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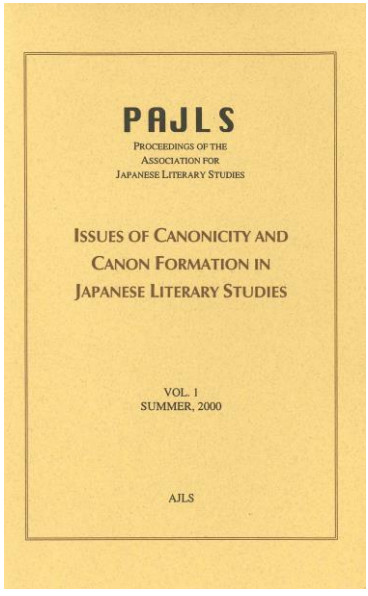

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"SAMURAI" FANTASIES IN LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY JAPAN

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Throughout the Meiji period (1868-1912) the "samurai" functioned as a convenient cipher upon which various groups projected their ideological fantasies. The meaning of this icon, therefore, shifted repeatedly and radically as it was constantly reformulated to suit transformations in its discursive environment. This paper considers changes in the perception of the "samurai" that occurred during the thirty-year period from the 1870s to the turn of the century. These years are significant because they mark a transition from a period of domestic instability in which the Meiji government struggled to quell a variety of opposition movements to a moment of international triumph when Japan emerged as the leading military power in Asia after its victory over China in the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War. I argue that Meiji strategies for reconstructing the "samurai" are directly related to shifting notions of what constitutes an appropriate male subject/citizen for a modernizing Japan. My intention is to locate Meiji references to the "samurai" in the historical moment of their production and to consider the ways contemporaneous discussions of masculinity, sexuality, politics and cultural identity operate within and around their fields of representation.

Basically, I argue that in the 1870s and 1880s the "samurai" served as a model of defiant, aggressive masculinity for a community of militarized, anti-government political activists. In the mid-1880s, however, a new, more conciliatory masculine icon known as the "youth" (*seinen*) emerged. In *seinen* discourse, the "samurai" ethos cherished by anti-government activists was reconfigured as an anachronistic outlook, counterproductive to the cultivation of a modern citizenry. In the late 1880s as Japan started consolidating its position as the premier military power in Asia, efforts to justify Japan's international position resulted in yet another reconstruction of the "samurai."

In this new incarnation, the "samurai" served as a nationalistic symbol of Japan's military prowess and distinct cultural identity.[1]

Before looking at these distinct formulations of the "samurai," however, it will be helpful to consider the environments in which they circulated. Let me begin by introducing some relevant information about the 1870s and early 1880s. Most historians will agree that these years were defined by the constellation of events known as the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement (*Jiyū minken undō*). This loosely organized movement was a challenge to the recalcitrant Meiji government, which resisted following through on its vague promises to promulgate a constitution, establish a representational assembly and renegotiate the "unequal" treaties that were imposed on Japan by Western nations during the last years of the Edo period (1615-1868). The most radical branch of this movement consisted of fervent activists known variously as "stalwart youths" (*sōshi*), "men of ideals" (*shishi*), and "committed activist" (*yūshi*), which hereafter I will refer to collectively as "men of action." These "men of action" were known for the recklessness and violence of their activism. In its most extreme forms, their political agitation involved such violent means as armed insurrection and assassination.

One of the most famous portraits of an early-Meiji "man of action" can be found in Tsubouchi Shōyō's (1859-1935) influential work *The Character of Modern Students* (Tōsei shosei katagi, 1885-86). Shōyō's narrative consists of character sketches of various student types from the early 1880s. Chapter Nine focuses on a student named Kiriyama Benroku, who turns out to be the quintessential early-Meiji political activist. He signals his position through an immediate reference to the need for "political reform" (*seiji no kairyō*), a buzzword associated with the Freedom and Popular Rights Move-

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[1] Two of the texts that I focus on in this paper are *The Humble Man's Bobbin* (Shizu no odamaki, author and exact date of composition unknown) and Kōda Rohan's *The Bearded Warrior* (Hige otoko, 1896). These two texts also figure prominently in an article by Komori Yōichi, entitled "The *Nanshoku* Landscape of Modern Japanese Literature" (Nihon kindai bungaku ni okeru nanshoku no haikei, 1995). In his article, Komori compares how these two narratives respectively negotiate the conflict between the "private sphere" (*shi*) and the "public sphere" (*kō*). Komori Yōichi, "Nihon kindai bungaku ni okeru nanshoku no haikei," *Bungaku* 6.1 (winter 1995), 72-83.

ment.[2] What distinguishes Kiriyama from more moderate political activists and ensures his inclusion in the category of "men of action" is his approach toward activism. For example, he endorses a political philosophy known as "brute force-ism" (*wanryoku-shugi*).[3] This approach is effective, he argues, because "even if you come out the loser in a political debate, you can always beat up your opponent."[4]

Kiriyama further identifies himself as a "man of action" through an admiring vignette about Itagaki Taisuke (1837-1919): "Take Itagaki. Because of his experiences on the battlefield, he wasn't scared of anything. And physically, he was a powerhouse. Someone like that isn't likely to become a victim, [...] even if he has been stabbed a couple of times."[5] This reference signals Kiriyama's identification with "men of action" through its praise of Itagaki, who was the founder of the Liberal Party (Jiyūtō), the most virulently anti-government party of the early 1880s and the one to which "men of action" flocked. Even after graduating from university, Kiriyama remains true to his political convictions. He chooses to become a reporter for an anti-government political newspaper, an esteemed occupation among "men of action" during the early 1880s. There is even a distinct possibility, the narrator observes, that Kiriyama might eventually become an anti-government terrorist.

Another way that Kiriyama typifies the early-Meiji "man of action" is by his tendency to justify his stance through association with the "samurai" tradition. For instance, in addition to contemporaneous "men of action" like Itagaki, another masculine icon admired by Kiriyama is the medieval "samurai." He observes somewhat wistfully: "Ah, the medieval warrior, what they lacked in formal schooling they made up for in the vigor of their character!"[6] This martial vigor is precisely what early-Meiji students lack, Kiriyama believes. This explains why they have been so ineffective in achieving any kind of significant political reform. Early-Meiji students would become more vigorous, Kiriyama goes on to argue, if the practice of

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[2] Tsubouchi Shōyō, *Tōsei shosei katagi* in *Nihon kindai bungaku taikei*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1974), 309.

[3] Shōyō, 309.

[4] Shōyō, 309.

[5] Shōyō, 309-10.

[6] Shōyō, 310.

"male love" (*ryūyō*), which was once common among members of the warrior class, were to become prevalent again. Romantic bonds between men, he contends, "would foster the exchange of knowledge, and would have the added benefit of encouraging lovers to talk about their dreams of the future, hence inspiring them to achieve their lofty ambitions."[7] The result of these relations, then, would be ambitious men of high character, a group unlikely to tolerate the Meiji government's repressive policies. Male-male sexuality thus occupies a central position in Kiriyama's political philosophy. In fact, it serves as the absolutely essential element of his entire outlook. He argues that when properly carried out, male-male romantic attachments can serve as the foundation for fully politicized "men of action."

What cannot be overlooked, however, is the extent to which Kiriyama retools the "samurai" tradition to fit the specific needs of his ideological position. His reasons for extolling the virtues of *kendō*, for example, are revealing. "First of all, *kendō* is good for the body, and that's important for the future. [...] As Darwin has shown us, the strong will always prevail over the weak in this world."[8] Here, Kiriyama clearly tries to update "samurai" practice so that it fits into his Social Darwinist worldview. "Samurai" activities such as *kendō* are valuable, he asserts, because they strengthen the body and therefore improve an individual's chance for prevailing in the battle for survival. The specific battle that Kiriyama imagines is the conflict between different political outlooks. From his perspective, *kendō* fosters the kind of physical strength (*wanryoku*) that allows a "man of action" to prevail in the political conflicts of the early 1880s. Kiriyama's evocations of "samurai" love involve a similar act of reconfiguration. That is, he sees "samurai" love as means of nurturing in young men a vigorous spirit that will allow them to stand up for their political principles.

Kiriyama, it turns out, was not alone among early-Meiji "men of action" in his tendency to reinterpret "samurai" love in this manner. Much of these efforts revolved around a text called *The Humble Man's Bobbin* (Shizu no odamaki, author and exact date of composition unknown), which was thought to have been composed sometime during the Edo period. Not surprisingly, the text turns out to be one of Kiriyama's most prized possessions. The narrator in *The Character of Modern Students* observes: "Mixed in with

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[7] Shōyō, 311.

[8] Shōyō, 309.

books imported from the West, there is a hand-copied manuscript of *The Humble Man's Bobbin*. Its tattered condition suggests that it has been taken down and read much more frequently than any of the Western books." Although neither the narrator nor Kiriyama offer any further explanation of the text or its content, a simple reference to *The Humble Man's Bobbin* was enough to alert readers that Kiriyama was a "man of action." Indeed, as Maeda Ai has pointed out, *The Humble Man's Bobbin* functioned in the early 1880s as a widely recognized signifier of "man-of-action" positionality.[9] It was, in fact, the definitive "man-of-action" narrative, essential to the larger process of establishing an imaginary genealogy in the "samurai" past.

A large audience of Meiji readers was reintroduced to *The Humble Man's Bobbin* when it was serialized in the political newspaper *The Torch of Freedom* (Jiyū no tomoshibi) during the summer of 1884.[10] This fact in itself suggests the relevance of *The Humble Man's Bobbin* to the "men of action" community, since *The Torch of Freedom* was the principal mouthpiece for their political party of choice, the Liberal Party. Preceding the first installment of *The Humble Man's Bobbin* was the following statement, written by fans of the tale who wanted to share it with a wider audience. Here is their assessment of the tale's value for readers in 1884:

> The following story is called *The Humble Man's Bobbin*. In the past it was a favorite among the "stalwart youths" (*sōshi*) of Satsuma and other domains. It is a tale about the love affair between a "stalwart youth" named Yoshida kura and his young comrade Hirata Sangorō. [...] We can only admire kura and Sangorō after comparing their sense of honor, their vitality, their undying loyalty, their patriotism, and their skill in the martial arts to the superficial, self-interested, undependable, unprincipled, weak, and self-indulgent behavior of today's youth. We believe that there is much to be learned from the character and behavior of these heroic warriors.[11]

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[9] For Maeda's discussion of *The Humble Man's Bobbin*, see "*Shizu no odamaki* kō" in *Kindai dokusha no seiritsu* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1989), 321-28.

[10] *The Humble Man's Bobbin* was serialized from July 19 to August 16.

[11] *Jiyū no tomoshibi*, July 19, 1884: 4-5.

Of particular interest here is how the authors of this statement justify republishing a tale about a love affair between two medieval warriors. They argue that this narrative, esteemed through the ages by members the "samurai" elite, will help to inculcate among its Meiji readers "venerable" qualities, such as "patriotism" (*chikara o kokka ni tsukusu*), which were exhibited by the "stalwart-youth" (*sōshi*) heroes depicted in the story. Although these qualities are characterized as "samurai" virtues, the authors of this passage articulate them in the lexicon of the "man of action." In other words, the authors of this statement project values from the early 1880s onto the Edo narrative. This statement thus typifies the process whereby "men of action" reformulate a tale about "samurai" love, complicated and ultimately destroyed by feudal conflicts, and transform it into a source of inspiration for politically-engaged youths working within the context of a developing nation state. Clearly, the narrative resonated powerfully enough among "men of action" to merit this kind of interpretive intervention. That this re-reading was even attempted reveals the extent to which for "men of action" idealized images of "samurai" love were inextricably connected to the construction and maintenance of their notions of masculinity and political position.

Yet even as early as 1885 the writing was already on the wall for the "man of action"'s status as a dominant cultural icon. In *The Character of Modern Students*, for example, Kiriyama is the lone "man of action" among Shōyō's extensive cast of characters. Surrounding and largely overshadowing him are students who conform to a new paragon of masculinity known as the "youth" (*seinen*).[12] The most extended discussions of this new masculine icon were produced by Tokutomi Sohō (1863-1957), the editor of the influential journal *The Friend of the People* (Kokumin no tomo). He articulated the basic characteristics of the *seinen* persona in two essays, *The Future Japan* (Shōrai no Nihon, 1886) and *The Youth of New Japan* (Shin-Nihon no seinen, 1887). The ideas presented in these essays were immediately picked up by other writers and soon gained common currency among a sizable portion of educated readers.

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[12] My discussion of the process whereby the *seinen* replaced the "man of action" as the dominant masculine archetype of the 1880s is largely indebted to an argument put forth by Kimura Naoe in *Seinen no tanjō* (Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1998). I differ from Kimura, however, in my definition of the "man of action" as a category.

In his study, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought*, Earl Kinmonth points out that Sohō's discussion of the *seinen* is mediated through Herbert Spencer's principles of Social Darwinism.[13] Sohō freely modifies these theories when he claims that societies inevitably progress from a military social order to a commercial/industrial social order. Basing his conclusions on the developments in England, which he posits as the universal model for all social development, Sohō argues that Japan was currently in the process of shifting from a military society to a commercial one. According to Sohō, the chief architects of this transition are *seinen*, who will exploit information and ideas gleaned from their Western-style education to guide Japan to a higher level of civilization. "Breathe deep the air of Western freedom," Sohō exhorts his readership, "That is your responsibility and duty toward the future. [...] If you want to make anything of your life, I encourage you to become a self-reliant person like one in the West."[14] Here, I would like to emphasize that in Sohō's discourse categories like "Social Darwinism" and the "West" function in a manner similar to the way that the "samurai" functions in the discourse of the "man of action." That is, they are a means to justify an ideological end.

Throughout his essays, Sohō constantly reassures his readers that a more inclusive form of participatory government will eventually be established in Japan. Within in his Social Darwinist framework, however, democratic government is the inevitable condition of an evolved, commercial/industrial society, and therefore will be achieved naturally once Japan's society has evolved sufficiently. The most efficient way for *seinen* to promote political reform, then, is indirectly through efforts to improve their economic productivity. Consequently, meritocratic terms such as "agency" (*jikatsu*), "self help" (*jijo*) and "self management" (*jiei*) become the cornerstone of the proto-bourgeois *seinen* identity that Sohō extols. As Kimura Naoe explains in her recent study, *The Birth of the "Youth"* (Seinen no tanjō), the end result of this process is that the *seinen* abandons the public sphere of political debate and activism and devotes himself to the non-political sphere of perso-

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[13] For a fuller discussion of Sohō's interpretation of Social Darwinism and its ramifications on his outlook, see Earl Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 97-109.

[14] Tokutomi Sohō, "Shin-Nihon no seinen" in *Meiji bungaku zenshū*, vol. 34 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1977), 120.

nal advancement.[15] Conversely, the principal object of Sohō's ire is the "man of action." He complains: "They have treated the people's interest and well-being as playthings. [...] They have collected war contributions, drafted appeals for military service, written violent and inflammatory manifestoes, and acted recklessly. Showing no sign of reflection, they have taken these activities as true attributes of men of high ideals."[16] Sohō thus criticizes the "man of action" for his violence, recklessness and sense of entitlement. Especially vexing to Sohō is the "man of action"'s style of political activism. It is troubling to Sohō precisely because it does not contribute to Japan's evolution into a commercial/industrial society. To the contrary, with their "feudal" (*hōkenteki*) code of honor and belligerent behavior, "men of action" threaten to hinder Japan's emergence from its military past.

As for the sexuality of the *seinen*, Sohō devotes little attention to this issue. Shōyō, on the other hand, shows no such discretion. The sexual peccadilloes of his *seinen* characters are the primary focus of *The Character of Modern Students*. Without exception, the sexual interest of these *seinen* characters is directed toward women. Indeed, at the heart of the narrative is an examination of how different *seinen* types negotiate their womanizing vis-à-vis their proto-bourgeois pursuit of personal advancement in the private sphere. Within Shōyō's narrative world, Kiriyama is the exception that proves the rule. *The Character of Modern Student*'s fictional world is monopolized by the *seinen* majority, which inhabits an exclusively heterosexual social space.

Through their relentless criticism, Sohō and his followers quickly undermined the "man of action"'s status as a viable paragon of masculinity. The "samurai," however, proved to be a more easily manipulated cultural icon. In its new incarnation the "samurai" signified a remarkably different set of values than it had for "men-of-action" anti-government activists. In its capacity as a popular icon in the 1890s, the "samurai" reflects the specific conditions of the historical moment in which it circulated. The defining event of the decade was without question the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War. As Japan established itself as the leading military power in Asia and an emerging world power, the "samurai" was reformulated to serve as an ideological

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[15] Kimura, 249-300.

[16] Tokutomi Sohō, *The Future Japan*, tr. Vinh Sinh (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1989), 171.

device to distinguish Japan from the other Asian nations. Specifically, references to "samurai" were used to explain the inevitability of Japan's military dominance over the region. For example in his influential treatise *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (1899), Inazo Nitobé (1862-1933) proclaimed: "When Mr. Henry Norman declared after his study and observation of the Far East, that the only respect in which Japan differed from other oriental despotisms lay in 'the ruling influence among her people of the strictest, loftiest, and the most punctilious codes of honour that man has ever devised,' he touched upon the mainspring which has made New Japan what she is, and which will make her what she is destined to be."[17] Elsewhere he suggests: "What won the battles on the Yalu, in Corea [sic] and Manchuria, were the ghosts of our fathers, guiding our hands and beating in our hearts. They are not dead, those ghosts, the spirits of our warlike ancestors."[18] In short, Nitobé encapsulated the popular notion that what differentiated Japan from the rest of Asia and ensured her rise to military prominence was its "samurai" heritage. The specific contours of this "heritage," of course, were a direct response the ideological demands arising from Japan's newly achieved status as an imperialist power.

Paralleling the "rediscovery" of the "samurai" was a comparable "rediscovery" of "traditional" Japanese culture. Influential movements such as the Maintenance of Japanese Cultural Essence (*Kokusui hozon*) challenged the indiscriminate infatuation with "Western" culture that characterized the ideas of public intellectuals like Sohō and his followers. One of the leading figures in this movement was the author and intellectual, Kōda Rohan (1867-1947). In 1896 he composed one of his representative works, the novel *The Bearded Warrior* (Hige otoko). This narrative epitomizes the values associated with the Japanese Cultural Essence movement. It is a historical novel, set in roughly the same period as *The Humble Man's Bobbin.* Like *The Humble Man's Bobbin*, it deals with "samurai" characters embroiled in a feudal conflict. Moreover, Rohan's narrative devotes considerable attention to the personal relations established between the warrior characters.

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[17] Inazo Nitobé, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 173-74.

[18] Nitobé, 188.

The remainder of this paper focuses on the representation of the "samurai" characters in Rohan's text. As I will demonstrate, Rohan's interpretation of "samurai" identity departs significantly from the image cherished by "men of action" fifteen years earlier. Rohan's characters, it turns out, have far more in common with Sohō's formulation of the *seinen* than they do with its polar opposite, the "man of action." For example, they are imbued with such *seinen* qualities as agency, self-reliance and rationality. More important, Rohan's "samurai" are essentially relieved of any inflammatory, anti-authoritarian connotations that were the hallmark of the "man of action"'s identity. Rather than a rejection of the Sohō's updated masculine icon, then, Rohan's "samurai" is an extension of the *seinen*. In other words, the *seinen*'s productivity and compliance are augmented by their prowess on the battlefield and indomitable courage. This makes Rohan's "samurai" the ideal masculine icon for an age of imperial expansion.

The Bearded Warrior is an extended rumination on the meaning of "samurai" manhood. It explores this issue by recounting the military exploits of a warrior named Kasai Dairoku. The principle at the core of Rohan's narrative is captured in the exhortation, repeated incessantly throughout the text, "Do not fail in life" (*Ikisokonau na*). A group of elders lay this charge upon Dairoku. Their intent is not encourage Dairoku to engage in reckless behavior or needlessly risk his life in order to maintain "samurai" honor. Rather, they exhort him to fulfill his potential as a "responsible adult" (*otoko hitorimae*). Rohan's use of this term is shaped by *seinen* values. Particularly, Rohan's "responsible samurai" ideal affirms the *seinen* virtues of self-determination and reasonableness. Dairoku is reminded, for example: "A heroic warrior aspiring to accomplish a mission in this life should not be beguiled by a juvenile, asinine notion such as predestination. If your destiny is already predetermined, overturn it. If it is yet to be sealed, let your own hand shape it."[19] In a manner comparable to Sohō's concept of "self reliance," Rohan's warriors are responsible for comporting themselves in a manner that contributes to the greater good.

In contrast to the *seinen* of the 1880s, however, Rohan's "samurai" fulfills their social responsibility on the battlefield. This shift coincides with significant modifications in the Japanese interpretation of social evolution.

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[19] Kōda Rohan, *The Bearded Warrior* in *Pagoda, Skull & Samurai*, trans. Chieko Irie Mulhern (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1985), 221.

Once again revealing it malleability as an ideological tool, Social Darwinism moved away from its endorsement of a transition from militarism to a commercial/industrial society. By the early 1890s the "battle for survival" became the dominant metaphor in discussions of social evolution. Although there is a superficial resemblance, this concept differs significantly from Kiriyama's usage of a similar term in *The Character of Modern Students*. For Kiriyama, the "survival of the fittest" (*yūshō retsubai*) was a metaphor for the conflict among various domestic political factions. Steeled by their pseudo-martial training regimen of activities such as *kendō* and inspired by their romantic attachments to like-minded comrades, Kiriyama's "men of action" were poised to prevail in this conflict. For Social Darwinists of the 1890s, such as Katō Hiroyuki, the "battle for survival" (*seizon kyōsō*) came to serve as a metaphor for full-scale warfare.[20] It referred to a productive social mechanism that was thought to weed out unfit members of the population. When mediated through this new epistemological framework, Japan's bloody past was reinvented as the source of its modern strength and the reason behind its current success in the competitive arena of international relations.

Aside from its single-minded affirmation of its warrior characters, *The Bearded Warrior* signals its acquiescence to the outlook of the 1890s through its opening passage. The narrative begins with a brief reference to the historical moment of its production: "On foreign soil, thousands of miles away, our troops a hundred thousand strong demonstrate their valor by winning glorious victories. Within our empire, however, not a speck of dust is disturbed. Dogs slumber untroubled beside willow trees, and chickens cluck idly under thatched eaves. A picture of halcyon peace itself. In contrast to our wondrous Meiji period, all sixty-four provinces of Japan writhed in chaos in the mid sixteenth century, a scant three hundred years ago."[21] According to this statement, Japan has evolved from a region wracked by internecine warfare to a powerful empire extending its dominion to foreign soil. The origins of this greatness, the subsequent story reveals, can be traced

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[20] For a more detailed discussion of Katō Hiroyuki's theories about warfare as an evolutionary mechanism, see Winston Davis, *The Moral and Political Naturalism of Baron Katō Hiroyuki* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies University of California Berkeley, 1996), 103-06.

[21] Rohan, 149.

back to sixteenth century, a scene of chaos from which only the strongest emerged.

The narrative's treatment of the affective relations among its warrior characters further reflects the new formulation of Social Darwinian principles. The bonds between "samurai" in *The Bearded Warrior* are intense, but not sexual. None of the "samurai" characters are explicitly involved in a sexual relationship with another warrior. We can interpret this as further evidence of the process whereby the "samurai" was reformulated into a *seinen*-like icon suitable for emulation by Japanese imperial subjects and distanced from associations with the "man of action." In a manner comparable to the *seinen*, the new and improved "samurai" of the 1890s signals his "evolved" status through his heterosexuality. In congruence with the tenets of Katō Hiroyuki's brand of Social Darwinism, Rohan's "samurai" heroes do not engage in behavior that would mark them as "unfit" or "atavistic."

One of the story's subplots reveals more fully the specific operations of how the text rejects "samurai" love. A secondary character in the narrative is a sickly young warrior named Yanagi Kotarō. Significantly, the weakest, most "unfit" character in the story is the only one who is described in terms that evoke the canon of "samurai" homoerotic literature. The following passage is typical: "His face, flushed and moist from excitement, was as pure and fair as a glistening white jewel. His petal-like lips were flaming red, his soft eyebrows blue-black, and his rage-widened eyes shimmering with gentle dew. A beautiful youth, too delicate to be handled by rough hands."[22] This observation comes from none other than Dairoku, and it describes his reaction right before he is compelled to kill the handsome youth.

With this incident the narrative reveals a new strategy for criticizing both the "man of action" and "samurai" love. Kotarō serves as the device through which these two categories are connected together. With his recklessness and hypersensitivity to matters of personal honor, he embodies the personality type that, after Sohō, had come to be associated with "men of action." Not coincidentally, he also functions in the text as the only vestigial trace of "samurai" homoeroticism. Reflecting shifting notions of the meaning of male-male sexuality, however, the robust homoerotically inclined "man of action" of the early 1880s is reformulated as a neurotic, sickly youth. An association with male-male sexuality is thus transformed from a marker of

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[22] Rohan, 243.

hyper-masculine political commitment to an indicator of psychological and physical weakness. It is no surprise, then, that Kotarō is killed off; he is not adequately equipped to emerge from the battle for survival. Appropriately enough, he dies in a confrontation with Dairoku, Rohan's emblem for the new Meiji imperial subject.

As this vignette clearly shows, Meiji representations of "samurai" reveal more about the moment of their production than they do about the realities of the premodern "samurai" experience. In each instance, as I have shown, the "samurai" serves as a potent device for justifying a specific ideological position. In the heyday of the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement of the late 1870s and early 1880s, the "samurai" was conceived as a self-righteous, intensely devoted comrade in arms. This was a perfect model for "men of action" who saw themselves as freedom fighters embroiled in a moral conflict with the unjust Meiji government. In the mid-to-late 1880s the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement lost steam, however, as the promised date for the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution drew near. Into this void stepped figures like Sohō, who advocated a more rational, conciliatory approach toward citizenship. In his discourse, the "samurai" came to signify elements of Japanese society, such as the "man of action," that were unevolved or counterproductive to social progress. In the wake of the Sino-Japanese War, the "samurai" underwent yet another transformation, emerging as an emblem of Japan's military prowess. In this new guise, the "samurai" epitomized a "productive" military spirit that easily accommodated the larger operations of fin-de-siècle Japanese nationalism and imperialism.