

Shino's Gender Variance in *Hakkenden*: Derision and Interiorisation as Coming-of-Age Trial

Daniele Durante

Postdoctoral Researcher, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

Visiting Researcher, Kanagawa University, Japan

International Symposium "It's no laughing matter! Laughter and seriousness in Japanese literature," Université Paris Cité, 11-12 June 2026

Abstract

In nineteenth-century Japan, parents could raise their child as the opposite gender when they feared the child might die in infancy. In *The Chronicles of the Eight Dog-Heroes* (*Nansō Satomi hakkenden*, 1814-1842), Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848) represents this folk custom in the story of Inuzuka Shino, one of the titular dog-heroes. In the narration, Shino is often "laughed (in scorn) at" (*warai/azawarai*) by his relatives and neighbours because, although biologically male, he has a girl's name and wears girl's hairstyles and clothes. As a consequence, Shino grows self-conscious of his "diversity" (*koto*) and when he comes of age takes a man's name and wears man's hairstyles and clothes. The paper aims to analyse the complex ways in which Bakin uses humour in relation to Shino's gender variance to craft his narrative. The paper will argue that the laughter of relatives and neighbours is prompted by Shino's break of cis-normative expectations. To back up this argument, the paper will read testimonies of contemporary real-life young men brought up as girls/women and show that said men were also derided because their attires did not match their anatomical sex. Furthermore, the paper will suggest that humour in *Hakkenden* also fulfills a serious role because it drives Shino to change and grow up to be a man in name, appearance, and in the opinion of his community. In this manner, laughter works as a motivating force in Shino's coming-of-age arc. The paper will use as primary sources: to study *Hakkenden*, Chapters 16-21 of the original text, the illustrations accompanying the work, and relevant entries from *Critique of the Dog-Heroes* (*Ken'i hyōbanki*, 1818) and *Proceedings of the Tōen Association* (*Tōen shōsetsu*, 1825), "miscellanies" (*zuihitsu*) in which Bakin discusses Shino's gender variance and gender variance in current society; to study the cases of real-life gender-variant men, newspapers articles and "brocade images" (*nishiki-e*) from the 1860s-1880s. The paper will adopt a multidisciplinary framework by integrating the approaches of history, gender history, and cultural history and will interpret the sources using historical discourse analysis. The paper will fill an important gap in the state of the art because, while previous research has examined Shino's gender variance to gain information on the folk custom of rearing a child as the opposite gender as practised in historical reality, this is the first study to explore how Bakin incorporates this phenomenon in the logic and economy of his fiction.

Introduction

Hello, everyone.

I would like to thank Prof. Struve and Prof. Simon-Oikawa for organising and hosting this fascinating symposium and for inviting me to share my research with you.

My name is Daniele Durante and I am a postdoctoral researcher at Ca' Foscari University and a visiting researcher at Kanagawa University. Currently I am working, as part of a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action, on a study about female cross-dressing in Japanese early modern and modern history. As part of this project, a part which I hope to further develop in a new stand-alone project, I examine the lived experiences of individuals who adopted the gender opposite to their anatomical sex for at least a portion of their lives.

In this paper I will discuss the case study of Inuzuka Shino, a fictional character from *Hakkenden*, written by Kyokutei Bakin and published in installments from 1814 to 1842. I will explore how laughter and seriousness work in Shino's story in relation to his upbringing: during his childhood and adolescence, Shino, while biologically male, is raised by his mother Tatsuka and his father Bansaku as a girl following a childrearing method which I will call the *torikae kosodate* practice. Since he has the name and the appearance of a girl, Shino is mocked by malicious relatives and some residents from the country village in which his family and he reside and he interiorises this critique, which pushes him to assume a male appearance and name once he reaches adulthood. According to my reading, the ridicule functions as a coming-of-age trial that Shino has to overcome and the interiorisation, the serious consequence to the laughter of which Shino is the object, motivates him to overcome said coming-of-age trial.

Contributions to the State of the Art

Takawa Kuniko has explained Shino's upbringing as a girl by focusing on the words that Bakin himself spends on the matter in *Ken'i hyōbanki* (*Appraisal of the Dog-Heroes*, 1818), a volume in which the author answers questions supposedly asked by his readers. In the text, Bakin states that he has Shino grow up as a girl because he wishes to establish a gradual transition from the previous part of the epic, which follows Fusehime, the mythical mother of the titular dog-heroes, to the following part of the epic, where the focus shifts to the dog-heroes themselves. As Fusehime is a female character while the dog heroes are all male characters, Bakin chose to have Shino spend a part of his life as a girl to make the transition from the female to the male cast. By expanding on Bakin's testimony, Takawa has studied the role Shino's childhood and adolescence plays in the scope of the overarching story of *Hakkenden*. However, she has not investigated what function Shino's upbringing fulfills within Shino's own story. This is the gap I would like to fill with this paper.

Mitsuhashi Junko has analysed *Hakkenden* to gain knowledge on the *torikae kosodate* practice. However, Mitsuhashi has used *Hakkenden* as the only source of information on this phenomenon and has not triangulated her findings with other cases. With this paper I wish to fill this gap by comparing Shino's story with other cases to have a more robust grasp on the custom for parents to raise their children as the opposite gender.

The objective I aim to reach with this paper is thereby twofold:

- Firstly, I want to understand what role Shino's upbringing fulfills within Shino's own story;

- Secondly, I wish to compare Shino's story with other cases of individuals raised as the opposite gender to produce a better understanding of this childrearing technique.

The *Torikae Kosodate* Practice I

I will discuss the second topic first, as understanding the modalities and the logic behind this custom is not only an aim of this paper on its own merit but it is also crucial to better appreciate Shino's story. To define this practice, I will compare Shino's case with other stories of individuals, both real life figures and fictional characters, who were raised as the opposite gender. These cases comprise:

- Dian Miangu, a fictional character from the Chinese anthology *Zibuyu* (*What the Master Would Not Discuss*, 1788) by Yuan Mei (1716-1798);
- Ooto (born c. 1854), a Japanese real life individual who, while being biologically male, was raised as a girl/woman; Ooto's life story is recounted in the newspaper *Tokyo nichichi shinbun* 813/1874;
- Nakajirō (c. 1863-1884) and Okame (born c. 1866), two Japanese real life individuals, the former a biological female raised as a boy/man and the latter a biological male raised as a girl/woman; their life stories are reported in the newspaper *Yomiuri shinbun* 13-15/06/1884;
- Saruwaka Kanzaburō, a character, modelled after a real *onnagata* actor, as portrayed in the novel *Kagama no adauchi* (*The Apprentice Actor's Vengeance*, 1899) by Jōno Saigiku (1832-1902);
- the general observations made by sexologist Sawada Junjirō (1863-1944) in his treatise *Shinpi naru dōseiai* (*The Mystery of Homosexuality*, 1920);
- an anonymous male whose case is discussed by sexologist Morita Yūshū (1882-1945) in *Dōseiai no kenkyū* (*Research on Homosexuality*, 1931).
-

Notes on Important Terms

Before I proceed to compare the case studies, I would like to explain the use of the key terms *torikae kosodate*, gender variance, and of gendered pronouns. As regards *torikae kosodate*, the primary sources do not use a specific name to indicate the custom under study. The phrase *torikae kosodate*, which means “childrearing” (*kosodate*) and “exchange” (*torikae*), which is an allusion to the late eleventh-century court tale *Torikaebaya* (*The Changelings*), where a biological female and a biological male grow up respectively as a boy and a girl, has been proposed by Mitsunashi and I use it for simplicity's sake.

In the title, I have used the phrase gender variance, which is a modern English phrase I have chosen to make the topic clear to the contemporary audience. Needless to say, this phrase did not exist in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japanese and thus its use is anachronistic. As a possible alternative to it, the *Yomiuri shinbun* articles refer to Nakajirō and Okame using the compound word *otoko-onna*, which literally means “man-woman,” a term that was part of the Edo/Tokyo dialect at least from the early eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century to indicate anatomical males who took on the lifeways of females and anatomical females

who took on the lifeways of males. Bakin employs a rare variant of this term *onna-otoko*, “woman-man,” in the miscellany *Tōen shōsetsu* (*Proceedings of the Bunny Garden Association*, 1825) to indicate a biological male who dressed and behaved like a woman. Perhaps the expression *otoko-onna* might be a more culturally adequate alternative for gender variance and gender-variant.

About the use of pronouns, I will use “he/his” for Shino since he consistently identifies as a “man” (*otoko*) during his childhood and adolescence despite his feminine name and appearance. Concerning Dian, the only Chinese subject I will discuss, I will use the gender-neutral singular pronoun “they/them” following the example set by Matthew H. Sommer in his book about transgender people in Chinese late imperial history. Sommer employs “they/them” because the Chinese of the time did not have gendered pronouns (Sommer, 2024, pp. 12-16). As for the other Japanese subjects, the primary sources do not reveal what pronouns the *otoko-onna* used for themselves nor do the writers of the texts use any pronouns. Only a small number of different sources which discuss the life stories of other *otoko-onna* contain material on the pronouns with which the writers of those sources and the gender-normative population referred to *otoko-onna*. In the miscellanies *Tōen shōsetsu* by Bakin, *Kasshi yawa* (*Night Stories of the Kasshi Year*, circa 1821) by Matsura Seizan (1760-1841), and *Kumo no itomaki* (*The Spider’s Reel*, 1846, 1850) by Santō Kyōzan (1769-1858), the authors utilise the male third person pronoun *kare* and its shortened form *ka* to refer to individuals who were anatomically male or believed by their communities to be anatomically male and the female third person pronoun *kanofu* to refer to an anatomically female individual. Additionally, Bakin refers to two *otoko-onna* by employing the gender-neutral noun and pronoun *mono*, which, differently from *ka(re)* and *kanofu*, does not explicate a person’s anatomical sex. Based on these testimonies, it appears that contemporary witnesses commonly indicated *otoko-onna* by gendered pronouns that referred to a given person’s (real or purported) biological sex and I could imitate this usage in the paper and use pronouns appropriate for a given individual’s biological sex. However, it is also plausible that, by indicating the sexes of the *otoko-onna*, these contemporary witnesses enforced a gender-normative bias on the individuals of whom they discussed. To avoid perpetrating such gender-normative bias, Bakin’s use of the neutral pronoun *mono* stands as an important alternative whose use is also justified by the sources. For this reason, I have decided to imitate Bakin’s *mono* pronoun by using in English the singular pronouns “they/them.”

The *Torikae Kosodate* Practice II

The origins of the *torikae kosodate* practice are not clear. Based on the *Zibuyu*, it is possible that this custom emerged in China, where it was adopted at least in the eighteenth century, and then it was imported to Japan. At least in reference to Japan, Bakin considers this custom as part of “folklore” (*yo*). Ooto, Nakajirō, and Okame all belonged to the “farmer” (*hyakushō*) class, suggesting the possibility that this custom was based on beliefs held by the lower segments of the population. Furthermore, *Hakkenden* and the newspaper articles emphasise that knowledge about this custom was shared orally. This detail could explain why this practice is usually not discussed in written childrearing manuals, a textual genre which

records customs based on Neo-Confucianism that were originally practised among the noble and the warrior classes and then uniformly spread to the commoner class as well, following a top down trend. If this reconstruction is correct, the *torikae kosodate* practice was based on folklore beliefs whose knowledge belonged to the lower classes of the Japanese population and was transmitted orally.

Parents could adopt this practice when they feared their children could die in infancy. In *Kageima no adauchi*, Saruwaka's father raises Saruwaka as a girl during their childhood and adolescence because he fears Saruwaka might die from an eye disease. In Dian, Shino, and Okame's cases, their parents had lost other male children, who died of illness during their infancy. Since the name Ooto means "the last one," it is plausible that their parents, too, had lost other children. Regardless of whether the subjects themselves or their brothers were sick, parents who were afraid their children would die an untimely death could raise their children as the opposite gender to protect them and have them live a long life. In the *Zibuyu*, a fortuneteller tells Dian's father that his other sons died because the star gods that look after his family are female star gods and thus they would protect his children only if they were female, that is why Dian's father rears Dian as a girl. Similarly, Sawada and Morita argue that Japanese parents raised their children as the opposite gender to invoke upon them the protection of the *kami*.

Unfortunately, the primary sources do not explain why children, if raised through this method, would receive the blessing of the gods. However, earlier and contemporary texts and practice indicate a belief that a person who fused male and female in one body was divine. For example, in the late twelfth-century court tale *Ariake no wakare* (*Partings at Dawn*) the main character, a biological woman who lives a part of her life as a man, is said to be the manifestation of a "heavenly maiden" (*amatsu otome*) and that her unusual life as a man is a demonstration of her divine nature. In the "Consecration of Acolytes" (*Chigo kanjō*), a ritual performed in Tendai Buddhism during the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the acolyte, who wore both male and female clothes and accessories, was declared to be the avatar of bodhisattva Kannon. The mid-eighteenth century text *Kōshoku henjō nanshi* (*The Amorous Adventures of a Hermaphrodite*), which discusses the practice for parents to raise their daughters as men, similarly argues that the fact that Kannon is commonly depicted as female in Chinese and Japanese devotional scrolls and statues and yet manifests herself as a boy to save sentient beings is proof of her otherworldly nature. Possibly, the *torikae kosodate* practice originated from the belief that the fusion of male and female was a trait of the divine. The fusion of male and female was also part of a folklore breastfeeding technique known as *hiawase*, according to which a weak newborn, if anatomically female, should be fed for the first time by the mother of a male child and vice versa. By being a trait of the divine, perhaps the fusion of male and female was understood as a way to strengthen and protect a baby from harm.

Children's Gendered Socialisation

Children were socialised as the opposite gender through the attribution of names, the performance of age-related rites of passage, and the transmission of skills that were usually reserved to persons of the opposite gender.

Children and adults raised as the opposite gender received names commonly bestowed on members of the opposite gender. For example, in their childhood Dian is called “Little Miss Seven,” *xiao qiqi niang*, where the use of the character *niang*, in Japanese *musume*, clarifies that this is a sobriquet meant for a girl. In the Japanese context, the names Ooto and Okame can be considered feminine since the use of the prefix O- was usually reserved for girls’ and women’s names. Similarly, Nakajirō can be read as a masculine name because of the suffix -jirō which was commonly attached to the end of adult men’s names. Furthermore, some of these names were auspicious in wishing the persons who had them a long life: for example, Okame contains the word for “turtle,” *kame*, which in the Chinese and Japanese cultures is a well known symbol of longevity; similarly, Ooto means “the last one,” suggesting perhaps that they would survive their childhood and thus their parents would not have to have other children after them. Shino’s name was both considered feminine and auspicious: in *Hakkenden*, characters who hear Tatsuka call Shino assume Shino must be a girl and, according to the explanation Bansaku gives about the name, Shino comes from an ancient word which means “long” and thus it is auspicious in wishing him a long life.

During the Tokugawa period, children and adolescents underwent a series of rites of passage that marked the progression from childhood to adulthood through the use of sartorial and tonsorial practices. These rites were usually different according to the status and the gender of the person for whom they were performed.

For both male and female children: *kamioki*, “hair placing,” 2/3 *sai*: while before this age parents would shave their child’s hair because it was believed that diseases entered the body through the hair, parents would now let their child’s hair grow.

This rite was performed three times in the life of a child with gender-specific clothes and hairstyles at 3, 5, and 7 *sai*, hence its name *shichigosan*;

For boys:

- 10/12 *sai*: “wearing of pleated trousers” (*hakamagi*), a boy received his first pair of *hakama* trousers; this rite was only performed by members of the nobility and the warrior class;
- 11/12 *sai*: the crown of a boy’s head was shaved; this hairstyle drew attention to the “forelocks” (*maegami*), which became the distinguishing feature of boyhood; the boy also started to comb the back of his hair in a “topknot” (*chonmage*);
- 14/15 *sai*: the boy’s natural hairline was reshaped by shaving the temples into right angles in a process called “putting in corners” (*kado wo ireru*);
- 16/17 *sai*: *genpuku*, “the ceremony of wearing (adult) clothes,” the boy, now a man, received a hat, a helmet in the case of warriors, ceremonial gifts, such as a sword in the case of warriors, and the pate of his hair was shaved, a style known as *sakayaki*; the man also received a new name;

For girls: coming of age ritual: *sodetome*, “stopping the sleeves,” coincided with their first marriage: girls would have the sleeves of their vests shortened, blackened their teeth, and removed their eyebrows, which they then repainted with makeup; women did not receive a new name but usually kept the one they had since childhood.

From 7 to 13 *sai*, boys and girls began schooling and were taught by parents and instructors different gendered skills. Dian was taught how to sew, an occupation that was considered quintessentially feminine both in China and in Japan. Analogously, Ooto was taught how to sew, how to dress according to the seasons and the weather, and how to apply make-up and take good care of their long hair. Unlike Dian and Ooto, Shino was taught by Bansaku to read and punctuate Confucian texts and martial treatises in *kanbun* and to fight, all skills deemed masculine.

Reversing the *Torikae Kosodate* Practice

Persons raised following this childrearing technique could decide to align their gender performance to their anatomical sex, usually when they reached adulthood. In *Zibuyu*, Dian is said to have lived half their life as a woman, implying that they take a masculine appearance for the remaining half. According to the *Yomiuri shinbun* articles, Okame's father expected Okame to adopt a masculine gender performance once they reached adulthood, but they decided to continue living as a woman. However, Okame and Nakajirō aligned their gender performance to their biological sex in order to marry each other. In *Kagama no adauchi*, Saruwaka assumes a masculine appearance at 16 *sai*. On the contrary, Ooto apparently continued to live as a woman after they became adult and Morita's patient did the same. Social expectations gave a time window during which individuals raised as the opposite gender could alter their gender performance and this time window coincided with adulthood, but it was up to the single person to decide for themselves. In Shino's case, he assumes a masculine appearance when he celebrates his *genpuku*.

Disappearance of the *Torikae Kosodate* Practice

Morita records the latest case which I have been able to locate in which this custom was adopted in Japan. Since Morita published his treatise in 1931 and the case refers to a twenty-year-old individual, they were raised as a girl/woman starting from the 1910s. After this, the custom seemingly disappeared. While I do not know of other sources that discuss or explain the disappearance of this practice, Kojima Hideo, the renowned scholar on the history of childrearing in Japan, suggests that in the 1910s and 1920s there was in Japan a seismic change in the ways parents brought up their children because the population abandoned the childrearing techniques that had been in use since the Tokugawa period and instead adopted the childrearing techniques imported from the West. It is possible that the *torikae kosodate* practice disappeared as a consequence of the introduction of Western childrearing techniques.

Shino's Upbringing as a Girl

Before conceiving Shino, Tatsuka and Bansaku have three other sons. However, they all die in infancy. When Shino is born, Tatsuka is worried that Shino might die as well. To prevent this from happening, she talks to Bansaku about the *torikae kosodate* practice: as she explains it, when parents lose their children in infancy, they can give them a boy's name if the child is

a girl and a girl's name if the child is a boy. If parents do this, children are said to live a long life safe from harm. For this reason, she would like to raise Shino as a girl until he turns 15 *sai*.

Bansaku does not think this might be a wise decision. He states that life and death are ordained by Heaven and not by names. Furthermore, he does not think that the *torikae kosodate* practice might work, as he considers it a superstition of the "people" (*yo*). Nonetheless, he agrees to raise Shino as a girl if this can help bring Tatsuka peace of mind. He proposes the name Shino, which means "long," as an auspicious name to wish their son a long life.

Tatsuka dresses Shino in "feminine clothes" (*onnafuku*) and when he is 3 or 4 *sai* she performs for him the *kamioki* rite of passage by letting his hair grow and combing it with "hairpins" (*kanzashi*). As she always calls him Shino, those who do not know him think he is a girl. The illustrations to the original publication of the text, which were realised by artist Yanagawa Shigenobu (1787-1832), show that Shino wears feminine hairstyles and feminine clothes throughout his childhood and early adolescence: in these illustrations which show Shino from 11 or 12 *sai* to 14 or 15 *sai*, Shino is not wearing *hakama*, the crown of his hair is not shaven, and he does not have a topknot, suggesting that he has a feminine appearance.

Shino's appearance and name make him the laughingstock of his malicious relatives Kamezasa, Bansaku's sister, and Hikiroku, Kamezasa's husband. Bakin presents them as usurpers of the Ōtsuka/Inuzuka's family and characterises them as jealous and always prone to belittling others and abusing their position. When they hear or see Shino's appearance and name, they badmouth Bansaku, saying that, while all warriors want to have sons, he wishes to have a daughter because he is a masterless warrior who was badly injured during a battle, so he wants to protect his child from all harm. By saying this, they create a humorous parody of the *torikae kosodate* practice. While they slander Bansaku, they "laugh in scorn" (*azawarai*), a compound work formed by *warai*, "to laugh," and *aza*, "cold," to express the tone of their mockery.

At 9 *sai*, Shino develops a passion for games suitable for a boy from a warrior family such as kite flying, sparrow archery, rock fighting, and bamboo-horse equestrianism. Given his interest in the martial arts, Bansaku, who runs a school for the sons of local warrior families, teaches him to read and punctuate Confucian texts and war chronicles and how to fight with a sword and hand to hand. In this way, Shino presents a mismatch between his appearance and name on the one hand, which are coded as feminine, and his behaviour on the other hand, which is gendered as masculine.

This mismatch is the cause behind other two scenes in which Shino is laughed at by villagers. In the first one, he mounts a dog as if it were a horse. Some of the villagers who see him "clutch their sides in laughter" (*hara wo kakaete warau*), astonished at the fact that "his appearance does not match his ability" (*waza to sugata to nigenaki*). Yanagawa illustrates the scenes where Kamezasa, Hikiroku, and the villagers laugh at Shino, which are two separate scenes in the text, combining them into a single drawing: at the center we can see Shino on the dog's back, while Kamezasa is on his left, laughing at him from behind her mansion's gates, and two villagers laugh at him on his right.

Similarly to the villagers, in the second scene the youth from the same community “laugh at him in scorn” (*azamite*) when they see him training while wearing girl’s clothes and mock him by saying that he has no genitals.

This kind of harassment was apparently common for people like Shino. Okame, too, was ridiculed by the community in which they lived, Susukimura village in Saitama prefecture, near Tokyo. According to an explanation Okame’s father gives in the *Yomiuri shinbun*, villagers knew that Okame was biologically male based on their body: they had a light moustache, Adam’s apple, and did not have breasts. For this reason, during a pilgrimage a group of drunk villagers harassed them by surrounding and pushing them. We can see another visual testimony of how people laughed at cross-dressing individuals from this illustration: This is the “brocade image” (*nishiki-e*) which accompanies the newspaper *Osaka nishikiga shinwa* number 5. The drawing shows a cross-dressing man being stopped by a police officer because the former broke a law against cross-dressing that was promulgated in 1872 as part of the Tokyo Misdemeanour Code. In the illustration, two women laugh at the man being stopped.

Now let us go back to *Hakkenden*. Shino interiorises the mockery of which he is the object: why, he asks, “differently from other other boys” (*yo no warabera to wa kotonishite*), is he the “only one” (*wagami hitori*) who wears “girl’s clothes” (*me no ko mekitaru kinu*)?

The ridicule Shino receives and its interiorisation reach a climax when Tatsuka dies. On the day of the funeral, Shino wears feminine clothes as usual and everyone in attendance “does not hide their laughter” (*warai wo shinobiaezu*). Shino is particularly troubled at being ridiculed on the day of the funeral, so he confronts his father as to why he has been raised as a girl. Bansaku explains Tatsuka and he meant to protect him from dying in infancy and also adds that until 15 *sai* boys and girls look the same as they do not shave their forelocks and wear wide-sleeved robes and hairpins. When he reaches 16 *sai*, Shino will become a man. For these reasons, those who mock him are ignorant and Shino should not listen to them.

After this dialogue, Shino undergoes the *genpuku* in two correlated scenes and assumes a masculine appearance just as Bansaku has said. In the first scene, Shino shortens his topknot and receives from Bansaku the adult man’s name of Moritaka and the sword “Rainmaker” (*Murasame*). In the second scene, Shino, who is now 14 or 15 *sai*, completes the *genpuku* under the sponsorship of his uncle Hikiroku. During the ceremony, Shino is gifted “men’s clothes” (*otokokinu*) which he wears instead of his old feminine clothes and cuts the hair on his temples. We can see his new appearance in this illustration, which shows him with the crown of his head shaved and a topknot. In the next illustration, Shino has also the top of his head completely shaved in the *sakayaki* style.

The Narrative Function of Shino’s Upbringing as a Girl

In his seminal treatise *Kojiki kenkyū* (*Research on Records of Ancient Matters*, 1973), Saigō Nobutsuna has discussed the scene where the hero Yamato Takeru kills his enemies, the Kumaso brothers. In this scene, Yamato Takeru wears feminine clothes so to enter his enemies’ base and slays them by surprise using his sword “Grasscutter” (*Kusanagi*). When the last Kumaso brother is about to be killed, he bestows on Yamato Takeru this sobriquet

with which he is later known. According to Saigō, the killing of the Kumaso serves as a coming-of-age trial, since he leaves behind him his boyish/feminine appearance and gains a sword and a new name, which were bestowed on men when they underwent the *genpuku*.

If Saigō's reading is correct, perhaps we can expand this hypothesis to Shino: the character from *Hakkenden*, like Yamato Takeru, also wears feminine clothes and faces numerous obstacles before he can undergo the *genpuku* and become a man of the same mythical stature as Yamato Takeru, which Ivan Morris has famously called the archetype of the tragic hero in Japanese history. In this way, Shino's upbringing as a girl functions as a coming-of-age trial which Shino has to overcome.

If this is correct, what do being laughed at and its interiorisation serve within Shino's story? In my opinion, laughter functions as the main obstacle Shino encounters in his childhood and adolescence. If his relatives and villagers had not laughed at him, Shino would have become a man without presumably meeting any obstacles on his way. Alternatively, it is also plausible that he could have decided not to assume a masculine appearance at all: as we have seen, reverting the *torikae kosodate* practice was a personal choice and Ooto and Okame continued to live as women until at least their early adulthood. In this manner, laughter functions as the obstacle in Shino's coming-of-age trial. Interiorisation, the serious consequence Shino learns from being laughed at, pushes him to become a man and a mythical hero. If my reading is correct, in *Hakkenden* laughter plays a role in setting Shino's coming-of-age trial, while seriousness works in motivating Shino to overcome said trial.

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined how Bakin incorporates the *torikae kosodate* practice in the fictional world of his masterpiece, *Hakkenden*. Firstly, we have explored how this custom worked: we have seen that it was a folklore childrearing technique adopted in Japan at least in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Parents could choose this technique when they feared their children would die in infancy, either from an illness or because they had already lost other children. Parents who chose to adopt this practice reared their children as the gender opposite to their anatomical sex, socialising them through the attribution of names, the performance of age-related rites of passage, and the teaching of skills as they were usually attributed to members of the opposite gender. While this custom granted parents some peace of mind, persons from outside the immediate families did not take kindly to individuals raised through this method, as they did not align their gender performances to their anatomical sexes. As a consequence, contemporaries often subjected persons reared as the opposite gender to mockery and harassment.

Secondly, we have noticed how Bakin portrays the *torikae kosodate* practice and the reactions communities had to it. In *Hakkenden*, Tatsuka and Bansaku bring up Shino as a girl, in spite of him being biologically male, to prevent him from dying an untimely death as happened to his brothers. In a series of key scenes, relatives and some villagers deride Shino because his masculine sex and his male-gendered behaviour do not match his feminine name, clothes, and hairstyles. In the words of Bakin, these characters “laugh” at Shino, a concept expressed through the verbs and nouns *warau/warai*, *azawarau*, and *azamiru*. As a serious counterpoint

to the laughter, Shino interiorises the slander he receives and decides to assume a masculine name and appearance when he becomes adult.

Lastly, we have investigated what functions laughter and seriousness play within Shino's story. We have proposed that the laughter to which Shino is subjected serve as an obstacle that the character has to overcome as a coming-of-age ritual. Correlated to this, we have observed that the interiorisation that Shino develops as a serious consequence to being laughed at plays a crucial role in pushing Shino to overcome said coming-of-age ritual and become a full-fledged man and hero.

Funding

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101149192.

References

- Anonymous, "Kien kinō no tsuzuki." *Yomiuri shinbun* 15/6/1884, p. 2.
- "Kien kinō no tsuzuki." *Yomiuri shinbun* 14/6/1884, p. 2.
- "Kien." *Yomiuri shinbun* 13/6/1884, p. 2.
Batkalova, Kuralay, Galiev, Anuar. "Rites of Passage in Japanese Traditional Culture," *The International Conference on Japan & Japan Studies 2016 Official Conference Proceedings*, 2016, pp. 1-12.
Birge, Bettine. "Chu Hsi and Women's Education," in de Bary, Wm. Theodore, Chaffee, John W. (ed.), *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989, pp. 325-367.
Durante, Daniele. "Sexology versus Folklore: The Argument over a Native Conception of Gender in Early 1920s Japan," *Proceedings of the International Conference on Gender Studies and Sexuality* vol. 2 no. 1, 2025, pp. 1-9.
Fushimi, Yūko. *Kindai Nihon ni okeru shussan to ubuya: Kagawa ken Ibukijima no debeya no sonzoku to heisa*. Tokyo, Keisō shobō, 2016.
Groemer, Gerald. *Portraits of Edo and Early Modern Japan: The Shogun's Capital in Zuihitsu Writings, 1657-1855*. Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
Hamada, Keisuke (ed.). *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei bekkā: Nansō Satomi hakkenden ni*. Tokyo, Shinchōsha, 2003.
- *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei bekkā: Nansō Satomi hakkenden ichi*. Tokyo, Shinchōsha, 2003.
Jolliffe, Pia Maria. "Childhood transitions in Edo period Japan," Faculty of History University of Oxford website, 2022.
Jōno, Saigiku. *Kagama no adauchi: sannin no kyōkaku*. Tokyo, Junseidō, 1899.
Kōbunkan (ed.). *Meika manpitsushū Teikoku bunsho dai ni jū san hen*. Tokyo, Kōbunkan, 1929.

- Kojima, Hideo. "Japanese Childrearing Advice in its Cultural, Social, and Economic Contexts," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* vol. 19 no. 2, 1996, pp. 373-391.
- Kokusho kankōkai (ed.). *Kinsei fūzoku kenbunshū dai ni*. Tokyo, Kokusho kankōkai, 1969.
- Komine, Shigeyuki, Minami, Takao. *Dōseiai to dōseishinjū no kenkyū*. Tokyo, Komine kenkyūjo, 1985.
- Kōnoshi, Takamitsu, Yamaguchi, Yoshinori (ed.). *Shinhen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū I Kojiki*. Tokyo, Shōgakukan, third edition, 2003.
- Mikoshi, Kanemitsu (ed.). *Ibukijima debeya shiryōshū III: iriko no shima no kosodate*. Tokyo, Ibukijima kenkyūkai, 2007.
- Mitsuhashi, Junko. *Rekishi no naka no tayō na 'sei:' Nihon to Aja hengen suru sekushuaritei*. Tokyo, Iwanami shoten, 2022.
- *Josō to Nihonjin*. Tokyo, Kōdansha, 2008.
- Mori, Yoshikazu (ed.). *Hiseki Edo bungakusen shichi: Tama no sakazuki Kōshoku henjō nanshi*. Tokyo, Nichirinkaku, 1975.
- Morita, Yūshū. *Dōseiai no kenkyū*. Tokyo, Jinsei sōzōsha, 1931.
- Morris, Ivan. *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan*. Kumamoto, Kurodahan Press, 2014.
- Nagashima, Atsuko. *Zōhokaitei Edo no kurosudoressātachi: sekushuaru mainoritei no rikai no tame ni*. Tokyo, Benseisha, 2023.
- Nakamura, Yukihiko, Nakano, Mitsutoshi (ed.). *Kasshi yawa sanben 3*. Tokyo, Heibonsha, 1983.
- Onshisaidan boshiai ikukai (ed.). *Nihon san'iku shūkan shiryō shūsei*. Tokyo, Daiichi hōki shuppan, 1975.
- Ōtsuki, Osamu (ed.). *Taiyaku Nihon koten shinsho Ariake no wakare: aru dansō no himegimi no monogatari*. Tokyo, Sōeisha, 1979.
- Porath, Or. *The Flower of Dharma Nature: Sexual Consecration and Amalgamation in Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California Santa Barbara, 2019.
- Pflugfelder, Gregory M. *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999.
- Roberts, Luke S. "Growing Up Manly: Male Samurai Childhood in Late Edo-Era Tosa," in Frühstück, Sabine, Walthall, Anne (ed.). *Child's Play. Multi-Sensory Histories of Children and Childhood in Japan*. Oakland, University of California Press, 2017, pp. 41-59.
- Saigō, Nobutsuna. *Kojiki kenkyū*. Tokyo, Miraisha, 1973.
- Sakaguchi, Haruo. *Ubuya shūzoku ni kansuru rekishi minzokugakuteki kenkyū*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kanagawa University, 2021.
- Santangelo, Paolo, Yan, Beiwen (trans.). Zibuyu, "What The Master Would Not Discuss", according to *Yuan Mei (1716-1798): A Collection of Supernatural Stories*. Leiden, Brill, 2013.
- Sawada, Junjirō. *Shinpi naru dōseiai gekan*. Tokyo, Tenkadō shobō, 1920.
- Sawayama, Mikako. *Edo no chichi to kodomo: inochi wo tsunagu*. Tokyo, Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2017.

- Schalow, Paul Gordon (trans.). *The Great Mirror of Male Love*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Sommer, Matthew H. *The Fox Spirit, the Stone Maiden, and Other Transgender Histories from Late Imperial China*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2024.
- Sunaga, Asahiko. *Edo kidan kaidanshū*. Tokyo, Chikuma gakugei bunko, 2012.
- Takada, Mamoru. *Kanpon Hakkenden no sekai*. Tokyo, Chikuma gakugei bunko, 2005.
- Takawa, Kuniko. “*Satomi hakkenden ron: Shino no monogatari*,” in *Bunkyo daigaku joshi tanki daigakubu kenkyū kiyō* no. 30, 1986, pp. 25-33.
- Teshirogi, Kōsuke. *Shifugo I*. Tokyo, Heibonsha, 2009.
- Tokuda, Takeshi. *Ukiyoeshi no e de yomu Hakkenden jō*. Tokyo, Bensei shuppan, 2017.
- Tomizawa, Tatsuzō. *Bunmei kaika no nishiki-e shinbun: Tokyo nichichi shinbun Yūbin hōchi shinbun zensakuhin*. Tokyo, Kokusho kankōkai, 2008.
- Tsuchiya, Reiko. *Ōsaka no nishiki-e shinbun*. Tokyo, Sangensha, 1995.
- Tsuji, Shōko. *Chigo kanjō no kenkyū: han to seisei*. Tokyo, Hōzōkan, 2021.
- Walley, Glynne (trans.). *Eight Dogs or Hakkenden: Part Two - His Master's Blade*. Ithaca, Cornell East Asia Series, 2024.
- Walthall, Anne. “For the Love of Children: Practice, Affect, and Subjectivities in Hirata Atsutane's Household,” in Frühstück, Sabine, Walthall, Anne (ed.). *Child's Play: Multi-Sensory Histories of Children and Childhood in Japan*. Oakland, University of California Press, 2017, pp. 60-79.
- “The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan,” in Bernstein, Gail Lee (ed.). *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, pp. 42-70.