Or the History of the Yoshiwara Yūkwaku*", this was done in order to distinguish what class the courtesan belonged to.<sup>31</sup> These young girls would attend their senior courtesans until their debut around the age of 13-14,<sup>32</sup> when they graduated into a group called *shinzō* in the Yoshiwara district. Their debuts were made into great celebrations. The term *shinzō* was also applied in later years within the Edo pleasure district, referring to some of the lowest-ranking courtesans, typically under the age of twenty, who would often be attending an *oiran*.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Kazuhiko, Kasaya. "Bushidō: An Ethical and Spiritual Foundation in Japan." *Nippon.com*, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/g00665/bushido-an-ethical-and-spiritual-foundation-in-japan.html>

<sup>27</sup> De Becker, *Nightless City*, P. 113

<sup>28</sup> Kalland, *Japans Historie*. P. 215-216

<sup>29</sup> De Becker, *Nightless City*. P. 105-106

<sup>30</sup> De Becker, *Nightless City*. P. 101

<sup>31</sup> De Becker, *Nightless City*. P. 101

<sup>32</sup> Kalland, *Japans Historie*. P. 216

<sup>33</sup> Uhlenbeck, and Dwinger. *The Riddles of Ukiyo-E*, P. 14

What sets a *geisha*<sup>34</sup> apart from the aforementioned courtesans, is the fact that they are an off-branch of the profession and a result of changing times. In other words, the early 18th century courtesans were well enough accomplished in the arts of singing, dancing, and music that there was no need for *geisha*, whose entire career was based on these skills.<sup>35</sup> It was not until the 1760s that *geisha* became its own distinct profession. What ultimately set the *geisha* apart from the courtesans was their expertise in performing *gidayū* (musical drama), *naga-uta* (lyric poetry or song) and *bungo-bushi* (a style of song originating in Bungo.)<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, the term *geisha* is not limited only to female entertainers, like most of the courtesan-related terms, it also includes male entertainers.<sup>37</sup> Contrary to the prostitutes, *geisha* were actually permitted to visit outside the *yūkwaku*, yet these visits were strictly regulated and amounted to only a couple of hours on two very specific days (New Year's Day and *Bon no jū-san-nichi*, which is the thirteenth day of the seventh month.) Even the *geisha* was prohibited from wearing finer clothing, just like the courtesans,<sup>38</sup> and they also had their place in the hierarchy alongside the prostitutes. When serving at the same events, a *geisha* was not permitted to sit near an *oiran* so as not to draw attention away from the courtesan. In addition, many of the people who were recruited as *geisha* were considered plain-looking, as they should not outshine an *oiran* when in their presence.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.4 *Ukiyo-E* - "Pictures of the Floating World"

The primary sources for this thesis are various *ukiyo-e* from the Edo period. *Ukiyo-E* are a form of woodblock prints (or in some cases paintings), depicting scenes from daily life, although often from the pleasure districts.<sup>40</sup> These prints were also ideal for combining pictures and text, which was perfect for illustrating books. However, at the beginning of the Tokugawa period, the genre was considered lewd and did not become a recognised art form until the end of the 19th century, when foreigners discovered the artworks and praised them.<sup>41</sup> There is also a difference between *ukiyo-e* prints and paintings. The paintings were much more exclusive and expensive compared to prints, which were mass-produced and therefore

---

<sup>34</sup> The word *geisha* can be interpreted to mean "artist," although "person of the arts" is more accurate.

<sup>35</sup> De Becker, *Nightless City*. P. 139

<sup>36</sup> De Becker. *Nightless City*. P. 139

<sup>37</sup> De Becker. *Nightless City*. P. 121-123

<sup>38</sup> De Becker. *Nightless City*. P. 141.143

<sup>39</sup> De Becker. *Nightless City*. P. 141-143

<sup>40</sup> Kalland, *Japans Histroie*, P. 223

<sup>41</sup> Kalland. *Japans Historie*. P. 223-224

much more accessible to the common masses. This led to prints being used for commercial flyers as well as decorations in one's home.<sup>42</sup>

It is also interesting to note that erotic artworks were discouraged and unwanted by the Tokugawa shogunate, so many *ukiyo-e* prints and artworks containing erotic themes were often made under a pseudonym or anonymously, making it difficult for the government to actually regulate these art pieces.<sup>43</sup>

While the majority of artists from the Edo period were men, there were in fact a small number of female artists as well. However, the way in which female artists portrayed women differed from how male artists depicted them, the primary difference being that men focused more on the outward aesthetic, while female artists focused on the deeper, psychological meaning within the art.<sup>44</sup>

### **3.0 Discussion - Sexuality, Gender, and Power in *Ukiyo-E***

#### **3.1 The Disparity in Representation Between Courtesan and *Geisha***

Courtesans in the Edo period had to dress a certain way in order to be distinguishable from other women, as well as *geishas*. One of these dress codes was the way they tied their sashes, known as *obi* in Japanese. Unlike *geishas* and other women, who typically tied their *obi* at the back,<sup>45</sup> courtesans of the pleasure districts tied theirs at the front. This subtle yet significant difference in clothing served as a visual marker to differentiate between courtesans, regular women, and *geishas*, making it possible for viewers to easily discern between the three in woodblock prints and other art forms from the era. For instance, in the print “*Hanamurasaki of the Tamaya*” (figure 5), the courtesan's *obi* is tied at the front, and in “*Evening Bell (Banshō)*” (figure 6), the women depicted are *geishas*, because their sashes are tied at the back.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable difference when comparing the clothing in woodblock prints of *geishas* and high-ranking courtesans. Courtesans, especially those of a higher rank, are often portrayed dressed in extravagant kimonos and *uchikake* (outer-kimono) with intricate designs and luxurious fabrics. In contrast, *geishas* typically appear more

---

<sup>42</sup> Kalland, *Japans Historie*, P. 223

<sup>43</sup> Uhlenbeck, and Dwinger. *The Riddles of Ukiyo-E*, P. 10-11

<sup>44</sup> Fister, Patricia. *Japanese Women Artists 1600-1900*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988. P.

<sup>45</sup> However, *geishas* also tied their *obi* differently from regular women. According to page 135 in De Becker's book “*Nightless City*” the *obi* was tied in a bow called *taiko-musubi*.

modestly dressed. This difference in attire is likely influenced by the societal hierarchy within the pleasure districts. Courtesans (especially *oirans*), as the pinnacle of the entertainment industry, were expected to exude opulence and refinement befitting their high status, while *geishas*, although highly skilled entertainers, were lower on the social ladder due to their lesser beauty. Additionally, the aforementioned unwritten 'rule' dictating that a *geisha* should not overshadow a courtesan when at the same event may have contributed to the more modest appearance of *geishas* in these *ukiyo-e*. By following these societal norms and hierarchical differences, woodblock prints reflect the power dynamics between courtesans and *geishas* of the *yūkwaku* during the Edo period.

When examining prints and paintings of courtesans from the Edo period, it becomes clear that many of these artworks featured named individuals, often with some sort of reference to the specific brothels where they served. As seen in the print of “*Hanamurasaki of the Tamaya*” (figure 5), where her name is Hanamurasaki and the brothel she is employed at is called Tamaya. This is a completely different treatment compared to the one given to the *geisha*. Unlike courtesans, who were often depicted as celebrities, *geishas* were frequently portrayed in a more modest manner, with many remaining unnamed in the artwork. This disparity establishes the celebrity-like status that courtesans held in Edo-period society, where they were not only admired for their beauty and talent but also recognized and remembered by name.

In addition to the disparity in the treatment of *geishas* and courtesans in *ukiyo-e*, there is also a notable difference in the thematic focus of the artworks. While woodblock prints depicting courtesans often focus on their lavish clothing, ethereal beauty, and graceful bearing, those featuring *geishas* tend to centre more on their professional skills. In these prints, *geishas* are often seen practicing their skills related to their profession, such as musical performances, dance, or conversation with clients. For example, in the print “*Evening Bell (Banshō)*” (figure 6), two *geishas* are depicted playing a string and a flute instrument, likely a *shamisen* and potentially a *shakuhachi* or *fue*.

On another note, “*Love at the Brothel Gate*” (figure 8) is an interesting piece when considering the attitude and sentiments surrounding courtesans, because it almost looks as if the courtesan in the painting is behind bars, almost like a prison cell. Previously it has been mentioned that the only way that these pleasure districts were allowed to be constructed was if the courtesans were segregated from the rest of society to the point that they were not allowed to go beyond the *yūkwaku*. Even if the courtesan was invited to a client outside of the pleasure district they had to decline, as they simply were not allowed to go beyond the

district, meaning that many Edo period courtesans would see very little of the outside world during their life. It has been established that girls as young as five were recruited to the pleasure houses and even old age was not enough to allow them to leave. *Yarite*, the female managers of these brothels were veteran courtesans themselves. But how does this all tie into the contemporary attitudes towards courtesans? The alienation and separation of the courtesans makes it almost seem as if they are not a part of society. In a sense, these women are locked away in a “prison” and only used for their services. It reiterates the sentiment that while the courtesans are highly thought of in regard to their beauty and elegance, they live in a world separate from the rest of society. In essence, they were “locked away” in a “prison” of their own profession, valued primarily for their services rather than their humanity. This is an example of how the courtesans could be viewed as “other”, one of the points that Mulvey makes in her concept of the “male gaze”. Therefore, establishing that the profession of the courtesans is inherently made for male desire. This will be explored more in the next chapter.

Since *geishas* did not sell their bodies like the courtesans, they were exempted from some of these regulations and separations. *Geishas* were at the very least allowed to leave the *yūkwaku* on certain days of the year and in the case they were to serve clients or attend performances or other events. In “*Geisha with an Origami Crane*” (figure 7) a *geisha* can be seen next to a lantern which were often found at temples and shrines, but also in gardens of wealthy teahouses or large estates, meaning that it is likely the *geisha* is visiting a client outside of the pleasure district, and showing that *geishas* were not as imprisoned as the courtesans.

“*Love at the Brothel Gate*” (figure 8) is also a curious piece when considering the interaction between the characters. As the title of the *ukiyo-e* hints at, the print depicts a pair of secret lovers; one a lower-ranking courtesan<sup>46</sup> and the other a street entertainer of the pleasure quarters. There is also a poem inscribed at the top of the print, which reads; “*Although I yearn, I do not speak, as days and months, pass by behind my cedar gate. How can I endure, keeping this secret within?*”<sup>47</sup> According to Uhlenbeck and Dwinger, the poem could express the courtesan’s desire to be with her lover, while waiting for him as long as necessary behind the wooden lattices (i.e. the display the courtesan sits behind, or what seems like a gate or “prison bars”), keeping her feelings for the performer hidden from the rest of the world. This poem again portrays the plight of the Edo-period courtesans by representing

---

<sup>46</sup> In this case a *shinzō*, we know this as *shinzos* were the lowest ranking courtesans and would be the only ones placed behind a wooden lattice.

<sup>47</sup> Laurel Rasplia Rodd, *Shinkokinshū*, P. 456, cited in Uhlenbeck, and Dwinger. *The Riddles of Ukiyo-E*, P. 30.

the tragedy of being kept separate from one's lover, being forced to watch time and people pass by the wooden lattice and yearning for her lover. Still, she must repress her feelings, as she is unable to leave the confines of the brothel.<sup>48</sup>

Continuing with this train of thought, one could argue that “*Love at the Brothel Gate*” (figure 8) is also an example of a depiction of rebellion within the pleasure districts. These fleeting interactions that the pair of lovers share through the wooden lattices display a behaviour and relationship that were not permitted, as courtesans were only allowed to serve those that could afford them. And yet, despite what society expected and permitted, the pair of secret lovers dares to steal what few moments together that they can get in pursuit of their own desires.

### 3.2 Celebration and Condemnation: *Jigoku Dayū* - the “Hell Courtesan” and the Demoness, Ibaraki-dōji

The tales surrounding the *Jigoku Dayū*<sup>49</sup> speak of a 15th-century daughter of a samurai being kidnapped by her father's enemies and sold off to a brothel. She was described as being elegant and very beautiful, managing to attain the highest rank of a courtesan. When she became a courtesan she adopted the name of *Jigoku Dayū*, the Hell Courtesan, trying to redeem some of the bad karma she believed she had garnered from her previous life. Then, one day, she served the legendary Zen monk Ikkyū Sōjun (1394-1481) and he taught her more of the Buddhist ways in order to attain enlightenment and free herself from her life as a courtesan. Once the courtesan died, she met Ema-O, the King of Hell, who revealed to her just how cruel she had been and that her punishment was to wear an *uchikake* made of all the tortured souls of hell.<sup>50</sup>

However, there are different variations of this story, which mainly focus on when the courtesan adopted the name of *Jigoku Dayū*. Some sources claim that she adopted the name

---

<sup>48</sup> Uhlenbeck, and Dwinger. *The Riddles of Ukiyo-E*, P. 30.

<sup>49</sup> The name “*Jigoku Dayū*” is somewhat of an oxymoron in Japanese. “*Dayū*” (from the word “*Tayō*”) typically refers to the highest-ranking courtesan in the pleasure districts, while “*jigoku*” is associated with a class of courtesans operating outside the regulated districts, often considered illegal or unlicensed. This term was also used to describe streetwalking prostitutes during the Edo period, sometimes referred to as “*yotaka*,” meaning “night hawk.” It's interesting that the Hell Courtesan's name combines both the highest and lowest ranks of prostitution.

<sup>50</sup> Junzaburo, Morimoto. *Kunichika, 36 Good and Evil Beauties - Jigoku Dayu*. Somerset: Toshidama Gallery. Retrieved from: [https://www.toshidama-japanese-prints.com/item\\_940/Kunichika-36-Good-and-Evil-Beauties--Jigoku-Dayu.htm](https://www.toshidama-japanese-prints.com/item_940/Kunichika-36-Good-and-Evil-Beauties--Jigoku-Dayu.htm)

after she met Ikkyū, but her reasons for adopting it remain the same.<sup>51</sup> Some stories of *Jigoku Dayū* (as interpreted by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and in reference to Kawanabe Kyosai's "Hell Courtesan" (figure 4)), introduce variations that emphasise a more supernatural aspect. For instance, in one of these versions:

*According to one, the Hell Courtesan doubted the religiosity of the scruffy monk who visited her brothel one day. She decided to spy on Ikkyū from behind a screen, only to find him engaged in a lively dance with a retinue of skeletons. She immediately recognized the monk's true enlightened status and became one of his followers.*<sup>52</sup>

While these variations may not significantly alter the overall narrative of *Jigoku Dayū*, they add a mystical aspect to the story.

Furthermore, what makes the *Jigoku Dayū* recognisable in these *ukiyo-e* prints and paintings are her clothes. Her clothes always depict scenes of hell, demons, and the souls of those she damned, but most interestingly it also depicts one of the Kings of Hell; the aforementioned Ema-O. This can be seen in "Seki: Ikkyū and the Hell Courtesan (*Jigoku Dayū*)" (figure 2). In "Hell Courtesan *Jigoku Dayū*" by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (figure 1), we can also see depictions of a *bodhisattva* on the Hell Courtesan's sleeve, perhaps signifying her dedication to redemption after she met with the monk Ikkyū.

It is also important to note exactly who the Zen monk Ikkyū was. Ikkyū was a Buddhist monk and poet of the 15th century, often viewed as a hero of folktales and legends.<sup>53</sup> He is described as having a large impact on Japanese art and literature, as well as the Zen religion. He is primarily characterised by his spontaneous and unbound nature, leading to him adapting the nickname of *Kyōun*, meaning Crazy Cloud. This also meant that he was quite an unorthodox monk, deciding to live without the conventions of the religious institution.<sup>54</sup> One of the opinions that made him unconventional was his love for sake (rice wine) and riotous behaviour, but perhaps most importantly his mockery of those who

---

<sup>51</sup> Art Institute of Chicago. "An Auspicious Kind of Hell." In *Painting the Floating World: Ukiyo-E Masterpieces from the Weston Collection*. Retrieved from: <https://www.artic.edu/articles/719/an-auspicious-kind-of-hell>

<sup>52</sup> Museum of Fine Arts Boston, *Hell Courtesan*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Retrieved from: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/538438>

<sup>53</sup> Steiner, Evgeny. *Zen-Life: Ikkyū and Beyond*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2014. P. 132

<sup>54</sup> Steiner, *Zen-Life*, P.127

shunned female company.<sup>55</sup> Going so far as to see women as the “flower of enlightenment,” something that was a very unconventional opinion in Buddhism, where it was believed that women were inherently born with worse karma.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Ikkyū viewed interactions with women as a harmonious way to develop religious practice and the evolution of the self. One of Ikkyū’s poems is called “*Praise to the brothel, shame to the brethren who purchase the dharma,*” showing his stance on prostitution and bodily urges, by not distancing himself from physical attraction and sex, like many monks from this era did.<sup>57</sup>

Knowing this can also give an impression of the evolution of attitudes surrounding sex and sexuality in mediaeval Japan. For example, during the time of Ikkyū and *Jigoku Dayū*, one could summarise that surrounding oneself with courtesans would be seen as sinful and bad, considering that the most common religion at the time was Buddhism (a religion that generally advocated for celibacy and a rejection of worldly desires), based on the fact that Ikkyū was considered crazy (hence the name crazy cloud) and unconventional. This is also strengthened by the fact that *Jigoku Dayū*’s story portrays her as a villain, considering that in the end she is punished for her cruelty, but it is never explicitly explained what her cruel actions were. Perhaps she is just framed as such due to propaganda or to paint courtesans as sinful and deserving of hell.

With the arrival of the *ukiyo* emerged a cultural phenomenon that celebrated the worldly pleasures, desires, and indulgences of urban life. *Ukiyo* was characterised by a fascination with the fleeting nature of existence and a focus on the pleasures of the senses, including entertainment and sexuality. *Ukiyo* (i.e. the pleasure districts) were the places that catered specifically to these senses and allowed the indulgence of these services.

It is also important to note that the general attitude and understanding of sex was different in Japan compared to the Western world. As can be seen in this quote from Woldemar and Amsden’s “*Impressions of Ukiyo-E*”;

*Whilst elsewhere the exposure of erotic desires often means an increased personal involvement or a descent into a sub-personal animal-like manner, it means something completely different in Japan, it is in fact a depersonalisation, a dwindling of individuality in favour of conventions.*<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Steiner, *Zen-Life*, P. 132-133

<sup>56</sup> Steiner, *Zen-Life*, P. 147

<sup>57</sup> Steiner, *Zen-Life*, P. 154

<sup>58</sup> von Seidlitz, Woldemar. and Dora, Amsden. *Impressions of Ukiyo-E*. (New York: Parkstone International. 2008) P. 85



This difference in understanding of sexuality and sex is imperative when analysing and interpreting *ukiyo-e* from Edo-period Japan because it creates awareness of the bias that might be present when studying these prints, at the very least from a Western perspective. For example, when applying feminism and feminist/gender theory.

Furthermore, the tale of Ikkyū and *Jigoku Dayū* was quite popular during the Edo period (something that also Steiner notes on page 157 in “*Zen-Life: Ikkyū and Beyond*”), evident by the sheer number of artworks depicting their story from the time period. The monk became akin to a symbol for those opposing religious authorities. But why did the tale of *Jigoku Dayū* and Ikkyū from the 15th century become so well-liked and relevant? Well, the monk Ikkyū represented many of the values that patrons of the pleasure districts sought from the *ukiyo*. This primarily involved escaping from responsibilities and expectations, desiring to indulge in life's simpler pleasures: sex and alcohol, as these were some of the primary wares of the pleasure districts. However, indulging in the pleasures of the physical world was also something that Ikkyū as well is seen doing in the many works surrounding his life. In regard to the specific tale of Ikkyū and the Hell Courtesan, it can be speculated that since this was the first time prostitution became “legalised,” in the sense that it was formalised and regulated, it could explain the desire to represent courtesans, and as such the tale of *Jigoku Dayū* was brought forth as an example. Courtesans now had an established and “official” place in the societal hierarchy.

However, Fister points out that by the nineteenth century, many popular novels and theatre plays told stories of “bad women,” as well as tormented female ghosts who had been vilified by their husbands. The success of these stories could indicate a new fascination among the audience for these women, in addition to feeling empathy towards those who had been mistreated,<sup>59</sup> which could explain why the story gained popularity during the Edo period. *Jigoku Dayū* would to a great extent fit the description of a tragic and mistreated woman, who could also very much have been vilified in the story.

It is also interesting that this is a story that was revitalised during the Edo period (based on the fact that a number of artistic works from this period depict either *Jigoku Dayū* alone or alongside Ikkyū), considering that the tale does not end happily for the Hell Courtesan. *Jigoku Dayū* was a figure associated with both beauty and tragedy. These qualities allowed artists to explore themes of desire, temptation, and the consequences of indulgence.

---

<sup>59</sup> Fister. *Japanese Women Artists*. P 11.

In *ukiyo-e*, *Jigoku Dayū* was typically portrayed in scenes surrounded by skeletons, as seen in “*The Enlightenment of Jigoku Dayū*” (figure 3) and “*Hell Courtesan*” (figure 4), perhaps emphasising her descent into hell where she would be haunted by those she condemned. Despite her alluring appearance, there was an underlying sense of warning about the dangers of excess and the fleeting nature of pleasure. At the same time, the portrayal of *Jigoku Dayū* could also serve as a commentary on the societal treatment of courtesans. While they were admired for their beauty and entertainment skills, they were also often marginalised and stigmatised by contemporary society. The depiction of *Jigoku Dayū* as a tragic figure may have reflected the empathy or fascination with the plight of courtesans in a society that simultaneously celebrated and condemned their profession. In essence, the plight of courtesans in the Edo period reflects the ironic nature of their existence. While celebrated for their beauty and elegance, they were simultaneously dehumanised, confined to a world that both worshipped and vilified them.

Fister makes an interesting comment in her book “*Japanese Women Artists 1600-1900*” in regard to the treatment of certain courtesans: “*Some courtesans were revered like Buddhist deities, for they offered love and compassion, be it worldly rather than spiritual.*”<sup>60</sup> This could be reflected in the *ukiyo-e* “*Hell Courtesan or Jigoku Dayū*” (figure 1), where the Hell Courtesan is depicted with a *bodhisattva* on her sleeve. In light of Fister’s comment, this could signify the reverence certain courtesans received from their audience. This also applies to “*Hell Courtesan*” (figure 4), but what separates Kyōsai’s rendition from Kuniyoshi’s is the fact that Kyōsai replaces the king of hell, Ema-O, with the figures of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune, as well as replacing the scenes of hell with red coral. The reason for making this a point of interest is that it shows the duality of attitude towards courtesans. Where at the same time they portray *Jigoku Dayū* in clothes with Buddhist iconography, showing some form of reverence, the Hell Courtesan still remains the villain of the story, dancing along a retinue of skeletons and wearing clothes depicting scenes of hell and the damned, as seen in the other *ukiyo-e* in this study that depicts the Hell Courtesan.

On another note, it has previously been mentioned that there is a difference in approach between male and female artists of the Edo period. However, the same could potentially be said about the audience. Fister points out that it is obvious that men found the courtesans of the pleasure quarters alluring, while women on the other hand could be speculated to view the courtesans with envy. As the most famous courtesans, the *oirans* or

---

<sup>60</sup> Fister. *Japanese Women Artists*. P. 54

*tayō*, were glamorised in popular literature and could appear to lead exciting and pampered lives (at least to outsiders).<sup>61</sup> Fister goes as far as to write that since the courtesans were trendsetters for women and the idols of every man, many women would have gladly exchanged places with these courtesans, despite all the moral issues involved.<sup>62</sup>

A certain school within the *ukiyo-e* specialisation, the *Kaigetsudō*, specialised in paintings and prints of seductive courtesans. The poses which were commonly found in the *Kaigetsudō* school were often courtesans looking coyly over their shoulders, and according to Fister, their models were often “ultra-sophisticated.”<sup>63</sup> The same poses and models can be found in “*Hell Courtesan or Jigoku Dayū*” (figure 1), “*Seki: Ikkyū and the Hell Courtesan (Jigoku Dayū)*” (figure 2) and “*Hell Courtesan*” (figure 4). *Jigoku Dayū* also fits the description of the ultra-sophisticated, due to her name indicating her being of the top-most rank, the *tayō*. And in these prints and paintings, she is also seen looking coyly over her shoulder. This is also one of the points that Berger criticises in his examination of the European nude, how poses such as these might reinforce traditional power dynamics and gender roles, by portraying these courtesans as seductive, yet graceful. According to Fister, this was the idealised version of women in general in Edo; “*Ryū-jo* [a female artist] *shared with Sukenobu* [a male woodblock printer] *a vision that women were graceful, docile creatures. In her designs she presented an idealized version of the feminine image which met with a receptive audience among the thriving townspeople of Edo.*”<sup>64</sup>

Continuing with Berger’s points, “*Love at the Brothel Gate*” (figure 8) could be viewed as an example of how courtesans were depicted as objects of possession and ownership. It could be tied back to the display of the courtesan behind “bars”, because it could, in a sense, also be viewed as a bird or an animal trapped in a cage, in which the courtesan would be the bird, and her wooden lattice would be the cage, becoming another symbol of the bereavement of the courtesans’ freedom. It also shows the disparity in the power dynamics between not only the genders, but especially the courtesans and the rest of society. This is also part of Mulvey’s feminist criticism of the visual arts, or the “male gaze”, where women are depicted as objects of desire and with a lack of agency, thereby catering to a male audience. On the other hand, as pointed out by Fister, female artists shared many of

---

<sup>61</sup> Fister. *Japanese Women Artists*. P. 49

<sup>62</sup> Fister. *Japanese Women Artists*. P. 49

<sup>63</sup> Fister. *Japanese Women Artists*. P. 50

<sup>64</sup> Fister. *Japanese Women Artists*. P. 52

the visions of male artists in the depictions of women, and, if not for the same purpose, female audiences were also receptive to this male-catered portrayal of courtesans.

Another example of the demonisation of the courtesans can be seen in “*Yūjo and Customer at Ibarakiya*” (figure 9). According to Uhlenbeck and Dwinger, this print is a *mitate*, a parody that reimagines classic themes and stories into more contemporary scenes. The story that this print refashions is the mediaeval legend of Watanabe no Tsuna and the demoness Ibaraki-dōji. The demoness in the story is referred to as both male and female, although it is most often depicted as female.<sup>65</sup> The story goes that the legendary warrior Watanabe no Tsuna (953-1025) was sent to quell the demoness Ibaraki-dōji, who was wreaking havoc in the city of Kyoto. Watanabe goes to confront the demoness on a rainy night. When arriving at the gate she was rumoured to lurk by, a shadow emerges and pulls Watanabe’s helmet off his head. Watanabe wounds the demoness, who in turn flees into the night.<sup>66</sup> There is a lot of symbolism in the print “*Yūjo and Customer at Ibarakiya*” (figure 9) that links it to the story of Watanabe and the demoness. Among them being the name of the brothel, Ibarakiya, playing on the name of the demoness, Ibaraki-dōji, as well as the umbrella referring to the rainy night. But most interestingly, the reference to the demoness tugging off Watanabe’s helmet is shown as the courtesan tugging at the customer’s umbrella instead.<sup>67</sup> By applying Mulvey’s concept of the “male gaze” to this print, it could be a good example of how the audience is encouraged to identify with the male character and view the woman as “other.” By building on the story of Watanabe and the demoness, it gives the audience preconceived opinions and expectations about the two characters. Considering that the print parodies the story of a warrior and a demoness, or a hero and a villain, in a sense it puts the courtesan in the position of the villain and can therefore be viewed as “other.” It could potentially also be interpreted to paint courtesans in a sinful or evil light, by having her represent the demoness from the story. However, at the same time the print depicts the courtesan as something sensual and desirable when looking at her playful pose and the loose strands of hair. The print “*Yūjo and Customer at Ibarakiya*” (figure 9) achieves the same sense of celebration and condemnation as the prints depicting *Jigoku Dayū*, where they at the same time manage to demonise the courtesans as well as worship them for their beauty and elegance.

---

<sup>65</sup> Uhlenbeck, and Dwinger. *The Riddles of Ukiyo-E*, P. 29

<sup>66</sup> Uhlenbeck, and Dwinger. *The Riddles of Ukiyo-E*, P. 29

<sup>67</sup> Uhlenbeck, and Dwinger. *The Riddles of Ukiyo-E*, P. 29

## 4.0 Summary

Chino Kaori catalysed debates surrounding feminism and gender theory in Japanese art history, introducing the opportunity of applying Western concepts for new perspectives on Japanese art. This enables the use of Western theories like Mulvey's "male gaze" and Berger's examination of the European nude. In his book Berger says: "*Men dream of women. Women dream of themselves being dreamt of. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.*"<sup>68</sup> This study has attempted to explore contemporary attitudes towards Edo-period courtesans through the lenses of gender and power, based on the concepts of Mulvey and Berger.

Showing the disparity in representation between *geisha* and courtesan was an attempt at conveying the different expectations for each profession. For courtesans, there were greater expectations put on their outward appearance and graceful posture, compared to the expectations put on *geishas*, where the focus was put on their skills, rather than their looks or attire. This is also shown in the *ukiyo-e* selected for this study, as seen in "*Hanamurasaki of the Tamaya*" (figure 5) and "*Evening Bell (Banshō)*" (figure 6). However, it has proven that whilst the courtesans of the pleasure quarters lived more "lavish" and "celebrity-like" lives, they did not have the same kind of freedom that *geishas* did. Being entirely constrained to the *yūkwaku* for most of their lives, and, for some, their entire lives.

However, this study has also explored the hypocrisy of both the treatment and representation of courtesans, primarily through the depictions of *Jigoku Dayū*. Woodblock artists showed their admiration of the courtesans by painting them in opulent clothing and, in some cases, adorning them in Buddhist iconography, like in Kyōsai's version of "*Hell Courtesan*" (figure 4). However, despite their celebration of the courtesans, there is also some form of condemnation present in the *ukiyo-e* of courtesans, as seen in "*Love at the Brothel Gate*" (figure 8), where it can be interpreted to symbolise the bereavement of freedom the courtesans faced, being imprisoned within the confines of the pleasure districts, as well as the demonisation of courtesans as seen in "*Yūjo and Customer at Ibarakiya*" (figure 9).

This study was conducted in order to show that there often is more than meets the eye. That what appears to be innocent depictions of elegant and graceful women of the pleasure districts, can in truth contain much hypocrisy and subconsciously show the division of power in the *yūkwaku* and the rigidity of gender expectations, through a lens catered towards the male gaze.

---

<sup>68</sup> Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. P. 47

To summarise, garnered from these selected *ukiyo-e*, the contemporary attitudes towards Edo-period courtesans appears to celebrate as well as condemn the prostitutes of this era.

## Bibliography

- Art Institute of Chicago. "An Auspicious Kind of Hell." In *Painting the Floating World: Ukiyo-E Masterpieces from the Weston Collection*. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.artic.edu/articles/719/an-auspicious-kind-of-hell>
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Clements, Jonathan. *A Brief History of Japan: Samurai, Shogun and Zen: The Extraordinary Story of the Land of the Rising Sun*. Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2017.
- De Becker, Joseph, E. *Nightless City: Or the History of the Yoshiwara Yūkwaku*. Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2012 [1899]. Ebook.
- Fister, Patricia. *Japanese Women Artists 1600-1900*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to Present*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Junzaburo, Morimoto. *Kunichika, 36 Good and Evil Beauties - Jigoku Dayu*. Somerset: Toshidama Gallery. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.toshidama-japanese-prints.com/item\\_940/Kunichika-36-Good-and-Evil-Beauties--Jigoku-Dayu.htm](https://www.toshidama-japanese-prints.com/item_940/Kunichika-36-Good-and-Evil-Beauties--Jigoku-Dayu.htm)
- Kalland, Arne. *Japans Historie: Fra Jegersamfunn til Økonomisk Supermakt*. Oslo: Cappelen Forlag AS, 2022.
- Kano, Ayako. "Women? Japan? Art?: Chino Kaori and the Feminist Art History Debates." *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003.
- Kazuhiko, Kasaya. "Bushidō: An Ethical and Spiritual Foundation in Japan." *Nippon.com*, 2019. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/g00665/bushido-an-ethical-and-spiritual-foundation-in-japan.html>
- Marshall, R (Columbia Pictures). "Memoirs of a Geisha." Film. 2005.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film: Psychology, Society, and Ideology*. London: Sage, 1999.
- Museum of Fine Arts Boston. *Hell Courtesan*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Boston.  
Retrieved from: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/538438>
- von Seidlitz, Woldemar. and Dora, Amsden. *Impressions of Ukiyo-E*. New York: Parkstone International, 2008.
- Steiner, Evgeny. *Zen-Life: Ikkyū and Beyond*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

Uhlenbeck, Chris. and Jim, Dwinger. *The Riddles of Ukiyo-E: Women and Men in Japanese Prints 1765-1865*. Brussel: Ludion Publishers, 2023.



## Appendix A



**Figure 1.** Utagawa Kuniyoshi. *No Official Title*. [Hell Courtesan or Jigoku Dayū] Late 1840s. Colour on silk. 145cm x 82cm.



**Figure 2.** Utagawa Hiroshige. *Seki: Ikkyū and the Hell Courtesan (Jigoku Dayū)*. 1854-1856. Colour woodblock print; section of an ōban sheet. 37,7cm x 25cm.





**Figure 3:** Tsukioka Yoshitoshi. *The Enlightenment of Jigoku Dayū*. “New Forms of Thirty-Six Monsters.” 1890.



**Figure 4:** Kawanabe Kyōsai. *Hell Courtesan*. 1870s-1880s. Hanging scroll; colour on silk. 149cm x 70,1cm.





**Figure 5:** Keisai Eisen. *Hanamurasaki of the Tamaya*. “Hibiscus Flowers Cannot Compare to Her Beauty.” Fl. early 1800s. Woodblock print; vertical ôban. 38,4cm x 26,1cm.

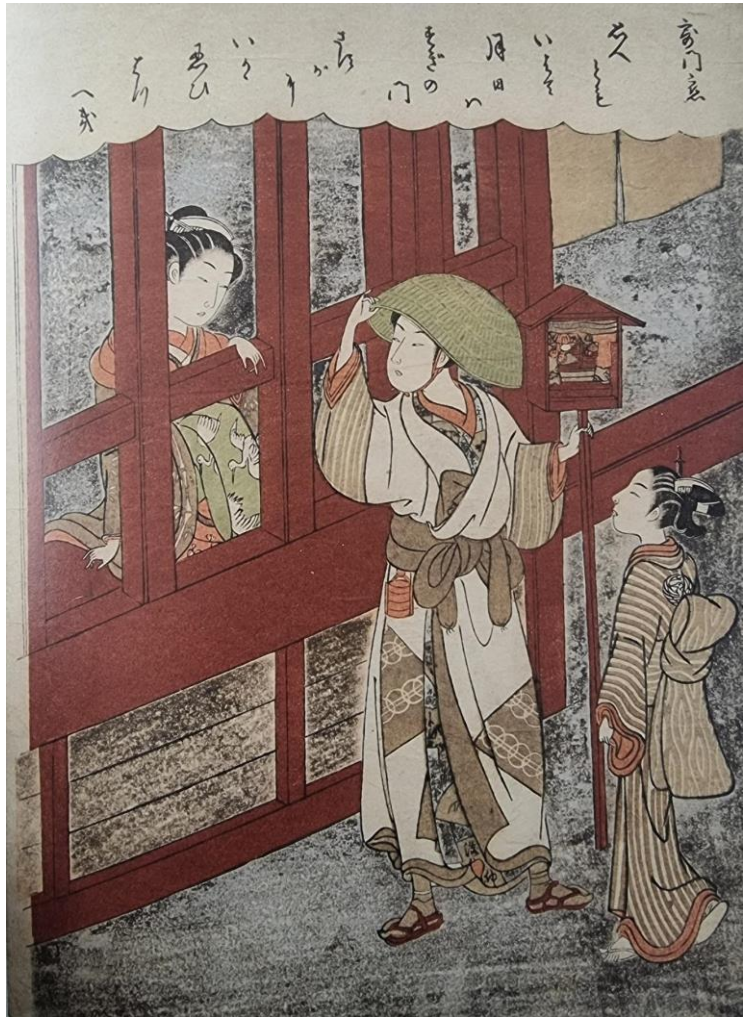


**Figure 6:** Isoda Koryusai. *Evening Bell (Banshō)*. 1773-1775. Woodblock print; vertical chûban. 25,4cm x 18,3cm.





**Figure 7:** Ippitsusai Bunchō.  
*Geisha with an Origami Crane.*  
 Late 1760s. Hosoban. 33cm x 13cm.



**Figure 8:** Suzuki Harunobu. *Love at the Brothel Gate.* 1767. Chûban. 18cm x 25cm.



**Figure 9:** Suzuki Harunobu. *Yūjo and Customer at Ibarakiya*. Ca. 1767-1768. Chûban. 18cm x 25cm.

## Appendix B

- Figure 1:** Utagawa Kuniyoshi. *No Official Title*. [Hell Courtesan or *Jigoku Dayū*] Late 1840s. Colour on silk. 145cm x 82cm. Retrieved from:  
<https://ukiyo-e.org/image/kruml/paintings9>
- Figure 2:** Utagawa Hiroshige. *Seki: Ikkyū and the Hell Courtesan (Jigoku Dayū)*. 1854-1856. Colour woodblock print; section of an ôban sheet. 37,7cm x 25cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Retrieved from:  
<https://ukiyo-e.org/image/mfa/sc213149>
- Figure 3:** Tsukioka Yoshitoshi. *The Enlightenment of Jigoku Dayū*. “New Forms of Thirty-Six Ghosts.” 1890. Retrieved from:  
<https://ukiyo-e.org/image/metro/2456-C001-014>
- Figure 4:** Kawanabe Kyōsai. *Hell Courtesan*. 1870s-1880s. Hanging scroll; colour on silk. 149cm x 70,1cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Retrieved from:  
<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/538438/hell-courtesan?>
- Figure 5:** Keisai Eisen. *Hanamurasaki of the Tamaya*. “Hibiscus Flowers Cannot Compare to Her Beauty.” Fl. early 1800s. Woodblock print; vertical ôban. 38,4cm x 26,1cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Retrieved from:  
<https://ukiyo-e.org/image/mfa/sc222310>
- Figure 6:** Isoda Koryusai. *Evening Bell (Banshō)*. “Eight Views of Fashionable Female Geisha.” 1773-1775. Woodblock print; vertical chûban. 25,4cm x 18,3cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Retrieved from:  
<https://ukiyo-e.org/image/mfa/sc207109>
- Figure 7:** Ippitsusai Bunchō. *Geisha with an Origami Crane*. Late 1760s. Hosoban. 33cm x 13cm. Foto taken from: “The Riddles of Ukiyo-E: Women and Men in Japanese Prints 1765-1865.”
- Figure 8:** Suzuki Harunobu. *Love at the Brothel Gate*. 1767. Chûban. 18cm x 25cm. Foto taken from: “The Riddles of Ukiyo-E: Women and Men in Japanese Prints 1765-1865.”
- Figure 9:** Suzuki Harunobu. *Yūjo and Customer at Ibarakiya*. Ca. 1767-1768. Chûban. 18cm x 25cm. Foto taken from: “The Riddles of Ukiyo-E: Women and Men in Japanese Prints 1765-1865.”