

Ihara Saikaku Lecture Series
Society for Asian Art
Spring 2026
Syllabus

Speaker: David J. Gundry, Associate Professor of Japanese, University of California, Davis.

April 12: Introduction; *The Life of an Amorous Man*. We will discuss the cultural and historical context of Saikaku's fiction, then focus on his first published work of fiction, *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* (The Life of an Amorous Man, 1682), which chronicles a life devoted to opposite- and same-sex erotic pursuits with both "amateur" partners and prostitutes.

Readings: David J. Gundry, *Parody, Irony and Ideology in the Fiction of Ihara Saikaku*, Introduction, Chapter 1 (pdfs, 116 pages). (My book contains copious footnotes that you should feel free to ignore, so this reading is equivalent to about 100 pages.)

Suggested supplementary reading: Ihara Saikaku, trans. Chris Drake, *The Life of an Amorous Man*: https://www.amazon.com/Life-Amorous-Man-Novel-Desire/dp/4805319852/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3BEDEATW76AYO&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.m0qkflCgH5BPC4wLSk8NEA.V4YsCq5F933kCpwanVuxdO96mWXDmXj5I6keH7RIDE8&dib_tag=se&keywords=drake+saikaku+amorous&qid=1770430676&srefix=drake+saikaku+amoro%2Caps%2C580&sr=8-1

The 1960s Kengi Hamada translation of *Amorous Man* is abridged, expurgated, generally inaccurate, and should be avoided. Chris Drake's full translation is brand new, so I have not yet read it, but I have read his earlier translations of a few of the novel's chapters and they were excellent.

To keep the readings to a manageable amount I have assigned my Saikaku monograph's first chapter, which summarizes and analyzes *Amorous Man*, instead of the novel itself. Another advantage of using my chapter on *Amorous Man* is that its humor derives in part from untranslatable puns and from literary allusions that require explanation. However, if you wish to take on *Amorous Man* in its entirety, you could read it along with the introduction to my monograph and skip my monograph's first chapter.

April 19: *Chōnin* (urban commoner) narratives. The stories we will discuss focus on love affairs, money and unfilial children, primarily among the bourgeoisie of Japan's cities and towns.

Readings: Ihara Saikaku, trans. Ivan Morris, stories from *Five Women Who Chose Love* (1686): "The Tale of Seijuro from Himéji, the Town of the Lovely Damsel"; "The Almanac Maker's Tale in the Middle Part"; "The Tale of Gengobei, the Mountain of Love" (pdf, 63 pages); Ihara Saikaku, trans. Paul Schalow, from *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (1687): "Fireflies Also Work Their Asses at Night" (pdf, 7 pages); Ihara Saikaku, trans. David J. Gundry, stories from *Twenty Cases of Filial Impiety in Japan* (1686) (pdf, 9 pages); Ihara Saikaku, trans. Masanori Takatsuka and David C. Stubbs, revised by David J. Gundry, stories from *This Scheming World* (1692) (pdf, 11 pages).

April 26: Samurai narratives. The stories we will discuss focus on love affairs, vendettas and abuse of power among the warrior caste.

Readings: Ihara Saikaku, trans. David J. Gundry, stories from *Exemplary Tales of the Way of the Warrior* (1687) (pdf, 45 pages), Ihara Saikaku, trans. Paul Schalow, stories from *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (1687): “Two Old Cherry Trees Still in Bloom”; “Though Bearing an Umbrella, He Was Rained Upon” (pdfs, 11 pages); Ihara Saikaku, trans. Caryl Ann Callahan, stories from *Tales of Samurai Honor* (1686): “At Least He Wears His Youth’s Kimono”; “Far Better to Consider What She Said at the End” (pdfs, 9 pages); David J. Gundry, “Samurai Lovers, ‘Samurai Beasts’: Warriors and Commoners in Ihara Saikaku’s *Way of the Warrior Tales*” (17 pages).