

# Family Bonding in the Lives of Nineteenth-Century Japanese Gender-Variant Individuals

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## Abstract

In nineteenth-century Japan, a small number of parents raised their anatomically male children as girls and their anatomically female children as boys. Experts have studied this custom with a focus on its symbolic and religious meaning as well as on its connection with gender identity. However, scholars have not yet investigated the complex ways in which gender-variant individuals bonded with their families. By scrutinising three highly relevant cases in the written text and illustrations of the fictional epic *The Chronicle of the Eight Dog-Heroes* (*Nansō Satomi hakkenden*, 1814-1842), the written text and polychrome printing in newspaper *Tokyo nichichi shinbun* 813/1874 and a series of articles in newspaper *Yomiuri shinbun* 13-15/06/1884, the paper shows how the subjects and their families took part in rites of passage that were usually performed for the opposite sex. Furthermore, the paper explores how parents taught their children gendered skills such as sewing, reading military books and fighting which were commonly imparted to members of the other sex. The paper also studies how the subjects and their families participated in pilgrimages and shared domestic tasks following gendered conventions to which members of the opposite sex normally adhered. Additionally, the paper analyses the emotions the gender-variant individuals and their families developed during these activities, which the sources describe as “filial piety” (*kōshin*) and “love” (*koi*). In conclusion, the paper suggests that the subjects, like their cis-gender counterparts, related with their families thanks to domestic occupations, religious celebrations, rites of passage and the emotions the actors felt. By conducting this research, the paper advances our knowledge about the lived experiences and literary representations of gender-variant individuals at the closing of the premodern age and the early years of the modern era.

## Introduction

Hello, everyone.

I would like to thank Dr Barducci, Jolliffe, and Steger for organising and hosting this fascinating workshop 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

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 cases of three real life persons and a fictional character who were raised by their parents as the opposite gender and show how they bonded with their parents and spouses. These persons are:

- Inuzuka Shino, one of the main characters of *Nansō Satomi hakkenden*, written by Kyokutei Bakin (1767-1848) between 1814 and 1842;
- Ooto (born circa 1854, native of Sanuki province, in Shikoku island), whose life is reported in *Tokyo nichichi shinbun* 813/1874 and the accompanying “brocade image” (*nishiki-e*);
- Nakajirō (circa 1860-1883, native of Edo/Tokyo) and Okame (born circa 1863, native of Susukimura village, Chichibu district, in Saitama prefecture), whose lives are recounted in *Yomiuri shinbun* 13-15/06/1884.

These persons and character were raised by their parents as the opposite gender following a childrearing technique which I will call *torikae kosodate*, an expression coined by scholar Mitsuhashi Junko, which means “childrearing” (*kosodate*) and “exchange” (*torikae*) which is an allusion to the twelfth-century court tale *Torikaebaya* where the protagonists, a girl and a boy, grow up as the opposite gender.

Shino, a biologically male character, is raised as a girl on the suggestion of his mother, Tatsuka. In the paper I will analyse the gendered rites of passage Shino undergoes from childhood to adulthood, the daily training Shino receives from his father, Bansaku, and how Shino cares for Tatsuka during a long illness. Furthermore, I will explore the emotions that the characters develop during these activities both on a linguistic and physical level.

Ooto, an anatomically male individual, was raised by her parents as a girl. According to the *Tokyo nichichi shinbun* article, Ooto’s parents taught her to sew and to dress according to the seasons and weather, occupations deemed quintessentially feminine. At 18 *sai*, she found employment as a seamstress and while selling clothes during a seasonal market she fortuitously met a man named Hayazō (dates unknown), who fell in love with her. They registered their marriage in the “family register” (*koseki*) reporting that Ooto was biologically female. Employees of the City Hall found out about the irregularity, declared the marriage null, and had Ooto cut her hair short to signal that she was biologically male. In this paper I will analyse the love story between Ooto and Hayazō, the *nishiki-e* that accompanies the article, which shows Ooto and Hayazō in a shared domestic activity, with Ooto mending a cloth in the company of Hayazō and a cat, and the subjects’ emotions on linguistic and physical levels.

In the case of Nakajirō and Okame, Nakajirō was a biologically female individual raised as male by his parents and Okame was a biologically male individual raised as female by her parents. According to the *Yomiuri shinbun* articles, they fortuitously met in 1881 during a yearly spring pilgrimage to the statue of Iwadono Kannon, in Saitama prefecture. Nakajirō fell in love with Okame and searched for her, then he met with Okame’s parents and asked for her hand in marriage. In the paper I will explore the gendered ways in which Nakajirō and Okame went on the pilgrimage, their ensuing love story, and the intimacy between Nakajirō, Okame, and Okame’s parents, describing the emotions the subjects exhibited on both linguistic and physical levels.

## The Practice for Parents to Raise their Children as the Opposite Gender

According to the mentioned primary sources, parents brought up their children as the opposite gender because they feared their children would die in infancy, either because of an illness and/or because parents had already lost other children. By rearing their children as the opposite gender, parents followed a folklore practice which suggested children would receive the protection of the gods and thereby would lead a long life. However, the primary sources do not explain why children would receive the blessing of the gods. Earlier and contemporary sources 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* 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 lady” (*tenjo*) 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*, 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.

It is not clear when this custom emerged and until when it was practised. The earliest reference I have found is Shino’s story in *Hakkenden*. However, the Chinese collection of short stories *Shi bu yu* (1788) includes a tale where a poor man prays to Heaven to have a prosperous family. He has daughters who in turn birth boys but, when they receive male names and clothes, they die, so the man has their grandsons have feminine names and clothes so they can live. After other generations pass, the boys in the family can receive masculine names and clothes without dying and the poor man’s desire is fulfilled. It is possible that the *torikae kosodate* practice originated in China and was then imported to Japan. As for the latest references, I have found allusions in the popular sexology manuals *Shinpi naru dōseiai* (1920) by Sawada Junjirō (1863-1944) and *Dōseiai no kenkyū* (1931) by Morita Yūshū (1882-1945), where Morita discusses the case of a biological man in her twenties raised as a woman. Since she was probably born in the 1910s, this case would be the latest recorded instance of which I know in which the custom was practised. Kojima Hideo (1996, p. 382) has argued that childrearing underwent a radical transformation in the 1910s and 1920s when the Japanese population adopted childrearing techniques from the West. It is possible the *torikae kosoate* practice fell out of use because of the introduction of Western childrearing techniques.

## Contribution to the State of the Art

In the current state of the art, Gregory Pflugfelder and Mitsuhashi have studied the *torikae kosodate* practice by focusing on:

- the religious motivations behind the custom;
- cross-dressing and naming as gendering practices;
- the prohibition against male-male relationships in the early Meiji period in connection with Ooto's marriage annulment.

In this paper I would like to advance the knowledge on this practice by examining an aspect of the phenomenon that has been under-researched, i.e. the lived experiences the subjects had and, in line with the workshop's topic, how they bonded with their parents and spouses through rites of passage, shared everyday activities, and seasonal celebrations.

## Methodology

I have conducted this study by adopting cultural history as a reference discipline. To define the concept of culture, I have referred to the semiotic definition developed by cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, according to whom culture is the web of meanings shared by the members of a given group or society. The objective of the cultural historian is cultural analysis, i.e. the reconstruction of the meanings the group or society attached to a given phenomenon.

I have also employed emotion history as a reference discipline. Emotion history aims to understand the meanings a given group or society attributed to a certain feeling.

I have used the life history method, an historiographical method wherein the researcher analyses the life of an individual as a story, i.e. a narration where the events in the existence of a person from the past are told in a chronological and causal order, to understand how an aspect of their life was shaped by the historical, social, cultural, economic, political etc. context; in this case, I have focused on how subjects were socialised into and performed their genders.

I have selected the case studies through purposeful sampling, i.e. I have chosen the cases that contain the most pertinent material on the *torikae kosodate* practice.

## Notes on Important Terms

The primary sources do not use a specific term to indicate the custom object of study. However, I will use the expression *torikae kosodate* proposed by Mitsuhashi for simplicity's sake.

In the title I have used the adjective "gender-variant" to make the topic of my paper clear for the modern audience. However, this adjective did not exist in the period under study and is not found in the primary sources. Primary sources, in particular the *Yomiuri shinbun* articles in regards to Okame and Bakin in *Tōen shōsetsu* (1825), employ the term *otoko-onna*, a word used in the Edo/Tokyo dialect from the early eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century to indicate biological males who took on the lifeways of females and biological females who took on the lifeways of males (Komine, Minami, 1985, pp. 276, 283, 292-296; Kokusho kankōkai, 1969, p. 476). Using the expression *otoko-onna* instead of gender-variant is more accurate to the lexicon of the day.

As for the pronouns I will use, I will refer to Shino as “he/his” because Shino consistently identifies as a man throughout the story. As for the remaining subjects, the sources do not reveal what pronouns they used for themselves. However, other sources seem to indicate that *otoko-onna* employed pronouns appropriate for their genders. In the *zuihitsu Kumo no itomaki* (1846, 1850), author Santō Kyōzan (1769-1858) states that a biological man from the early eighteenth century who behaved like a woman also spoke like a woman. In literary texts, this usage extends to pronouns: in *Shunshoku umegoyomi* (1832-1833) by Tamenaga Shunsui (1790-1844), Oyoshi, a biological woman who dresses and behaves like a man, uses the male pronoun *washi*. In the novel *Kagama no adauchi* (1899) by Jōno Saigiku (1832-1902), the main character, a biological male raised by her mother as a girl following the *torikae kosodate* practice, uses the feminine and polite pronoun *watakushi*. I will adapt this usage by employing the pronouns appropriate for the subjects’ genders: for Nakajirō I will use “he/his” and for Ooto and Okame “she/her.”

## Case 1: Shino

### Rites of Passage in Tokugawa Japan

During the Edo period, children and adolescents underwent a series of rites of passage that marked the progression from childhood to adulthood through the attribution of names and 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*. From 7 to 13 *sai*, boys and girls began schooling and were taught by parents and instructors different gendered skills;

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.

### **Rites of Passage in Shino's Life**

Shino undergoes the following age-related rites of passage:

- At 3 or 4 *sai*, Tatsuka lets Shino's hair grow, ties his hair up with "hairpins" (*kansashi*) and dresses him in "feminine clothes" (*onnafuku*);

The illustrations to the text 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;

- At 14 or 15 *sai*, by his own volition and following Bansaku's will, Shino takes on a masculine appearance by undergoing the *genpuku*: he takes off his "feminine clothes" (*onnakinu*) and cuts the hair on his temples. Furthermore, he receives a sword from his father and takes on the adult name Moritaka;

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.

In summary, Shino undergoes the childhood rite of passage appropriate for a young girl at the wish of his mother, while he undergoes the coming of age ritual appropriate for a man by his own will and at the wish of his father.

### **Everyday Training**

At 11 or 12 *sai*, Shino begins schooling under his father Bansaku, who runs a local school for the sons of warrior families from his village. During the day, Bansaku teaches Shino calligraphy and reading and punctuating Confucian texts and martial treatises in *kanbun*. At night, he teaches Shino sword fighting. This training regime follows the ideal of the twin path of the martial arts and the letters, an ideal which was pursued by men of the warrior class. It is important to note that the training Shino undergoes is clearly male gendered. For his proclivity towards the martial arts, Bansaku feels a "deep affection" (*shōai*) for Shino.

### **Caring for a Sick Mother**

When Shino is 11 or 12 *sai*, his mother Tatsuka falls ill. During her long convalescence, which ends with the character's peaceful death, Shino carries out many tasks to help Tatsuka recover: he goes to the physician and prepares medicines; to help her take her mind off her sickness, he gives her massages and tells her stories. Tatsuka is so touched that she frequently cries and shows Shino affection by "caressing" (*nadete*) him. According to the narrator, Shino's behaviour serves as a paragon of "filial piety" (*kōshin*) while Bansaku and Tatsuka

have for Shino “compassion” (*jiai*), a term commonly found in Buddhist texts to indicate the feeling that pushes buddhas and bodhisattvas to guide sentient beings to salvation.

## **Case 2: Ooto**

### **Illustrating Domestic Activities**

Now I would like to move on to the *nishiki-e* that shows Ooto and her husband Hayazō. In the illustration, Ooto is mending a garment, while Hayazō is relaxing and a cat is scratching its chin. Ooto’s sewing ability and clothes are at the centre of the piece, both in the narrative connections they establish between the characters and visually. According to the text, Ooto’s parents taught her to sew and dress as feminine skills which were part of her upbringing as a girl/woman. Ooto found employment as a seamstress and met with Hayazō at a market. As the text explains it, Hayazō fell in “love” with Ooto “at first sight” using the characters for *miru* and *koi*, which the *furigana* read as *kaimamite*. In front of the cat there is a sewing utensil, suggesting the possibility that it was playing with the item. In summary, sewing and clothes are a *fil rouge* connecting Ooto, her parents, her husband, and her cat. Sewing and clothes also occupy a prominent position in the illustration on a visual level. Ooto wears different layers of clothes that almost hide her petite body. Furthermore, she has a box of sewing utensils on her left. Hayazō is connected visually to Ooto thanks to his clothing and the box of sewing utensils in front of him. Lastly, the cat was playing with the utensil and, since in prints cats often appear with women and playing with spools of thread, its presence highlights Ooto’s femininity and sewing ability. The rhythmic movements of Ooto’s hands and the relaxed poses of Hayazō and the cat lend the image an atmosphere of intimacy and calm typical of family members who carry out shared everyday activities.

## **Case 3: Nakajirō and Okame**

### **Gendered Ways to Go on a Pilgrimage and Fall in Love**

Nakajirō and Okame met in 1881 during a pilgrimage to the Iwadono Kannon in Shōbōji Temple, in Saitama prefecture. The temple is the 10th stop on the *Bandō sanjūsankasho*, a pilgrimage with 33 stops in Buddhist temples throughout the Kantō region. The pilgrimage to the Iwadono Kannon was done every year on the 18th day of the 3rd month.

Okame was native of Saitama prefecture, as she lived in the nearby village of Susukimura. She went to pray at the statue with a young girl of 7 or 8 *sai*. The articles do not say who the little girl was, presumably she was a relative or a neighbour of Okame. What is important to note is that travelling in the company of a girl was customary for girls and young women of the time: as Yamakawa Kikue has reported on her study on the customs of women of the warrior class from Mito domain, it was deemed inappropriate for women to travel alone, so they would ask relatives or neighbours if there were young girls who could accompany them. Okame seemed to have done the same thing to go on the pilgrimage. Furthermore, Okame travelled only a short distance, as it was customary for women of that age who only rarely embarked on journeys to distant places.

Differently from Okame, Nakajirō was native of Tokyo and travelled to Saitama on his own on the invitation of a friend from the prefecture. The fact that he travelled a longer distance than Okame did and travelled on his own was appropriate for a man.

Nakajirō saw Okame at the foot of the statue and fell in “love” (*koi*) with her. The articles construct the relationship between Nakajirō and Okame as a story of love at first sight and employ the main elements of this trope as found in court literature. Nakajirō and Okame are brought together by the will of Kannon, the pilgrimage serving as the location where they fortuitously meet, and Nakajirō is smitten by Okame’s beauty and grace. In the following days, Nakajirō continues to see her “image” (*omokage*) and asks the villagers who Okame was to see her again. Nakajirō goes to her house, meets with her parents, and asks for her hand in marriage. In the end, they marry and have a child. The scene where Nakajirō speaks with Okame and her parents is particularly touching and emotional: Okame’s father tells Nakajirō the life story of Okame and Nakajirō shares his over cups of tea and sweets and Okame’s father “caresses” (*nadete*) Okame on the head. The scene feels very intimate. In the end, Nakajirō and Okame marry. It is important to note that in this narration of love at first sight, Nakajirō and Okame follow gendered social roles with Nakajirō who takes on a male-coded active role in that he falls in love first, searches for Okame, and proposes to her, while Okame takes on a female-coded passive role in that she is the recipient of Nakajirō’s courtship.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored the *torikae kosodate* practice, a childrearing technique that was adopted in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan. By following this technique, parents who feared their children would die in infancy would raise their children as the opposite gender so that the gods may protect them. At the present state of the art, Pflugfelder and Mitsuhashi have studied this custom for its religious motivations, as a gendering practice, and for its connection with early-Meiji state-sanctioned homophobia. In this paper, we have filled a gap in the current knowledge by examining how a sample of four subjects bonded with their parents and spouses through rites of passage, shared everyday activities, and seasonal celebrations.

As regards the parents-children relationships, we have seen:

- How parents decided children’s childhood rites of passage and how parents and children co-decided children’s adulthood rites of passage;
- How parents and children shared everyday activities which revolved around the teaching of gendered skills and sickcare;
- How parents and children bonded through intimate conversations about life stories;
- On a linguistic level, we have seen that the primary sources convey the love parents felt towards their children as “deep affection” (*shōai*) and “compassion” (*jiai*), where both words contain the term *ai*, which, in this paper, seems specialised in expressing parental love; filial love is instead expressed by “filial piety” (*kōshin*);
- On a physical level, children expressed affection through massaging and parents through caressing.



As concerns the relationships between spouses, the sources construct this tie through:

- The narrative of love at first sight;
- Seasonal celebrations, such as the spring pilgrimage to the Iwadono Kannon and the market Ooto and Hayazō attended, which serve as the locations where the subjects fortuitously meet and fall in love;
- Shared activities: conversations around life stories and everyday domestic tasks; sharing activities establishes and expresses affection between spouses on a physical level;
- On a linguistic level, the articles refer to this tie as “love” through the character *koi*; thereby, *koi*, at least in this paper, appears specialised in indicating romantic love, whereas *ai* seems specialised in expressing parental affection.

In summary, the subjects of this study bonded with their parents and spouses through rites of passage, shared everyday activities, and seasonal celebrations, which inspired parental affection and romantic love. In this paper, it has been important to take into consideration the ways and the reasons why the individuals under research did not align their gender performances to their anatomical sexes, but this aspect of their lives apparently did not alter their capacity to bond with their families.

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