



THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRAGMENTARY PROSE GENRE (ZUIHITSU) DURING THE EDO PERIOD, 1600–1868

The Japanese *zuihitsu* was a genre of freely conceived prose consisting of loosely assembled fragments of information, observations, memories, insights, and criticism. More than 5000 *zuihitsu* were penned between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and thus this genre represents the most common and perhaps the most important form of premodern Japanese non-fiction writing. The origins of the *zuihitsu* may be traced to classics such as the “Pillow Book” of Sei Shōnagon and the “Essays in Idleness” of Kenkō, as well as to similar genres of Chinese writing. During the Edo period *zuihitsu* writers developed such models to create a form of writing that implied an empiricist critique of the far more systematic and dogmatic Confucian and Buddhist discourses of the day. After the Meiji era, however, as more methodical scientific, historical, and social-scientific discourses became evermore authoritative, the *zuihitsu* underwent considerable transformation. This lecture will consider the social context and historical forces that led to the rise and development of the *zuihitsu* from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries.



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