The Japanese Concept of Angelica in the Yedo Era Seen from the Viewpoint of the Herbs and Womanliness: Compared with the Peony and Lily

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Abstract
In Japan, we often say of an elegant woman, ‘She looks like a White Peony when standing, a Magenta Peony when sitting, and a Lily when walking’, which means that she is elegant in every stance. This proverb indicates that the Japanese consider these flowers to be symbols of the beauty of Japanese women. These flowers are famous as herbs for women, but none of them is the most popular one. The most popular herb, renowned as the ‘leading herb for women’, is Angelica. Angelica has many uses, but it has never been associated with womanliness. Conversely, as the above-mentioned proverb illustrates, Peony and Lily had been depicted in pictures, poetry, and proverbs. The above proverb appeared in the middle of the Yedo era, when Japanese medicine underwent a great revolution, particularly in obstetrics (i.e. with the rise of the Kagawa School). During this period, herbs were widely employed to treat women’s diseases, popular culture flourished, and women’s kimono styles changed. This led to a change in the standard of womanliness—from understated to gorgeous. However, Angelica was not associated with the concept of womanliness during the Yedo era.

Keywords: the eighteenth century, womanliness, the concept of ‘Mother’, obstetrics

Introduction
The plant in the above picture is the Japanese Angelica flower, the scientific name of which is ‘Angelica acutiloba’. From the picture on the right, you can see that it has approximately 30 to 50 umbels with very tiny white flowers that smell sweet, almost like caramel. In Europe, all
herbs for women were associated with womanliness: European Angelica\(^1\) was called 'the herb of the Angel' and was used as a woman's name,\(^2\) thereby suggesting that Europeans widely recognized the femininity of Angelica. In Japan, by contrast, Angelica was called 'the leading herb for women' and the 'Mother of Life', but was never associated with any womanly qualities. Then, how did the Japanese define the concept of Angelica and why was it not associated with womanliness during the Yedo Era?

**Two kinds of Peony and Lily**

Beginning in the middle of the Yedo era (around the middle of the eighteenth century), an elegant Japanese woman was often described in the following manner: 'She looks like a White Peony when she is standing, a Magenta Peony when sitting, and a Lily when walking'\.\(^3\) This proverb means that the woman looked elegant in every stance. It also indicates that the Japanese considered these flowers to be symbols of Japanese womanliness.

![White Peony, Magenta Peony, Lily](image)

Traditional East-Asian medicine uses the above-mentioned three flowers as herbs because of their effectiveness. The root of the white peony is anti-inflammatory, anti-hypertensive, sedative, 

\(^{1}\) The scientific name for the European Angelica is 'Angelica archangelica'. In the Middle Ages, particularly in the thirteenth century, contagious diseases such as the black and white plagues were prevalent. There were no remedies, and people believed that Angelica has the power to beat off a disease, so most people took Angelica. As many Europeans remained healthy by taking it, people believed that Angelica had powers given by the angels and thus called it 'the herb of the angel'. In Europe today, Angelica (particularly its stalk) is often candied as a sweetmeat and used as an ingredient in perfume and an aroma for liqueur.

\(^{2}\) Like Angelica, other herbs used by women (such as the Rose, Lily, Artemisia, and Myrtle) have been used as women's names.

\(^{3}\) This proverb (‘立てば芍薬、座れば牡丹、歩く姿は百合の花’ in Japanese) first appeared in the book *Tatoe-dukushi* (譬喩尽’ in Japanese), a collection of famous Yedo (江戸) proverbs, particularly from the Temmei (天明) years (between 1781 and 1788), written by SHOYOKEN Tosei (松葉軒東井) and published in 1787.
anti-spasmodic, anti-bacterial, and analgesic. Similarly, the bark of the Magenta Peony’s root is anti-inflammatory, analgesic, anti-bacterial, drainage, and emmenagogic. Part of the Lily’s bulb is immunopotentiative, anti-inflammatory, anti-tussive, diuretic, and sedative. In the Shen-Nong-Ben-Cao-Jing or Shen-Nong’s Herbal, the most ancient pharmacy book in China, these flowers are described in great detail. The White Peony is described as tasting bitter, being the cure for abdominal pain, palsy, chills and fever, being an effective diuretic and analgesic, beneficial for general health, and growing around valleys and hills. The Magenta Peony is described as tasting hot, being the cure for chills, fever, aphronia, convulsions, epilepsy, and disturbances in blood circulation, being beneficial for general health, having the power to cure tumours, and growing around ravines. The Lily is described as tasting sweet, being the cure for turgescence and cardiagra, promoting evacuation and strong digestive organs, being beneficial for general health, and growing around valleys.

People, particularly women, took these herbs as medicine. However, none of the above-mentioned herbs was the most popular or famous. The most popular herb, known as the ‘leading herb for women’ and the ‘Mother of life’, was Angelica.

The efficacy of Angelica
The story below reflects the common tales of Angelica’s efficacy:

4 The photo of the Magenta Peony on the previous page was taken by Mrs. Tsuneko TAKEDA in the herbal garden of Osaka University.
5 The Magenta Peony is one of the herbs that traditional Asian medicine considers incompatible with pregnancy because of its power.
6 In original Chinese, the following is the text on the White Peony：芍藥味苦平、主邪気腹痛、除血腫、破堅積、寒熱疝瘕、止痛、利小便、益氣。生川谷及邱陵。
7 In the original, the Magenta Peony is described in the following manner：牡丹味辛寒、主寒熱中風、瘈瘲痙、驚癎邪気、除瘈堅瘀血、留舎腸胃、安五臓、療癰創、生山谷。
8 In the original, the Lily is described in the following manner：百合味甘平、主邪気腹張心痛、利大小便、補中益氣、生川谷。
9 There are many versions of this story. This is another example: ‘A long time ago, there
A long time ago, there were a couple of lovebirds in China. They had good relations with each other, however, the wife was of a weak constitution and couldn’t get pregnant. She blamed herself for her infertility.

One day, she asked her husband for a divorce and went back to her parents’ home. Since her husband loved her very much, he went to the mountains to collect herbs for her and found a lot of Angelica. After taking the Angelica, she became healthy. Her mother said to her, ‘you have to go back [to your husband]’. Soon, they had a lovely baby and lived happily forever.

Therefore, it was believed that Angelica was a cure for diseases afflicting women.

There were many such tales that suggested that people believed in Angelica’s efficacy and took it to cure women’s diseases.

In fact, as this tale relates, Angelica’s root has many medicinal qualities: it is analgesic, anti-inflammatory, anti-pyretic, anti-hypotensive, effective for low ocular tension, anti-allergic, sedative, blood replenishing, and promotes blood circulation. In Shen-Nong’s Herbal, Angelica is described as tasting sweet, Boil Angelica in order to bring out its flavour and drink it, it will be the cure for cough and shaking chills produced by fever, and make the skin strong, effective for atypical genital bleeding, sterility, dermatitis, or wounds, it grows around valleys. Indeed, Angelica is the leading ingredient in the following formulas: ‘Tangkuei Peony Powder’ (当帰芍薬散), ‘Warm the Menses Decoction’ (温経湯), ‘Augumented Rambling Powder’ (加味逍遙散) and ‘Tangkuei Decoction’ (当帰湯).

For this reason, Angelica is called the ‘leading herb for women’ and, particularly in Japan, the ‘Mother of Life’.

Although it flowers with tiny umbels, is relatively small, and looks plain and sober, Angelica has some very powerful properties. Angelica plays a key role in many recipes for cures for women’s diseases.

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10 The original describes Angelica in the following manner: 当帰味甘温、主咳逆上気、温瘧、寒熱、洗在皮膚中、婦人漏下絶子、諸悪瘡瘍金創、煮飲之。生川谷。

11 ‘Tangkuei Peony Powder’ (当帰芍薬散) is one of the most famous remedies for women and is often prescribed for the symptoms accompanying hypotension without constipation, for example, menstruation disorders, chills, and infirmity.

12 ‘Warm the Menses Decoction’ (温経湯) is another famous remedy for women, prescribed for symptoms less grave than those indicated in patients of ‘Tangkuei Peony Powder’.

13 ‘Augumented Rambling Powder’ (加味逍遙散) is often prescribed for the symptoms accompanying hypotension with constipation, for example, dinus, agrypnia, hidrosis, menstruation disorders, and the blues.

14 ‘Tangkuei Decoction’ is often prescribed for neurodynia, for example chills, irradiating pain (such as abdominal pain) and cardiagra.
However, Angelica has never been associated with womanliness. Bearing in mind these considerations, I will describe the social background of why Angelica was not associated with womanliness. I will focus on the following three factors. The first is the fact that the above-mentioned proverb was at least created before 1787 and known among the public. The second is that numerous licensed quarters prospered all over Japan. The last is that the field of obstetrics underwent a great revolution, thereby changing the concepts of medicine and pharmacy.

**Economic growth and cultural prosperity**

In the early seventeenth century, after the TOKUGAWA government was formed, the public enjoyed a return to peace and the economy grew. This change influenced the culture—clothes became brighter every year and the populace even had access to silk.

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Before the age of TOKUGAWA (i.e. before the Yedo era), Japan experienced constant civil war as its many lords fought amongst one another for the post of Shogun or ruler of Japan. After the establishment of the new government, the nobles had little authority or influence over society.
As the above prints attest, hairstyles during the Yedo era became progressively so complex that women needed help putting their hair up. In the mid eighteenth century (when the print and were made), Japanese popular culture flourished. Before the Yedo era, only the nobles created culture, which was based on the traditional rules that governed, for example, the meaning of color and design. Because the economy was growing, kimono styles became progressively more beautiful. Until the beginning of the Yedo era, kimonos were short, and people wore only a narrow obi. However, as the economy flourished, kimonos became longer than their wearers, making walking difficult. The obi became broader and longer. With the wider kimono and obi surface areas, artisans could make their designs bigger and more beautiful. These changes occurred precisely in the middle of the eighteenth century.

16 These colored prints are part of the *Jidai-kagami* (‘時代かがみ’ in Japanese) collection of paintings from the National Diet Library. Pages devoted to this collection are available at [http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1304634](http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1304634). This collection was produced by YOSHU Nobuchika 揚州宣親(HASHIMOTO Nobuchika 橋本宣親), one of the most famous Ukiyoe painters, who worked from the end of the Yedo era to the Meiji 明治 era (from about the middle of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth). This collection features paintings of 50 women of fashion from various social classes (that of the noble, the Samurai, the merchant, etc.) from the Kemmu 建武 (from approximately 1334 to 1336) to the Meiji eras (from 1868 to 1912). This span runs through ①the Genna 元和(from 1615 to 1624), ②the Kambun 寛文(from 1661 to 1673), ③the Jokyo 貞享(from 1684 to 1688), ④the Genroku 元禄(from 1688 to 1704), ⑤the Hiei 宝永(from 1704 to 1711), ⑥the Kan’ei 寛永(from 1624 to 1645), ⑦the An’ei 安永(from 1772 to 1781), ⑧the Temmei 天明(from 1781 to 1789), ⑨the Koka 弘化(from 1845 to 1848), ⑩the Kaei 嘉永(from 1848 to 1855), ⑪the Ansei 安政(from 1855 to 1860), and ⑫the Genji 元治(from 1864 to 1865). The copyrights of colored prints in this paper are all in the National Diet Library.

17 This complexity in hairstyles inspired women to become hairstylists for women. In the Yedo era, women were prohibited from working as hairstylists, and the government made several attempts to oppress those who tried to do so (for example, in 1795, 1840, 1841, and 1847) because, it was reasoned, women should put their own hair up.
In the Yedo era, the creators of culture changed from the nobles to the populace. The leaders of fashion also changed from the nobles to Tayu 太夫 or Oiran 花魁; they were the most fashionable women. They had good looks, the best education, and many other accomplishments. Despite their lowly position, they created new fashion. I can illustrate the process by which courtesans came to associate luxury with colour prints (ABCD EF); in general, the women depicted in them were courtesans. As with hairstyles, the way of knotting a kimono sash, colours, and designs were transformed into gorgeous arts, a phenomenon replicated by the general populace (GHIJK). The changes seen in the colour prints suggest that the favoured style of womanliness changed from understated to gorgeous during the Yedo era.

18 Since ancient times, Chinese characters had been commonly used in Japan’s official documents and literature so that every intellectual could read them. Hence, Tayu or Oiran, most of whose regular customers were feudal lords and wealthy merchants, had to study Chinese characters and literature. Therefore, they could write poems in Chinese as well as draw pictures, sing songs, and dance. They acquired the highest education in terms of culture. Of course Tayu and Oiran were in the high class, but the most of Yujo 遊女 in the middle class and even the populace also could read characters, and in many nobles it described that they corresponded with their lovers to make their love sure.

19 These prints A and B, parts of the Sanza nasakeno kayohiji ‘山三情乃通路’, were drawn by HISHIKAWA Moronobu 菱川師宣, a famous painter of colour prints, and published in 1685. Pages are available at (http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1288467).

20 These C and D prints are from the Seiro bijin awase ‘青楼美人合’, were drawn by SUZUKI Harunobu 鈴木春信, and published in 1770. Pages are available at (http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1288444).

21 This print E, entitled Ooi miyakosakura ‘大井みやこさくら’, was drawn by KOCHORO Kunisada 香蝶楼国貞 (another name for UTAGAWA Kunisada 歌川国貞, a famous painter of the Yedo era), and possibly published between 1827 and 1830, as suggested by the painter’s name. Pages are available at (http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1301798).

22 This print F was drawn by KEISAI Eisen 渓斎英泉, who was known as a painter of women. It was probably published between 1820 and 1830. Page is available at (http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1302393).

23 These prints are part of the Yedo meisho hyakunin bijo ‘江戸名所百人美女’, drawn by UTAGAWA Kunisada 歌川国貞 and UTAGAWA Kuniisa 歌川国久, and published in 1858. This book of paintings features 81 women from various social classes. The woman in G is a waitress, that in H is a merchant of a dry-goods store, that in I is a young multimillionaire, that in J is a young woman of the samurai class, that in K is the daughter of a feudal lord or government director. Of these five women, the woman in G belongs to the lowest class, but she wears a kimono with many patterns and colours. Thus, the government’s prohibition on luxurious goods had little effect. Pages are available at (http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1311468).

24 Similarly, gorgeous flowers came to be favoured as ornaments or designs. In the Yedo era, raising Morning Glory, Camellia, and Magenta Peony was common and people generally preferred showy and colorful flowers.
However, in contrast, numerous texts on manners and novels of the time state that being understated was preferred for women. These texts often state that heavy makeup is undesirable and recommend that women have a diffident manner and an unobtrusive way of making themselves up. In addition, the texts establish two categories, woman and mother. They state that, ‘the woman always has to prepare her own appearance’, ‘the [married] woman has to be the first one of her family to wake up and start keeping house every day’, and ‘the mother always has to support her own family’. These statements show that society demanded that a woman with children be more a mother than a woman.

Originally, Japanese society was matrilineal. Thus, the mother was an essential component of the family and, occasionally, her social standing influenced her children’s future. As women were defined as mothers after delivering a child, Angelica became a key herb in most medicines for women as it was connected to motherhood rather than womanhood.

The prosperity of Japanese Obstetrics
Next, I will discuss the prosperity of Japanese obstetrics. In the middle of the eighteenth century, Japanese medicine and pharmacy underwent a great revolution, particularly in obstetrics. During the Kyoho years (from 1716 to 1745), the government loosened restrictions on the import of Chinese versions of European medical and pharmacological texts. People were shocked at the

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25 The Joyo-kinmo-zui ‘女用訓蒙図彙’, published in 1687 and reprinted many times afterwards, says that putting powder on a swarthy complexion makes it look sallow because the powder does not match the colour of the face; slowly, the makeup will come off: therefore, when putting powder on your nose, you must do so lightly (the Japanese version reads, 生地黒きに化粧の濃きは軽粉肌に沈まぬゆへに底厳なく、やがてのうちにはげおつるなり。かやうの顔は底から拭ひたててなる程細なるおしろいをうすうすとあるべし).

26 The prosperity of pharmacy during this time brought success to HANAOKA Seishu 華岡青洲 who studied traditional Japanese medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, and European medicine and who invented the inebriant recipe using herbal medicines such as aconite (aconitum napellus) and jimsonweed (Datura stramonium). With this inebriant, he achieved epoch-making success by using general anesthesia while performing a mastectomy, the first such use ever recorded.
differences between Asian and European anatomical charts. The Asian understanding of the internal organs and bowels was old fashioned; Asian anatomy was obsolete, and the anatomical charts printed in the medical texts were antiquated. Moreover, they considered that internal medicine was more important than any other discipline and thus neglected surgery as an object of study. However, after seeing the new anatomical charts and surgical texts, doctors wanted to attempt human dissection. In 1754, a group of doctors performed Japan's first human dissection on an execution ground in Kyoto. Thereafter, the Japanese performed dissections, anatomy texts were published, and people began studying surgery.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the eighteenth century (in the 1740s), a new obstetric technique was designed, kaisei-jutsu 回生術, created by KAGAWA Gen'etsu 賀川玄悦. When a delivery was difficult and there was a risk of death for the woman, obstetricians operated using kaisei-jutsu, which helped. After the invention of this technique, the number of women who died in childbirth decreased. This technique brought prosperity to the school of Kagawa, which started in Japan's mid-west, near Osaka and Kyoto. The technique was constantly improved and continued to help both women and babies during difficult deliveries. Naturally, the number of obstetricians (and gynecologists) increased and herbs were widely employed to treat women’s diseases. The Kagawa School was built in the region around Osaka and located near a large area of Angelica cultivation. Furthermore, data on the trade of herbs during the Yedo era record that Chinese Angelica was imported continuously from 1735 to 1810. Therefore, much medicine containing Angelica was prescribed, and people began to recognize that Angelica is good for treating women's health

27 At this time, doctors could not perform human dissection because doing so was prohibited by law.
28 Kaisai-jutsu means ‘the technique that can make mother (and baby) revive’.
29 In the mid seventeenth century, there were large farms of Angelica at Nara, Kyoto, and in the north-east. Even now, Nara has large farms of Angelica. Descriptions of Nara and Kyoto as the most famous regions of Angelica cultivation can be read in pharmacy and agricultural texts such as Honzo-bengi ‘本草弁疑’, written by ENDO Genri 遠藤元理 and published in 1681, Wakan-sansai-zuye ‘和漢三才図会’, written by TERASHIMA Ryoan 寺島良安 and published in 1713, and Yakusomoku-tukuriue-kakituke ‘薬草木作植書付’, written by KOSAKA Rikigoro 小坂力五郎 and published in 1843.
30 We can see this data in Hokusai-Yakubuturoku ‘舶載藥物録’ of the Iwase Bunko Library in Nishio city, Aichi prefecture. This text describes the following: 当帰 享保二十卯年寄文化七午年迄折々持候得共、其後持渡不申候。
problems. In addition, Angelica and closely related plants (such as Angelica pubescens, Heracleum dulce, Ligusticum hultenii, and Cnidium officinale) grew naturally all over Japan's countryside; thus, those who could not pay hospital consultation fee used Angelica and closely related plants to cure their illnesses by themselves. This is another way in which Angelica became 'the leading herb' for women.

Conclusion
I would like to close with several conclusions. The eighteenth century witnessed several key events: 1) the ideas of femininity changed drastically, and 2) after the Kagawa School was established, the populace was able to profit from its expertise and realize the efficacy of Angelica for women's illnesses.

These facts lead us to the following conclusions: 1) economic development led to a change in the culture and in femininity, the ideal of which went from understated to gorgeous; 2) women with children were considered exclusively as mothers and were expected only to raise their children and support their families; and 3) the rise of the Kagawa School brought about great changes in obstetric techniques and herbal medicines began to be widely prescribed, thereby allowing people to recognize the efficacy of Angelica.

Accordingly, in the Yedo era, Angelica was not associated with womanliness but only with motherhood.