
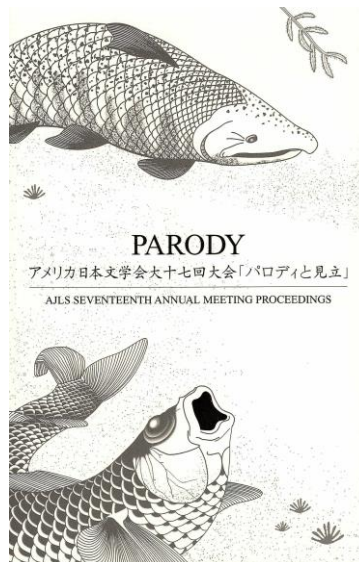


“Parody and Tokugawa Realism: Subverting Religious and Cultural (Con)Texts in Ejima Kiseki’s *Keisei kintanki*”

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**PARODY AND TOKUGAWA REALISM:
SUBVERTING RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL (CON)TEXTS
IN EJIMA KISEKI'S *KEISEI KINTANKI***

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Within the great body of Tokugawa-period realistic fiction, there are many levels of parody, ranging from near imitation and faintly amusing pastiche to the most grotesque and indecent travesty. We find them in books of the floating world (*ukiyo-zōshi* 浮世草子) which are masterpieces of the artistic use of parody and Tokugawa realism.

But Tokugawa fiction does more than simply parody earlier texts. Particularly interesting is how the literary genre of *ukiyo-zōshi* negotiates with issues of agency. It probes such questions as: To what extent do these works spark a debate regarding the difference between influence and inter-textuality? How much control do authors have over appropriating ideas, plots, or motifs from earlier works and deliberately subverting cultural texts or codes when parodying a certain genre or writing style? And, even more importantly, questioning the forms of representation and modes of knowledge within a culture, through parody foregrounds the political inter-text that remains a form of negotiation with the dominant social text.

This paper examines these and related concerns as articulated in *Keisei kintanki* 傾城禁短気 (*Courtesans Forbidden to Lose Their Temper*) written by Ejima Kiseki 江島其碩 (1666–1735) in 1711. This *ukiyo-zōshi* turns the Azuchi religious debate (*Azuchi shūron* 安土宗論), which took place between the Nichiren and Jōdo sects at Oda Nobunaga's Azuchi castle in 1579, into a discussion of the merits of heterosexuality and homosexuality by means of puns on Buddhist terminology. Kiseki brings parody to *kōshoku* 好色 texts by radically re-encoding a serious theological question-answer session between devotee and monk to serve its very different agenda in fiction. In other words, the novel may have used the Buddhist debate as a literary trope, only to subject it to the subversive and reshaping force of parody.

Ejima Kiseki, whose original name was Murase Gonnojō 村瀬権之丞, was the first Tokugawa-period professional writer in the exclusive employ of a combination publisher and bookseller. This commercial aspect is the main difference between Ejima Kiseki and Ihara Saikaku

井原西鶴 (1642–93), whose popularity in the seventeenth century helped create the market for Kiseki's works.¹

Kiseki was the son of a wealthy Kyoto rice-cake merchant, which allowed him to follow his frivolous tastes as “devotee” of the theatre and pleasure quarters. In 1694, Kiseki published his first *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 and *kabuki* 歌舞伎 texts which brought him to the attention of Andō Jishō 安藤自笑 (1662–1745), the head of the Hachimonjiya 八文字屋 publishing house in Kyoto.² In 1699, Kiseki published a series of *yakusha hyōbanki* 役者評判記 (*actor critiques*), which started out as simple guidebooks to young male actors of the theatre, but gradually developed into works of professional dramatic criticism under Kiseki. The first of Kiseki's *yakusha hyōbanki* published by the Hachimonjiya was the *Yakusha kuchi jamisen* 役者口三味線 (*The Actor's Vocal Shamisen*), which listed the names, roles and skills of all kabuki actors of the season.³

However, the plunge made by Kiseki and Jishō into the *ukiyo-zōshi* and *kōshoku-bon* 好色本 market took off with Kiseki's series *keisei hyōbanki* 傾城評判記 (*courtesan critiques*), which were the first *ukiyo-zōshi* published by the Hachimonjiya.⁴ Kiseki's *keisei hyōbanki* were modeled after his earlier *yakusha hyōbanki* and contained detailed information about the courtesans of the pleasure quarters such as their names, ranks, houses, and fees. The following list includes all of Kiseki's *keisei hyōbanki ukiyo-zōshi* which were published by the Hachimonjiya in the first decade of the eighteenth century:

1701 *Keisei iro-jamisen* 傾城色三味線 *The Courtesan's Shamisen of Love*

1705 *Keisei tsure-jamisen* 傾城連三味線 *The Courtesan's Companion Shamisen*

1706 *Fūryū kyoku-jamisen* 風流曲三味線 *Elegant Shamisen Virtuosités*

1709 *Keisei tamago-sake* 傾城卵酒 *The Courtesan's Eggnog*

1710 *Yahaku naishō kagami* 野百内証鏡 *The Secret Mirror of Prostitutes of both Sexes*

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¹ Fox 1988, p. 83.

² Hasegawa 1991, pp. 53–57.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴ Kiseki's works restored the waning popularity of Saikaku's *kōshoku-mono* 好色物, which had lost favor after Saikaku's death.

- 1710 *Keisei denju-gamiko* 傾城伝授紙子 *The Courtesan's Handed-down Paper*
 1710 *Kankatsu Heike monogatari* 寛闊平家物語 *The Dashing Tale of the Heike*
 1704-10? *Keisei nichō-jamisen* 傾城二挺三味線 *The Courtesan's Two Shamisen*
 1704-10? *Keisei tsugi-jamisen* 傾城継三味線 *The Courtesan's Jointed Shamisen*
 1711 *Iro hiinagata* 色ひいな形 *Models of Love*
 1711 *Keisei kintanki* 傾城禁短気 *Courtesans Forbidden to Lose Their Temper*⁵

Of these, *Keisei kintanki* is considered to be Kiseki's masterpiece. The title *Keisei kintanki* successfully illustrates Kiseki's introduction of parody to the erotic novel. The double pun *kintanki* 禁短気 alludes to the genre of the popular Buddhist sermon, called *dangi* 談義, and the sectarian anti-Nichiren dispute known as *kindangi* 禁断義 or by its full name *Kindan Nichiren-gi* 禁断日蓮義.⁶ By means of an ingenious parody of the Buddhist *mondo* 問答, a sermon-style dialogue between two Buddhist sects, *Keisei kintanki* discusses the merits of male and female prostitutes which parodies the Azuchi Religious Debate, a formal doctrinal dispute between the Nichiren and Pure Land sects that was held in 1579 by Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1532–1582) at his castle in Azuchi. Nobunaga, who was concerned about the Nichiren sect's general intransigence, combative missionary methods, and growing popularity in Azuchi, ordered the debate after Nichiren zealots disrupted a Pure Land sermon. The Nichiren followers, in spite of their convincing arguments, were declared the losers of the contest, and three of their principals were executed on Nobunaga's orders. Threatened with a general persecution, the main temples of the Nichiren sect acknowledged defeat, swore to abandon their habitual intolerance of other Buddhist sects, and paid a large fine. In his management of this dispute Nobunaga showed once again that his unification regime meant to exercise firm control over religious organizations.⁷

Debates on the relative merits of male-male and male-female erotic pursuits can be found in the literary traditions of many cultures, including Japan. The classicist David Halperin has drawn our attention to the

⁵ Hibbett 1951, p. 413.

⁶ McMullin 1984, p. 26.

⁷ Akita 1990, p. 38.

interpretative pitfalls that such texts pose for twentieth-century western readers, who are apt to view them simply as arguments for or against homosexuality.⁸ Among the various stories in *Keisei kintanki*, I have selected *Yakei no ryōshū Azuchi ron* 野傾の両宗安土論 (*The Yarō-Keisei Azuchi Debate*) as a representative of the literary genre of “erotic debates” (*danjo yūretsuron* 男女優劣論 or *yakeiron* 野傾論). Kiseki’s use of parody in this story provides a tool for understanding the complimentary rather than antithetical nature of the two “ways”—male-male love, and male-female love. Moreover, parody questions the forms of representation and modes of knowledge within Tokugawa-period Japan, and foregrounds the political and social inter-textuality within the text.

The preface to *Keisei kintanki* opens with a strong statement that argues for the superiority of *joshoku*/ *nyoshoku* 女色 (lit. male-female sexual relationship/heterosexuality) over *nanshoku* 男色 (lit. male-male sexual relationship/ homosexuality).⁹ Kiseki states that *joshoku* is the right path of both sacred and secular enlightenment because it has been practiced since the time of Izanagi and Izanami, legitimizing its orthodox origin:

神代以来、世に遊興のうはもりといふは女色の外なし。¹⁰

Kamiyo konokata, yo ni yukyo no uwamori to iu ha joshoku no hoka nashi.

Since the age of the Gods, in this world nothing else than male-female sexual relations has topped the pursuit of pleasure.¹¹

This orthodox viewpoint is strongly challenged in *Yakei no ryōshū Azuchi ron*. *Yakei*, a combination of *yarō* 野郎 (male prostitute) and *keisei* 傾城 (female prostitute), represents the two factions of *nanshoku*

⁸ Halperin 1994, pp. 19–21.

⁹ The meaning of the terms *joshoku* and *nanshoku* in Tokugawa-period Japan differs from our present-day Western understanding of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Though *joshoku* is written with the Chinese characters for “female” and “love,” it refers specifically to a male “love of females.” In comparison, although *nanshoku* is written with the characters for “male” and “love,” it refers exclusively to the eroticism between males, rather than women’s “love of males.” For a detailed discussion about heterosexuality and homosexuality in the Tokugawa period see Pflugfelder 1999.

¹⁰ NKBT 91, p. 194.

¹¹ The English translation is my own.

and *joshoku* which parody the two opposing and rivaling Buddhist sects respectively. The only difference is that the former debates the superiority of male-male and male-female sexual pleasures, whereas the latter disputes the superiority of doctrinal Buddhist orthodoxy regarding the Nichiren and Pure Land teachings. The irony here is that both *nanshoku* and *joshoku* originated and prospered in the same Tokugawa-period social milieu—the pleasure quarters—and both the Nichiren and the Pure Land sects were part of the same school of Tendai Buddhism. Their harmonious co-existence was thrown out of balance by government restrictions, thus parody here provides the political inter-text that needs to be negotiated with the dominant socio-historical context.

To reinforce the essential difference between the “unorthodox” *nanshoku* and the “orthodox” *joshoku* factions, throughout the debate the former is called *shūdōmon* 衆道門 which is an abbreviation of *wakashūdōmon* 若衆道門 (Gate to the Path of the Youths). The latter is called *jodōmon* 女道門 (Gate to the Path of the Women) which parodies *jodomon* 浄土門 (Gate to the Pure Land), recalling not only the superiority of the Pure Land sect in terms of orthodox doctrine and the path to enlightenment, but also indirectly referring to the outcome of this debate—the victory of *joshoku*—as the ultimate and correct path leading to secular enlightenment.



Figure 1. “Yakei no ryōshū Azuchi ron,” *Keisei kintanki* (1711).

On the *joshoku* side, the debate is led by the proprietor Keian, and on the *nanshoku* side by the monk Nichigan (figure 1). Keian opens the discussion with the following question:

男色一道の中に賣若衆ありや。¹²

Nanshoku ichidō no naka ni uriwakashu ari ya?

Are there any professional youths on the single path of male-male sexual relationships/homosexuality?

Nichigan answers:

賣若衆あり。上品なるを名つけて、太夫子・舞臺子・板付といへり。¹³

Uriwakashu ari. Jōban naru wo na tsugete, taiyūko – butaiko – itatsuki to iheri.

There are professional youths. The ones of the highest grade are called by their titles *taiyūko*, *butaiko* and *itatsuki*.

Here, Kiseki not only challenges the assumed superiority of *joshoku*, but also cleverly parodies Buddhist terminology to indicate that the two “paths” are exactly the same. Within the context of *nanshoku*, the “single path” (*ichidō* 一道) refers to the path two male lovers pledge to follow for the rest of their lives, just like men pledge their love to women. In Buddhism, the “single path” is the path the believer pledges to follow in order to attain enlightenment, entrusting one’s body to the Buddha. Therefore, Nichigan’s confirmation that “there are professional youths on the single path” shows that the “essential doctrines” of both *nanshoku* and *joshoku* should be considered as orthodox, which would end the debate in a tie.

This aspect is even further emphasized by Nichigan’s classification of *wakashu* in the highest grade (*jōbon* 上品) and comparison of their ranks as *taiyūko* 太夫子 (lit. “child at the head of his profession;” a *wakashu* who has the talent to become a leading *onnagata*), *butaiko* 舞臺子 (a *wakashu* who brings out his talent on the kabuki stage), and *itatsuki*

¹² NKBT 91, p. 196.

¹³ Ibid., p. 196.

板付 (a *wakashu* who appears first on stage when the curtain opens) to those of female prostitutes (*tayū* refers to the highest-ranking prostitute). In Pure Land Buddhism *jōbon* means “upper grade” and it is the highest of the nine grades (*kuhon* 九品) in which devotees can be reborn into Amida Buddha’s Pure Land Western Paradise. The different grades people can be reborn in depend on their karma. People in this “upper grade” include monks and pious devotees who diligently pursue the “single path” toward enlightenment. By elevating *nanshoku* to the level of *joshoku*—both of them belonging to the highest class of social rank—that is within the world of the pleasure quarters—and spiritual attainment of enlightenment, Nichigan clearly states that the devotion of *nanshoku* and *joshoku*, as well as of the Nichiren and the Pure Land sects are of the same sincerity towards their creed. This emphasizes the complimentary rather than antithetic nature of the two “ways.” If the erotic debate in *Yakei no ryōshū Azuchi ron* is not exclusively about the superiority of homosexuality or heterosexuality, what are some other readings and how does parody enhance them in the text?

In addition to pairing *yaro* with *nanshoku* and *keisei* with *joshoku*, *Yakei no ryōshū Azuchi ron* also links these two factions with the two main Pure Land sect temples Nishi-honganji and Higashi-honganji, respectively:

女色（裏）と男色（表）。お裏（東本願寺）、お表（西本願寺）のもじり。¹⁴

Joshoku ura to nanshoku omote. O ura higashihonganji, o omote nishihonganji no mojiri.

Joshoku is the wrong path, *nanshoku* is the right path. The wrong path parodies Higashi-honganji, and the right path parodies Nishi-honganji.

The parody in Kiseki’s erotic debate recalls another form of institutional rivalry—namely that of religious dominations. The *Yakei no ryōshū Azuchi ron* likens the two erotic paths to competing religious disciplines at the time—the two branches of the Honganji headquarter—Higashi and Nishi-honganji—which pits a cult of female prostitutes against a cult of male prostitutes. Since 1709, the Higashi and Nishi-honganji temples have been in a dispute about unequal support and status which is

¹⁴ NKBT 91, p. 197.

mirrored in this erotic debate. By designating the *joshoku* faction as “the wrong path,” namely Higashi-honganji which actually is the smaller of the two temples and was trying to compete with Nishi-honganji for equal status, and *nanshoku* as “the right path,” that is Nishi-honganji which is the larger and more powerful of the two branch temples, Kiseki’s ingenious parody turns the Azuchi debate upside down and puts it into a contemporary socio-historical context. Although in reality the Pure Land sect won the Azuchi debate, Nishi-honganji won the dispute with its sister temple, and the *joshoku* faction won the *Yakei no ryōshū Azuchi ron*, Kiseki reverses these events in order to promote the superiority of the *nanshoku* faction. Why?

The pleasure that erotic debates held for the reader, it seems clear, lay less in the championing of one or the other erotic option than in the nature and pleasure of debate itself. For example, in *Yakei no ryōshū Azuchi ron* the female prostitutes are burlesqued and called *Saihō jorō* 西方女郎, which refers to prostitutes in the *Shimabara* pleasure quarter in Kyoto, and it parodies the Buddhist term *Saihō jodō* 西方土 (Pure Land Western Paradise). We should not lose sight, however, of the fundamentally rhetorical nature of the genre. The speakers of the erotic debate do not so much personify a dichotomy in social identities as provide a device for the articulation of various esthetic judgments that the male erotic subject might be called upon to make in his pursuit of ultimate connoisseurship.

The arguments they put forth might be combined in different ways by different individuals, and the two sides in such debates merely defined the poles of the erotic field, without requiring that readers align themselves exclusively with one or the other. At times, the very extremity of both positions seems intended for humorous effect, and it is precisely because of the rhetorical excesses preceding it, one cannot help but feel, that one voice is able to persuade.

The sectarian metaphor is suggestive, however, not only because of the sense of rivalry that it conveys but also because it does not preclude the possibility of peaceful coexistence and even commingling. Syncretism constituted a far more respectable tradition in Japanese than in Judeo-Christian religion, and the religious strife of medieval Japan had dwindled by the Tokugawa period chiefly to the level of textual polemics. Thus, after hearing the representatives of *nanshoku* and *joshoku* compare their disciplines respectively to Buddhism and Shinto, the underlying criticism in form of parody implies that the faiths are “no further apart than waves and water” (*suiha no hedate* 水波の隔て) and calls for a prompt end to the debate. Just as Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples

often stand in the same compound, authors such as Ejima Kiseki were content to place stories about courtesans, actors, and religious institutions side by side in the same collection, as were readers, presumably, to read about them. While religious zealots, to whom the authors of the debates often likened their speakers—such as Nichigan of the *nanshoku* faction whose name is clearly to recall Nichiren, the founder of the Nichiren sect—might choose to focus their devotion upon a single creed, there was nothing to prevent the ordinary practitioner from professing more than one faith, as many Japanese in fact did. Likewise, in the temporal realm, an individual might acquire proficiency in several disciplines. It was only because *shudo* and *nyodo* existed in close proximity, in other words, that their mutual borders required negotiation.

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