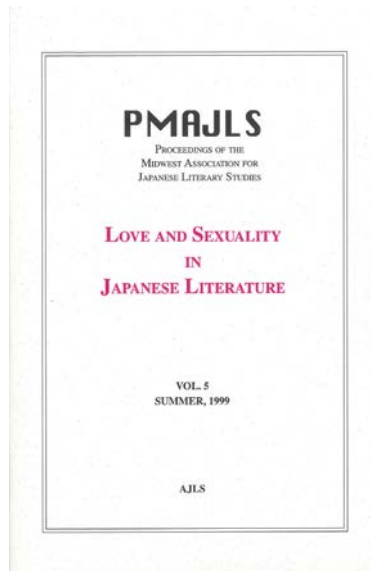


“Love and Sexuality in Heian Text: ‘Productive’
and ‘Non-productive’ Sex”

Kimura Saeko 

*Proceedings of the Midwest Association for
Japanese Literary Studies* 5 (1999): 47–56.



PMAJLS 5:
Love and Sexuality in Japanese Literature.
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

LOVE AND SEXUALITY IN HEIAN TEXT: “PRODUCTIVE” AND “NON-PRODUCTIVE” SEX

Kimura Saeko
Tokyo University

The aim of this paper is to consider the problem of love and sexuality in the court of the Heian period(794-1184), through *Torikaebaya monogatari*¹ or *The Changelings*, and in particular to deal with the problem of sexual “productivity” and “non-productivity.”

The problem of *meshūdo* is of particular interest in regard to the politics of sex in the court. I have already presented an overview of this problem at the MAJLS conference 1997.² As a preface, I would like to briefly outline of my previous paper.

What the word *meshūdo* represented was *nyōbō*, or the court ladies who were in favor with their master. In Heian texts, *meshūdo* were represented, unlike the principal wife or other wives, as being somehow not a part of the hierarchy of court ladies. The hierarchy of court ladies was decided in terms of the status of their father, or by their bearing of children to their master. However, to the *meshūdo* those conditions did not apply. *meshūdo* were doubly eliminated from the hierarchy, and no mention is made of their class and their children in texts.

Under the regency, not all the women but only women of high birth were expected to have children. I have called this situation the “system of sexuality,” a system to maintain a line of legitimate heirs born by legitimate wives.

It is possible to interpret such a situation as a paradigm of “productive/non-productive sex.” That is to say, *meshūdo* belonged to a system of “non-productive sex” discriminated according to their class, although their sexual relationships often resulted in children.

¹ Story from the late Heian period. Author unknown. It has been called *Ima Torikaebaya* (the new or present Torikaebaya) because a lost version of the story was referred to as *Ko Torikaebaya* (the old Torikaebaya) in *Mumyōzōshi* (The Untitled Book), a text from the early Kamakura period (around 1196-1202). The edition used in this paper is *Torikaebaya Monogatari*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai 26, Iwanami shoten, 1992. 106–356.

² See Kimura.

Contrary to this, “productive sex” was considered appropriate for legitimate wives, who not only produced children but also reinforced the political power of their father through the success of the children.

In this paper, I use the term “productive/non-productive sex” to refer to discrimination based on the production of political power.

The regency was a system based on heterosexuality. The daughter of a regent gave birth to a legitimate child of the Emperor, and thus reinforced the power of her father as a regent. The regent then wielded actual authority in place of an Emperor too young to rule. In order for a child Emperor to take the throne, the regent needed to make the former Emperor who was the husband of his daughter give up the throne. The retired Emperor was divested of his heterosexuality by being made a priest. The regent had to prevent the retired Emperor producing another heir who was not his grandchild to do this. The retired Emperor was therefore enclosed in a monastery that excluded women.

In the monastery, *chigo* emerged as another system of sexuality.³ The *chigo* were the young boys who acted as intimate attendants to their masters, or priests. The word *chigo* does not refer to one’s homosexual preference, but to the institutionalized sexual relations represented by the “*chigo kanjo*,” or initiation ceremony where young boys become *chigo*. *Chigo* represented their gender as female. Their sexuality was restricted to a homosexual role. They performed passive sex posing as women. Just like the retired Emperor, priests had a life devoid of heterosexual encounters, within which system homosexual relations with *chigo* were carried out.⁴

After the heterosexual period of “Regency,” the period of *Insei* (1068–1221), or rule by retired Emperor, became an epoch, in which homosexual relations procreated power. However, for the Emperor, homosexual relations had to be prevented as he was expected to produce an heir. For him, homosexuality was a forbidden pleasure. In other words, the court was a designated place of heterosexuality with the Emperor at its core, and the monastery a place of homosexuality with the retired Emperor at its center.

³ Kawazoe Fusae pointed out that there is a structural similarity in *meshūdo* and *chigo* with respect to the relationships between a master and his/her servants. See Kawazoe, 106.

⁴ Matsuoka Shinpei gives several important comments on the problem of *chigo*. According to him, in the medieval period, priests had sexual relationships with *chigo* and idolized them as an incarnation of Kan’non and the alter ego of the Emperor. See Matsuoka, 138-139.

In *Masukagami*,⁵ or *The Larger Mirror*, a text from Nanboku period(1336-1392), the word *meshūdo* represented the male attendants of a regent of that time. The text mentions that they are like “*chigo* of priests”.⁶ The reason for this change in the meaning of the word *meshūdo*, can easily be expected in terms of the possibility of sexual production.

For the *meshūdo*, it was a fiction of the Regency system that they did not have children. And with the *chigo*, the later system of sexuality, the problem of having children did not exist. As I mentioned, *meshūdo* belonged to a system of “non-productive sex,” and were discriminated according to their class. On the other hand, *chigo* was the system of “non-productive sex” deterring from the biological pregnancy, which was discriminated according to the distinction of sex. The construction of the paradigm “productive/non-productive sex” has changed from *meshūdo* to *chigo*, namely women to men, along with the transition from the regency to the rule by retired Emperor. The transition from the regency to the rule by retired Emperor also shifted the center of political power from the court to the monastery.⁷

In the broader sense of the word “productive,” we could say that the “non-productivity” of *chigo* was also a fiction. *Chigo* were in reality, capable of having children through heterosexual relations. However, what makes *chigo* sex “non-productive sex” is the restriction of his sexuality, to that of homosexuality. We shall return to this point later.

Let us discuss the problem of *chigo* from the point of view of their dress.⁸ *Chigo* dressed themselves as women. We sometimes come across figures in medieval paintings that we can not distinguish as either young girl or *chigo*. In ancient times children were, irrespective of sex, dressed the same and wore their hair long. *genpuku* is the ceremony for boys where they cut and dress their hair to join the men’s society. For girls,

⁵ A semi-historical narrative of the *rekishi monogatari* genre. Author unknown. Written approximately in the middle fourteenth century. Told in the form of an old nun talking to young novice. The edition used is *Masukagami*, Kōdansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 1979-1983.

⁶ See *Masukagami* Book 3, 114–115.

⁷ It may be misleading to refer to *Chigo* as the latter system of sexuality. The point I would like to emphasize is that *Chigo* in the monastery system became visible only after *Insei*, in which a retired emperor has the real political power in control, had started.

⁸ According to Matsuoka Shinpei (136), the term of the service of a *chigo*, which is from the age of *Genpuku* to 17 or 19 years old, is clearly specified in “*Uki*”(1202). See “*Uki*,” 674.

there was also a ceremony called *mogi* where they were accepted as adults, but their hair remained unchanged. *Chigo* wore their hair long like women did. That is to say, *chigo* represented their gender as female. *Chigo*'s sexuality was restricted to homosexuality but posing in a heterosexual role. They performed passive sex posing as women.

I will now consider contemporary sexuality through *Torikaebaya monogatari*. In this late Heian period text, Senior Regent, Sadaijin's son and daughter rise to power by changing their gender roles. The following diagram shows the relationships among the characters in the story.

Diagram of Character Relationships
in *Torikaebaya Monogatari*

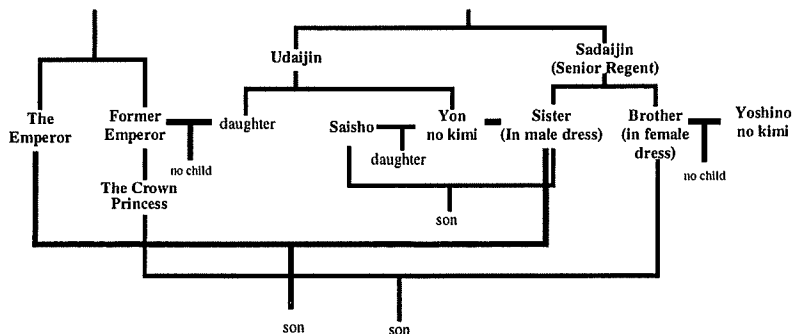


FIGURE 1

"*Torikaebaya*" opens as follows. The Emperor does not have a son to be his successor. There is also no competent person for role of Crown Prince, so the daughter of former Emperor becomes the Crown Princess. The Crown Princess is an exceptional case and this situation creates a threat to the continuation of the Emperor system.

Hopes were thus pinned on the two children of Sadaijin. The Emperor expected the daughter to be his wife, and Udaijin expected the son to be a husband to his daughter called Yon no kimi.

For the Sadaijin House, the daughter was pivotal in keeping their authority. The daughter had to marry the Emperor and give birth to a son.

The other party, the Udaijin House, had missed a chance at power before. One of his daughters had married the former Emperor but she did

not have any children. In addition, she could not be the Empress because she was not from the House of the regent.⁹ For the Udaijin House, the marriage with the Sadaijin was done in the hope of producing a baby girl, and a second chance for political power in the future. The position of the Sadaijin and the Udaijin could perhaps be reversed sooner or later if Udaijin's granddaughter was able to marry the Emperor and have a boy.

The Sadaijin House almost came to a halt as well. Sadaijin's two children's natural inclinations led them to live as members of the opposite sex.¹⁰ Their father sighed and said "Torikaebaya!"¹¹ "I wish I could change them." His sigh of grief shows his discouragement toward his imminent declining power as Senior Regent.¹²

Eventually, he decided to introduce them to society as the opposite gender. By changing them, unknowingly the Emperor invites a man and Udaijin's daughter invites a woman. It means that both ask for the homosexuality although "the changelings" play heterosexual gender roles by disguising them. At this point, the situation is similar to that of *chigo*.¹³ The brother in female dress who is much like *chigo* from the point of view of his sex and gender role, refuses the advances of the Emperor and decides to serve the Crown Princess. The homosexual encounter between he and the Emperor was thus avoided for the time, but the possibility of secretly meeting still remained.

The Emperor and another man, Saishō, who plays an essential role in the development of the plot, are both interested in the brother in female dress. And both of them appeal to the sister in male dress, express their affection for her brother. Talking personally with the sister, they are also charmed by her, being exactly like her brother. Their desire is basically

⁹ See *Torikaebaya*, 115-116, 118-119.

¹⁰ *Torikaebaya* (107-112) says that both of them (i.e., the daughter and the son) indulged in the gendered activities of the opposite sex. The daughter liked to do boy-like activities outside, which include playing the flute, and composing Chinese poems. The son liked to play with dolls inside and showed no interest in Chinese poetry.

¹¹ See *Torikaebaya*, 108.

¹² In addition to this, Sadaijin is described as being dissatisfied with his two principal wives, and both of two were not attractive for him at all. Nevertheless, he had to keep them as the principal wives in order to maintain his only two children's high rank. See *Torikaebaya*, 106-107, 109.

¹³ Tanaka Takako considers the question of sexuality, comparing *chigo* and the characters of *Torikaebaya* from the point of view of their similarity of hairstyle. See Tanaka, 9-45. Gregory M. Pflugfelder also refers to the issue of *chigo* in *Torikaebaya*, although he finds it to be less evident in this text. See Pflugfelder, 365-366.

heterosexual but appears homosexual. Saishō actualizes his desire with the brother. When he does this, he discovers the secret that the brother is in reality, physically, a female. As a result of the sexual encounter with Saishō, the sister in male dress gets pregnant. Saishō persuades her to decide changing her dress into that of a female. She then suddenly disappears from the court. Her brother reacts to her disappearance, and decides to change his dress to male and search for her. They meet each other in Yoshino and discard their life as the opposite gender and return to court.¹⁴

Although the fact that the sister is pregnant is considered to be a trigger for the plot, it is not represented as an essential within the narrative. After the sister became pregnant, she received a promotion to Udai-sho, and she went to see the lady with whom she had exchanged poems once and spent a night with her. She wanted to live in the male gender both socially and sexually, and refused to live as a woman despite being pregnant. Another example which supports this analysis is an episode found in the lost version of *Torikaebaya* (*Ko Torikaebaya*).¹⁵ *Mumyōzōshi*¹⁶ (*The Untitled Book*), a text from early Kamakura points out that it has a scene of childbirth happening in man's clothing. Furthermore, the incident that the brother disguised as a woman made the princess pregnant did not trigger the change at all. Its narrative exposes their disguised sex and an attempt to hide their sex by means of the pregnant sister dressed as a man.

Research on *Torikaebaya* has focused on the problem of the appearance of homosexuality, brought about by disguise. Not on actual physical homosexual relations. Researchers have represented this as a sexual perversion caused by the decadence of the court. However, I would rather view this problem as a scramble for political power between the Udaijin and the Sadaijin.

Yon no kimi, a daughter of Udaijin marries the sister. It is impossible for them to have children. Within the text, a child is produced through Saishō's act of adultery with her.¹⁷ Later, the truth about this child, an illegitimate heir, causes Udaijin to lose his chance of seizing power decisively. Yon no kimi is forced to give up her position of principal wife.

¹⁴ The period of disguise matches with that of *chigo*; they changed their gender at Genpuku and came back to their original gender when they became 19.

¹⁵ See n.1.

¹⁶ See n.1.

¹⁷ Inoue Mayumi claims that this serves as an evidence for the decline of pedigree. I would rather interpret this as an unavoidable result for the sake of its storytelling. See Inoue, 265.

Yoshino no kimi seizes that position in place of her. The ambition of Udaijin to make his granddaughter the Empress falls apart completely.

Turning now to the relations of brother dressed as a female and the Crown Princess. They are both exceptional in that, for both houses, they are both “Torikaebaya!,” meaning “wish to change.” Their relations appear homosexual in gender and heterosexual in sex. From the point of view of their sex, we could say that the brother in female dress was the hope to ensure the continuity of the lineage of the House of the Emperor. He could do this by having a heterosexual relationship. Actually, the Crown Princess bears the brother a son.

From this story, we see that the idea of *chigo* as “non-productive sex” is not true. It is also a fiction along with that about *meshūdo*, made up by restricting their sexuality to homosexual. If *chigo* are placed in the heterosexual role, as lesbianism in the opposite gender, the *chigo*’s inherent potential productivity, becomes visible. The text seems to predict that the homosexuality would reproduce power around the retired Emperor in the medieval period.

Torikaebaya brought *chigo* from the monastery to the court, and uncovered the uncertainty of the system of sexuality in every sense.

Given that *chigo* could be defined as disguising themselves in the opposite gender for homosexual activity, *Torikaebaya* creates two kinds of sexuality for *chigo* that breaks down and changes sexuality within the regency system.

Torikaebaya clings to the system of regency intending to be heterosexual.¹⁸ Since the story began with problem of successor to the House of the Emperor, or of regent, it is impossible to create the story of homosexuality within the politics of Regency.

The narrative is quite conscious in the distinction of sex to avoid homosexuality. Before their re-changing into the gender role of their original sex, the text never expressed their differences physically, but rather as an inclination towards the opposite gender.

After the changelings returned to their own sex, Saishō pursued the brother believing that he is his lover. Saishō did not know the fact of the re-changing. When Saishō caught him in a private room, he found sparse facial hair on the face of the brother. Although they stayed in the room by themselves (an opportunity for a sexual encounter), Saishō did not have sexual desire for the brother even though he looked like the sister, his

¹⁸ Although Saishō had had a chance to break into the brother (dressed as a woman)’s room, he never put it into action. See *Torikaebaya*, 177-179.

lover.¹⁹ The narrative represents the physical distinction for the first time, but at the same time, avoids physical homosexuality.

People around the sister dressed as a male wished her to be made into a woman.²⁰ The expression “wish to make him a woman”²¹ is a clichéd phrase used to praise the beauty of men. This expression appears frequently in *The Tale of Genji*. In *Torikaebaya*, this phrase changes from praise to parody as the person who is desired to be made into a woman was already really a woman.

As we have seen, *Torikaebaya* keeps the outline of the heterosexual system of regency. We might to say it is dangerous story, not because of the decadence of Eros, but because of the seizing of power with fake sexuality by disguise.

The narrative introduces a bastard child into the system. That is to say, the text exposes that the producing power and producing a child do not go hand in hand now. Furthermore, it reveals the foundation of power could be deceitful.

Torikaebaya embodies the disruption of regency and dawn of a new political system. The period of rule by retired Emperor comes after the regency.

Under the rule by retired Emperor, production of children was disengaged from production of power. Insei was the period of power in “non-productive sex,” in other words, homosexuality around the retired Emperor was potent in gaining political power without the intermediary of childbirth. In addition to this, in the medieval period, the system of discrimination by class had waned. Any class of women had the chance to be a principal wife if they could have children.

Before I finish my paper, I would like to mention the problem of love. *Torikaebaya* has its complication resolved in the end. The daughter of Sadaijin becomes the Empress and has a son. But we may predict that the success of the House of Sadaijin won't last so long, and the struggle for power will happen again sooner or later. Although the brother seized the position of Senior Regent, his principal wife, Yoshino no kimi did not have her own children. Why did the principal wife not give birth to any children? She was, after all, the woman whom the brother loved the most. Having children with a principal wife is legitimate in the regency, therefore, too simple as it does not hold the interest necessary for a romantic narrative. Rule breaking and disorder are essential for realizing a narra-

¹⁹ See *Torikaebaya*, 327-329.

²⁰ See *Torikaebaya*, 117,181.

²¹ “Onna nite mi tatematsurahoshi.”

tive. If we could read the love story from the relations with Yoshino no kimi, it would be also expressed in the same narrative style of disorder. Romantic love was not dependent on childbirth, that is the production of power.

Love in sexuality produces the romantic narrative. From this, you can see all sexuality is “productive” in the sense of producing a narrative.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Childs, Margaret H. “Chigo Monogatari—Love Stories or Buddhist Sermons?” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 35 no. 2. Tokyo: Sophia University, 1980. 127–151.
- Hasegawa, Masaharu. *Kyōkai kara no hassō—tabi no bungaku koi no bungaku* —, Shintensha, 1989.
- Inoue, Mayumi. “Sei to Kazoku, Kazoku o koete.” *Iwanami kōza Nihon Bungakushi* vol.3 11,12seiki no Bungaku, Iwanami Shoten, 1996.
- Kanda, Tastumi. *Monogatari bungaku, sono kaitai—“Genji Monogatari” “Uji jū-jō” ikō* —, Yūseidō, 1992.
- . “Nanshokuka, Fujiwara Yorinaga no Jikohatan—“Taiki” no Inseiki.” *Sōsho, Bunkagaku no Ekkyō* 1, Ōchō no Sei to Shintai—Itsudatsu suru Monogatari, Shinwasha, 1996.1
- Kawazoe, Fusae. “‘Genji Monogatari’ no sei to bunka—Androgynous toshitenō Hikaru Genji—.” *Bungaku* vol.6 no.4, Iwanami Shoten, 1995.
- Kimura, Saeko. “*Meshūdo* and the System of Sexuality in The Tale of ‘Genji and Other Heian Texts.” *PMJLS* vol.4, 1998.
- Komori, Yōichi. “Hyōshō toshite no nansyoku—“VITA SEXUALIS” no “sei” ishiki.” *Kōza Mori Ōgai* Vol.2, Ōgai no sakuin, Shin’yōsha, 1997.
- Masukagami*, trans. Inoue, Muneo. Kōdansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 1979–1983.
- Matsuoka, Shinpei. *Utage no Shintai—Basara kara Zeami e—*, Iwanami Shoten, 1991.
- Mumyōzōshi*, trans. Kuwabara, Hiroshi. Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei, Shinchōsha, 1976.
- Pflugfelder, Gregory M. “Strange Fates—Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in *Torikaebaya Monogatari*.” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 47, no. 3. Tokyo: Sophia University, 1992. 347–368.
- Tanaka, Takako. *Seiai no Nihon Chūsei*, Yōsensha, 1997.
- The Changelings*, trans. Willig, Rosette F. Stanford UP, California, 1983.

Torikaebaya Monogatari, *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 26, Iwanami shoten, 1992. 106–356.

“Uki,” *Gunsho ruijū* Vol.24, Shakuka-bu, Zoku Gunsyo ruijū kansei kai, 1932. 673–688.