One should not pee or defecate when facing a shrine." - Body and performance in the Yōjōkun

In this talk, I will ask how day-to-day body techniques are connected to ideas of the body and analyze the mechanisms that bind performance, body, and ideology. My analysis will be based on the Yōjōkun (養生訓, Rules for Life Cultivation, 1713), a text written by the Neo-Confucian thinker, physician, botanist, and educator Kaibara Ekiken (貝原益軒, 1630–1714). The Yōjōkun is an educational manual, in the Chinese cultivation of life tradition (yangsheng 養生), which guides the reader to a healthy life, based on a set of dietetic rules; dietetics in the sense of “an intimate combination of health, medicine, and philosophy of living.” (Coveney 2006: 26). Ekiken elucidates the moral principles of health preservation, touching on topics like eating and drinking, sexuality, sleeping, hygiene, and physical exercise. The Yōjōkun, in this sense, creates knowledge about the body, the way it functions. I will argue that the Yōjōkun represents, reproduces, and disseminates a hegemonic idea of the body of the Edo-period.