Empowering Popular Fiction: The Ironic Reinterpretation of Confucianism in the Fiction of Kyokutei Bakin

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Empowering Popular Fiction: The Ironic Reinterpretation of Confucianism in the Fiction of Kyokutei Bakin

(This dissertation includes previously published material.)

In my dissertation, I investigate the seemingly paradoxical relationship between the hierarchical, state-endorsed Confucian ideology imported from imperial China and the iconoclastic, popular literature of Edo Japan. Although the Tokugawa shogunate implemented Confucianism to reinforce social order from above, I argue that Kyokutei Bakin (1767-1848), a renowned popular writer whose audience consisted of people from various classes, reinterpreted and appropriated this ideology in his fictional works as a means of critiquing and resisting governmental oppression.

Previous scholarship on the literary exchange between Edo Japan and Imperial China has primarily focused on the influence of Chinese vernacular novels in terms of themes, plots, and terminology, while often neglecting the transference and reinterpretation of Chinese philosophical thought. My interdisciplinary research addresses this gap by bridging the fields of literature and philosophy. This transnational and multilingual approach reveals how the seemingly rigid framework of Confucian thought was adapted and transformed into a literary tool for questioning social hierarchies and challenging authority.

The core of my research examines how Bakin's works critique Confucianism by systematically deconstructing its prescribed top-down social order–beginning with the higher-level legitimacy of the ruler, moving to the secondary-level obligation and righteousness of the

samurai class, and finally addressing the personal-level filial piety and chastity. Chapter I outlines this overarching structure, while Chapter II analyzes the concept of legitimacy in *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden* (Lives of the gallants: Read them and wonder, 1832-1835). The novel's multifaceted portrayal of legitimacy through characters from diverse positions challenges and resists a singular, monolithic interpretation of the concept. Chapter III, part of which has been published in *Studies in Japanese Literature and Culture*, investigates the *kyōaku* (gallant) archetype, debunking the myth that a righteous person has to devote himself to serve the ruler. The portrayal of virtuous *kyōkaku* as protectors of the oppressed reflects societal anxiety over disorder and the collective yearning for justice. Chapter IV focuses on the portrayal of a *dokufu* ("poisonous woman") character in *Shinpen Kinpeibai* (New Edition of the Plum in the Golden Vase, 1831-1847), uncovering how filial piety and chastity can function as tools of oppression. Ultimately, I conclude that Bakin's works amplify the voices of marginalized individuals, emphasizing their agency in reinterpreting state-endorsed ideologies and constructing their own identities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"If one is capable of reading unofficial histories [novels], then he can uncover what others have yet to reveal, explain what others cannot explain, and ultimately enable the reader to grasp everything clearly in advance."

—Preface to *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, vol. 2, Kyokutei Bakin[1]

Kyokutei Bakin 曲亭馬琴 (1767–1848), one of the most celebrated writers of the Edo period (1603–1868), remains an important figure in Japanese literary history. His works continue to captivate modern readers, as evidenced by the recent Japanese film *Hakkenden* 八犬伝 (Hakkenden: Fiction and Reality, 2024), which blends the fictional world of Bakin's famous narrative with the struggles he faced in real life. According to data from Kōgyo Tsūshinsha, this film ranked number one in the domestic movie category for October 25 to 27, 2024. It attracted 125,700 viewers and earned a box office revenue of 168 million yen (approximately 1.1 million US dollars) over the first three days of its release.[2]

This film not only demonstrates Bakin's enduring influence in contemporary Japanese culture and literature but also coincidentally echoes one of the key themes I explore in this dissertation: the "transcendent" nature of fiction. To begin with, the film's success highlights how classic literary works can transcend time and space. The 2024 film, directed by Sori

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[1] Bakin Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, ed. Yokoyama Kuniharu and Ōtaka Yōji, Shin nihon koten bungaku taikei 87 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), 145. 苟能読稗史者、発人所未及発、解人所不能解、竟令看者先已了了。

[2] "The domestic movie rankings (2024/10/25–2024/10/27)," Eiga.com, accessed February 9, 2025, https://eiga.com/ranking/20241028/.

Fumihiko 曽利文彦 (b. 1964), adapts Yamada Fūtarō's 山田風太郎 (1922–2001) novel *Hakkenden* 八犬伝 (The tale of the eight dogs, 1982), which itself blends Bakin's biography with *Nansō Satomi hakkenden* 南総里見八犬伝 (The lives of the eight dogs of the Satomi of southern Fusa, 1814–1842; hereafter, *Hakkenden*), one of Bakin's most famous novels, itself a loose adaptation of a Chinese vernacular novel. This continuous process of adaptation sustains *Hakkenden*'s vitality, while this work's engagement with other literary traditions reminds us of Japan's connections to the broader world. Bakin's fictional works are not forgotten relics of the past but remain relevant in both contemporary Japan and global literary discourse.

Secondly, fiction transcends genres. Modern technology allows audiences to have an immersive experience with Bakin's fictional world and real life in cinema. Likewise, in Bakin's time, he also produced works that blurred the boundary between text and image. *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden* 開巻驚奇俠客伝 (Lives of the gallants: read them and wonder, 1832–1835; hereafter abbreviated as *Kyōkakuden*), one of my two primary sources, belongs to the genre known as *yomihon* 読本 ("book for reading"), a text-heavy form of fiction. Meanwhile, *Shinpen Kinpeibai* 新編金瓶梅 (New edition of *The plum in the golden vase*, 1831–1847), my other primary source, is a *gōkan* 合巻 ("omnibus") picture book, a visually rich genre that organically combine images and text. Stylistically, *yomihon* employ an extensive lexicon of Chinese vernacular terms and frequently adapt Chinese novels, providing readers with an imaginary space to engage with a different culture and literature. By contrast, *gōkan* make extensive use of pictures and colloquial Japanese, offering a more visual and oral experience accessible to less-literate audiences. While these two genres may seem distinct from a modern perspective,

analyzing both is crucial for developing a thorough and nuanced understanding of Edo-period fiction in general and Bakin's writings in particular.

Thirdly, as the subtitle of the film—*Fiction and Reality*—suggests, fiction has the power to transcend the confines of the written page and take on real-life significance. In the film, Bakin's real-life struggles shape his writing philosophy and narrative choices. Similarly, I argue that Bakin's fiction contains profound implications for real-world issues. A common approach to deciphering the hidden message in his work is to closely examine his narratives for parallels to historical events. However, given that Edo-period writers often adapted and blended existing stories, this approach has its limitations. Rather than focusing solely on specific historical references, I choose instead to examine the multi-layered meanings of abstract philosophical concepts that have serious political implications in his works. Through close analysis of narrative structures and underlying themes, I contend that Bakin's use of Neo-Confucianism is deeply ironic—contrary to the widespread assumption that his stories strictly follow and uphold Confucian teachings.

The central argument of my dissertation is that Bakin's works transcend the traditional view of popular literature as "useless" and merely "for fun," serving instead as serious critiques of Neo-Confucianism, the state-endorsed ideology imported from China. As a popular writer addressing a broad readership, he deliberately subverts and even reconstructs the social hierarchy imposed by Neo-Confucianism, giving voices to socially marginalized and oppressed groups. On the surface, his narratives seem to adhere strictly to Confucian principles, but a close examination reveals a hidden irony that undermines their authority. Rather than reinforcing Confucian ideology, Bakin questions it and sometimes even reduces it to a mere plot device, stripping it of its legitimacy. Although he did not explicitly comment on contemporary politics,

his narratives challenged the ideological foundations of the government, ultimately exposing its hypocrisy.

1.1 Chapter Outlines

My dissertation explores the reinterpretation of Confucian concepts and the reconstruction of Confucian social hierarchy in Bakin's *Kyōkakuden* and *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. The three main chapters explore the following key questions in sequence: How should the legitimacy of the highest-level ruler be evaluated? To whom should secondary-level samurai pledge their loyalty and righteousness? And how should individuals navigate the tension between familial obligations—such as filial piety—and their personal desires? Additionally, each chapter investigates character types that were popular in late Edo period but whose characterizations seriously challenge the moral virtues celebrated in Confucianism: reclusive Daoist immortals and Buddhist monks who judge the legitimacy of a ruler, gallants who fight the government for the sake of the oppressed and marginalized, and a "poisonous" woman who manipulates filial piety and chastity to secure her own survival and fulfill her desires.

Chapter II examines the legitimacy of the highest-level ruler in *Kyōkakuden*. In this novel, Bakin extensively references the famous Confucian scholar Arai Hakuseki's 新井白石 (1657–1725) interpretation of *seitō* 正統 (Ch. *zhengtong*, commonly translated as political "orthodoxy" or "legitimacy"), yet their approaches diverge significantly. Hakuseki examines the concept from the perspective of the ruling class, ultimately seeking to confirm the legitimacy of the Tokugawa shogunate he serves. In contrast, Bakin's focus lies in demystifying *seitō* and deauthorizing Confucianism, as evidenced by his utilization of diverse viewpoints to scrutinize the legitimacy of the Ashikaga shogunate, as well as through his ironic depiction of marginalized

characters, such as a female Daoist immortal and a Buddhist monk, as both wise and authoritative on the topic of legitimacy.

Chapter III (an earlier version of this chapter has been published in *Studies in Japanese Literature and Culture*) continues the investigation of loyalty and righteousness through the *kyōkaku* 俠客 (Ch. *xiake*, gallants) archetype in *Kyōkakuden*. Unlike the traditional image of samurai who devote their loyalty to their lords, the *kyōkaku* Bakin constructs are willing to sacrifice their lives to protect the vulnerable, even if it means challenging the prevailing social hierarchy and contesting top-down political ideologies. Drawing inspiration from Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (J. Shiba Sen, 145? – 89? BCE) *Shiji* 史記 (J. *Shiki*, Records of the grand historian, c. 91 BCE), Bakin integrates multiple schools of thought, including Daoism, Buddhism and Legalism, with Confucianism to challenge the sanctity of Confucian virtues such as benevolence, righteousness, and loyalty. Furthermore, through a comparison of ideal *kyōkaku* and their evil counterparts, great thieves, Bakin highlights the difficulty of distinguishing between them. By referencing the discussion of the "great thief" in *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (J. *Sōshi*; c. 369–286 BCE), he critiques the shogunate itself as the "great thief," exposing its hypocrisy.

Shifting from the macro-level of state legitimacy and social order to a micro-level focus on family stability and self-cultivation, Chapter IV examines *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, the last long-form *gōkan* project Bakin completed before his death in 1848. Through an analysis of the transformation of a filial daughter into a *dokufu* 毒婦 (poisonous woman) both textually and visually, I argue that this work critiques the traditional Confucian virtues, such as filial piety and women's chastity and obedience, as ineffective means of sustaining and restoring family stability. Instead, the oppressive nature of Neo-Confucianism exacerbates the misery of an

obedient woman, ultimately leading her to become a poisonous woman who subverts these virtues in order to break free from the confinement of the family structure.

The Conclusion (Chapter V) shifts focus to the real-world obstacles Bakin faced while serializing *Kyōkakuden* and *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. Although he envisioned a fictional world where Neo-Confucian hierarchy could be reversed and the voice of the marginalized could be heard, due to the social pressures and censorship of his time, Bakin had to cease the *Kyōkakuden* project completely and heavily self-censored the last volume of *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. Nevertheless, the rebellious spirit embedded in both works continued to inspire later generations of writers. In the Meiji period, narratives featuring *kyōkaku* and *dokufu* gained significant popularity.

1.2 The *Daxue* as the Fundamental Framework and Its Use in Fiction Commentaries

Neo-Confucianism serves as the key framework for my exploration of Bakin's novels. It not only offers a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationships between different social classes but also upholds morality as the cornerstone of societal stability. Both of these aspects are challenged and critiqued by Bakin in *Kyōkakuden* and *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, but before turning to an analysis of these primary texts in the following three chapters, it is essential to first clarify the connection between Neo-Confucianism and Edo Japan in general and its influence on Bakin in particular.

NEO-CONFUCIANISM IN THE EDO PERIOD

Neo-Confucianism is a philosophical movement that emerged during the Song dynasty (960–1279) in China as a revitalization and reinterpretation of traditional Confucian thought. In contrast to traditional Confucian thought, it provided a metaphysical basis for the necessity of fulfilling *wulun* 五倫 (J. *gorin*, five relations: father and son, ruler and subjects, husband and

wife, elder and younger brothers, and between friends), and equated the fulfilling of one's social role(s) to the expression of personal ethics. It had been studied in Japan as early as the Kamakura period (1185–1333) by Buddhist monks and men of learning.[3] However, it was not until the Edo period that Neo-Confucianism received more serious attention as a teaching with the potential to serve as the foundation for an orderly society.[4] Fujiwara Seika 藤原惺窩 (1561–1619), often considered the most important figure of the first generation of Confucian scholars in the Edo period, separated Confucianism from traditional Buddhist study. Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583–1657), who studied with Seika, established a lineage for himself as the inheritor of orthodox Neo-Confucianism.

The seventeenth century witnessed the increasing popularity of Neo-Confucianism. Scholars such as Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 (1619–1691), Yamazaki Ansai 山崎闇斎 (1619–1682), Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622–1685), Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (1627–1705), Arai Hakuseki, and Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728) employed different approaches to interpreting Confucianism. In 1691, Yushima Seidō 湯島聖堂, a Confucian holy temple, was established under the order of the fifth shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi 徳川綱吉 (1646–1709).[5] By the early eighteenth century, however, due to the rise of *kokugaku* 国学 (Japanese studies) as a counterbalance to the pervasive influence of Chinese culture and because many Confucian

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[3] Richard Bowring, *In Search of the Way: Thought and Religion in Early-Modern Japan, 1582–1860* (Oxford: University Press, Incorporated, 2017), 46.

[4] It should to be noted that although Confucianism received more attention among men of learning, it was not widely appreciated until the reign of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi. Hiroshi Watanabe, *Kinsei nihon shakai to sōgaku* (Tōkyō: Tōkyō daigaku shuppansha, 1985), 16–17.

[5] Bowring, *In Search of the Way*, 165.

scholars began questioning the orthodox status of Neo-Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism gradually lost its popularity. During the Kansei 寛政 Reform (1787–1793), Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 (1759–1829), the senior councilor of the Tokugawa shogunate, attempted to restore its authority. In 1790, he initiated the famous *igaku no kin* 異学の禁 (Prohibition on Heterodox Teachings), which mandated the teaching of Neo-Confucianism as the official Confucian philosophy of Edo Japan. In 1798, he transformed the Yushima Seidō into the Shōheizaka Gakumonjo 昌平坂学問所 (The School of Shōheizaka), an official Tokugawa institution. Examinations were even instituted in an attempt to emulate the Chinese bureaucratic examination *keju* 科挙 (J. *kakyo*), which was used to select future officials based on their knowledge and understanding of Neo-Confucianism.[6]

Unlike China where Confucianism had been the official political philosophy since the Han period (220 BCE–220), the dominant ideology in Japan prior to the Edo period was Buddhism. Systematic study of Neo-Confucianism by Japanese scholars did not begin until the sixteenth century, and it was not until the late eighteenth century that Neo-Confucianism was officially recognized as the state philosophy. Because Japan had never experienced a clear philosophical turn from traditional Confucianism to Neo-Confucianism, the two terms were often used interchangeably during the Edo period. For instance, while Yamazaki Ansai explicitly supported Neo-Confucianism, his contemporary Itō Jinsai was generally opposed to it, advocating instead for close readings of original Confucian texts over reliance on Neo-Confucian

[6] Bowring, 240–41.

interpretations. Despite their opposing stances, both thinkers are broadly categorized as Confucian scholars.

Given this historical conflation of terms, I do not strictly differentiate between traditional Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism in my main chapters. However, I wish to emphasize that explorations of traditional Confucianism in Edo Japan were almost always in dialogue with Neo-Confucianism. Even scholars like Jinsai, who rejected Neo-Confucianism, developed their ideas in response to it. Therefore, it is ultimately Neo-Confucianism—rather than traditional Confucianism—that shaped the Japanese intellectual and ideological landscape.

THE DAXUE'S DISCUSSION ON SELF-CULTIVATION

In Edo Japan, Neo-Confucianism was often referred to as *Shushigaku* 朱子学, which literally means "the study of Master Zhu." Master Zhu refers to Zhu Xi 朱熹 (J. Shu Ki, 1130–1200), one of the most influential philosophers in the development of Neo-Confucianism. Zhu Xi canonized the Four Books—*Lunyu* 論語 (J. *Rongo*, The analects), *Mengzi* 孟子 (J. *Mōshi*, Mencius), *Daxue* 大学 (J. *Daigaku*, Great learning), and *Zhongyong* 中庸 (J. *Chūyō*, Doctrine of the mean)—as the core of Neo-Confucian thought, placing exceptional emphasis on the *Daxue*.[7]

After the *Daxue* was elevated to the status of a foundational text, numerous Neo-Confucian scholars in both China and Japan reinterpreted this text to support their own

[7] Unlike *Lunyu* and *Mengzi*, whose texts remained stable, both the *Zhongyong* and the *Daxue* were edited by Zhu Xi—with the *Daxue* receiving more revisions than the *Zhongyong*. Therefore, the *Daxue* text plays a crucial role in Zhu Xi's thought. See Yoshida Kōhei, "Shushigaku & Yōmeigaku ni okeru *Daigaku*," in *Edo no jugaku:* Daigaku *juyō no rekishi*, ed. Minamoto Ryōen (Tōkyō: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1988), 11–12. Moreover, Zhu Xi recommended that students begin with the *Daxue* when reading the Four Books, further underscoring its importance in Neo-Confucianism. See Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-Hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1986), 4, 6.

understanding of Neo-Confucianism.[8] These interpretations not only reaffirmed the core significance of *Daxue* in Neo-Confucianism but also further promoted its importance.

The *Daxue* text begins with the "three cardinal principles" *san gangling* 三綱領 (J. *san kōryō*): "The way of great learning lies in keeping one's inborn luminous Virtue unobscured, in renewing the people, and in coming to rest in perfect goodness. 大学之道、在明明徳、在新民、在止於至善."[9] In other words, the *Daxue* links individual moral cultivation to the stability of society as a whole. The text then introduces the "eight steps" *ba tiaomu* 八条目 (J. *hachi jōmoku*), which further elaborate on the three cardinal principles:

> Those of antiquity who wished that all men throughout the empire keep their inborn luminous Virtue unobscured put governing their states well first; wishing to govern their states well, they first established harmony in their households; wishing to establish harmony in their households, they first set their minds in the right; wishing to set their minds in the right, they first made their thoughts true; wishing to make their thoughts true, they first extended their knowledge to the utmost; the extension of knowledge lies in fully apprehending the principle in things.[10]
>
> 古之欲明明德於天下者，先治其國；欲治其國者，先齊其家；欲齊其家者，先修其身；欲修其身者，先正其心；欲正其心者，先誠其意；欲誠其意者，先致其知，致知在格物。

The first three steps pertain to "renewing the people," while the remaining five elaborate on "keeping one's inborn luminous Virtue." The passage follows a macro-to-micro approach, beginning with world peace and state governing, and then narrowing its focus to family management and individual self-cultivation (see Figure 1). Self-cultivation further breaks down into the rectification of the mind and thoughts, culminating in the extension of knowledge

[8] Yoshida, "Shushigaku & yōmeigaku ni okeru *daigaku*," 22–23.

[9] Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-Hsueh*, 88–90.

[10] Gardner, 91–92.

through apprehending the principle in things. While this passage initially adopts a top-down perspective on societal stability from the ruling class's standpoint, the following paragraph reverses this logic, asserting that individual self-cultivation is foundational to societal stability.

> Only after the principle in things is fully apprehended does knowledge become complete; knowledge being complete, thoughts may become true; thoughts being true, the mind may become set in the right; the mind being so set, the person becomes cultivated; the person being cultivated, harmony is established in the household; household harmony established, the state becomes well-governed; the state being well-governed, the empire [All-Under-Heaven] becomes tranquil. From the Son of Heaven on down to the commoners, all without exception should regard self-cultivation as the root.[11]
>
> 物格而後知至，知至而後意誠，意誠而後心正，心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。自天子以至於庶人，壹是皆以修身為本。

This passage adopts a bottom-up approach, arguing that everyone—regardless of social status—should cultivate the self to ensure peace in the world. Whereas the previous passage emphasizes the leading power of the ruling class, this one flattens social hierarchy to the extent that even the Son of Heaven [ruler] and a commoner are equal in terms of the need to cultivate the self. The influence of Neo-Confucianism gradually extended into other fields, including popular fiction, and the flattened relationship between ruler and commoner articulated in *Daxue* enabled fiction writers to explore larger political themes through literary depictions of family conflicts and individual struggles.

I want to clarify that although I focus primarily on the *Daxue* here, I do not mean that the *Daxue* is the only Confucian text that explores the relationship between self-cultivation and societal stability, nor that Bakin exclusively used this text in his writing. In fact, in the main chapters, I explored how Bakin reinterpreted lines from other Confucian classics such as *Lunyu* and *Mengzi*. However, I believe that *Daxue*, as a representative Neo-Confucian text, provides a

[11] Gardner, 93–94.

nice framework to explore how individuals, families, and states are constructed in Confucianism, and this framework can be effectively applied to analyzing Bakin's fictional narratives as well.

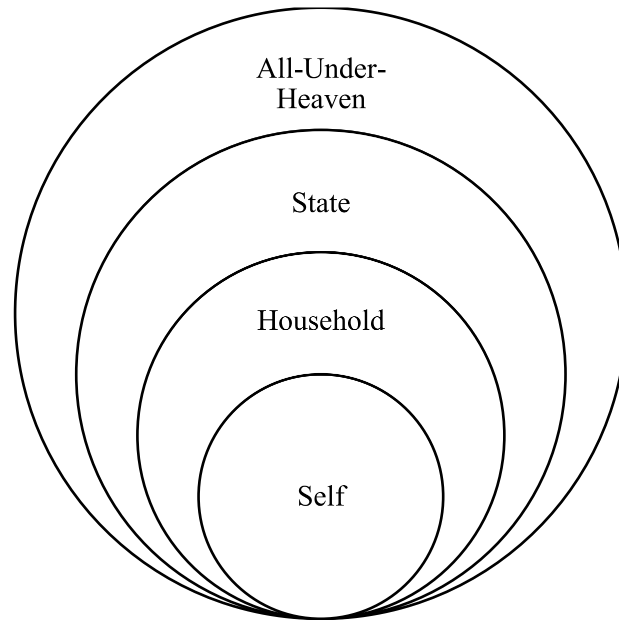

Figure 1. The visual representation of "three cardinal principles" and the "eight steps."

CHINESE FICTION'S COMMENTARY TRADITION

The intellectual interest in analyzing fiction through the lens of Neo-Confucianism is evident in the *pingdian* 評点 (J. *hyōten*) or *piping* 批評 (J. *hihyō*; criticism or commentaries) tradition.[12] This practice originally referred to commentaries on classical texts. For example, Zhu Xi not only compiled the Four Books but also wrote commentaries to guide what he considered the "correct" understanding of these texts. However, this so-called "correct" understanding diverged significantly from the original meanings, reflecting Zhu Xi's own ideological vision and his hope of transforming the China of his day. This tension between the original text and the

[12] David L. Rolston and Shuen-fu Lin, eds., *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, Princeton Library of Asian Translations (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3–4.

interpretive layers imposed by commentators later had a strong influence on fiction criticism.[13] Although early commentaries primarily provide lexical explanations and informative material, as novels became more complex, commentaries grew increasingly exegetical.[14] Some scholars even approached fictional narratives as if they were serious scriptures or Confucian classics.

The most representative long-form, complex novels of the Ming dynasty are the so-called *sida qishu* 四大奇書 (J. *Shidai kisho*, four masterworks of the Ming novel): *Sanguo zhi tongsu yanyi* 三国志通俗演義 (J. *Sangoku shi tsūzoku engi*; A Popularization of the Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms; hereafter, *Sanguo*), *Zhongyi shuihu zhuan* 忠義水滸伝 (J. *Chūgi suiko den*; The Water Margin; hereafter, *Shuihu zhuan*), *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (J. *Saiyū ki*; Journey to the West), and *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (J. *Kin Pei Bai*; Plum in the Golden Vase). In discussing the interpretation of the four masterworks, Andrew Plaks frequently points to "their reflection of a revised understanding of certain key concepts of basic Four Books Neo-Confucian thought."[15] In his view, "at the heart of these philosophical debates [in novels] is the redefinition of the crucial issue of self-cultivation."[16] By "self-cultivation," he refers to the relationship between the abstract self and the physical self within a social context—an idea that closely parallels the *Daxue*'s exploration of the connection between the self and society. Moreover, when listed in chronological order, the four masterworks seem to follow a thematic progression: from the highest level of ruler legitimacy in *Sanguo*, to secondary-level loyalty and righteousness in

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[13] Rolston and Lin, 4–6.

[14] Rolston and Lin, 8.

[15] Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel = Ssu Ta Ch'i-Shu* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 19.

[16] Plaks, 20.

Shuihu zhuan, to the rectification of the mind in *Xiyou ji*, and finally to the failure of self-cultivation in *Jin Ping Mei*.

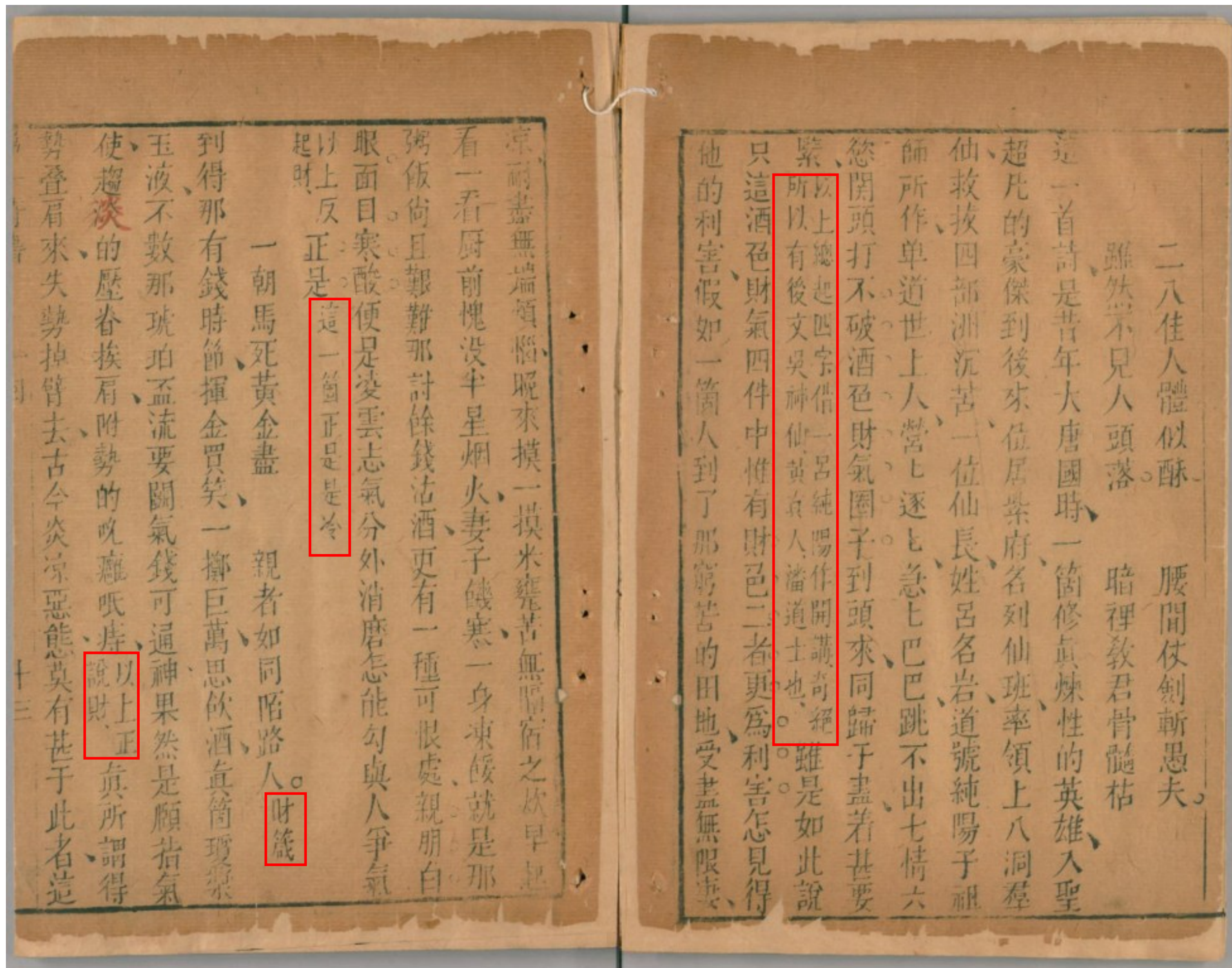
二八佳人體似酥　腰間仗劍斬愚夫
雖然不見人頭落　暗裡教君骨髓枯
這一首詩是昔年大唐國時一箇修真煉性的英雄入聖
超凡的豪傑到後來位居紫府名列仙班率領上八洞羣
仙救拔四部洲沉苦一位仙長姓呂名岩道號純陽子祖
師所作單道世上人營營逐逐急急巴巴跳不出七情六
慾關頭打不破酒色財氣圈子到頭來同歸于盡着甚要
緊以上總起四字借一呂純陽作開講奇絕所以有後文吳神仙黃真人潘道士也雖是如此說
只這酒色財氣四件中惟有財色二者更爲利害怎見得
他的利害假如一箇人到了那窮苦的田地受盡無限淒
涼耐盡無端煩惱晚來摸一摸米甕苦無隔宿之炊早起
看一看廚前愧沒半星烟火妻子饑寒一身凍餒就是那
粥飯尚且艱難那討餘錢沽酒更有一種可恨處親朋白
眼面目寒酸便是凌雲志氣分外消磨怎能勾與人爭氣
正是這一箇正是是冷
以上反起財
一朝馬死黃金盡　親者如同陌路人財箴
到得那有錢時節揮金買笑一擲巨萬思飲酒真箇瓊漿
玉液不數那琥珀盃流要鬪氣錢可通神果然是頤指氣
使趨淡的壓脊挨肩附勢的吮癰舐痔以上正說財真所謂得
勢疊肩來失勢掉臂去古今炎涼惡態莫有甚于此者這
十三

Figure 2. *Kōkakudō hihyō daiichi kisho kin pei bai* 皐鶴堂批評第一奇書金瓶梅 (The first masterwork *Jin Ping Mei* with commentaries by Zhang Zhupo), Vol. 4 (pub. 1695). National Diet Library. https://doi.org/10.11501/2545582 (image 4).

During the Ming Dynasty, publishing works of fiction with embedded commentaries became a common practice. Typically, these commentaries were organically woven into the main text, making them an inseparable part of the reading experience. For example, Figure 2 shows two pages from *Jin Ping Mei*, where the lines highlighted in red frames are commentaries, while the remaining text constitutes the main narrative.[17] Due to this unique style of commentary culture,

[17] Figure 1 employs double-column interlineal comments (*shuanghang jiapi* 雙行夾批), a very common method of

readers were fully aware of the presence of these comments, and it was common for them to engage with the commentaries for additional information and literary evaluations.

1.3 Bakin and Neo-Confucianism

KYŌKAKUDEN AND THE MAOS

Although popular fiction in Edo Japan did not adopt the same commentary practice as Chinese literature, its influence on Bakin is more than obvious. As an avid reader fluent in both classical and vernacular Chinese, Bakin engaged with Chinese novels throughout his life. His awareness of and interest in Chinese commentary culture is evident in many of his writings. A striking example appears in the preface to the second volume of *Kyōkakuden*, where he explicitly reflects on the Chinese commentary tradition:

> If one is capable of reading unofficial histories [novels], then he can uncover what others have yet to reveal, explain what others cannot explain, and ultimately enable the reader to grasp everything clearly in advance. As for those with exceptional talent, their discerning eyes can see through everything,[18] and they use extraordinary talent to critique extraordinary talent—such talent is truly rare. Readers who follow such a guide, like obtaining a compass, will find the shortcut to the other shore. Is this not the help from a kindred spirit who truly understands one's intent across different eras? Alas! Even in one's own time, finding a true friend is difficult. Who would think about this [finding a true friend] across different generations?
>
> 苟能読稗史者、発人所未及発、解人所不能解、竟令看者先已了了。至於其尤、具眼如車輪、以奇才批奇才。其才稀有。看者随得南鍼、到彼岸庶矣。其非異世之知己之資耶。嗚乎知己、当年尚難得。況于異世、誰亦思之。[19]

annotating the text. There are other ways to place comments, for more details, see Rolston and Lin, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 53–57.

[18] *Sharin* 車輪 literarily means "car wheel." Bakin may have intended to suggest that the readers' discerning eyes are as large and perceptive as car wheels. However, *sharin* might also allude to the concept of chakra or cakra, meaning "wheel" or "circle-shape weapon" in ancient India. It has the extensive meaning of destroying the false teachings or eliminating people's anxiety and confusion.

[19] Kyokutei Bakin, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 145.

This passage reveals Bakin's deep admiration for talented commentators and his recognition of the value of insightful critique. Rather than attributing ultimate understanding to the author of the novel, he regards the genius commentator as the one who truly grasps the text's meaning. Furthermore, he emphasizes the close relationship between the commentator and the reader. By comparing commentary to a compass, he underscored the necessity of commentaries in guiding readers toward a fuller understanding of the text.

Bakin further elaborates the meaning of commentaries in the same preface:

> Our country [Japan] has long had its own unofficial histories [novels], known as *sōshi monogatari*. Works such as *Taketori monogatari*, *Utsuho monogatari*, *Ise monogatari*, and *Genji monogatari* are what can be called the unofficial histories of old. Later generations have indulged in them without ceasing, yet they have only annotated the words without offering critiques. This shows how difficult it is to find a true friend. As for China, no matter if it is an unofficial history or a tale of the marvelous, as long as it is a great work, it will always be accompanied with commentaries. Though the commentary practice exists, it is exceedingly rare to find those who can truly illuminate an author's hidden intentions while making flawless arguments. In my view, among [the commentators who commented on works] like Luo Guanzhong's *Sanguo yanyi* and Gao Dongjia's *Pipa Ji*, it is only Mao Shengshan who truly stands out. He introduced novel ideas and unique perspectives, enlightened readers' minds and resolved their doubts. His commentaries and critiques are on point and bring great enjoyment.
>
> 皇朝素有稗史。是謂策子物語。竹採宇通保勢語源語者、所謂古之稗史也。後人玩之不措。但注解其詞、不作批評。知己之難得可知也。唐山也者、無稗史、無伝奇、于其大筆、必有批評。雖則有批評、然発明作者之隠微、而論弁無謬者、幾稀矣。以予観之、若羅貫中三国演義、高東嘉琵琶記、独有声山毛氏焉。標新領異、啓蒙解疑。評注大得趣。[20]

Here, Bakin first acknowledges that Japan also has a tradition of great novels, but he laments the absence of commentaries for these great works. In this context, the commentary practice does not merely refer to annotations or background information but rather to a deep, analytical interpretation of the text that provides "novel ideas and unique perspectives" leading to thorough

[20] Kyokutei, 145.

understanding and enlightenment. The precise nature of his desired commentary remains somewhat ambiguous, but Bakin's reference to Mao Shengshan suggests that he sees it as a vehicle for revealing moral truths associated with Neo-Confucianism.

Mao Shengshan, also known as Mao Lun 毛綸 (J. Mō Rin; fl. 17th century), along with his son Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗 (J. Mō Sōkō, fl. 17th century), completed two major commentaries: one on *Pipa ji* 琵琶記 (J. Biwa ki; Story of the Lute, fourteenth century) and another on *Sanguo*.[21] Bakin's preface borrows lines from the 1666 preface to *Pipa ji* by Fuyun kezi 浮雲客子 (J. Fukuun kyakushi). The original text goes:

> However, upon reading Shengshan's commentary, one sees his novel ideas and unique perspectives, uncovering what others have yet to reveal and explaining what others cannot. Furthermore, his words flow abundantly, encouraging righteousness for the sake of the world, evoking sorrowful thoughts that inspire filial piety and deep emotions that cultivate loyalty. At this, one cannot help but be moved, leaping with joy and exclaiming: "This is truly a work of genius!"
>
> 但観声山之評、則見其標新領異、発人所未及発、解人所不能解；又見其淋淋漓漓、為天下勧義、傷悲之思、可以作孝、悱惻之志、并可以作忠、于是皇然動容、躍然称快曰：斯誠才子之書也已！[22]

The first line is separated into two halves and used in Bakin's preface. The following lines clearly illustrate the ultimate purpose of Mao Shengshan's commentaries: to instill Confucian moral virtues such as *yi* 義 (J. *gi*, righteousness), *xiao* 孝 (J. *kō*, filial piety), and *zhong* 忠 (J. *chū*, loyalty) in readers "for the sake of the world" (*wei tianxia* 為天下). By the same logic, Bakin's definition of the commentary tradition also aligns with these moral values, reinforcing the Confucian framework for self-cultivation and world peace.

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[21] Rolston and Lin, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 146.

[22] Hou Baipeng, *Pipaji ziliao huibian* (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1989), 271.

Bakin was also familiar with the moral teaching in Zhang Zhupo's 張竹坡 (J. Chō Chikuha, 1670–1698) commentaries to *Jin Ping Mei*. In the preface to the second volume of *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, whose narrative is loosely based on *Jin Ping Mei*, Bakin references Zhang's "Piping diyiqishu Jin Ping Mei dufa 批評第一奇書金瓶梅読法 (How to read *Jin Ping Mei*—the first masterwork with commentaries, 1695)," quoting his defense of the novel's moral value:

> For this reason [that even a genius writer who has a thorough understanding of the world finds it hard to accurately describe it without deep reading in literary writing], in his "How to read *Jin Ping Mei*," Zhang Zhupo suggested that it was not *Jin Ping Mei* that injures people [readers], but people who injure themselves. He also mentioned that if one person explains the meaning of theft to another, his original intention is to warn the person. However, if the other person takes advantage of the information to acquire the art of thievery, it is not the fault of the original informant. The one who heard the explanation of theft himself decides to become a thief. These critical remarks are truly well reasoned and persuasive.
>
> かゝる故に張竹坡が、金瓶梅の読法に、金瓶梅は人をしも、是誤するものならず、人々みづからこれを誤る。夫人に賊を説くものは、原戒を示す也。然るを听く者かゝる故に張竹坡が、金瓶梅の読法に、金瓶梅は人をしも、是誤するものならず、人々みづからこれを誤る。夫人に賊を説くものは、原戒を示す也。然るを听く者これに因て、遂に賊を做すときは、これ説くものゝ過ならず、听くものみづから賊を做因て、遂に賊を做すときは、これ説くものゝ過ならず、听くものみづから賊を做すのみ、云云となんいへりける、這批語寔に説得て好し。云云となんいへりける、這批語寔に説得て好し。[23]

This paragraph clearly shows the influence of Zhang Zhupo's commentaries on Bakin and Bakin's emphasis on the moral interpretation of the text.[24] While a story can be read in many

[23] Kyokutei Bakin, *Shinpen Kinpeibai* (Tōkyō: Waseda University Library, 1831), 2:jo-1 omote.

[24] The critical remarks Bakin mentioned are from the eighty-second item in Zhang Zhupo's "How to read *Jin Ping Mei*." See Rolston and Lin, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 236–38.

ways, Bakin encourages readers to look beyond plot details and extract the underlying ethical message.

One of the key Confucian concepts Zhang Zhupo explores is filial piety. In his essay "*Kuxiao shuo*" 苦孝説 (J. *Kukō setsu*, On the bitterness of filial sentiments), one of the prefaces included in *Jin Ping Mei*, he argues that the author of *Jin Ping Mei* may have suffered the loss of his parents and that he not only wrote the novel to express his lament but also used it as a means of transforming his frustrated filial piety.[25] Furthermore, Zhang Zhupo highlights the orphaned nature of the protagonist and the artificial social relationships he creates in the narrative.[26] These false social bonds correspond to the Confucian concept of *wulun* or "five cardinal relationships." Because the bonds in *Jin Ping Mei* are inauthentic, the protagonist is doomed from the start. However, this lack also serves to reaffirm the Confucian theory of *wulun*—if one properly maintains these bonds, they will bring personal prosperity and, by extension, harmony to the entire world.

Interestingly, in Bakin's adaptation, he completely rewrites the protagonist's social bonds. Rather than portraying him as an orphan with no "real" bonds from the beginning, Bakin transforms the protagonist and three other main characters into siblings. On the surface, this change appears to uphold the value of *wulun* and emphasize the connection between self-cultivation and household harmony, as discussed in the *Daxue*. However, Bakin's approach is actually more radical, as it suggests that even "real" familial bonds are not necessarily beneficial

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[25] Maram Epstein, "*Plum* and Filial Piety," in *Approaches to Teaching Plum in the Golden Vase* (*The Golden Lotus*), ed. Andrew Schonebaum (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2022), 207–8.

[26] Rolston and Lin, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 239–40.

to self-cultivation.[27] Rather, in some cases, these bonds can backfire, pushing individuals into despair, a theme I will carefully explore in Chapter IV. Despite taking a different approach from the author(s) of *Jin Ping Mei*, Bakin's rewriting of the story demonstrates his deep engagement with Zhang Zhupo's Confucian moral interpretations of the text.

In short, a close reading of Bakin's prefaces to both *Kyōkakuden* and *Shinpen Kinpeibai* confirms his familiarity with and influence from Chinese commentary culture. Inspired by these Confucian morality-based commentaries, Bakin, in constructing his own narratives, also articulates his perspective on the connection between individual self-cultivation and broader societal harmony. This is why I have chosen *Daxue* as a framework to examine both how Bakin constructs his narratives and how he reinterprets certain Confucian virtues.

BAKIN'S FRIENDS AND THEIR COMMENTARIES

Tonomura Jōsai 殿村篠斎 (1779–1847), Ozu Keisō 小津桂窓 (1804–1858), Kimura Mokurō 木村默老 (1774–1856), and Ishikawa Jōsui 石川畳翠 (1807–1841) were four of Bakin's trusted readers who frequently exchanged ideas with him about his fiction. The first three were often referred to as the *Bakin sanyū* 馬琴三友 (Bakin's "three friends"), and when Jōsui joined them in later 1830s, they became known collectively as the *Bakin shiyū* 馬琴四友 (Bakin's "four friends"). These individuals were not only devoted readers of Bakin's novels but also active commentators.

[27] Andrew Plaks also raises the possibility to discuss the *Jin Ping Mei* text through the lens of the *Daxue*. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel = Ssu Ta Ch'i-Shu*, 256–61.

All four wrote commentaries on *Kyōkakuden*, and the first three also left commentaries on *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. In addition to exploring narrative details, identifying sources for specific episodes, and analyzing writing techniques, a major focus of their commentaries was the moral evaluation of characters according to Confucian principles. For example, Keisō noted that an ideal *kyōkaku* character in *Kyōkakuden* embodies the Confucian "five eternal verities" (*gojō* 五常): *jin* 仁 (benevolence), *gi* 義 (righteousness), *rei* 礼 (propriety), *chi* 智 (wisdom), *shin* 信 (fidelity).[28] Similarly, Jōsai's commentaries on *Shinpen Kinpeibai* examine whether a *dokufu* character's revenge for her parents can be considered an act of filial piety or not. He concludes that although her revenge lacks moral authenticity, the more important issue explored in her episode is the collapse of a harmonious household.[29]

These commentaries reflect the Chinese commentary tradition, particularly their use of Confucian moral standards to assess literary characters. However, a key distinction lies in the fact that these commentators were Bakin's close associates; their commentaries were read and evaluated by Bakin himself, and in turn, they influenced Bakin's writing process. The formation of such an interpretive community sheds light on Bakin's writing strategies and the pervasive role of Confucianism for both the author and his readers.

In the main chapters of this dissertation, I frequently cite these commentaries and Bakin's responses to support my analysis. I also draw on the letters Bakin exchanged with his friends, the

[28] Ozu Keisō, and Tonomura Jōsui, *Kyōkakuden KeiShō hyō* (Tōkyō: Waseda University Library, 1833), image 12.

[29] Tonomura Jōsai, "*Shinpen Kinpeibai* goshū no guhyō," in *Kinpeibai goshū jōmokukei sanpyō* (Tōkyō: Waseda University Library, 1838), 1 ura-2 omote.

prefaces Bakin wrote to guide his readers, the publisher's notes, and commentaries by other writers as additional evidence to explore Bakin's engagement of Confucianism in his fiction.

1.4 Overview of Existing Scholarship on Kyokutei Bakin's Fictional Narratives

NEO-CONFUCIANISM AND EDO-PERIOD POPULAR LITERATURE

Four key works of scholarship have inspired my research on the use of Neo-Confucianism in Edo popular literature: Glynne Walley's discussion of Bakin and his *Hakkenden*, Richard Bowring's exploration of Edo Neo-Confucianism, Asō Isoji's 麻生磯次 (1896–1979) examination of Edo literature and Chinese literature, and Tokuda Takeshi's 徳田武 analysis of how Chinese literature inspired Bakin to form his writing style and subtle political critique. Although these scholars take markedly different approaches, they all share the perspective that Chinese philosophy and literature played a crucial role in shaping Edo popular literature. However, while the connection between Chinese philosophy and Edo popular literature is frequently mentioned, discussions of it are often overshadowed by attention to the Chinese vernacular novel genre and the vernacular Chinese language used in this genre. My research aims to address this gap and deepen our understanding of Edo popular fiction.

Glynne Walley, in *Good Dogs*: *Edification, Entertainment & Kyokutei Bakin's Nansō Satomi hakkenden* (2017), highlights Bakin's balanced approach to education and entertainment. Bakin's stories often adhere to the principle of *kanzen chōaku* 勧善懲悪 (praising good and chastising evil), which, as many Confucian scholars argue, shows the didactic potential of nonhistorical, non-philosophical prose works.[30] While some modern scholars consider *kanzen*

[30] Glynne Walley, *Good Dogs: Edification, Entertainment, and Kyokutei Bakin's Nansō Satomi Hakkenden* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Program, 2017), 160–62.

chōaku an aesthetic or structural device, Walley argues that structure and content are two inseparable sides of the same coin for Bakin, and Bakin's serious exploration of didacticism actually invites readers to reconsider and reevaluate the meaning of *kanzen chōaku* that they used to take for granted. However, Walley does not go beyond *kanzen chōaku* to explore other Neo-Confucian aspects of Bakin's works. Therefore, I aim to expand on Walley's argument by examining Bakin's critical and creative use of other key Neo-Confucian concepts and evaluating how these concepts reflected and challenged the social reality in Bakin's time.

Richard Bowring's *In Search of the Way: Thought and Religion in Early-Modern Japan, 1582–1860* (2016) meticulously traces the development of Neo-Confucianism in Edo Japan. Beginning with Confucian thought in the Song and Ming Dynasties, Bowring then summarizes the thoughts of major Edo-period Confucian scholars. He also briefly discusses the connection between Confucian scholars and popular literature. For example, he argues that the renowned Confucian scholar Itō Jinsai's discussion of human nature contributed to the emergence of the Genroku culture, and his understanding of emotion influenced popular writers and poets like Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴 (1642–1693), Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門 (1653–1724), and Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1644–1694).[31] Bowring also examines the influence of the orthodox-ization of Neo-Confucianism by Matsudaira Sadanobu and the *igaku no kin* in the 1790s.[32] However, his book primarily focuses on intellectual history, and his discussion of popular fiction serves mainly as supporting evidence for his broader philosophical arguments. I

[31] Bowring, *In Search of the Way*, 135–36.

[32] Bowring, 241.

seek to restore agency to popular fiction, treating it not merely as a reflection of intellectual trends but as a body of texts with its own philosophical engagement.

Among Japanese scholarship, one of the fundamental studies of Edo literature and its relationship with Chinese literature is Asō Isoji's *Edo bungaku to Shina bungaku* 江戸文学と支那文学 (Edo Literature and Chinese Literature, 1946).[33] Asō explores the influence of Chinese fiction on Edo literature, and he discusses Bakin in considerable detail. In chapter three, "Bakin no yomihon ni oyobaseru chūgoku bungaku no eikyō 馬琴の讀本に及せる中国文学の影響 (The influence of Chinese literature in Bakin's *yomihon*)," in Volume I, he catalogs Bakin's Chinese sources and examines how Bakin adapts their plots, characterizations, themes, topics, narrative structures, and language. However, this chapter focuses primarily on the influence of Chinese fiction rather than Chinese philosophy. In Chapter Two, "Yomihon no jinsei kaishaku 讀本の人生解釋 (The explanation of life in *yomihon*)," in volume II, Asō discusses the use of Buddhist concepts like *inga* 因果 (karmic retribution) in *yomihon*, but he does not explore the application of Confucian concepts.

Another scholar who has significantly influenced my research is Tokuda Takeshi. In his *Ninhon kinsei shōsetu to chūgoku shōsetsu* 日本近世小説と中国小説 (Japanese early modern novels and Chinese novels, 1987), he traces the history of *yomihon* from its origins to its impact on modern literature. Chapter Three, "Chōhen yomihon no seiritsu to tenkai 長編読本の成立と展開 (The establishment and development of long-form *yomihon*)," primarily examines the

[33] Asō, *Edo bungaku to Shina bungaku* (Tōkyō: Sanseidō, 1946), 144–74. Asō's book was later retitled *Edo bungaku to Chūgoku bungaku* in 1972.

relationship between Bakin's *yomihon* and Chinese literature. In addition to the comparison between plots, characters, narrative structure, and writing style, Tokuda argues that Bakin's writing contains subtle political criticism of the Tokugawa government. He traces this approach back to Sima Qian's satirical writing style, mean "to give vent to deep indignation" (c. *fafen*, j. *happun* 発憤) in *Shiji*.[34] Furthermore, in "Bakin no haishi shichi hōsoku to Mō Seisan no 'Doku Sangokushi hō*'* 馬琴の稗史七法則と毛声山の「読三国志法」(Bakin's seven rules of writing novels and Mao Shengshan's 'How to read *Sanguo*,' 1980)," he affirms the influence of the Chinese commentary tradition on Bakin's novel writing. He also highlights that the Confucian discussion of legitimacy in the Maos' commentary on *Sanguo* contributed to the development of *inbi* 隠微 (hidden intent), one of the seven rules Bakin established for novel writing.[35]

CHINESE COMMENTARY CULTURE AND THE DAXUE AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hamada Keisuke's 濱田啓介 *Kinsei shōsetsu eii to yōshiki ni kansuru shiken* 近世小説・営為と様式に関する私見 (Views on the early modern novel: agency and form, 1993) explores Bakin's interest in Chinese commentary culture. Hamada argues that novel criticism during the Edo period is rooted in Chinese commentary traditions and that Bakin should be considered the first Japanese commentator who evaluated the literary value of fiction.[36] Unlike the earlier theater criticism, which was limited to lexical notes and comments on plot

[34] Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel = Ssu Ta Ch'i-Shu*, 358.

[35] Tokuda Takeshi, "Bakin no haishi shichi hōsoku to Mōseisan no 'Doku *Sangokushi* hō': *Kyōkakuden* ni sokushite 'inbi' o ronzu (jō)," *Bungaku* 48 (June 1980): 21–24.

[36] Hamada Keisuke, "Kinsei ni okeru shōsetsu hyōron to Bakin no *Hankan sōdan*," in *Kinsei shōsetsu, eii to yōshiki ni kansuru shiken* (Kyōto: Kyōto Daigaku Gakujutsu Shuppankai, 1993), 333,353.

development, Bakin's commentary aims to reveal the ideology embedded in the novel and theorize the novel's structural features.[37]

David Rolston's *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary* (1990) examines the history of fiction commentary in China and highlights the increasingly significant role of Neo-Confucianism in the development of this practice. For example, during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), there was a tendency to take fiction seriously and apply the methods of classical commentaries to popular fiction.[38] Furthermore, Rolston notes that both the Maos and Zhang Zhupo placed heavy emphasis on the moral correctness of their texts.

Andrew Plaks, in *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel Ssu ta ch'i-shu* (1987), underscores the significance of commentary culture and the value of using the Neo-Confucian concept of self-cultivation from the *Daxue* to analyze the canonical Chinese novels .[39] Considering that Bakin was a devoted reader of the four masterworks and familiar with their commentaries, examining Bakin's novels through the lens of the *Daxue* can provide deeper insight into his engagement with Confucian morality.

I also find Plaks' discussion of "irony" as a fundamental narrative strategy in the four masterworks insightful. Although the nuances of irony differ across the texts he analyzes, he argues that "all four of the works share a rhetorical ground based on the undercutting of surface texture, with the implied redirection of the reader's vision toward some unarticulated exploration

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[37] Hamada, 355.

[38] Rolston and Lin, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 8–10.

[39] Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel = Ssu Ta Ch'i-Shu*, 503–4.

of positive values."[40] I believe that Bakin's *Kyōkakuden* and *Shinpen Kinpeibai* also employ similar satiric tones as shown in his highlighting of the compositional principle of *inbi*. Bakin explores multiple possible interpretations of the cardinal Confucian virtues to expose the artificial nature of the Confucian hierarchy and the irreconcilable relationship between personal desire and social obligation.

Maram Epstein offers a gender studies approach to analyzing self-cultivation, exposing tensions within the expected roles for women. The *Nü xiaojing* 女孝経 (J. *Onna kōkyō*, Classic of filial piety for women) identifies two key bonds for women—the parent-child relationship and the husband-wife relationship and promotes the idea that brides should shift their allegiance to their new conjugal family.[41] It was also commonly believed that *yin* and *yang* essences constitute the Way, with a husband and a wife representing a microcosm of this principle. In other words, because Confucian morality requires women to be obedient to both their parents and husbands, women's struggles within the household could serve as a reflection of broader social conflicts. Epstein also notes that by the late Ming, stories increasingly centered on women's choices rather than men's dilemmas between passion and duty.[42] This narrative strategy—using female characters' struggles to reflect collective anxieties about an increasingly unstable society—can also be observed in Bakin's *Kyōkakuden* and *Shinpen Kinpeibai*.

Building upon these previous works of scholarship, this dissertation aims to establish the connection between Neo-Confucianism and Bakin's fictional works. While Neo-Confucianism

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[40] Plaks, 499.

[41] Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 37.

[42] Epstein, 90–93.

provides a theoretical framework for Bakin to explore issues of political stability and morality in his fiction, he simultaneously reinterprets Neo-Confucianism to expose its oppressive dimensions and to restore a voice to the marginalized. In Chapter II, I will explore how Bakin reconstructs the concept of *seitō* to critique the failure of both the imperial family and the shogunate in fulfilling their duties as rulers.

CHAPTER II

VIRTUE VS. POWER: NARRATING *SEITŌ* (LEGITIMACY) IN *KYŌKAKUDEN*

> "If one believed everything in the *Book of History*, it would have been better for the *Book* not to have existed at all."
>
> –"Book VII · Part B" in *Mengzi*.[1]

Kyokutei Bakin is renowned for his historical novels. These narratives are typically set in the distant past, with the main characters often hailing from powerful samurai clans. After enduring various hardships and overcoming many villains, the protagonists ultimately restore the house of their samurai lord, bringing peace and prosperity to the land.[2] While these novels primarily focus on the protagonists' personal struggles and growth, the narratives frequently touch on larger political topics and historical events. A core theme explored in these novels is *seitō*, commonly translated as "orthodoxy" or "legitimacy." While this concept shapes many of Bakin's stories, it is typically confined to the level of local samurai lords, leaving the ultimate ruler of Japan untouched—perhaps due to the censorship of his time. *Kyōkakuden*, which directly engages with the legitimacy of both the imperial house and the shogunate, thus stands out.

I argue that *Kyōkakuden* presents nuanced and diverse perspectives on *seitō* through the voices of various characters, challenging single-voiced official historical records that convey clear political messages. *Kyōkakuden* thereby encourages readers to engage in critical reflection

[1] Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 2003), Book VII · Part B, paragraph 3. 尽信『書』、則不如無『書』。

[2] A good example is Bakin's most famous fiction *Hakkenden*, which tells the adventures of eight dog warriors and eventually go to Awa to serve the Satomi clan there. See Walley, *Good Dogs*, 375.

and independent thought. Furthermore, the ironic use of marginal characters to deliver seemingly serious speeches on *seitō* exposes the hypocritical nature of Confucianism in an entertaining way and suggests the possibility of reinterpreting Confucianism to challenge the social hierarchy it promotes. The discussion of *seitō* in this chapter reveals Bakin's pessimistic view on the possibility of restoring worldly order, and this worldview lays the foundation for a deeper exploration of Confucian virtues such as loyalty, righteousness, filial piety, and chastity in the two chapters that follow.

I will begin by introducing the text, its genre and style, and influences on it. Then, I will explore the meaning of *seitō* and examine how Arai Hakuseki applied it to Japanese history—a reading that Bakin adopts as a major reference. Following this, I will analyze perspectives on the Ashikaga shogunate from multiple angles, and finally, I will highlight the irony embedded in the opinions of a Daoist immortal and a Buddhist monk to further illustrate how the Confucian concept of *seitō* is challenged and reversed within the text.

2.1 Introduction

The story of *Kyōkakuden* is set temporally in the aftermath of the Nanboku-chō 南北朝 period (Southern and Northern Courts period, 1336–1392). Historically, this period saw the coexistence of two imperial courts, namely the Northern Court (the Jimyōin 持明院 line) backed by the Ashikaga shogunate, and the rival Southern Court governed directly by the emperors of the Daikakuji 大覚寺 line. After decades of conflict, the Southern Court at length capitulated to the Northern Court in 1392. *Kyōkakuden* follows the descendants of families that supported the erstwhile Southern Court, who, prior to fighting the shogunate in defense of the Daikakuji line, must navigate a path of endurance and conceal their identities. But the fate of these protagonists

was left hanging after Bakin stopped writing partway through the story. Despite the anticipation for a sequel, *Kyōkakuden* remained unfinished, leaving Bakin's intended conclusion unknown.[3] Nevertheless, its incomplete status did not impede its popularity, which proved enduring both in Bakin's own era and long after his death.

The initial four volumes of *Kyōkakuden*, written by Bakin himself, were serialized from 1832 to 1835. It was a collaborative project between the lead publisher Kawachiya Mohei 河内屋茂兵衛 in Osaka and the supporting publisher Chōjiya Heibei 丁字屋平兵衛 in Edo, and different illustrators were used for each installment.[4] The suspension of the project was the result of several factors. Correspondence from Bakin to the publishers indicates that he was displeased by Kawachiya's unjust accusations that he was delaying the whole publishing process.[5] Moreover, the failing health of Bakin's son, Sōhaku 宗伯, in 1833 and his subsequent death in 1834 deeply disheartened Bakin, further dissuading him from continuing the project.[6] Yet even as Bakin himself ceased working on the project, its popularity continued. One year after Bakin's demise in 1848, a fifth volume written by Hagiwara Hiromichi 萩原広道 (1815–1863) was published.

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[3] Tokuda Takeshi, "Gonanchō hiwa: Teishō, Bakin, Shōyō," *Meiji Daigaku Kyoyō Ronshū* 146 (February 28, 1981): 53.

[4] The first installment was illustrated by Keisai Eisen 渓斎英泉 (1791–1848); the second was illustrated by Yanagawa Shigenobu 柳川重信 I (1787–1832); Utagawa Kunisada 歌川国貞 (1786–1865) was responsible for the third installment; and Yanagawa Shigenobu 柳川重信 II (n.d.) illustrated the fourth. See Hattori Hitoshi, "*Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden* no kuchie, sashie," in *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), 795.

[5] Kyokutei Bakin, *Bakin shokan shūsei*, ed. Shibata Mitsuhiko and Kanda Masayuki (Tōkyō: Yagi Shoten, 2003), 4:34. The suspension of this project is further examined in Chapter V.

[6] Kyokutei Bakin, *Bakin shokan shūsei*, 3:118–119.

Kyōkakuden belongs to the genre *yomihon*, a type of book whose narrative is told primarily via its written text, which distinguishes it from the picture-centered *kusazōshi* 草双紙 ("grass booklets") genre. In *Kinsei mononohon Edo sakusha burui* 近世物之本江戸作者部類 (The modern storybook: Edo authors classified, 1834), Bakin points out two features of *yomihon* when he describes Takebe Ayatari 建部綾足 (1719–1774), which are their status as "petty history (*haishi* 稗史)" and their Chinese influence.[7] In other words, *yomihon*, at least in Bakin's view, refers to *haishi*, or historical stories about the common people, which parallel and supplement the traditional official history.[8] Furthermore, Bakin reveals the importance of the Chinese vernacular novel that provides the framework of how to construct such "petty histories." Asō Isoji, one of the earliest scholars to analyze *Kyōkakuden*, explores the substantial influence of Chinese vernacular novels on Bakin.[9]

[7] Bakin argued that Ayatari should be considered the first *yomihon* writer in Edo, as most novels before Ayatari's time consisted of anecdotes about the floating world and licentious stories from the pleasure quarters. Ayatari's *Honchō Suikoden* 本朝水滸伝 (*Water Margin* in Japan, 1773) was the first work that adapted the Chinese *haishi* novel *Shuihu zhuan*, making it the first *kokuji haishi* 国字稗史 ("petty history" in Japanese). See Kyokutei, *Kinsei mononohon Edo sakusha burui*, ed. Tokuda Takeshi (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2014), 150. Bakin also explained why he placed Ayatari before the more famous writer Hiraga Gennai 平賀源内 (1729–1780). Although Bakin acknowledged Gennai's greater talent, he noted that Gennai rarely adapted Chinese *haishi*. Therefore, by the standards of the *yomihon* genre, Ayatari should be ranked before him. Kyokutei, *Kinsei mononohon Edo sakusha burui*, 157–158.

[8] Walley, *Good Dogs*, 64.

[9] Asō, *Edo bungaku to Shina bungaku*, 144–74. Asō's book was later retitled *Edo bungaku to Chūgoku bungaku* in 1972. Asō points out that Bakin utilized a variety of Chinese vernacular novels as sources when composing *Kyōkakuden*. These include *Nüxian waishi* 女仙外史 (J. *Jōsen gaishi*; Unofficial history of the female transcendent, 1704), *Pingyaozhuan* 平妖伝 (J. *Heiyōden*; The three Sui quash the demons' revolt, the late sixteenth century), Haoqiuzhuan 好逑伝 (J. *Kōkyūden*; The fortunate union, the seventeenth century), *Kuaixinbain chuanqi* 快心編伝奇 (J. *Kaishinhen denki*; Tales to delight the heart, the seventeenth to eighteenth century), *Chuke Pai'an Jingqi* 初刻拍案驚奇 (J. *Shokoku haku'an kyōki*, Slapping the table in amazement, the seventeenth century), *Shuihuzhuan*.

Kyōkakuden is a great example to illustrate Bakin's view on the relationship between official historical records and petty history and his utilization of Chinese literary theories of the vernacular novel in constructing his own stories. When writing *Kyōkakuden*, Bakin collected and read many historical records, among which Arai Hakuseki's *Tokushi yoron* 読史世論 (Lessons from history, 1712) became the key source for the discussion of *seitō* in *Kyōkakuden*.[10] However, unlike Hakuseki, whose political position is clearly reflected in *Tokushi yoron*, Bakin's *Kyōkakuden* contains competing and even contradictory opinions on rulership from the perspectives of various groups of people, which might be influenced by Mao Lun and Mao Zonggang's "Du Sanguozhi fa" 読三国志法 (J. *Doku* Sangokushi *hō*, How to read *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*).

As explored in my Introduction chapter, Bakin expresses deep admiration for the Maos' scholarly acumen, particularly praising the Mao commentaries on *Sanguo* and *Pipa ji* in the preface of the second volume of *Kyōkakuden*. Tokuda Takeshi suggests that *Kyōkakuden*'s *inbi* is derived from the first tenet in "Du *Sanguozhi* fa," which delineates the concepts of *seitō* (this concept means "states that rule by legitimate succession" here), *jun'un* 閏運 (Ch. *runyun*, states that rule during an intercalary period), and *senkoku* 僭国 (Ch. *jianguo*, those that rule illegitimately).[11] As the Maos suggest, the "petty history" supplemented and corrected the deficiencies of the official history. In the same way, I argue that *Kyōkakuden* also challenges

[10] Arai Hakuseki, *Lessons from History: The Tokushi Yoron*, trans. Joyce Ackroyd (St. Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 1982), xvii. 1712 is the year when Hakuseki wrote the original lectures for shogun Tokugawa Ienobu. The completion of this work is more likely to be 1723 or 1724.

[11] Tokuda, "Bakin no haishi shichi hōsoku to Mō Seisan no 'Doku Sangokushi hō': 'Kyōkakuden' ni sokushite 'inbi' o ronzu (jo)," *Bungaku* 48 (June 1980): 21–22; Rolston and Lin, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 152–53.

the official understanding of *seitō* represented by Hakuseki and provides alternative interpretations from multiple perspectives.

2.2 The Definition of *Seitō*

In order to fully understand the significance of *seitō* in *Kyōkakuden*, it is necessary to introduce the meaning of this term and explain the historical background that the narrative is set in before diving into the text. The first Chinese character of *seitō*, *sei* 正, is a pivotal character employed in discussions of legitimacy. As a noun, it denotes the correct or right form of existence, while as a verb, it signifies the act of rectification or the restoration of something to its proper state. In this sense, *seitō* refers to a legitimate political status often granted by bloodline or law. For instance, the term *seijun* 正閏 (legitimate and illegitimate) is often used by Bakin to explore the question of who has the legal right to rule. In addition, *sei* also possesses a moral dimension, as evidenced in terms like *seigi* 正義 (justice or righteousness) and *seija* 正邪 (good and evil). From this perspective, a ruler who fails to cultivate his moral virtues risks losing his right to rule.

The two dimensions of *seitō*—political legitimacy and moral cultivation—give rise to four possible forms, as shown in Figure 3. The first category, "rightful and moral," represents an ideal ruler, while the fourth, "illegitimate and immoral," depicts a failed ruler. The second and third categories occupy ambiguous space, opening the door for debate. For instance, if a politically legitimate ruler lacks moral virtues, he may become a tyrant and thereby lose his *seitō*. Conversely, if someone overthrows the previous regime with violence but governs with benevolence and compassion, he might then be considered *seitō*. This ambiguity is particularly relevant to the history of the Nanboku-chō period, where the narrative of *Kyōkakuden* is set in.

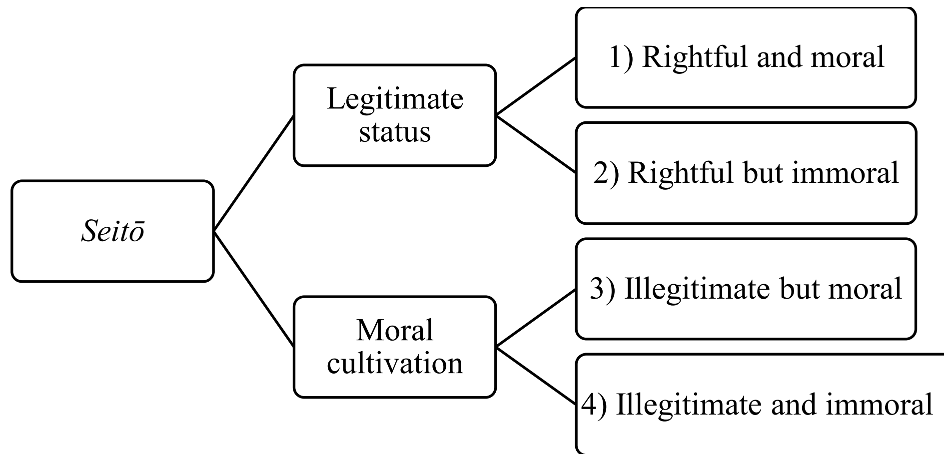

Figure 3. Four forms of *seitō*.

The Nanboku-chō period is characterized by the coexistence of two imperial courts: the Northern Court aligned with the Ashikaga shogunate, and the Southern Court governed directly by the Daikakuji line emperors. In the early fourteenth century, the Kamakura shogunate began a system of alternate succession between the Jimyōin and Daikakuji lines in order to prevent the imperial house from consolidating political power and posing a potential threat to the shogunate's rule. This arrangement also fostered serious conflict between the two lines, whose deepening hostility eventually broke out during Emperor Go-Daigo's 後醍醐 (1288–1339) reign.

With the support of powerful warlords, Go-Daigo succeeded in overthrowing the Kamakura shogunate in 1333, initiating the short-lived Kenmu Restoration to bring the Imperial House back into power. In 1336, Ashikaga Takauji 足利尊氏 (1305–1358), a former ally of Go-Daigo, turned against him and installed Kōgon 光厳 (1313–1364) from the Jimyōin line as the new Northern Emperor. Go-Daigo fled to Yoshino, where he established the Southern Court. The dual-court system persisted approximately fifty years, ultimately concluding in 1392 when the Southern Court capitulated to the Northern Court.

The debate over *seitō* during the Nanboku-chō period centers on three key parties—the Southern Emperor, the Northern Emperor, and the Ashikaga Shogun. Both the Southern and Northern Emperors descended from the same imperial bloodline, granting each a claim to legitimacy in terms of lineage. However, their circumstances differed: the Southern Court, directly ruled by the imperial house represented by Go-Daigo, viewed Ashikaga Takauji as a retainer and traitor. In contrast, the Northen Court was controlled by Ashikaga Takauji, who used the Northern Emperor as a puppet. (See Figure 4.)

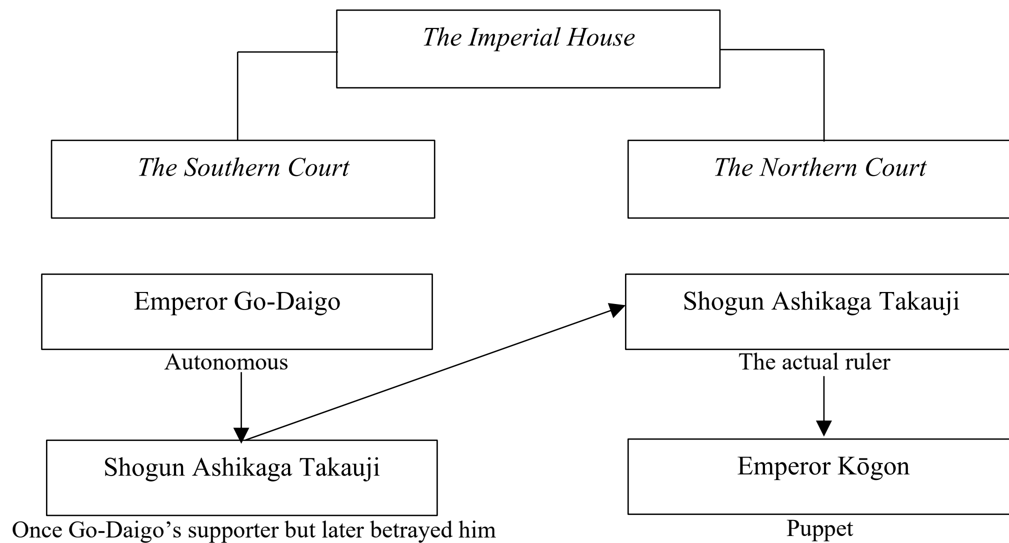

Figure 4. The power structure of the Nanboku-chō.

This dual-court system complicates the interpretation of "legitimacy" in *seitō*. If both courts stem from the same bloodline, which can be considered the more "legitimate"? Could the shogunate itself also be considered "legitimate"? Regarding "morality," can the ultimate fall of the Southern Court be attributed to a lack of virtue among its emperors? Conversely, does this imply that the Ashikaga shoguns are virtuous rulers? Following the unification of the two courts, who should be regarded as the true ruler of Japan—the Ashikaga shogun or the (Northern) emperor?

As shown above, the Nanboku-chō period offers a compelling context for exploring the concept of *seitō*. Set in this particular time, one of the key themes *Kyōkakuden* examines is the interpretation of rulership. However, before delving into the diverse discussions on *seitō* in *Kyōkakuden*, it is essential to first understand how official history defines this concept. In the next section, I will focus on *Tokushi yoron*, one major historical reference Bakin used, to explore how the influential Confucian scholar Hakuseki evaluates the Southern and Northern Courts as well as the Ashikaga shogunate.

2.3 Hakuseki's Confucian Reading of *Seitō* in *Tokushi Yoron*

As one of the most significant references for *Kyōkakuden*, the renowned Confucian scholar Arai Hakuseki's discussion of *seitō* in *Tokushi yoron* warrants careful analysis — particularly his interpretation of the decline of the imperial house and the ascendancy of the military houses, exemplified by Emperor Go-Daigo's failed restoration and Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu's 足利義満 (1358–1408) successful unification of the Southern and Northern Courts. Although Hakuseki endorsed the legitimacy of the imperial bloodline, he nevertheless critiqued Emperor Go-Daigo for his shortcomings as a proper ruler. Although Bakin appropriated many of Hakuseki's arguments, it is important to note that *Tokushi yoron* was originally composed as lecture notes for shogun Tokugawa Ienobu 徳川家宣 (1662–1712), thus naturally reflecting a pro-shogunate bias and Hakuseki's own aspirations for political reform—an agenda that Bakin, as a popular writer and political outsider, did not necessarily share.

Ōtaka Yōji, one of the editors of the modern edition of *Kyōkakuden* in 1998, firmly believes that among the plethora of reference materials utilized by Bakin, *Tokushi yoron* emerges as paramount, with Bakin seemingly incorporating Hakuseki's texts into his narrative with a

sense of ownership.[12] A close examination of Chapter Twenty-Two, a key chapter exploring the notion of *seitō*, also proves Bakin's extensive reliance on the writings of *Tokushi yoron*.[13] Thus, it can be argued with confidence that Hakuseki's *Tokushi yoron* furnishes Bakin with the conceptual framework necessary to delve into the discourse surrounding *seitō* in the Nanboku-chō period.

Tokushi yoron provides a nuanced political schema that theoretically accommodates both the imperial house and shogunate. Drawing inspiration from various Confucian theories, Hakuseki elucidates two particularly noteworthy concepts— *tenmei* 天命 (Ch. tianming, Mandate of Heaven) and *seimei* 正名 (Ch. zhengming, rectification of names). Firstly, *tenmei*— refers to the divine or cosmic authority granted by Heaven to a ruler. It serves as a foundational principle for understanding political legitimacy.[14] On the one hand, Heaven is often considered as an abstract divine force or the embodiment of the historical process itself;[15] on the other hand, its mandate also emphasizes the importance of *toku* 徳 (Ch. *de*, Confucian virtue) and self-cultivation. Essentially, while the Mandate of Heaven elucidates the abstract legitimacy of a

[12] Ōtaka Yōji, "*Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden* no kokkaku," in *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), 833.

[13] Tokuda Takeshi argues that this chapter is one of the most important chapters of *Kyōkakuden* as the notion of *seitō* is meticulously expounded in it. See Tokuda, "Gonanchō hiwa: Teishō, Bakin, Shōyō," 54.

[14] Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 292, 314, 750, 778. The earliest reference to the notion of Heaven's mandate is the Chinese classic *Shangshu* (Book of Document), which legitimates the kingship of Zhou. In the early stage, this notion was still largely related to supernatural power such as turtle-shell divination. When it came to the time of Confucius and Mencius, the connection between Mandate of Heaven and virtue was established, and the ruler's self-cultivation became one important factor for the heaven to judge his legitimacy.

[15] Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel = Ssu Ta Ch'i-Shu*, 491.

ruling family or dynasty, it equally underscores the moral imperative for rulers to embody virtue, lest they forfeit Heaven's favor.[16]

Tokushi yoron discusses Japanese history in terms of two overlapping long-term trends. The first trend, which is called *kyūhen* 九変 (literally "nine changes") indicating the history approximately from ancient times until 1392, describes the decline of the imperial house and the court nobles, and the second trend of *gohen* 五変 (five changes), from 939 until Hakuseki's time, explores the rise of military power. The rise and fall of the imperial house, court nobles, and military houses correspond to the Mandate of Heaven theory. The weak imperial house gradually loses its mandate while the strong shogunate eventually becomes the actual ruler of Japan. However, unlike his Chinese counterparts who often use this theory to justify the overthrow of dynasties, Hakuseki does not challenge the fundamental premise of the imperial house's unbroken line of sovereigns. Rather, it justifies this premise by arguing that both the imperial house and the three shogunates are descended from the same imperial bloodline.[17]

The Nanboku-chō period is a special era which is covered in both the first and the second phases in *Tokushi yoron*. It not only marks the end of imperial rule but also disrupts the rise of military houses. Hakuseki's discussion on Emperor Go-Daigo, who succeeded in restoring the imperial rule temporarily and established the Southern Court, reflects the Mandate of Heaven theory's emphasis on morality.

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[16] David Magarey Earl, *Emperor and Nation in Japan: Political Thinkers of the Tokugawa Period* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 7–8.

[17] Arai, *Lessons from History*, xxiii.

Hakuseki's evaluation of Go-Daigo is quite negative, and he suggests that Go-Daigo's failure marks the end of the age of the imperial house. One of Hakuseki's comments goes:

> In my opinion, although Go-Daigo was wanting in virtue, since his reign coincided with the time when the Hōjō were destined to be overthrown, for a short time he brought about a restoration of the imperial power [Kenmu Restoration]. However, soon the empire was again thrown into confusion, and finally he fled to Yoshino.
>
> 按ずるに、後醍醐不徳にておはしけれども、北條が代の亡ぶべき時にあはせ給ひしかば、しばしが程は中興の業を起させ給ひしかど、やがて又天下みだれて、ついに南山にのがれ給ひき。[18]

Hakuseki also lists some other mistakes Go-Daigo made. For example, Go-Daigo failed to reward the court nobles and the military lords impartially after the Kenmu restoration.[19] He concludes that the fall of the Southern Court was caused by Go-Daigo's lack of virtue, and even Heaven did not side with him.[20]

Secondly, the concept of *seimei*—meaning the alignment of one's ideal standard with reality—is employed by Hakuseki to assess the legitimacy of the Ashikaga shogunate. As *The Analects* goes, "Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject be a subject, a father be a father, a son be a son 君君臣臣父父子子."[21] This popular line is commonly revered as one of Confucius's fundamental doctrines and the term *seimei* was used by Confucius himself in section13.3 in *The Analects*.[22] This theory posits that alignment between one's social role and conduct engenders societal harmony.

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[18] Arai Hakuseki, "Tokushi yoron," in *Yūhōdō bunko* No. 21, ed. Tsukamoto Tetsuzō (Tōkyō: Yūhōdō Shoten, 1913), 271. I used Ackroyd Joyce's translation as reference for this paragraph. See Arai, *Lessons from History*, 106.

[19] Arai, "Tokushi yoron," 365–69.

[20] Arai, 272.

[21] Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. by Annping Chin (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 12.11.

[22] Loewe and Shaughnessy, *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, 757–58. Not only does Hakuseki extensively

Hakuseki leverages this doctrine to critique the governance of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the third Ashikaga shogun, highlighting the incongruity between his title and his actual governance. He writes:

> Confucius said, "If names are not rectified, what is said will not seem reasonable. When what is said does not seem reasonable, nothing will get accomplished." Confucius also said, "when a gentleman names something, the name can surely hold up in speech. When he says something, his words can surely be carried out in action. When a gentleman speaks, there is nothing casual or careless about what he says." The so-called Chancellor of the Realm is an official title, and the person with this title should serve the ruler. A title must have its duties. It is what is meant by "when a gentleman names something, the name can surely hold up in speech; when he says something, his words can surely be carried out in action."
>
> 孔子曰、名不(れば)レ正則(から)言不レ順(は)、言不レ順(は)則事不レ成(ら)と。又名(ること)レ之(を)必可(くす)レ言也。言(ふこと)レ之(を)必可(くす)レ行也。君子於(て)二其言(に)一無レ所レ苟(するも)而已矣、と見ゆ。夫所レ謂大臣とは人臣にして君に仕(つか)ふの官なり。その官ある時は必その職掌(しよくしやう)あり。是を名レ之(を)可レ言(ふ)言レ之(を)可レ行(ふ)とは申すなり。[23]

Here, Hakuseki clearly critiques Yoshimitsu's failure to rectify his rank titles. Hakuseki lists three titles Yoshimitsu received—the rank of Chancellor of the Realm (*Dajō-daijin* 太政大臣), the title of King of Japan (*Nihon kokuō* 日本国王), and Retired Emperor (*Dajōkō* 太上皇), and then he points out the inconsistency among these titles.[24] Yoshimitsu's grandfather, Ashikaga Takauji 足利尊氏 (1305–1358), set up the puppet emperor of the Northern Court. Although the Northern and Southern Courts were reunified during Yoshimitsu's reign, the emperor did not regain any political or military power. Yoshimitsu was the actual ruler of Japan.

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cite this notion, but Bakin also uses this line frequently in his works.

[23] Arai, "Tokushi yoron," 413; Confucius, *The Analects*, 13.3. If not noted otherwise, texts cited from *Lessons from History* are translated by me. As for Hakuseki's citation of *The Analects*, I used Annping Chin's translation.

[24] Arai, "Tokushi yoron," 412–13; as for how Yoshimitsu received the title of King of Japan and Retired Emperor, see Mori Shigeaki, *Nanboku-chō no dōran* (Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2007), 220-221,224-226.

According to Hakuseki, because Yoshimitsu had received the rank of Chancellor of the Realm from the court, it was his duty to serve the emperor as his minister. However, Yoshimitsu's title was not in accordance with his actual actions. In reality, all ministers and lords followed Yoshimitsu's orders, even though their titles suggested they were all retainers of the emperor. Within this interpretation, Yoshimitsu failed to align his titles with his actual governance, thus engendering societal disorder and fostering an environment conducive to rebellion and betrayal.

Crucially, Hakuseki's critique of Yoshimitsu is not merely condemnatory; it underscores the potential for reform and proposes the need to establish a new political order reflective of contemporary realities. *Tokushi yoron* posits a decline in the power of the imperial house alongside the ascendancy of military houses. If the old polity with the imperial house as its center no longer reflects reality, a new political structure should be established, and as Ackroyd suggests, Hakuseki saw Yoshimitsu's seeking of rulership as "the first step in a plan to change the status of all daimyō to that of the shogun's direct vassals, instead of their being, like the shogun himself, legally subjects of the emperor."[25]

Considering Hakuseki's intimate political ties with the Tokugawa shogunate, both his pragmatic historiography and his utilization of the Mandate of Heaven theory to undermine the legitimacy of the imperial house, alongside his emphasis on the rectification of name theory to underscore the necessity of a new order, manifest his political aspirations toward reforming the polity of Edo Japan, albeit without tangible success.[26] While Hakuseki's efforts fell short of

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[25] Arai, *Lessons from History*, xlvi.

[26] Arai, xlvi–xlvii.

effecting fundamental differentiation between the shogun's title and those of other high-ranking samurai, his underlying intention is discernible in his endeavor to alter the title from Taikun 大君 to King of Japan in diplomatic dealings with Joseon Korea.[27] In his essay collection *Oritaku shiba no ki* 折たく柴の記 (Told Round a Brushwood Fire), Hakuseki contends that Taikun was perceived as a title bestowed upon a subject by the emperor in Joseon Korea, and he highlights that this term could even denote the emperor himself according to a certain Chinese source, likely *Yijing* 易経 (J. *Ekikyō*, The book of changes, late ninth century). His disavowal of the title Taikun signifies both his reluctance to view the shogun as a subject of the emperor and his refusal to equate the shogun with the emperor. This perhaps constituted one of Hakuseki's endeavors to explore the potential for restructuring the political landscape to align with reality, albeit provoking substantial backlash and dissent, even from within his own intellectual circles.[28] Nevertheless, his advocacy for reinstating the title of King of Japan, coupled with the subsequent criticism he faced, underscores his profound affiliation with the shogunate and his considerable political influence.

However, as a commoner who stood far away from the political center and a popular writer who wrote for the general public, Bakin's appropriation of Hakuseki's theories demonstrates a populist approach, catering to the perspectives of the general public rather than aligning with entrenched political interests.

2.4 Views on the Ashikaga Shogunate from Multiple Perspectives in *Kyōkakuden*

[27] Miyazaki Michio, *Teihon Oritaku shiba no ki shakugi* (Tōkyō: Shibundō, 1964), 299–300.

[28] Miyazaki, 301–2.

The central plot of *Kyōkakuden,* which revolves around the Southern Court's followers seeking vengeance against the Ashikaga shogunate, might suggest that Bakin intended to convey a clear message: the supporters of the Southern Court represent the righteous side, while the Ashikaga shogunate and its followers are the villains. However, a closer examination of the narrative casts doubts on this superficial reading and reveals Bakin's more nuanced view of both sides. While the Southern Emperor on the good side is criticized for his weakness and lack of virtue by some character, the Ashikaga shogunate on the evil side is occasionally depicted in a positive light. In this section, I will closely read four characters' competing views on the Ashikaga shogunate to show the multivocal nature of *Kyōkakuden* and Bakin's nuanced view on the concept of *seitō*.

Tokuda Takeshi has argued that, despite the unfinished state of *Kyōkakuden*, the discussion of *seitō* in Chapter Twenty-Two offers crucial insight into the author's hidden intentions, making it possible to deduce the primary message of this work even without its conclusion. He even suspects that because Bakin had already explained his hidden intention, he had no other choice but to cease this project.[29] While I concur with Tokuda's assertion regarding the significance of Chapter Twenty-Two, I posit that there are additional chapters that deserve closer scrutiny. Furthermore, Tokuda's analysis presupposes an equation between Bakin's voice and one single character's articulation of *seitō*, and therefore, fails to consider the presence of other perspectives within the narrative, particularly those related to the evaluation of the Ashikaga shogunate.

[29] Tokuda, "Gonanchō hiwa: Teishō, Bakin, Shōyō," 54.

In *Kyōkakuden*, a quartet of characters engage in discourse concerning the Ashikaga shogunate, with their opinions displaying notable variance. In Chapter Twenty-Two, Kuro-hime 九六媛, a Daoist immortal, delivers an extensive speech on Emperor Go-Daigo and the Ashikaga shoguns; in Chapter Twenty-Four, the female protagonist Koma-hime 姑摩姫 engages in a debate on the legitimacy of the Ashikaga shogunate with Hatakeyama Mitsuie 畠山満家, one of the shogun's vassals; finally, in Chapter Twenty-Five, Ikkyū 一休, a Buddhist monk, intervenes to expound his perspective. Each of these three chapters delves into the theme of *seitō*, with each character presenting a distinct and noteworthy viewpoint.

Firstly, Kuro-hime enumerates the three major transgressions committed by Yoshimitsu, the third Ashikaga shogun, in Chapter Twenty-Two. Emphasizing his deceit of the Emperor of the Southern Court to obtain the Three Sacred Treasures, his appointment as Chancellor of the Realm against courtly reservations, and his acceptance of the title of King of Japan from Ming China,[30] Kuro-hime channels Hakuseki's commentary with slight alteration.

Central to Kuro-hime's critique is Yoshimitsu's disregard for the imperial house, a stance informed by her prior service as a court lady under Emperor Tenmu 天武 (631–686) before her transformation into a Daoist immortal. Kuro-hime says,

> "Even though I can bear his other mistakes, his deception of the Southern Emperor and his acceptance of the title [King of Japan] bestowed by the Ming seriously challenges Japan's polity and he should never be forgiven."

[30] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 313–14.

> 這它の不義は忍ぶとも、南帝を紿きまつりて、誓に背く一条と、明の冊封を受たるは、是国体に係る処、讞然として饒すべからず。[31]

Although as a reclusive Daoist immortal, Kuro-hime seems to have a neutral and unbiased position, her identity as a former court lady who served Emperor Tenmu reveals her subtle preference for the Imperial house. Moreover, her belief in Emperor Go-Daigo's spiritual affiliation with her former lord underpins her alignment with the Southern Court, further motivating her support for the heroine's vendetta against Yoshimitsu. In essence, Kuro-hime perceives Yoshimitsu as a threat to imperial authority.

The second perspective is provided by the female protagonist Koma-hime. Her perspective aligns closely with Kuro-hime's, especially considering the fact that Kuro-hime is her teacher for both martial arts and Confucian morality. However, unlike Kuro-hime, a free deity who has lived for hundreds of years, Koma-hime's hatred towards the Ashikaga shogunate contains a more personalized intensity. Koma-hime's great grandfather is Kusunoki Masashige 楠木正成 (1294–1336), a loyal subject of Go-Daigo who was later revered as a symbol of loyalty. Descended from the Kusunoki clan, Koma-hime's animosity towards the Ashikaga shogunate is rooted in both loyalty and filial piety. As a loyal retainer of the Southern Court, she should kill Yoshimitsu, and as a filial daughter, she needs to avenge her ancestors. Therefore, Koma-hime is much more passionate and obsessive about fighting the Ashikaga shogunate than Kuro-hime.

[31] Kyokutei, 314.

After Koma-hime succeeds in assassinating Yoshimitsu with the help of her teacher, Kuro-hime tells her that she should not use the magic she taught her in the future. However, five years later, Koma-hime decides to break her promise to her teacher, and plans to use magic to kill Ashikaga Yoshimochi 足利義持 (1386–1428), son of Yoshimitsu and the fourth Ashikaga shogun, because Yoshimochi, like his father, also fails to keep a promise made to the Emperor of the Southern Court. Koma-hime thinks to herself,

> "If only I could find ways to sneak into the Capital and cut off Yoshimochi's head as recompense for his violation of his words, then it would fulfill my duty of loyalty to my lord and my filial piety to my parents in this world and that world, and it would be unlike my dream-like assassination [of Yoshimitsu] in Kitayama years ago."
>
> いかで我、京師に赴き潜入りて、那義持が首級を捕て、誓約に背く怨を復さば、今世後世の君と親に、尽す忠孝両全にて、夢歟とぞ思ふいぬる年の、北山撃の類にあらず。[32]

Unfortunately, Koma-hime's assassination fails this time and she is captured by Yoshimochi. In front of her enemy, she bravely states her name and lists Yoshimitsu and Yoshimochi's sins,

> "I am the one called Koma-hime of Yako, daughter of Masamoto the Governor of Kawachi, who was the grandson of Kusunoki Masashige, a loyal follower and stalwart supporter of the Southern Court. The Ashikaga [shoguns] are the enemies of my lord and ancestors. Yoshimitsu and Yoshimochi broke their promises and deceived the Southern emperor. Their sins have already reached the uttermost limit. Following my father and ancestor's steps of loyalty, I planned to get Yoshimochi's head tonight. Unfortunately, I failed. This must be the will of Heaven."
>
> 我は南朝股肱の忠臣、楠正成が孫也ける、河内守正元が嫡女にて、八九の姑摩姫と喚るもの也。足利は是君父の怨敵、義満・義持誓約に背きて、南帝を

[32] Kyokutei, 331.

> 紿きまつりし、罪悪既に極れり。こゝをもて、父祖の遺忠を嗣ん与に、今宵必義持の、首級を捕んと思ひしに、事成らざるは、天なり命也。[33]

In short, Koma-hime views the Ashikaga shogunate from her particularist perspective of a loyal retainer of the Southern Court and a filial daughter of the Kusunoki clan. Even in defeat, she maintains her defiance, firmly articulating her loyalty and filial piety.

Thirdly, Hatakeyama Mitsuie, a devoted retainer of Yoshimochi, represents a stark contrast to Koma-hime's fervor. After listening to Koma-hime's words above, he laughs,

> "When the country was divided into the Southern and Northern Courts and [the two courts] were busy fighting each other, this type of hatred might have been justifiable. However, the Southern and Northern Courts have been reunified now. No one does not receive the virtuous blessing from the Ashikaga shogunate, and you are also a subject of the Ashikaga shogun. Because you, a subject, have offended against the lord, you are a traitor…"
>
> 曩に南北相分れて、戦ひ間なき折ならば、然る怨のありもせめ。今は南北御合体まし／＼て、足利家の徳沢を、戴ずといふものなければ、和女も亦是室町殿の民也。その民として上を犯せば、是則国賊也。…[34]

Obviously, Mitsuie sides with the Ashikaga shogunate and considers Yoshimochi the actual ruler of Japan. Interestingly, Hakuseki also holds a similar practical view of the rise and fall of the ruling power. This might be because both serve the shogunate and stand in the center of the political world. Moreover, Mitsuie's argument is also based on Confucianism. Affirming the virtues of the Ashikaga shogunate and Yoshimochi's legitimacy as Japan's ruler, Mitsuie rebukes Koma-hime's actions as treachery. As a comparable pair in this episode, Mitsuie's

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[33] Kyokutei, 337.

[34] Kyokutei, 339.

stance underscores a pragmatic loyalty borne out of political allegiance, in stark contrast to Koma-hime's impassioned adherence to the Confucian ideals of loyalty and filial piety.

Lastly, Monk Ikkyū's intervention introduces another perspective to the narrative. In the story, he foresees Koma-hime's assassination plan and warns Yoshimochi in advance. That night, Ikkyū replaces Yoshimochi in his chamber and fights Koma-hime with his magic. When Koma-hime is captured and Yoshimochi is about to kill her, Ikkyū appears and pleads with Yoshimochi to spare her life. As a Buddhist monk, he delivers a sermon to the shogun in which he explores the meaning of *tōzoku* 盗賊 (thief), a notion closely related to the concept of *kokuzoku* 国賊 (traitor), a term frequently used by all three characters analyzed above.[35] His teaching goes,

> "Among the five Buddhist commandments, killing is the worst. However, people in the mundane world do not follow [the Buddhist teaching]. Instead, people follow the law. If one kills another, the killer should be killed for his sin. If one steals another's money, the thief should be captured and killed. Crimes should be exposed, and evil should be punished. This is the so-called law. Many died because of their crimes, but the number of criminals did not decrease. Rather, the number increased so much that even in the execution site, there are pickpockets. From this story, we can see that rather than capturing and killing people who broke the law, we should teach people to be good before they commit crimes. This is why Confucius says, 'In hearing litigations, I am like any other body. What is necessary, however, is to cause the people to have no litigations.' Both Buddhist compassion and Confucian benevolence and righteousness follow the same principle."
>
> こゝをもて五戒の内中に、殺生を第一義とす。俗家はしからず、法律あり。人もし人を殺すときは、その殺したる人を殺して、その死を償ざることなく、人もし人の財を窃めば、その盗児を捕へ殺して、罪を倡へ悪を懲らす、是所云法律

[35] Kuro-hime lists the sins of the first three Ashikaga shoguns and concludes that they are all traitors. Koma-hime holds a similar opinion and she also believes the fourth shogun Yoshimochi is a traitor. Mitsuie takes a different position and argues that Koma-hime who tries to assassinate the shogun is the traitor. The term *kokuzoku* will be further discussed in Chapter III.

> 也。この故にその罪に、死するもの多けれども、罪人はいよ／＼絶ず、甚しきに至りては、その刑罰の場に于て、人の懐にせし東西を、掻攫ふ須利草あり。是に由て観るときは、その法度を犯すに及びて、捕てこれを殺さんより、いまだ犯さゞる前に、教て善人に做すにはしかず。然ばこそ孔子もいはずや、「訟を聴くこと吾猶人のごとし。必や訟なからしめん」、とぞ。仏の慈悲、儒の仁義、欲する所、一理也。[36]

This disquisition serves Ikkyū's goal of persuading Yoshimochi to become a virtuous ruler. His implication is that the Ashikaga shogunate was established through violence rather than moral superiority.[37] In order to secure his rule, it is important to pacify people's anger by showing his virtue and tolerance. In other words, Ikkyū highlights the necessity of self-cultivation in fully obtaining *seitō*.

Ikkyū further criticizes the former wars which threw the country into chaos and laments the loss of the Great Way. He also fears that even the way of benevolence and righteousness is about to disappear. Then he suggests that it is time for the shogun to be the exemplar for his people and rule with virtue. He says,

> "It is time [for you] to become your people's father and mother. Show your vast and boundless compassion like Amida and be empathetic and benevolent like Confucius. If you can abandon your cruelty and refrain from killing, and if you can wash away the evil for the sake of your people and teach them instead of killing them, your people will learn the meaning of shame. They will learn to love and stop killing. Violent acts and thefts will gradually disappear, and finally the nation will achieve peace. Your mind is the mind of hundreds and thousands of people. Therefore, when you teach, your people will learn; when you want something, your people will want the same thing…"

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[36] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 342.

[37] Ikkyū's speech reflects two Confucian theories of kingship—*Ōdō* 王道 (the Way of the King) and *Hadō* 覇道 (the Way of the Overlord). On the one hand, *Ōdō* emphasizes a ruler's superior moral virtue, represented by *jin* 仁 (benevolence), and his continuing self-cultivation; on the other hand, *Hadō* is a theory of practical government based on the use of force and fear. Earl, *Emperor and Nation in Japan*, 9.

> 這時民に父母たるもの、慈悲広大、阿弥陀の如く、忠恕惻隠、孔子の如く、残に勝殺を去り、衆生の与に悪を洗ひて、教て殺すことなくば、世の人通て恥を知りて兼愛して殺すを嗜ず、暴行窃盗、漸次に絶て、国家是より泰平ならん。蓋一人の御心は、千万人の心也。この故に、上の教給ふ所は、民必これを学び、上の欲し玉ふ所は、民も亦これを欲す。…[38]

These words correspond to his initial sermon that emphasizes the importance of virtue, which Ikkyū believes that Yoshimochi lacks. However, this time, Ikkyū clearly recognizes Yoshimochi's status as Japan's actual ruler, by comparing him to his people's "father and mother" and urging him to be a moral exemplar for his people.

Ikkyū's subtle preference for Yoshimochi is related to his connection with the Northern Court and his closeness with Yoshimochi, which is described in detail in Chapter Twenty-Four. He is an illegitimate child of Emperor Go-Komatsu 後小松天皇 (1377–1433), the sixth emperor of the Northern Court and the first emperor after the reunion of the Southern and Northen Courts. Due to his status as an illegitimate prince, Ikkyū and Yoshimochi are very close. However, unlike Mitsuie, the loyal retainer of Yoshimochi, Ikkyū's imperial blood and his status as a Buddhist monk allow him to question Yoshimochi's *seitō* and provide advice to him.

In summary, Bakin adroitly exploits fiction's capacity for multivocality to interrogate the notion of *seitō* from diverse perspectives. The political stance of each of the four characters analyzed above is intricately woven into their personal narratives, reflective of their birth, personal loyalities, occupation, upbringing, and life experience. While Koma-hime and Mitsuie's clear stances seem to provide the readers with dichotomous moral and practical views on the

[38] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 342–43.

issue of *seitō*, Kuro-hime and Ikkyū embody a more nuanced engagement with *seitō*, underscoring its complexity.

As Bakin points out himself, *Kyōkakuden* aims to "delight people's hearts."[39] By refraining from imposing a singular interpretation, Bakin invites readers to grapple with the complexities of *seitō*, encouraging intellectual inquiry and independent thought. In doing so, *Kyōkakuden* serves as a platform for the exploration and contemplation of historical and philosophical themes, echoing Kuro-hime's citation of *Mengzi*, which goes, "If one believed everything in the *Book of History*, it would have been better for the *Book* not to have existed at all."[40]

This section demonstrates how *Kyōkakuden* distinguishes itself from univocal official history by incorporating multiple interpretations of *seitō* through the perspectives of various characters. However, Bakin's reinterpretation of *seitō* does not stop here. He further highlights the irony behind this Confucian concept through the characterizations of Koma-hime, the Daoist deity, and Ikkyū, the Buddhist monk.

2.5 The Irony behind the Seemingly Serious Discussion on *Seitō*—Kuro-hime

Both Hakuseki's *Tokushi yoron* and the debates on the legitimacy of the Ashikaga shogunate in *Kyōkakuden* are largely grounded in a Confucian interpretation of *seitō* as a combination of political and moral legitimacy. However, one intriguing aspect that deserves closer attention is the fact that the two dominant discourses on *seitō* are delivered by reclusive

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[39] Kyokutei, 6. 以快人之心、

[40] Kyokutei, 310. 「尽(ことごと)く書(しよ)を信(しん)ぜば、書(しよ)なきに不如(しかず)」、

figures who come from Daoist and Buddhist backgrounds, rather than Confucianism. While these three strands of thought are often intertwined in premodern times, the narratives of these two characters highlight their unique social statuses and both discourses present ironic interpretations of Confucianism. Such characterizations challenge the reliability of their ostensibly serious discussions of *seitō* and reveal Bakin's ironic take on Confucianism.

The first character is Kuro-hime, a Daoist deity introduced into the text in Chapter Twenty. Upon her initial appearance before the female protagonist Koma-hime, the latter immediately expresses skepticism regarding her identity. Koma-hime stares at her suspiciously and is about to pull out a hidden dagger, asking,

> "This is strange! Are you a mountain witch? Or just a spirit or monster? They say that sometimes deities and buddhas answer ordinary people's prayers and help them, but they rarely show their true forms to teach ordinary people. Don't fool me!"
> 「怪しや、和女郎は野婆歟。亦只魑魅歟、妖怪歟。神明仏陀は、凡夫の与に、霊応利益ありといへども、よくその形貌を顕して、凡夫に教給ひしことを聞かず。烏滸をなせそ。」[41]

This line obviously casts doubt on the reliability of this character. In order to clear up Koma-hime's doubt, Kuro-hime carefully explains her origin,

> "… I am a female immortal who has lived in Mt. Katsuragi for several hundreds of years, and my name is Kuro-hime 九六媛. A long time ago, when Emperor Tenmu, still the Crown Prince at the time, went to Yoshino to avoid political conflict, I was a court lady serving him. My name was Kuro-hime 九六姫. I was passionate about reading both Japanese and Chinese historical tales, and gradually, I mastered the meaning of words, the Confucian five and eight virtues, the difference between correct and wrong, and the principle of good and evil. When I learned that even though Tenmu had already abdicated the throne to Prince Ōtomo, he planned to fight Ōtomo in order to retrieve the throne, I presented my advice to prevent him from executing that plan. He detested me and said, 'it is not proper for you, a woman, to say those things that surpass your position. A woman's tongue is the longest!' When I heard that he wanted to punish me, I fled before it was too late. I traveled from mountain to mountain and never thought of going back to my life as a human. I concentrated on Daoist practices, drinking mist and sucking dew [in

[41] Kyokutei, 275.

> mountains] and relying on pinecones as my only food. [Finally,] I become a Daoist ascetic as immortal as heaven and earth. I sometimes walk on clouds and sometimes ride on a crane to visit the Sun Goddess. I also become friends with the deities of constellations and the Goddess of the Moon. The Sun Goddess makes me protect the cherry blossoms on Mt. Saho in spring and guard the red leaves in Tatsuta in autumn. I also kill poisonous insects and ferocious beasts to prevent them from hurting people in summer and winter. My achievements have earned me the title 'Supreme Mystical Daoist Immortal Maiden,' and I become the god of Mt. Yoshino and Mt. Katsuragi. …"
>
> 「…俺は是葛城山に、幾百歳を歴たりける、女仙九六媛 即 是なり。在昔天武天皇の、なほ東宮にまし／＼て、吉野に世を避給ひし折、俺那宮に給 事せし、命婦にてありければ、名を九六姫と召れたり。しかるに俺性として、和漢の史伝を読ことを、大かたならず好みつゝ、やうやくにして字義に通じ、五 常 八行、是非邪正の、道理を発明したりしかば、 皇 大弟（天武をまうす。）の大友に、皇位を譲りながら、又大友と皇位を、 争 んとて 謀 せ給ひし、その折諫 書を 献 りて、那議を否し稟せしかども、「その 職 ならぬ非礼の婦言、舌最長し」、と 憎 せ給ひて、「罪せらるべし」と聞えしかば、世ははや慐と思ひつゝ、跡を 闇 し亡命して、山又山に入りしより、復人間に立もかへらず、真を修し 形 を煉り、 霞 を呑み露を舐り、只松実を粮として、天地と共に 衰 へず、仙たることを得たりしかば、或ときは雲を踏み、ある時は鶴に駕りて、大日霊尊に 朝 し 奉 り、且天上の列 宿 と、月宮の姮娥にも、 交 ることを許されたり。よりて日の神 妾 をもて、春は佐保山に花を守らせ、秋は竜田に黄葉を護らせ、夏天冬 月 に至りては、 毒 虫 猛 獣 の、世の人に害あるを、征服せしめ給ひしに、功課やうやく積りしかば、无 上 玄通神仙 嬢 といふ、名号を 賜 りて、吉野葛城両峯の、山祇に做されたり。…」[42]

Kuro-hime's response attempts to dispel Koma-hime's doubts, but it actually makes her words more suspicious. She first explains her previous life when she was still a court lady serving Emperor Tenmu. Although she tried to stop Tenmu from fighting Prince Ōtomo, she failed due to her identity as a woman. As Glynne Walley points out, Fuse-hime, a goddess character from Bakin's *Hakkenden*, embodies skills which are commonly regarded as masculine, such as

[42] Kyokutei, 275–76.

reading and writing, resulting in an understanding of "righteous principles."[43] Kuro-hime's interest in reading historical tales also suggests that she possesses masculine skills, but unlike Fuse-hime, Kuro-hime's masculinity is neither recognized nor appreciated by her lord. Rather, he called her a long-tongued woman and criticized her behavior based on the Confucian belief that women should be quiet and obedient and should not talk about politics. The misogynistic image of the "long-tongued woman" originates from *Shijing* 詩経 (J. Shikyō, The book of songs, eleventh to seventh centuries BC), one of the Confucian five classics. The original text goes,

> The clever men build the city wall;
> The clever women bring its fall.
> The clever woman oft plays foul,
> No better than a vicious owl.
> She always wags her evil tongue.
> Leading to woe rung by rung,
> Disorder comes not from the sky,
> But from women who boast and lie.
> By none the king has been taught
> But Female Eunuch at his court.
> 哲夫成城、哲婦傾城。
> 懿厥哲婦、為梟為鴟。
> 婦有長舌、維厲之階。
> 乱匪降自天、生自婦人。
> 匪教匪誨、時維婦寺。[44]

[43] Walley, *Good Dogs*, 244–45. Notably, although both Kuro-hime and Fuse-hime possess masculine qualities, they are different in many ways. For instance, Fuse-hime is deeply involved in the main story and is the spiritual mother of the main characters while Kuro-hime is more like an outsider. As Walley points out, before her death, Fuse-hime is transfigured (spiritually) into a man and her preaching of Lotus Sutra allows her to ascend into Buddhahood, while Kuro-hime is more like a Daoist immortal who achieves immortality through numerous years of wandering. More importantly, Fuse-hime's masculinity is recognized and praised in general while Kuro-hime's masculinity is ignored and criticized. Therefore, their positions and reliabilities are fundamentally different in the story.

[44] *The Book of Poetry*, trans. Junying Chen, Jianyuan Jiang, and Rongpei Wang (Changsha: Hunan People's

The passage suggests a prevailing notion that women are naturally talkative and unteachable and that their words have the dangerous power to disorder things, and their negative influence might be stronger than Heaven's will. In this regard, Kuro-hime's marginalized status as a female impedes the recognition of her voice. Only upon her retreat to the mountains and detachment from the conventional social hierarchies does she assume the authority to speak on matters of *seitō*. However, even after attaining immortality, her voice can only be discerned by similar social outliers such as Koma-hime, both a woman and a loyal retainer of the defunct Southern Court. Ironically, Koma-hime herself deviates from Kuro-hime's teachings. Following Koma-hime's successful assassination of Yoshimitsu, Kuro-hime advises her to refrain from further employing the lethal skills she imparted. Yet, Koma-hime subsequently reneges on her vow and endeavors to assassinate the new shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimochi. Notably, Kuro-hime anticipates this turn of events and imparts a prophetic verse to Koma-hime. However, her reluctance to either dissuade Koma-hime from her course of action or aid her therein casts doubt upon Kuro-hime's seriousness regarding the matter of *seitō*.

Furthermore, her identity as a Daoist immortal also deepens any suspicions readers might have about her. In general, characters such as Daoist immortals residing in remote mountains typically evoke suspicion, with their utterances often cloaked in deception.[45] Kuro-hime also clearly states that she has no intention of going back to her former life, showing that she is no

Publishing House, 2008), 1:650–51.

[45] One of the most well-known works of fiction that portrays the suspicious nature of Daoist immortals is *Xiyouji*. In this novel, various Daoist immortals employ magic either to obstruct the protagonists' pilgrimage or to test their determination, often blurring the line between divine guidance and malicious interference. This theme of unreliable Daoist immortals also appears in *kabuki* and *jōruri* theater. For example, both Gama 蝦蟇 and Tekkai 鉄拐 are celebrated Chinese legendary characters who use suspicious magic. Gama is said to be able to control toads, while Tekkai is believed to possess the ability to expel his soul from his body, allowing him to travel vast distances.

longer part of the mundane world. She has obtained a new life within the Daoist realm, and her comments on the world she left behind might not be serious enough.

Her Daoist friends also appear in Chapter Twenty-One, further casting doubts on Kuro-hime's seriousness. Upon Koma-hime's acquisition of the assassinating skills imparted by Kuro-hime, she seeks her teacher's assistance in avenging her family and lord. However, she is informed of Kuro-hime's absence by two young attendants. They say,

> "Our lady changed her attire and ascended on a cloud towards the Heavenly Palace to offer New Year's greetings to the Sun Goddess before the break of dawn today. She told us, 'It's been an age since I last paid homage to the Goddess of the Moon and the deities of constellations. Additionally, I intend to pay visits to other foreign gods such as the Queen Mother of the West, The Supreme Venerable Sovereign, and various mountain deities, so I envisage my return around the close of spring or the onset of summer, though it may well extend to the fifth or the sixth month. Should Koma-hime come again, apprise her of these arrangements, and reassure her that there is no need to journey to my place prior to my return. It is fine to stay in her abode [waiting for me].'"
>
> 「我仙孃は今朝未明に、日の神に年の首の、寿詞を奏しまつらんとて、衣裳を更め雲に駕て、天宮に赴き給ひぬ。その折咱們に仰るよう、「我は久しく天上の、姮娥列宿に見参せず。這它外国なる西王母、太上老君、名山の諸仙をも、訪ばやと思ふ也。恁ればかへり来ぬる日は、春の季か、夏の孟歟、然ずば五六月の時候に及ん。姑摩姫が又来なば、これらのよしを報知して、『我かへり来る日まで、這里に往返をせんは要なし。宿所に在るこそよかめれ』、と報て禁めよ」、と宣ひにき」。[46]

In stark contrast to the fervent dedication exhibited by Koma-hime towards vengeance, Kuro-hime approaches the matter with levity, if not outright hilarity. Despite her cognizance of Koma-hime's distress, Kuro-hime plans to spend the entire spring celebrating the new year and reconnecting with old friends both domestic and foreign. Her extended absence may be construed as a test of Koma-hime's endurance; however, the incongruity between her joyous

[46] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 300.

itinerary and Koma-hime's anxious vigil undermines the gravity of her subsequent discourse on *seitō* in Chapter Twenty-Two. Moreover, the intentionally listed numerous names of goddesses and deities remind readers of her current social circle and her reclusive status detached from the world of human beings. Rather than helping Koma-hime to chastise evil for people's sake, she is more interested in celebrating the New Year with her immortal friends.

Moreover, the depiction of New Year celebrations serves to blur the boundary between fiction and reality, further undermining the seriousness of the following discussion on *seitō*. Given the Edo period tradition of releasing popular fiction during the New Year, readers might find Kuro-hime's whimsical journey vivid and entertaining. As Kuro-hime embarks on her trip to the Heavenly Palace to deliver her greeting to the God of the Sun, readers might similarly celebrate the beginning of the new year by visiting shrines; while Kuro-hime visits various foreign gods and deities, readers might similarly see families and friends; while Kuro-hime asks Koma-hime to wait until her return, readers might also make Koma-hime wait until they finally find time to read the fiction. In short, similar to Kuro-hime, readers are also outsiders from a different time period who make judgements after reading the novel. No matter how serious a reader might be, their thinking process would be interrupted by Kuro-hime's abrupt journey. Her pointed critique of the Southern Emperor's lack of Confucian virtue and the Ashikaga shogun's failure to properly behave according to his rank title—delivered immediately upon her return from the joyful journey—ultimately becomes part of an entertaining reading experience. *Seitō* is thus transformed from a serious Confucian debate on legitimacy into an object of playful satire.

In summary, the characterization of Kuro-hime exposes the irony deeply embedded in *Kyōkakuden*. As a court lady, her gender, in accordance with Confucian doctrine, impedes her from voicing political opinions; as a Daoist immortal, she is detached from the mundane world

and her words are suspicious. The irony embodied by this character might reflect Bakin's self-mocking attitude towards his identity as a popular writer who produces stories both "useless" and "unserious." Yet the central role given to this forgotten Daoist immortal in *Kyōkakuden* suggests Bakin's rejection of an evaluation system based on practicality. The subtle humorous tone of her episodes further challenges the solemnity of *seitō*.

2.6 The Irony behind the Seemingly Serious Discussion on *Seitō*—Ikkyū

The second character whose narrative reveals the irony of *Kyōkakuden* is Monk Ikkyū. As a foil to Kuro-hime, Ikkyū's portrayal contrasts sharply with hers. Although both characters achieved enlightenment and retreated from the mundane world, Kuro-hime is long forgotten by society, her voice barely audible, whereas Ikkyū is highly revered, with even the shogun respecting his opinions.

When Ikkyū first introduced in Chapter Twenty-Four, the text goes,

> Thus, this monk, despite his youth, is respected and revered by everyone, from the court nobles and high-rank samurais above to old men and women in the villages below. Because of this, even Ashikaga Yoshimochi, the Muromachi shogun, occasionally summons Ikkyū to preach Buddhist sermons. At times, they would face each other in a game of Japanese chess, during which Yoshimochi would inquire about the principles of governance and the reasoning behind order and chaos.
>
> 然ば這沙彌、年少けれども、上は公武貴族より、下は村翁（○ヰナカヂヾ）野娘（○ヰナカバヾ）まで、尊信せずといふものなし。是により室町殿【足利／義持】も、折々一休を屈招して、その法談を聴聞し、或は局に対ひ棋を囲して、成敗理乱の道理を問はる。[47]

This passage clearly illustrates Ikkyū's popularity and influence. Unlike Kuro-hime, whose advice was dismissed by her lord as treacherous words unworthy of consideration from a

[47] Kyokutei, 334–35.

woman, Ikkyū's teachings and suggestions are seriously considered and highly valued by Yoshimochi.[48] For instance, after Ikkyū delivers the metaphor story to save Koma-hime's life, Yoshimochi replies,

> "Your teaching is so true. I will convey your words to the senior retainers and let them proceed with a settlement in a peaceful manner. The merit of your deeds [of saving my life] last night is overwhelming. Thank you!"
>
> 「示教の趣、道理に称へり。老臣們にこゝろ得さして、穏便の沙汰に及ぶべし。昨夜の功徳、感ずるにあまりあり。大儀にこそ」[49]

However, despite Ikkyū's trustworthiness in the eyes of the characters in the story, many details cast doubts on this reliability, forming a subtle ironic tone. To begin with, before Ikkyū embarks on his extensive and serious discussion of *seitō*, he offers an evaluation of Koma-hime to Yoshimochi, reducing her attempted assassination to nothing more than the result of a young woman's mental disorder. The text goes:

> "With all due respect, a mere woman could not be qualified as your enemy. Moreover, while her actions may seem treacherous in your view, they could prove her loyalty and filial piety from her standpoint. A noble person does not punish others in anger. … As you can see, Koma-hime is a woman, a maiden around sixteen years old. Her words and actions may resemble a brave warrior, but she is not. If we consider this further, it may truly be that she is possessed by earthly or heavenly spirits. If she has been driven to confusion by some kind of supernatural or monstrous or bestial force and has, unwittingly, become a sinner, would that not be a reason to extend her some measure of compassion?"
>
> 「最憚りなる言ながら、女子は敵手にならぬもの也。且その情を推ときは、上のおん与には悖逆なれども、他が与には忠孝也。君子は、怒をもつて人を誅せず。…既に釁したるごとく、姑摩姫は嬋娟たる、二八可りの少女なり。しかるに言語進止は、勇士といへども及ぶべからず。こゝをもて猜すれば、実に地

[48] Ashikaga Yoshimochi is a complex and intriguing character. Unlike his father, Yoshimitsu, who is generally depicted in a negative light, Yoshimochi exhibits traits of both a virtuous and a flawed ruler. On the one hand, he shows respect for figures like Ikkyū and expresses a desire to govern with virtue. On the other hand, he is easily swayed by currupt retainers, which undermines his moral authority.

[49] Kyokutei, 343.

狗天狗なンどの、憑たるにこそ候はめ。倘物の怪により心乱れて、憶ずも罪人に、なりたらんには故らに、憐むべきものに候はずや。…」[50]

Ikkyū's strategy to save Koma-hime revolves around emphasizing her identity as a young woman. By invoking the traditional view of women as inferior to men both physically and mentally, he argues that Koma-hime could not possibly have plotted to assassinate the shogun of her own accord. Instead, he claims that she must be possessed by some supernatural force, urging Yoshimochi to pity her rather than punish her.

While the characters in the story are easily persuaded by Ikkyū due to his esteemed reputation, readers familiar with the context would immediately recognize his words as a fabricated excuse to protect Koma-hime. This becomes evident from his private words to Koma-hime at the end of Chapter Twenty-Four, which clearly reveal his awareness of her true nature:

> "You are strong and brave, but what you did [the attempt to assassinate Yoshimochi] was not right. If you truly seek revenge, you must face the battlefield, advance the banner, sound the drum, and defeat [him] in combat—only then can it be called a great achievement. Yet, you climbed over walls and dug through holes and gaps like an assassin or a thief. Even if you indeed took your revenge in this way, a noble general would never have done such a thing, and a true warrior would be ashamed of such conduct. … Nevertheless, saving others is the true intention of a monk. Therefore, tonight, I have saved the shogun from a great calamity, and tomorrow, I shall save you from your doomed fate. Please understand my intention."

「和女郎は勁勇あまりあれども、行ふ所正しからず。実に恨を雪んと思はば、戦場に相莅て、旗を進め鼓を鳴らし、撃果してこそ、大功ともいはめ。然るを何ぞや、垣を踰穴隙を鑽り、刺客〔左訓：〇シノビノモノ〕夜盗〔左訓：〇ヨヌスビト〕の状態を事として、仮令怨を復すとも、そは良将のせざる所、勇士の恥とする所也。…しかれども、人を救ふは出家の本意也。因て今宵

[50] Kyokutei, 341.

は将軍の、大厄を救ひまゐらせ、明日は又和女郎の必死を、救はんと思ふのみ。先よく這意を得られよかし。」[51]

It is clear that Ikkyū is fully aware of both Koma-hime's capability and determination to assassinate the shogun. Therefore, his later claim about her mental illness is nothing more than a fabrication.[52] More ironically, immediately after he lies about Koma-hime's mentality at the end of Chapter Twenty-Four, he begins his lecture on thieves and his interpretation of *seitō* at the start of Chapter Twenty-Five. This juxtaposition highlights the unreliability of his words and raises doubt about the sincerity of his arguments.

While Ikkyū's words are dubious, his actions—saving the lives of both Yoshimochi and Koma-hime—seem to portray him as wise and compassionate. Yet does he really put much weight on the value of human life? The answer Bakin provides is, once again, complex and ironic. Ikkyū is compassionate enough to save lives at times, yet indifferent enough to disregard them at others.

After delivering his lengthy discourse on *seitō* and pleading with Yoshimochi for Koma-hime's life, Ikkyū abruptly requests to leave without even waiting to hear Yoshimochi's final decision. He says,

> "… Because of this, if you can give her a generous judgement, the military fortunes of your esteemed house will endure long. As for this humble monk, today I have an urgent spiritual duty entrusted to me by my master. I humbly request leave to excuse myself."
> 「…這義によりて左も右も、寛仁の御沙汰あらば、当家の御武運長久ならん。貧道けふは師父の命ぜし、緊要の法務あり。身の暇を賜るべし」[53]

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[51] Kyokutei, 337.

[52] Both Kuro-hime and Koma-hime are undermined by the voicing of sexist values in the text. However, this intradiegetic sexism is meant to be ironic. Bakin's view on women will be explore more closely in Chapter IV.

[53] Kyokutei, 343.

Ikkyū's sudden departure, reflecting his indifference to Yoshimochi's judgment and Koma-hime's fate, may remind readers of Kuro-hime's light-hearted absence during the New Year when Koma-hime visits her, which similarly suggests her limited interest in assisting Koma-hime's quest for revenge. After all, considering their reclusive identities as a Daoist immortal and a Buddhist monk, their attention to worldly matters is inherently limited.

This playful tone surrounding Ikkyū is also evident in the carefully designed illustrated frontispiece of Volume Three, as shown in Figure 5. Ikkyū is depicted as the monk seated on the left. He holds a skull in his left hand and a staff in his right, both of which are of significant symbolic importance.

Figure 5. The illustration of Ikkyū. *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, part 1 (pub. 1834), vol. 3, 6 *ura*. Owned by Hiroshima University Library, retrieved from Union Catalogue Database of Japanese Texts. https://doi.org/10.20730/100302090 (image 296).

To begin with, the staff-like object Ikkyū holds is actually a *mitate* 見立て (or みたて), a term that refers to one picture or image "being set up to look like another, for humorous or parodic

purposes."[54] Although the object appears to be a monk's staff, it is composed of a bamboo stick, an enclosing rope circle, some leaves of *urajiro* (Gleichenia japonica) and *yuzuriha* (Daphniphyllum himalaense), and two pieces of *shide* (zigzag-shaped paper)—indicating that the staff-like object is a decoration for the New Year celebration. This reference again mirrors Kuro-hime's New Year trip in the narrative and functions as a humorous New Year's greeting to the readers who have just purchased the latest volume of *Kyōkakuden*, which was recently released.

The letter at the top of the staff resembles a New Year's greeting card, but the term on it reads *migyōsho* 御教書, a type of official document conveying the shogun's order. This suggests that Ikkyū's true intention is to obtain the *migyōsho*, or in other words, to persuade Yoshimochi to make a favorable judgment regarding Koma-hime's attempted assassination. The auspicious New Year decorations on his staff serve as a form of camouflage to obscure his real motive.

Following the same logic, in the narrative, Ikkyū's discussion of Koma-hime's mental instability, his seemingly serious speech on *seitō* and his auspicious wish for a peaceful world under Yoshimochi's reign can all be interpreted as forms of camouflage, much like the New Year decorations in the illustration. These speeches are all made to conceal his true purpose: saving Koma-hime's life. Therefore, perhaps, none of his arguments should be taken seriously.

Secondly, the skull Ikkyū holds is linked to an anecdote about him. It is said that Ikkyū once placed a skull atop his staff and walked through the streets during the New Year's celebrations, saying, "Be careful, be careful!" In his view, although the New Year is a time of celebration, it also marks the passage of time, bringing one closer to death. Ikkyū's perspective

[54] Walley, *Good Dogs*, 80.

on life and death is further elaborated in *Ikkyū gaikotsu* 一休骸骨 (Ikkyū's Skeleton). While this work may not have been written by Ikkyū himself, it has traditionally been attributed to him and was very popular during the Edo period.

Figure 6. *Ikkyū gaikotsu* 一休骸骨 (Ikkyū's Skeleton), 4 *ura*-5 *omote*. NDL digital collections. https://doi.org/10.11501/2533860 (image 9).

Ikkyū gaikotsu tells the story of a monk's strange encounter with skeletons. One night, the monk stays at a temple next to a graveyard during his travels. When he wakes up at midnight, he sees numerous skeletons behaving like living humans. The skeletons are drinking sake, singing, dancing, and embracing each other as men and women do. Suddenly, one male skeleton falls ill and dies. The female skeleton who was his partner shaves her head and becomes a monk. She then cremates the male skeleton, and the story comes to an end.

This tale reflects the Buddhist concept of *shōji ichinyo* 生死一如 (life and death are one and the same), which urges people to transcend the dualistic thinking that sees life and death as distinct or opposing states. Instead, life and death are part of the same cycle of impermanence,

and therefore, one should let go of attachment and peacefully accept the impermanence of all things.[55]

This Buddhist philosophy explains Ikkyū's seemingly paradoxical attitude towards both Yoshimochi and Koma-hime. On the one hand, he saves the lives of both characters this time; on the other hand, he shows no interest in saving them again in the future, evidenced by his supportive attitude towards Koma-hime's revenge against Yoshimochi and his quick departure before hearing Yoshimochi's final judgement on Koma-hime. In Ikkyū's view, life and death are two sides of the same coin called impermanence, so if they choose to cling to power and hatred—leading ultimately to killing and death—there is no point in saving them twice.

In short, the characterization of Ikkyū exposes the irony deeply embedded in *Kyōkakuden*. Despite the trust and respect he receives from other characters in the story, his words are filled with lies, and his discussion of *seitō* serves merely as an excuse to conceal his true intensions. Furthermore, the depiction of Ikkyū as an enlightened monk, both compassionate and indifferent to life, underscores his limited interest in mundane affairs and reveals the ironic tone underlying his rescuing action. This characterization also reflects Bakin's critical stance on Confucianism and his interest in manipulating and reinterpreting it. Confucianism is no longer portrayed as a supreme political ideology guiding behavior; instead, it is reduced to a convenient excuse to justify one's arguments and mask one's true intentions.

2.7 Conclusion

[55] Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, Vol. 2, *Japan* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), 100–102.

This chapter delves into the depiction of *seitō* explored in Bakin's *Kyōkakuden*. Bakin's narrative regarding the history of the Nanboku-chō period heavily draws upon the Confucian political theory articulated in Hakuseki's *Tokushi yoron*. Nonetheless, Bakin's interpretation diverges significantly from Hakuseki's perspective. While Hakuseki, serving as a pivotal figure in the shogun's education, adopted an active top-down approach aimed at instilling the correct understanding of kingship in the shogun, Bakin's stance towards *seitō* is more reader-oriented and polyvocal. His focus lies in demystifying *seitō* and deauthorizing Confucianism, as evidenced by his utilization of diverse viewpoints to scrutinize the legitimacy of the Ashikaga shogunate, as well as through his ironic characterization of marginalized characters such as Kuro-hime and Ikkyū.

In Bakin's view, neither the emperor nor the Ashikaga shogun qualifies as an ideal ruler. Emperor Go-Daigo is portrayed as mentally weak, while Ashikaga Yoshimitsu is morally corrupt. Consequently, the emperor loses his legitimacy, and the shogunate usurps control of the country. This state of disorder forms the backdrop of *Kyōkakuden*. In such a chaotic and corrupt world, to whom should one pledge loyalty, and how should one uphold righteousness? The following chapter shifts the focus from questions of top-level rulership to the relationship between individual and society, through an analysis of two contrasting character types—virtuous *kyōkaku* and notorious *tōzoku*.

CHAPTER III

THE SHOGUNATE VS. THE PEOPLE: *KYŌKAKU* SPIRIT IN *KYŌKAKUDEN*

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"Until the sage is dead, great thieves will never cease to appear."

–"Rifling Trunks" in *Zhuangzi*.[1]

Chapter II explored the concept of *seitō* and established the backdrop of a corrupted world ruled by rulers who lack true legitimacy. In such a context, how can individuals act with loyalty and righteousness? Should one serve the Ashikaga shogun, the de facto ruler of the time? Or should one pledge loyalty to the Northern emperor, who is little more than a puppet of the shogunate? Bakin's answer is no. Instead, he praised the anti-hierarchical and at times lawbreaking *kyōkaku*. These figures often embody moral ambiguity, but they consistently also honor their commitments, and are willing to sacrifice their lives to protect the vulnerable. Their marginalized status empowers them to challenge the prevailing Confucian hierarchy, their focus on the welfare of common people allowing them to contest top-down political ideologies. Even today, the bravery and righteousness associated with *kyōkaku* continue to influence popular culture, as amply manifested in a variety of genres, especially boys' manga, historical dramas and action movies.

This chapter analyzes the meaning and portrayal of *kyōkaku* in *Kyōkakuden,* particularly in contrast to that figure's negative counterpart, *tōzoku*. Through close reading,

[1] Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 70. 聖人不死、大盜不止。

contextualization, and comparison, I argue that Bakin's characterization of *kyōkaku* reflects his recognition of the limitations inherent in Confucian morality. Rather than adhering to the traditional interpretation of Neo-Confucianism from the perspective of the ruling class, Bakin subverts this logic to examine Confucian virtues such as loyalty and righteousness from the standpoint of the common people. Employing fiction as a medium to amplify the voice of the people, the *kyōkaku* characters he crafts serve as fictional champions of justice for the downtrodden and oppressed.

3.1 Introduction

Although the English scholarship on *Kyōkakuden* is limited, renowned Japanese scholars have analyzed this text from different perspectives. For the purpose of this chapter, I will primarily introduce three of them—Asō Isoji, Maeda Ai, and Uchida Yasuhiro—focusing particularly on their research concerning the meaning of *kyōkaku*. When analyzing *Kyōkakuden* in *Edo bungaku to Shina bungaku*, Asō suggests that Bakin's obsession with Sima Qian's anti-Confucian interpretation of *kyōkaku* casts doubt on the common perception of Bakin as a supporter of Confucianism.[2] However, as Asō's primary objective in analyzing *Kyōkakuden* is to support his broader argument regarding the connection between Edo literature and Chinese literature, his discussion of *Kyōkakuden* is largely confined to identifying those Chinese sources, particularly in popular fiction, that Bakin drew upon. A comprehensive analysis of the significance of the *kyōkaku* spirit in Bakin's works would not emerge until the late 1970s.

In 1977, Uchida Yasuhiro published "Bakin no kyō: *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden* izen" (Bakin's gallantry: before *Lives of the gallants: read them and wonder*), in which he traces the

[2] Asō, *Edo bungaku to Shina bungaku*, 172–73.

development of *kyōkaku* figures in works by Bakin predating *Kyōkakuden*. Uchida's study highlights how Bakin strove gradually to remove those traits of immorality and outlawry traditionally associated with *kyōkaku*, ultimately redefining the concept in a way that shaped its influence on subsequent writers and literati.[3] However, as his title suggests, Uchida limits this analysis to works predating *Kyōkakuden* and does not engage directly with the latter text itself. While I concur with Uchida's argument that Bakin sought indeed to redefine *kyōkaku* as a group of righteous people, I would argue that in *Kyōkakuden*, Bakin nonetheless simultaneously acknowledges the moral ambiguity of *kyōkaku* when measured against Confucian ethical standards. Moreover, Bakin also consciously juxtaposes *kyōkaku* with *tōzoku*, intentionally blurring the line between the two categories.

In contrast to Uchida's interest in *kyōkaku* before *Kyōkakuden*, Maeda Ai is more intrigued by the reinterpretation of *kyōkaku* in the context of Japan's modernization. In "Bakin to Tōkoku: 'kyō' o megutte" (Bakin and Tōkoku: about "gallantry," 1976), he explores this idea through an analysis of writings by Kitamura Tōkoku 北村透谷 (1868–1894). He shows that in Tōkoku's view, *kyōkaku* embodied ordinary people's hopes for freedom and justice, noting that he even compared the surviving supporters of the Southern court in *Kyōkakuden* to his own comrades after the failure of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in the 1880s.[4] Although Maeda's analysis has little to do with Bakin's work itself, such a connection between the *kyōkaku* spirit and the desire of the marginalized for voice and for justice is indeed in accord with the main theme of *Kyōkakuden*.

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[3] Uchida Yasuhiro, "Bakin no kyō: 'Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden' izen," *Geibun Kenkyū* 36, no. 3 (1977): 182–83.

[4] Maeda Ai, "Bakin to Tōkoku: 'kyō' o megutte," *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 21 (August 1976): 134–36.

In short, while the research conducted by these three scholars is certainly groundbreaking, none of them focuses exclusively on the specific meaning of *kyōkaku* within *Kyōkakuden*. Still, all of their works highlight the importance of this concept. In the sections that follow, I begin by first examining Bakin's theoretical articulation of *kyōkaku* through a close reading of his preface to the initial volume of *Kyōkakuden*. Drawing inspiration from Sima Qian, Bakin amalgamates various schools of thought, including Daoism, Buddhism and Legalism, with Confucianism to challenge the sanctity of Confucian virtues such as benevolence, righteousness, and loyalty. After this, I proceed to examine in detail Bakin's depiction of an ideal *kyōkaku* character, with a focus on such a figure's intrinsic fictionality: although he represents a source of hope for the oppressed, the possibility of true salvation seems to exist only in the realm of fiction.

The pessimism of this view is also reflected in Bakin's portrayal of *tōzoku*, the evil counterpart to *kyōkaku*. Inspired by the discussion of the "great thief" in *Zhuangzi*, Bakin highlights the difficulty of distinguishing between *kyōkaku* and *tōzoku* and critiques the shogunate as itself the great thief, exposing its hypocrisy. *Kyōkakuden* provides the readers with two realms—a utopian realm of justice and a harsh historical reality—allowing them to navigate and interpret these realms individually or collectively.

3.2 The Definition of Kyōkaku

The historical roots of the term *kyōkaku* can be traced back to ancient China.[5] In *Shiji*, Sima Qian highlights *kyōkaku* as a group of outlaw heroes who were largely ignored in earlier,

[5] The term *kyōkaku* lends itself to various English translations. Burton Watson often translated it as "knight" because of shared qualities such as bravery, righteousness, and compassion. However, the term "knight" evokes images of a loyal horseman of high social status in medieval Europe, which may not accurately encapsulate the essence of *kyōkaku*, a term that does not necessarily imply loyalty to a given lord or any high social rank (or indeed

ruling-class-centered historical records.[6] Their role as protectors of the people makes these figures a popular subject in Chinese literature, notably influencing the vernacular novel *Shuihu zhuan*. The protagonists in *Shuihu zhuan* are portrayed in a positive light as marginalized outlaw heroes or, conversely, as a violent gang of bandits who morally diverge from dominant Confucian ideology. Even so, the novel's suggestion that the societal margins can become centers of influence contributed to its widespread popularity in both imperial China and early modern Japan.[7]

Takasu Yoshijirō traces the origins of *kyōkaku* back to the *gekokujō* 下克上 (inferiors overthrowing their superiors) practices and the *tsuchi ikki* 土一揆 (peasant uprisings) phenomenon of the late Muromachi period (1336–1573).[8] During this time of political instability, as the central authority collapsed and social order unraveled, mid/low-ranking samurai sought to replace their superiors, while peasants rose up to resist oppressive rule. The

the use of a horse). Another possible translation is "chivalry." Nitobe Inazō offered an early analysis of the similarities between the concept of chivalry and *bushidō* 武士道 ("the way of the samurai"), a term sometimes associated with *kyōkaku*. See Nitobe Inazo, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (AmazonClassics, 2020), 5–9. Although it is difficult to summarize the concept of chivalry, which has a long and complicated history, its origin as a medieval ethical code of conduct for elite, noble, and Christian knights makes it a possible translation for *bushidō*, which is also rooted in elite culture, noble class status, and religion. However, *kyōkaku* differs significantly from both chivalry and *bushidō* by virtue of its iconoclastic nature. Rather than being followers of the elite and nobility, or the guardians of dominant religious and political ideologies, *kyōkaku* adhere to their own moral codes, which sometimes run counter to those of authorities. Hence, Glynne Walley's translation of *kyōkaku* as "gallant," emphasizing courageous and heroic attributes, seems more fitting. See Walley, *Good Dogs*, 8. Thus, while here I predominantly utilize the Japanese term *kyōkaku*, I occasionally employ "gallant" when contextually appropriate.

[6] Chiba Kameo, "Kyōkaku oyobi kyōkaku shisō," in *Kyōkaku no sekai: Edo kara Shōwa made*, ed. Muramatsu Shōfu (Tōkyō: Kokusho Kankōkai, 2015), 31–32.

[7] William C Hedberg, *The Japanese Discovery of Chinese Fiction: The Water Margin and the Making of a National Canon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 3–4.

[8] Takasu Yoshijirō, "Kyōkaku no hassei oyobi hattatsu," in *Kyōkaku no sekai: Edo kara Shōwa made*, ed. Muramatsu Shōfu (Tōkyō: Kokusho Kankōkai, 2015), 8–9.

shared resistance against the ruling class by these groups laid the foundation for the eventual appearance of *kyōkaku*.

Takasu further argues that the *hatamotoyakko* 旗本奴 (young samurai who served high-ranking *hatamoto*, or shogunal vassals) of the early Edo period should be regarded as the precursors of *kyōkaku* because their emphasis on cultivating mental endurance and physical sturdiness sharply contrasted with the luxurious and decadent lifestyles of the increasingly bureaucratized *hatamoto* class, and their distinctive appearance and behavior embodied a form of resistance to the progressively class-solidified social customs of the time. Their rebellious spirit gradually spread to the commoner class, eventually giving rise to their commoner counterpart, the *machiyakko* 町奴 (young townsmen).[9] *Machiyakko* generally hailed from commoner families, and they actively resisted the oppression of the ruling class. However, as Takasu points out, both *hatamotoyakko* and *machiyakko* tended to overemphasize spirit and the importance of accepting challenges without hesitation, which sometimes led them to recklessly charge forward without regard for right or wrong.

Bakin holds a critical view of both *hatamotoyakko* and *machiyakko*, however, considering them unworthy of the title of true *kyōkaku.* In the preface of the first installment of *Kyōkakuden*, he asserts that these "gallants of the towns (*ryokō no shi* 閭巷之士)" are inferior to the "virtuous warriors of old (*inishie dōtoku no shi* 古者道徳之士)." His portrayal of "gallants of the towns" includes figures from both groups, such as Ōtori Ippei 大鳥逸平 (1588–1612),[10] a

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[9] Takasu, 12–16.

[10] Ōtori Ippei formed his *hatamotoyakko* group around 1610, and its members were renowned for wearing strange clothes and conducting villainous deeds. This group was composed primarily of low-ranking samurai, and aimed to both restrain the high-ranking samurai elite's tyranny as well as to protect low-ranking samurai's rights. Inui

pioneering *hatamotoyakko*, and Banzuiin Chōbei 幡随院長兵衛 (1622–1650),[11] a renowned *machiyakko*. Both are historical figures from the early Edo period who were later mythologized in popular culture. For instance, Banzuiin Chōbei became a celebrated character in kabuki theater, first appearing on stage in 1744. His popularity endured throughout the Edo period and continues even into modern times.[12]

Yet despite the iconic status of these two men, Bakin's portrayal remains critical, suggesting that their actions and behaviors fell short of the virtues he associates with true *kyōkaku*. His negative evaluation reads:

> Some of their behavior cannot unreservedly be called righteous. They were impetuous, sometimes bullying others and sometimes aiding them. They formed their own groups and made a living through their brute strength.
> 而其所為、或未必合於義。啻立気斉作威福、結私交以立彊於世者也。[13]

In other words, Bakin disapproves of how such people exploit their power to oppress those weaker than themselves. In Bakin's conception, true *kyōkaku* are brave and skilled in martial arts, uphold their promises, and defend the vulnerable. While their sense of righteousness may diverge from the Confucian definition, they maintain humility and refrain from boasting about their deeds. Because of these traits, they are perceived as formidable threats by the government, as they adhere to their own moral code rather than serving authority. They harbor disdain for those who abuse power and are willing to sacrifice their lives to combat such tyranny. Moreover,

Katsumi ed., *Nihon denki densetsu daijiten* (Tōkyō: Kadokawa Shoten, 1986), 185–86.

[11] Banzuiin Chōbei was from the *chōnin* (townsmen) class. He eventually rose to become the head of the *machiyakko* and competed with local *hatamotoyakko* groups. His life came to an end when he was killed by Mizuno Nariyuki 水野成之 (1630–1664) and members of the latter's own gang. For more details, see Inui, 729.

[12] Kawatake and Furuido, *Kabuki tōjō jinbutsu jiten (fukyūban)* (Tōkyō: Hakusuisha, 2010), 659–61.

[13] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 6.

their ability to evade detection complicates governmental efforts to control or regulate them. And while authorities may view them as more dangerous than ordinary thieves and bandits, the general public worships them as their protectors and saviors.

In this preface to the first installment of *Kyōkakuden*, Bakin meticulously outlines the definition of *kyōkaku*, drawing heavily from Chapter 124 "Youxia liezhuan" 遊俠列伝 (J. "Yūkyō retsuden"; The biographies of the wandering knights) of Sima Qian's *Shiji* and the same chapter in its Ming commentary *Shiji pinglin* 史記評林 (J. *Shiki hyōrin*, Annotated records of the grand historian, 16th century).[14] Nishimura Hideto has observed that over half of this preface comprises excerpts from *Shiji* and its commentary, with Bakin contributing only some transitional sentences and the concluding portion.

Nishimura interprets these excerpts as indicative of Bakin's complete reliance on *Shiji* and its use as a mere "justification" for his composition of this narrative centered on *kyōkaku*.[15] However, as mentioned previously, Bakin's comparison between the "inferior" *hatamotoyakko* and *machiyakko* and the virtuous *kyōkaku* of old indicates that he has a more nuanced definition in mind. In Bakin's view, true *kyōkaku* are characterized by their willingness to protect the weak, an understanding that diverges from their conventional popular image as gangsters who impose their power on others. For Bakin, the essence of *kyōkaku* lies in their ethical commitment to defend the vulnerable, marking a stark contrast to the lawless behavior of some *hatamotoyakko* and *machiyakko*. His conceptualization of these terms is moreover deeply rooted in the classical

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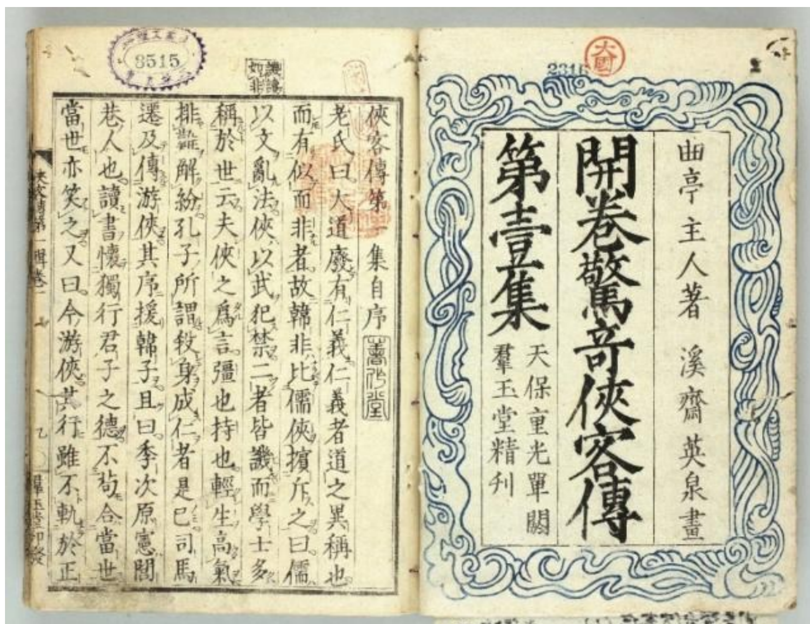
[14] Nishimura, "Chūgoku bungaku yori mita Bakin no ichi danmen," in *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), 790–91.

[15] Nishimura, 791.

texts he cites, rather than in the prevailing popular interpretations of the time. Consequently, a careful analysis of this preface is essential to understanding the theoretical foundations of Bakin's strategy in constructing the morality of *kyōkaku*.

3.3 Moral Degradation and the Appearance of Kyōkaku and Tōzoku

In the preface of the first installment of *Kyōkakuden* (Figure 7), Bakin establishes a worldview centered on societal decline. He contends that the deterioration of moral standards in society has contributed to the blurred ethical boundaries associated with *kyōkaku* figures. Furthermore, by considering *kyōkaku* alongside *tōzoku*, Bakin is able to distinguish the two, effectively setting aside the more "evil" elements traditionally attributed to *kyōkaku*. In doing so, he redefines *kyōkaku* as representatives of righteousness, positioning them as figures who embody the virtue of protecting the weak, and thus elevating them as symbols of good in contrast to their more nefarious counterparts.



曲亭主人著 溪齋英泉畫
開巻驚奇侠客傳
第壹集
天保重光單閼
羣玉堂精刊

侠客傳第一集自序
老氏曰大道廢有仁義仁義者道之異稱也
而有似而非者故韓非比儒侠擯斥之曰儒
以文亂法侠以武犯禁二者皆譏而學士多
稱於世云夫侠之爲言彊也持也輕生高氣
排難解紛孔子所謂殺身成仁者是已司馬
遷及傳游侠其序援韓子且曰季次原憲閭
巷人也讀書懷獨行君子之德不苟合當世
當世亦笑之又曰今游侠其行雖不軌於正

Figure 7. Inside front cover and the author's preface. *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, part 1 (pub. 1832), vol. 1. Owned by Hiroshima University Library, retrieved from Union Catalogue Database of Japanese Texts. https://doi.org/10.20730/100302090 (image 4).

The preface begins with a citation from the Chinese Daoist classic *Dao de jing* 道徳経 (J. *Dō toku kyō*, fourth century BC): "Laozi says, 'When the Great Way declined, the words for benevolence and righteousness came in."[16] This opening line sets the thematic tone for the entire narrative and establishes the context for *kyōkaku*: they emerge when the Way—the Daoist principle of natural order and harmony—is lost and society falls into disorder. (This idea also echoes Takasu's discussion of the *gekokujō* and *tsuchi ikki* practices during chaotic wartime.) The whole stanza in *Dao de jing* is as follows:

> And when the olden way of rule declined, the words for love [benevolence] and serve [righteousness] came in. Next came knowledge and keen thought, advent of lying, sham, and fraud. When kinsmen lost their kind concord, they honored child- and parent-love. In dark disorder ruling houses turned to loyal devoted vassals.
> 大道廃、有仁義。智慧出、有大偽。六親不和、有孝慈。国家昏乱、有忠臣。[17]

This stanza describes the decline of the Great Way, a natural state of order in which words for virtues are not needed. It is only after the decline of such a state that virtues like benevolence and righteousness are conceived. Therefore, benevolence and righteousness mark the decline of the Way rather than any reflection of the Way. In general, Daoism espouses a critical stance towards such Confucian virtues. For example, *Zhuangzi* has a similar or even more critical attitude: "That the Way and its Virtue were destroyed in order to create benevolence and righteousness—this was the fault of the sage."[18]

By citing Laozi's teachings, Bakin highlights the degeneration of society and the inherently unreliable nature of Confucian virtues in such a context. He then extends this

[16] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 5. 老子曰、「大道廃、有仁義。」

[17] Laozi, *Dao de Jing: The Book of the Way*, trans. Moss Roberts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 68.

[18] Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 66–67. 毀道徳以為仁義、聖人之過也。

argument by stating that even virtues such as benevolence and righteousness have become corrupted: "There are fake people who pretend to be true, and that is why Han Fei criticizes them by comparing them to 'Confucians and gallants,'"[19] a direct citation from *Shiji*. In other words, once the Way is lost, secondary virtues such as benevolence and righteousness emerge to fill the void; but when these virtues are tainted, distinguishing between good and evil becomes increasingly difficult. Through this reasoning, Bakin establishes a moral hierarchy that reflects the disordered nature of society. Although *kyōkaku* encompasses negative qualities like recklessness and deceptiveness, making them imperfect according to the Confucian moral standard, this is owing to the degradation of a disordered society. In this way, Bakin justifies the ambiguous morality of *kyōkaku* and aligns them with the good.

Next, Bakin defines the qualities of *kyōkaku*, citing Chen Renzi's 陳仁子 (J. Chin Jinshi, Song Dynasty) comments in *Shiji pinglin* and Sima Qian's *Shiji* itself:

> Gallants are powerful and they protect people. With high moral integrity, they are not afraid of death. They help people in trouble and solve disputes. This is what Confucius meant when he remarked, "to die to achieve virtue." When Sima Qian composed *Shiji*, he cited Han Fei in the preface. He also wrote, "Ji Ci and Yuan Xian were both commoners from village lanes. They studied books and cherished independence of action and the virtues of the superior man; in their righteousness they refuse to compromise with their age, and their age in turn merely laughed at them." Furthermore, he wrote, "as for the wandering gallants, though their actions may not conform to perfect righteousness, yet they are always true to their word. What they undertake they invariably fulfil; what they have promised they invariably carry out. Without thinking of themselves they hasten to the side of those who are in trouble, whether it means survival or destruction, life or death. Yet they never boast of their accomplishments but rather consider it a disgrace to brag of what they have done for others. So there is much about them which is worthy of admiration."
>
> 夫俠之為言、彊也持也。軽生高気、排難解紛。孔子所謂殺身成仁者是已。司馬遷及伝游俠、其序援韓子。且曰、季次原憲閭巷人也。読書懐独行君子之徳、不苟合当世。当世亦笑之。又曰、今游俠、其行雖不軌於正義、然其言必信。其行必果。

[19] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 5.

已諾必誠。不愛其軀、赴士之阨困。既已存亡死生矣。而不矜其能、羞伐其德。蓋亦有足多者。[20]

The opening sentence of this passage underscores two pivotal attributes of *kyōkaku*—bravery and righteousness.[21] The following citation of the stories of Ji Ci 季次 (J. Ki Ji) and Yuan Xian 原憲 (J. Gen Ken) from *Shiji* further elucidates three qualities of *kyōkaku*: they are not confined to noble lineage; they diligently study texts and cultivate virtues; and they may face misunderstanding or ridicule from contemporary society.[22] The text continues to emphasize their unwavering commitment to their words and their readiness to sacrifice themselves for others in distress; it states furthermore that they refrain from boasting of their deeds, and that and their righteousness may not always align perfectly with societal norms.

Yet because of the marginalized status of *kyōkaku* and the falsity of society, it is extremely difficult to identify them. *Shiji* continues to explore in more detail those people who pretend to be *kyōkaku*—thieves and bandits, or *tōzoku*:

> Ignorant people have a saying, "Why bother to understand benevolence and righteousness? Whoever does you some good must be a virtuous man!" Bo Yi hated the Zhou dynasty and chose to starve on Shouyang Mountain rather than serve under it, but Kings Wen and Wu did not give up their thrones on that account. Zhi and Qiao were cruel and lawless bandits, yet their own followers never tired of singing their praises. From this we can see that "he who steals a fishhook gets his head chopped off, but he who steals a state becomes a great lord, and when one is a great lord, he automatically acquires benevolence and righteousness." These are no empty words!

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[20] Kyokutei, 5. I rely on Watson's translation for the citations from *Shiji*. See Sima, *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty*, trans. Burton Wartson (Hong Kong: Columbia University Press, 1993), 2:409–10.

[21] Sima, *Shiki Hyōrin* (National Institute of Japanese Literature, 1636), vol. 124, 1-omote. Bakin cites part of Chen Renzi's comment with slight revisions. The original reads: 陳仁子曰、〔中略〕夫游者、行也。俠者、持也。軽生高気、排難解紛。(Chen Renzi says, "… *You* 游 means 'to travel' and *xia* 俠 means 'to guard.' With high moral integrity, [gallants] are not afraid of death. They help people in trouble and solve disputes.")

[22] Ji Ci and Yuan Xian are Confucian scholars rather than *kyōkaku*, but Sima Qian discusses them to highlight the qualities they share with *kyōkaku*.

鄙人有言曰、何知仁義。已嚮其利者為有德。故伯夷醜周、餓死首陽山、而文武不以其故貶王。跖蹻暴戻、其徒誦義無窮。由此観之、窃鉤者誅、窃国者侯、侯之門仁義存。非虚言也。[23]

Sima Qian cites instances where ignorance leads people to equate real benevolence and righteousness with actions only consequentially beneficent, regardless of the actor's true character. For instance, the Confucian sage Bo Yi 伯夷 (J. Haku I), critical of King Wu's lack of loyalty and filial piety, starved himself in protest but failed to dissuade the king from assuming the throne. Similarly, despite Zhi 跖 (J. Seki) and Qiao's 蹻 (J. Kyō) notoriety as ruthless bandits, their followers lauded them. Sima Qian further draws from *Zhuangzi* to challenge conventional notions of right and wrong, positing that a great thief, if benevolent towards his subjects after usurping power, can be transformed into a virtuous ruler. Sima Qian delineates a crucial distinction between *kyōkaku* and *tōzoku*: whereas *kyōkaku* uphold their principles and commitments steadfastly, even if it necessitates solitude, *tōzoku* employ deception and adapt their principles opportunistically to amass fame, power, and wealth. The motif of the *tōzoku* serves as another thematic axis in *Kyōkakuden*, to be examined further in section five.

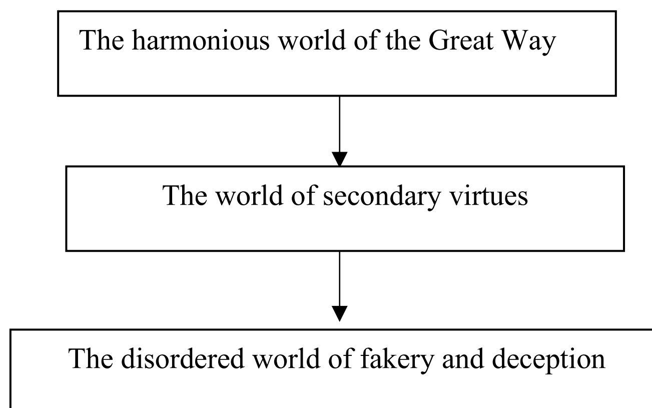

Figure 8. The three phases of the world's degradation, according to Bakin.

In summary, drawing upon Chinese classics, Bakin divides the moral degradation of the world into three phases: the harmonious world of the Great Way, the secondarily good world of virtues, and further beyond that the disordered chaotic world, as shown in Figure 8. *Kyōkaku* are situated within the third phase, where their imperfect morality can still be considered good, albeit inferior to the first two phases. Furthermore, *kyōkaku*'s moral superiority is confirmed by their foil,

[23] Sima, *Records of the Grand Historian. Han Dynasty*, 2:410.

tōzoku, who are defined as possessing evil characteristics. In the following sections, I will explore how Bakin puts these theoretically defined images of *kyōkaku* and *tōzoku* into practice in *Kyōkakuden*.

3.4 The *Kyōkaku* Ideal and the People's Hope for Justice

The quintessential *kyōkaku* character crafted by Bakin in *Kyōkakuden* is Nogami no Fuhito Akinobu 野上史著演, a *gōshi* 郷士 (country samurai) whose detailed introduction marks the beginning of Chapter One.[24] Akinobu's lineage extends back to the Kamakura shogunate. During the Nanbokuchō period, his grandfather had allied with the Southern Court and transported rations for General Nitta Yoshisada's 新田義貞 (1301-1338) army; but upon learning of Yoshisada's demise, he withdrew from political affairs. Akinobu's own father, incapacitated by illness, followed scholarly pursuits instead of serving a lord. Heir to such a family legacy, Akinobu strives himself to hone his skills in both literature and martial arts. His principles prioritize loyalty and filial piety, manifested in his refusal to pledge allegiance to the contemporary Ashikaga shogunate due to his familial ties to the Southern Court.

Akinobu's family history and educational background shape his unique *kyōkaku* nature, making him willing to diverge from conventional norms of his society. He sympathizes with the defunct imperial line and refuses to serve the incumbent ruling authority, challenging prevailing notions of loyalty and righteousness. Despite his reluctance to perform obeisance to the rulers, he exhibits remarkable compassion toward the common people. Akinobu extends aid to all who seek it, dispensing resources without inquiry into their identities. Exceptionally, his empathy

[24] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 715. Bakin often used this term *gōshi* to refer to characters born into samurai families but currently living in the countryside while keeping their samurai titles.

extends also to anonymous casualties of war: he purchases skulls of the nameless dead scattered along the roadside, symbolizing his reverence for the souls of those forgotten.[25]

Akinobu's interpretation of filial piety similarly deviates from societal expectations. Despite his age, he and his wife remain childless, a situation traditionally viewed in Confucian doctrine as a failure to perpetuate the family line. Yet whereas his wife suggests taking a concubine to ensure lineage continuity, Akinobu attributes their childlessness to Heaven's will. He challenges the Confucian teaching of *shichikyo* 七去 (Ch. *qiqü*, seven rules to divorce a wife), which allow a husband to put the blame of infertility entirely on the wife.[26] He argues that both men and women can be infertile and that perhaps his and his wife's lack of children is his fault rather than hers.

In the largely government-oriented and hierarchical Neo-Confucianism, moral virtues such as benevolence, loyalty, and filial piety are keys to sustaining the grand social stability. Consequently, groups of people who cannot or no longer contribute to this system, such as the anonymous dead in wars and infertile women, are often silenced and marginalized. Akinobu's allegiance and filial piety challenge such conventional definitions by prioritizing the welfare of

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[25] It was a common practice in war for samurai to gather the heads of famous enemy generals as the proof of their military achievements, for which their lords would reward them accordingly. Akinobu is not motivated by utilitarian purposes, however. Rather, he chooses to collect skulls of the nameless. This again shows his unique understanding of loyalty and righteousness.

[26] The seven reasons to divorce a wife are given as follows: "If the wife is not filial to her parents in law, she should leave; if the wife is childless, she should leave; if the wife is not chaste, she should leave; if the wife is jealous, she should leave; if the wife has incurable disease, she should leave; if the wife is too talkative, she should leave; and, if the wife steals things, she should leave." This was a common Confucian practice in both premodern China and Japan. *Dadai Liji Jinzhu Jinyi*, trans. Gao Ming (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1984), 469.

the vulnerable over deference to authority. He aligns himself with the downtrodden populace, thereby underscoring Bakin's commitment to representing the voice of the common people.

At the same time, even as Bakin portrays Akinobu as an exemplary *kyōkaku* character, he subtly exposes the fictional nature of his depiction. Although Akinobu and his peers serve as beacons of hope for readers, the narrative effectively suggests that it is only through the lens of fiction that the grievances of the oppressed can be heard and addressed. Notably, his name, Nogami no Fuhito Akinobu 野上史著演, can be rearranged to signify "to write unofficial history and historical romance" (*yashi engi o chosu* 野史演義を著す). Jōsai highlighted this linguistic play, noting: "Needless to say, this [Akinobu's] name means unofficial history and historical romance. How interesting!"[27] In the Edo period, "unofficial history and historical romance" often denoted fictional works in general, imbuing Akinobu with metaphorical significance as a representative of fiction within *Kyōkakuden*.

One particular episode involving an empty letter further underscores this fictionality. Dairoku Hidenao 大六英直 falls gravely ill en route to Sagami and entrusts his wife, Omoya 母屋, and son, Koroku 小六, to Akinobu through a letter. Akinobu receives the letter, only to find it empty upon opening. He thinks to himself,

> "Hidenao and I have never met before. He heard about my conduct and wanted to entrust his wife and son to me. There is little he can mention, so he only wrote his name on the envelope and put a piece of white paper in it. [The empty letter] conveyed his painful intention: 'silence is better than words.'"

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[27] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 715. 野史演義ノ意ヲ以テノ名ナルコトハイフマデモナク、オモシロシ。 Another hypothesis is that Akinobu's name hints at Bakin's pen name Chosakudō 著作堂, which can be interpreted as "the hall where the writer composes works." In this case, the character of Akinobu would represent the author's own fictional persona, an equation perhaps highlighting for the readers his fictional, created nature.

> 英直俺と一面の、交りあるにあらねども、俺行状を伝聞て、妻子を託せんと欲するに、書記すべきよしのなければ、標書にのみ姓名を、写して白紙を封ぜしは、いはぬはいふに優るといふ、苦しき意中を示せしならん。[28]

Akinobu interprets the empty letter as a silent testament to Hidenao's character, attributing significance to the absence of words. This portrayal suggests that moral individuals like Akinobu possess an innate ability to recognize each other's virtues, albeit through unreliable means such as hearsay or silence.

However, the episode also underscores the ambiguity and unreliability of words. Akinobu's trust in the empty letter reveals his acceptance of such ambiguity as well as his own fictional nature. Thus, while Akinobu, as an ideal *kyōkaku*, symbolizes moral integrity and virtue within the narrative, his encounters and interpretations simultaneously highlight the inherent limitations and uncertainties of human communication and narrative representation.

Another manifestation of Akinobu's fictionality is the episode of the brush tomb. After assisting Hidenao's son Koroku in retrieving the heads of Wakiya Yoshitaka 脇屋義隆 (?-1404), a high-ranking samurai from the Nitta clan serving the Southern Court, and his retainers, Akinobu places the heads into six urns and inters them alongside Hidenao's body in a temple he frequents. He thereupon delivers a speech to the villagers:

> "These vases contain the worn-out brushes I used from the spring of [my life] at the age of eight, when I started to learn calligraphy, up until yesterday and today, when I am almost fifty years old. Thanks to these brushes, I learned how to write, though my writing is not perfect, so I think I should not break them and throw them away. I have kept them till now, and because tonight [is my sworn brother's funeral], I decided to bury them here and make a brush tomb for them."
>
> 這瓶に斂めしは、俺年八才ばかりなりし春の比、初て手習せし日より、五十に近かる昨今まで、年来用敗したる、禿筆にて候也。これ等が資を得たればこ

[28] Kyokutei, 36.

> そ、曲做にも文字をば写せ、掻遣棄べきものにはあらず、と思ひにければ蔵め置しを、廼今宵の便宜に任して、こゝに瘞めて筆塚を、遺さんとての所為になん。[29]

Evidently, the brush tomb enables Akinobu to conceal the fact that he clandestinely reclaimed the heads of Yoshitaka and his retainers, who were killed by the shogun's follower, Fujishiro Yasutomo 藤白安同. Yoshitaka, a supporter of the Southern Court, was perceived as a traitor by the Ashikaga shogunate, which put his head on display as a deterrent to potential dissidents. From Akinobu's perspective, however, Yoshitaka was a loyal samurai who remained steadfast in his allegiance until the end, motivating Akinobu to retrieve his head and properly bury it alongside his body. All the same, Akinobu's actions are illegal, necessitating the fabrication of the brush tomb pretext to conceal what he has done.

Both the empty letter and the brush tomb episodes serve symbolic purposes.[30] Paper and brush, essential tools of fictional composition, hold significance for Akinobu, whose name implies a connection to fictional narratives. Akinobu himself, however, after first acknowledging the symbolic power of empty paper, subsequently then buries his own brushes, suggesting rather a skepticism toward the authenticity and efficacy of writing. The inability to convey reality through written words underscores the government-centric nature of official history, which often suppresses dissenting voices. Fiction, therefore, emerges as a unique realm, albeit an imaginary one, where such voices can in fact persist.

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[29] Kyokutei, 48.

[30] The brush tomb in *Kyōkakuden* may remind readers of the brush tomb that Bakin built for himself in 1809 , which still exists today on the grounds of the Seiunji 青雲寺 Temple in Tokyo. In this sense, the character Akinobu might even symbolizes the fiction author Bakin himself (as discussed in footnote 28 as well), and the emphasis on the deception of writing in his two episodes reminds readers of the fictional nature of *Kyōkakuden*.

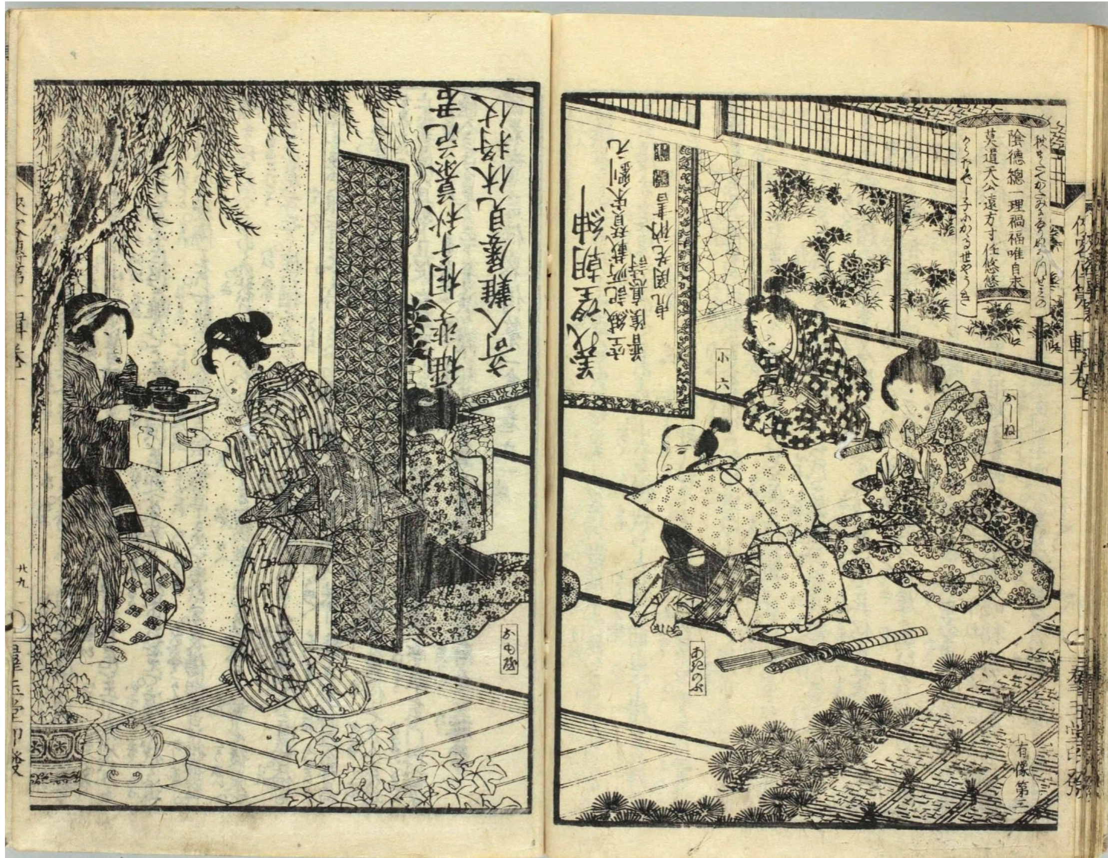

Figure 9. The screen with an upside-down poem. *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, part 1 (pub. 1832), vol. 1. Owned by Hiroshima University Library, retrieved from Union Catalogue Database of Japanese Texts. https://doi.org/10.20730/100302090 (image 33).

Akinobu's fictionality is further elaborated in the illustrations.[31] Figure 9 depicts the meeting between Akinobu, his wife, Omoya, and her son in the empty-letter episode. This illustration situates the four characters within a guest room, attended by two maids engaged in culinary tasks. Notably, in the middle of the illustration, there is a screen with an upside-down poem and its source. The text goes,

[31] Although *Kyōkakuden* was illustrated by four artists, Bakin himself was responsible for the design of the illustrations. See Hattori, "*Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden* no kuchie sashie," 795–96. Hattori also explores Bakin's attitude towards and evaluation of different illustrators, whose diverse artistic styles yield distinct outcomes. See Hattori Hitoshi, "Bakin ni okeru yomihon no kuchie sashie no isō," in *Kyokutei Bakin no bungakuiki* (Tōkyō: Wakakusa Shobō, 1997), 228–34.

Praise Duke Pei; admire Fan Shi forever.[32]

Such great people are too few; pin no such hope on everyone with wealth and rank.

A poem to praise the secret kindness of Liu Yuanpu in the Song dynasty, sourced from "The Story of the Empty Letter."

Calligraphed by Monk Kokan.[33]

稱裴相，千秋慕范君。

奇人難屡見，休将仗義望朝紳。

空緘記所載賛宋劉元普陰悳詩

虎関老衲書

As elucidated by Mizuno Minoru, this poem reveals Bakin's source material for the empty letter episode.[34] It is a rearrangement of the opening poem in "*Li Kerang jingda konghan Liu Yuanpu shuangsheng guizi*" 李克譲竟達空函　劉元普双生貴子 (Li Kerang sends a blank letter; Liu Yuanpu begets two precious sons) in *Chuke Pai'an Jingqi* 初刻拍案驚奇 (J. *Shokoku haku'an kyōki*, Slapping the table in amazement, 17th century), and Liu Yuanpu is the original model for Akinobu in the empty letter episode.[35] The fact that both titles contain the same term *kyōki* 驚奇 (to be amazed) also reflects the significance of this reference.

The poem on the screen has at least three layers of significance. Although it is common practice for Bakin to reveal his sources,[36] he usually did so with certain purposes. In this

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[32] Both Duke Pei and Fan Shi are characters appearing in episodes in the Chinese Ming novel *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小説 (J. *Kokon shōsetsu*; *Stories Old and New*, the 17th century).

[33] Kokan 虎関 (1278-1346) was a famous Rinzai Zen patriarch and was noted for his Chinese poetry and calligraphy. See Kyokutei, *Kaikan Kyōki Kyōkakuden*, 718.

[34] Mizuno Minoru, "Bakin to *Haku'an kyōki*," in *Edo Shōsetsu Ronsō* (Tōkyō: Chūōkōron Shinsha, 1974), 341–42.

[35] For details of the original Chinese story, see Ling Mengchu, *Slapping the Table in Amazement: A Ming Dynasty Story Collection*, trans. Yang Shuhui and Yang Yunqin (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 411.

[36] In *Hakkenden*, Bakin revealed one main source for the marriage of a princess and a dog is *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (J. *Gokanjo*; Book of the Later Han; 5th century) by including the original Chinese text in one of the illustrations. See Walley, *Good Dogs*, 127–29.

example, the exposure of the reference underscores the fabricated nature of Akinobu's character. Moreover, the poem's thematic content reinforces the rarity of the *kyōkaku* ethos. Both Duke Pei and Fan Shi are fictional characters and the use of them as supporting references to prove the *kyōkaku* spirit implies the scarcity of such noble traits in reality, as implied by the latter portion of the verse.

Last, the placement of the screen at the center of the illustration, coupled with the inversion of the poem, invites readers to engage in a contemplative exploration of the author's concealed intent. However, when they invert the book, all the other elements outside the small space marked by the edge of the screen lose their significance and this moment of pause which interrupts the immersive reading experience makes the readers realize the fact that they are reading a fictional story. Such reader-oriented narrative strategies underscore Bakin's intention to entertain and engage his audience, while simultaneously interrogating the notion of *kyōkaku* in reality. Thus, this illustrative device serves as a poignant reminder of the ephemeral allure of fictional worlds, juxtaposed against harsh realities.

This section has examined the characterization of Akinobu as an ideal *kyōkaku*. By exercising virtues such as loyalty and filial piety in the service of protecting the marginalized and challenging governmental authority, Akinobu adopts a bottom-up approach to morality that departs from a conventional Confucian perspective. However, Akinobu ultimately remains a fictional construct within the narrative of *Kyōkakuden*. This harsh reality implies that the solace sought by the marginalized may be found only within the realm of fictionality.

3.5 *Tōzoku*: The Evil Counterpart of *Kyōkaku*

The negative counterpart of *kyōkaku* in *Kyōkakuden* is *tōzoku*. Yet in many early modern narratives, the two groups are not always depicted as contradictory, as Uchida points out. In some cases, *kyōkaku* were even portrayed as morally corrupted as *tōzoku*. Against this, Uchida argues, Bakin's conception of *kyōkaku* is distinct precisely because he seeks to strip *tōzoku* elements from *kyōkaku*.[37] I agree with this insofar as Bakin does indeed attempt to establish the category of *kyōkaku* as morally good and *tōzoku* as evil, yet a careful examination of two *tōzoku* characters from *Kyōkakuden* reveals Bakin's intentional blurring of the two categories. Although according to his proposed framework, *kyōkaku* and *tōzoku* are theoretically different in nature, in the narrative itself they are extensively misrecognized and prove to be indistinguishable.

While *kyōkaku* and *tōzoku* share many similarities, such as maintaining low profiles and adhering to their own codes rather than the laws of society, their motivations differ significantly. *Kyōkaku* employ their power and occasionally transgress laws for the betterment of others, whereas *tōzoku* typically act in pursuit of personal gain. However, discerning an actor's true intentions is challenging, making it in practice difficult to distinguish between *kyōkaku* and *tōzoku*. Even the *kyōkaku* exemplar Akinobu is often labeled as *tōzoku* by corrupt government officials. In Chapter Three, Fujishiro Yasutomo refers to Akinobu as "the head thief" (*kubinusubito* 首級盗人) and "the person who stole the heads of the traitors" (*gyakuto no kubi o nusumishi mono* 逆徒の首を窃みしもの).[38]

Conversely, skillful *tōzoku* often masquerade as benevolent and righteous individuals. An illustrative example is Ikazuchi Denji Takateru 五十槌電次隆光, a former samurai who turned

[37] Uchida, "Bakin no kyō: 'Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden' izen," 173.

[38] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 51.

to a life of crime after his lord's demise. By day, Takateru assumes the guise of a respectable *gōshi*, teaching martial arts in the Ishikawa area of Kawachi (a province in the eastern part of modern Osaka Prefecture). However, under the cover of night, he and his cohorts engage in thievery elsewhere. Cunningly, Takateru refrains from plundering the local populace and even safeguards them from other thieves and criminals, fostering an atmosphere of tranquility in the Ishikawa area itself. As a result, the region thrives as a veritable haven of happiness, where "nobody picks up articles dropped on the street or locks their door at night"[39]—a reference to the ideal world of the Great Way, though in an ironic sense. Even the local authorities remain oblivious to Takateru's true nature, regarding him as a dependable guardian of the community.

Clearly, Akinobu and Takateru form a juxtaposed pair of *kyōkaku* and *tōzoku*. Both are esteemed as *gōshi* by the populace, and both utilize their prowess to protect the locals. However, while Akinobu selflessly bestows his wealth upon those in need, Takateru's actions stem from a self-serving desire for long-term survival. As readers, we possess the omniscient perspective, allowing us to discern the true character of the two individuals. Yet within the narrative, the inhabitants struggle to differentiate them. Ironically, it is Akinobu the government denounces as disloyal while lauding Takateru as an honorable gentleman.

Another similarity shared by these two characters is that both receive "abnormal" letters asking for assistance. In Chapter Thirty-One, another *tōzoku*, Yūbari Nijirō 木綿張荷二郎, escapes from prison with a beautiful widow from a high-ranking samurai family and seeks refuge with Takateru. Nijirō expresses his desire to join Takateru's gang, but Takateru stipulates that he

[39] Kyokutei, 396. 路(みち)に遺(おち)たるを拾(ひら)ふことなく、夜鎖(よるとざゝ)でも患(うれ)ひなき、

must present a *tōmeijō* 投名状 (letter of recommendation) within seven days.[40] Puzzled, Nijirō queries how he can produce such a letter. One of Takateru's students clarifies that a *tōmeijō* need not be a written missive but rather may be a valuable commodity such as gold, silver, or a beautiful woman, demonstrating one's worth as a thief. Returning home, Nijirō persuades the widow to assume the role of *tōmeijō*. Impressed by what he takes to be alluring "gift," Takateru welcomes Nijirō into the gang. He praises Nijirō by pointing out that the initiate possesses the eight Confucian virtues (although he actually lists only seven):

> Your talent surpasses my expectations. Although you were captured in a prison, you found a way to escape. This is "wisdom." You pitied a framed woman and saved her. This is "benevolence." After that, you killed that adulterous couple who you had a grudge with. This is "bravery." Also, although you obtained a beautiful woman, you did not sell her to the pleasure quarter or rape her by yourself. This is "fidelity." This is "righteousness." Furthermore, you brought the woman all the way here to present her to me as a gift. This is "propriety." This is "loyalty." There is no one in my team who can even follow one of the eight virtuous codes.
>
> 思ふに優たる人の才幹。その身獄舎に繋れしを、脱去たるは即智也。その罪ならぬを憐みて、婦人を拯ひしは仁也。その折に那恨ある、姦夫淫婦を殺せしは勇也。又美しき婦人を獲ながら、そを遊女に售もせず、みづから犯さゞりけるは、是則信也義也。況件の美婦人を、遥杳我に贈んとて、将て来にけるは礼也忠也。是等の仁義八行を、一箇也とも行ふもの、我党に誰かあらん。[41]

The cynical invocation of the eight Confucian virtues in the narrative echoes Bakin's renowned work *Hakkenden*, in which each protagonist embodies one of these virtues. However, unlike the earnest portrayal in *Hakkenden*, the depiction here is laced with satire and irony. Moreover,

[40] Asō, *Edo bungaku to chūgoku bungaku*, 170. The model here for *tōmeijō* is Chapter Eleven of *Suikoden*. When Lin Chong wants to join the gang, he is asked to provide a *tōmeijō*. Zhu Gui tells him that he needs to kill a person and bring his head back in three days to prove his loyalty to the gang.

[41] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 452.

Takateru was actually himself deceived by Nijirō, and in fact, none of the actions he ascribed to Nijirō when praising his supposed virtues turns out to be true.

First, while it is accurate that Nijirō cleverly escapes from prison, he does so by deceiving and brutally slaughtering the jailer who aided him; therefore, his cunning should not be lauded. Second, Taketeru praises him for kindly saving an innocent woman, but he is unaware that Nijirō was himself the thief who deceived and stole all her money in the first place. Third, Nijirō does not engage bravely with the couple against whom he has a grudge but instead tricks them into opening the door for him by pretending to be the village head's errand boy, whereupon he launches a surprise nighttime attack. As for his fidelity and righteousness, the fourth and fifth virtues, although Nijirō claims to be treating the woman properly, he actually forces her into a sexual relationship immediately following their escape. Finally, regarding the sixth and seventh virtues, while Nijirō appears to be demonstrating his propriety and loyalty by presenting the woman as a recommendation letter, his true intention is to ultimately usurp the gang's headship himself and eliminate Takateru. In this regard, Nijirō emerges as an even more cunning *tōzoku* than Takateru: his intentions and actions are fundamentally malevolent, yet he artfully portrays himself as a virtuous individual.

The author intentionally frames both Takateru and Nijirō through the lens of the *kyōkaku* spirit: Takateru is recognized by the local people and the government as a noble gentleman, while Nijirō is applauded by Takateru as a man embodying the eight Confucian virtues. However, both characters ultimately harbor selfish, profit-oriented intentions, suggesting that their feigned virtues only exacerbate the chaos within an already disordered society. Nevertheless, they are not the root cause of societal degradation. By referring to *Zhuangzi*'s

discussion of the great thief, Bakin implies that it is the hypocritical Ashikaga shogunate that bears responsibility for pervasive disorder in the realm.

3.6 The Ashikaga Shogunate and the Great Thief Metaphor

The usage of *tōzoku* in *Kyōkakuden* extends beyond its literal meaning of thief or bandit to encompass the concept of usurpation, particularly in the context of the Ashikaga shogun, who sets up a puppet emperor in the Northern Court while effectively himself becoming the actual ruler of Japan. Such disorder at the highest levels of authority catalyzes systematic social unrest, creating an environment in which *tōzoku* can thrive. Although *kyōkaku* emerge to confront them, the persistence of disorder at the level of governance ensures, per the narrative, that *tōzoku* will continue to appear.

Bakin's interest in exploring the connection between *tōzoku* and usurpation is evidenced by his extensive incorporation of episodes featuring the legendary thief, Zhi. Indeed, Takateru's speech praising Nijirō's eight virtues as discussed above can be seen as deriving also in part from discourse on the great thief. Rhetorically, it is closely resembles a dialogue on Confucian morality between two *tōzoku* found in *Zhuangzi*'s "Quqie" 胠篋 (J. "Kyokyō," Rifling Trunks) section. The text reads:

> One of the Robber Zhi's followers once asked Zhi, "Does the thief, too, have a Way?" Zhi replied, "How could he get anywhere if he didn't have a Way? Making shrewd guesses as to how much booty is stashed away in the room is sageliness; being the first one in is bravery; being the last one out is righteousness; knowing whether or not the job can be pulled off is wisdom; dividing up the loot fairly is benevolence. No one in the world ever succeeded in becoming a great thief if he didn't have all five!"

故跖之徒問於跖曰、盜亦有道乎。跖曰、何適而無有道邪。夫妄意室中之藏、聖也。入先、勇也。出後、義也。知可否、知也。分均、仁也。五者不備而能成大盜者、天下未之有也。[42]

In "Rifling Trunks," Zhi humorously delineates the virtues inherent in thievery, equating aspects of the criminal enterprise with Confucian virtues such as sageliness, bravery, righteousness, wisdom, and benevolence. In *Kyōkakuden*, Takateru's enumeration of Nijirō's virtues seems to parallel this humorous exploration, emphasizing the fusion of criminality and moral conduct. Although Bakin suggests that there are eight virtues, in listing these, he also divides them into five groups. Furthermore, the eight virtues in *Eight Dogs*, which were long established and were well known to readers, do not include *yū* 勇 (Ch. *yong*, bravery); nor does the common understanding of the "five eternal verities" in Confucianism include *yū*.[43] However, both Takateru in *Kyōkakuden* and Zhi in *Zhuangzi* consider *yū* to be one of the canonical Confucian virtues, again confirming the connection between the two passages.[44]

The legend of Zhi is also referenced in *Shiji*, in which Sima Qian questions the meaning of good and evil through his pairing of the infamous Zhi, who was celebrated by his admirers, and the saintly Bo Yi, who spent his life attempting to dissuade King Wu from taking the throne but failed. Considering the fact that *Shiji* was one of the main reference books Bakin referred to

[42] Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 69.

[43] The eight virtues in *Hakkenden* are *jin*, *gi*, *rei*, *chi*, *shin*, *chū* 忠 (loyalty), *kō* 孝 (filial piety), and *tei* 悌 (fraternity). Walley points out that these virtues are not necessarily a canonical grouping. Bakin's eight virtues might be inspired by the traditional Confucian "five eternal verities (*jin*, *gi*, *rei*, *chi*, and *shin*)," "four principles (*jin*, *gi*, *rei*, and *chi*)," and "eight forgettings (*kō*, *tei*, *chū*, *shin*, *rei*, *gi*, *ren* 廉, and *chi* 恥, the latter two meaning "frugality" and "shame")." They might also be influenced by the Eightfold Path of Buddhism. See Walley, *Good Dogs*, 190–93.

[44] The inclusion of bravery here might be related to the nature of *kyōkaku*. As discussed earlier, one of the most important qualities defining the *kyōkaku* figure is the evidence of a special bravery.

in composing *Kyōkakuden*, it is quite likely that Bakin drew inspiration from this particular juxtaposition, leveraging the Zhi episode to explore the concept of *tōzoku*.

Moreover, Bakin's earlier writings indicate his longstanding interest in the story of Zhi and the treacherous nature of *tōzoku*. For example, in the last paragraph of *Geppyō kien* 月氷奇縁 (*The miraculous destiny of moon and ice*, 1803), he wrote, "Thief Zhi makes jokes of Confucius; Wang Mang is compared to the Duke of Zhou."[45] The first half of the sentence refers to another section of *Zhuangzi*, in which Confucius himself attempts to confront Zhi in argument but fails. There Confucius suggests that Zhi might become a great man if he were to quit thievery, but Zhi refutes him, pointing out that lords are no different from *tōzoku*, killing people at will as they do in the name of benevolence and righteousness. The second half highlights the similarity between the Duke of Zhou, a paradigmatic loyal minister in Chinese history who suffered from baseless gossip, and the usurper figure of Wang Mang, who only pretended to be humble and kind until he was able to carry out his planned treason. This comparison underscores Bakin's exploration of the blurred lines between good and evil in a world of moral decline, as well as connections between *tōzoku* and usurper. Elsewhere in "Rifling Trunks," *Zhuangzi* offers a similar view:

> He who steals a belt buckle pays with his life; he who steals a state gets to be a feudal lord—and we all know that benevolence and righteousness are to be found at the gates of the feudal lords. Is this not a case of stealing benevolence and righteousness and the wisdom of the sage? … This piling up of profits for Robber Zhi to the point where nothing can deter him—this is all the fault of the sage!

[45] Kyokutei Bakin, "Katakiuchi no monogatari: Geppyōkien," in *Kindai Nihon bunngaku taikei*, vol. 15 (Tōkyō: Kokumin Tosho, 1928), 104. 盜跖、孔子に戯れ、王莽、周公に比す。

> 彼窃鉤者誅。窃国者為諸侯。諸侯之門而仁義存焉。則是非窃仁義聖知耶。〔中略〕此重利盜跖而使不可禁者、是乃聖人之過也。[46]

Zhuangzi critiques the moral ambiguity inherent in governance and the appropriation of moral codes by usurpers. By equating the actions of usurpers with those of thieves, Zhuangzi highlights the perversion of morality and the complicity of sages in enabling such usurpations. In essence, Bakin's utilization of the Zhi episode and Zhuangzi's philosophical discourse serves to underscore the moral complexity of *tōzoku* characters in *Kyōkakuden*. Through these references, Bakin invites readers to contemplate the nuanced interplay between morality, governance, and criminality, challenging conventional notions of good and evil.

The use of *tōzoku* as a metaphor for usurper is explicit in *Kyōkakuden*, too, particularly in the context of the Ashikaga shogun. In the third installment of *Kyōkakuden*, Kuro-hime presents a discourse on the history of the Nanboku-chō period that highlights this metaphorical interpretation, depicting the first three Ashikaga shoguns as usurpers who seized power like thieves. In particular, she points out that Ashikaga Takauji, the first Ashikaga shogun, along with his son Ashikaga Yoshinari 足利義詮 (1330-1367),[47] simply pretended to be loyal to the emperor because they did not want to be called *kokuzoku* 国賊 (state thief).[48] Similarly, she

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[46] Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 70.

[47] The most common pronunciation of 義詮 is Yoshiakira, but in *Kyōkakuden*, Bakin glosses it as Yoshinari. In volume two, Bakin leaves a note explaining why he chooses Yoshinari. 義詮の和訓(ワクン)太平記にハヨシノリとす。又一説(イツセツ)にヨシアキラとす。義教(ヨシノリ)・義昭(ヨシアキ)この子孫にあれバ、同訓(ドウクン)いぶかしきこと也。詮(セン)に就(シユ)の義(ギ)あれば、実(ジツ)ハヨシナリなるべし。 "義詮 is glossed as Yoshinori in *Taiheiki* (Chronicle of Great Peace). Another possibility is Yoshiakira. Since there are 義教 (Yoshinori) and 義昭 (Yoshiaki) in the later generations [of the Ashikaga clan], it seems questionable to use the same reading for his name. Because 詮 has the meaning of 就, it should be pronounced as 'nari.'" See Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 200.

[48] Kyokutei, 307.

criticizes Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the third shogun, for his interest in taking the Three Sacred Treasures from the Emperor like "a thief sneaking into people's houses" (*sen'yu no nusubito* 穿窬の盗).[49] The Three Sacred Treasures being unambiguous symbols of imperial power, Yoshimitsu's desire for them signifies his transition from mere thief to full-fledged usurper.

The examples above clearly establish the connection in Bakin's eyes between the *tōzoku* metaphor and the Ashikaga shoguns. His narrative further explores this connection through the female protagonist Koma-hime, also a *kyōkaku* character,[50] and her quest for revenge against Yoshimitsu and Yoshimochi, respectively the third and fourth Ashikaga shoguns. Ultimately Koma-hime succeeds in assassinating Yoshimitsu, but her attempt to kill Yoshimochi is thwarted. Yoshimochi, moreover, though allowing her to escape, takes the precaution of assigning a retainer to secretly watch her movements: should she show any sign of rebellion, she is to be immediately captured and put to death. In other words, confined to her residence and under surveillance, Koma-hime is given no further chance to kill Yoshimochi.

Furthermore, the story is set in the 1400s and 1410s, meaning that if Yoshimochi were to be killed at this point in the narrative, it would contradict his actual death in 1428, thereby immediately exposing the fictional nature of the story. Bakin, who cited a large number of historical sources to construct a sense of veracity, would have found such an obvious mistake

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[49] Kyokutei, 313.

[50] Yodoya Shintarō 淀屋新太郎, one of Bakin's fervent readers and commentators, pointed out the connection between Koma-hime and the *machiyakko* Koman 小万. He wrote, "Many readers don't know that *Yako* 八九 [the place where Koma-hime is from] is *yakko* 奴 [of *machiyakko*], and Koma 姑摩 is Koman 小万." (八九は即奴にて姑摩は小万といふことはしらぬ人多かり。) Bakin also confirmed his speculation. See Yodoya Shintarō, *Kyōkakuden Kyōshi YodoShin hyō* (Tōkyō: Waseda University Library, 1836), image 9.

intolerable. If, however, Yoshimochi himself is to remain out of reach, how can Koma-hime enact her revenge? Bakin ingeniously navigates this narrative challenge by introducing Takateru as a surrogate for the shogun, providing the lady *kyōkaku* with another opportunity to pursue her vengeance.

Takateru leads his gang members to break into Koma-hime's residence and steal the gold she had received from Emperor Gokameyama 後亀山天皇. The significance of the gold is similar to that of the Three Sacred Treasures, representing imperial power threatened by the Ashikaga shogunate, here embodied by Takateru. Koma-hime's residence thus serves as a metaphorical stronghold of imperial authority, containing and defending the imperial power against external threats. Keith McMahon uses the term "containment" to describe "the ideology of the control of desire, and more concretely, for the containing aspects of physical things such as walls."[51] The imperial power should by all rights be securely contained in the residence, but the "cracks" spread in the walls of said container various "doors" and "windows" open up, allowing those on the outside to have their peek within. When the treasure once concealed inside is exposed, desire is aroused.

The confrontation between Koma-hime and Takateru serves as a symbolic battle between the emperor and the shogun for the legitimacy of rulership over Japan. Although most of the gang members are killed in the battle, Takateru manages to escape, and the text says, "Though like a bird wounded by an arrow, only Takateru escaped—an example of slipping through the loophole in the heavenly net."[52] This outcome underscores the precariousness of imperial power

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[51] Keith McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (New York: Brill, 1988), 2.

[52] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 474. 只五十槌隆光のみ、天羅〔左訓：〇アミ〕を漏れしに似たれど

and the persistence of danger. There is, moreover, the following episode to consider, which implies that Koma-hime actually failed to protect the residence.

When Takateru returns home, he meets Nijirō, who had not been harmed in the previous night's fight. Nijirō tells Takateru that he had managed to sneak into Koma-hime's living room and steal a black treasure box with the *kikusui* 菊水 pattern, the family crest of the Kusunoki clan. Thereafter he escaped secretly through a dog door. Inside the treasure box, Nijirō finds several clan flags, imperial rescripts from the emperor of the Southern Court, and some documents and letters written by Koma-hime's own ancestors. Nijirō intends to use one of the letters in forging a letter of rebellion, in order to frame Koma-hime for treason.

Nijirō, the man praised by Takateru for possessing the eight virtues, thus emerges as another great *tōzoku* within the narrative, showcasing his cunning and resilience in outsmarting both Koma-hime and Takateru. As it turns out, his scheme goes on to be exposed, and the schemer is punished by having his face tattooed. Nontheless, he finds some way into the service of a high-ranking samurai, and at the end of the fourth installment, he is still on the run and with plans to kill more people. Because Bakin failed to finish the *Kyōkakuden* series, we can never know what he intended to happen to Nijirō later in the story.[53] However, the unfinished text as it stands allows this great *tōzoku* seemingly to escape forever, a conclusion well in line with the famous saying from *Zhuangzi*, "Until the sage is dead, great thieves will never cease to appear."

も、他も亦是矢傷の鳥也。

[53] In the fifth volume, Nijirō has a change of heart and decides to help Koma-hime before his death. However, because this volume was written by Hiromichi, Nijirō's intervention in this direction should not be taken as representing Bakin's original plan.

This great *tōzoku* metaphor serves as a critique of the Ashikaga shogunate's usurpation of imperial authority, as represented by Koma-hime's struggle against Takateru and Nijirō.[54] Despite Koma-hime's victories over Yoshimitsu and Takateru, her failure in the case of Yoshimochi and Nijirō underscores Bakin's pessimistic assessment of the *kyōkaku*'s ability to restore peace for the populace, or to rectify the disordered hierarchy of governance. While Bakin's narrative universe may appear ostensibly to offer its readers something of a utopian allure, in other words, subtle undertones within his work serve to expose the underlying dystopian realities that pervade his fictional construct.[55] The ideal *kyōkaku*, who as agent of good represents the people's hopes for justice, is thus ironically proved to be merely fictional, while the great *tōzoku* figure, symbolizing the oppressive and hypocritical nature of the shogunate, seems perpetually to elude capture.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter explores the construction of the *kyōkaku* and *tōzoku* archetypes within Bakin's *Kyōkakuden*. In a chaotic world where virtues such as benevolence and righteousness have become obsolete, the Ashikaga shogunate usurps the emperor's ruling power, positioning itself as the actual ruler of Japan. The emergence of such a great thief at the pinnacle of society gives rise to numerous petty thieves, further exacerbating societal confusion. In this context, the *kyōkaku* emerge as symbols of hope for the oppressed, bravely protecting the general public and

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[54] Although Bakin was critical of the shogunate's legitimacy, this does not necessarily indicate his support for the imperial house. As discussed in the previous chapter, he also expressed criticism toward the imperial line. With both the emperor and shogunate failling to fulfill their roles as proper rulers, the world descended into chaos. It was against this backdrop that the figures of *kyōkaku* and *tōzoku* emerged.

[55] Bakin's other works such as *Hakkenden* also provide readers with a fictional utopia and a historical reality. See Walley, *Good Dogs*, 344–46.

confronting both ordinary *tōzoku* and the Ashikaga shogunate itself. Within the narrative, however, *kyōkaku* are often misrecognized as *tōzoku* because of the need to conceal their true identities, and from an extra-narrative standpoint, they are revealed to be every bit as fictional as the genre to which they belong. Thus, even as *Kyōkakuden* offers readers a mirage of hope, it hints subtly at the underlying realities that cruelly undermine this hope.

The contrast between fiction and reality is further emphasized in the illustrations. Figure 10 pertains to the illustration depicting Koma-hime's assassination of Yoshimitsu in Kinkaku-ji 金閣寺 (Temple of the Golden Pavilion). Koma-hime is depicted in light ink, symbolizing her utilization of disappearing magic to conceal herself. Remarkably, she appears to stand upon the surface of the pond, a departure from the textual description which merely references her initial concealment within the shadow of the trees before advancing towards the palace.[56] Additionally, the multitude of dots scattered throughout the illustration represent fireflies.

Yoshimitsu, portrayed as a monk-like figure on the left, is depicted reveling in the display of firefly luminescence. However, as soon as the fireflies are released, he is killed by Koma-hime's lethal arrow, which pieces through his body and claims the life of a young man seated behind him. Despite this dramatic occurrence, Yoshimitsu's attendants and serving ladies remain oblivious to Koma-hime's presence, transfixed solely upon their lord.

[56] Bakin typically drafted the illustrations himself and gave detailed instructions to illustrators. Considering the fact that this is one of the most important scenes in *Kyōkakuden,* I believe that it was Bakin who gave the instructions to draw the water beneath her, though it is also possible that the illustrator Kunisada designed this detail by himself.

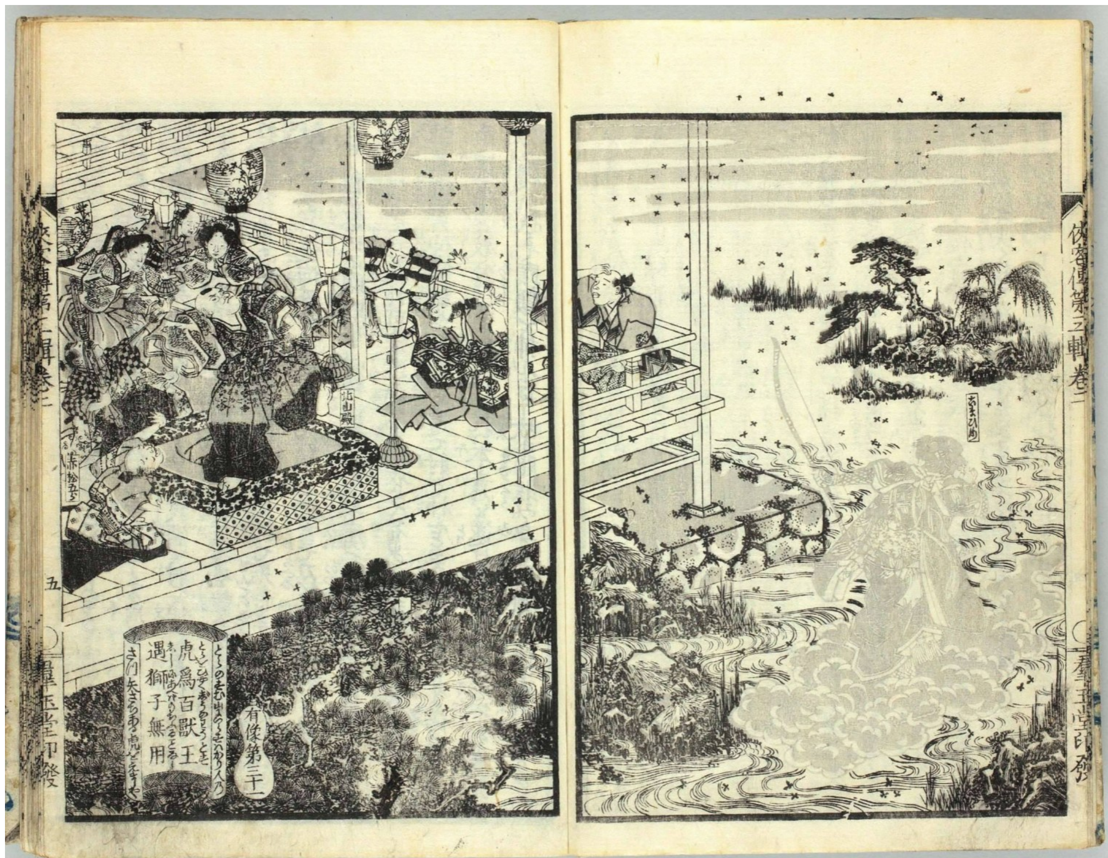

Figure 10. Koma-hime's assassination of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, part 2 (pub. 1834), vol. 3. Owned by Hiroshima University Library, retrieved from Union Catalogue Database of Japanese Texts. https://doi.org/10.20730/100302090 (image 327).

This illustration engenders a liminal space situated between reality and imagination. The ethereal depiction of Koma-hime, characterized by light ink and suspended above the water, accentuates her imperceptibility. The obliviousness of the surrounding characters further underscores the enigmatic nature of her existence. Night is about to fall. The juxtaposition of light in the palace and darkness within the courtyard further amplifies the surreal ambiance of the scene. The luminous trajectories of the fireflies serve as a visual bridge between these disparate realms.

The motif of fireflies warrants particular attention. As Bakin himself points out, this firefly watching scene corresponds to Koroku's dream in which the fireflies light the road for

him in the previous volume.[57] In Koroku's episode, the fireflies guide him on a nocturnal mission to retrieve the heads of Wakiya Yoshitaka, a venture ultimately thwarted by the appearance of watchmen. With the help of a man in black, he succeeds in escaping, but without the guidance of the fireflies, he cannot find the way back, and on the way, he falls into a river. With a shout, he wakes up and realizes that it is a dream. Later, he realizes that Akinobu is the one who successfully retrieved Yoshitaka's head last night and he concludes that the man in black in his dream must be Akinobu.

Koroku's dream-like experience starts with the appearance of fireflies. In other words, the fireflies function as a symbol of a space in which dream and reality mix. Although Koroku is not physically in the scene, the happening in his dream is half right. (Still, because Akinobu himself symbolizes fictionality, even the right half of Koroku's dream turns out to be suspicious.) In a similar vein, the release of the fireflies in Koma-hime's episode also implies the beginning of a half-real and half-dreamy experience. Five years later, when Koma-hime herself recalls this experience, she thinks to herself,

> "Although it [the killing] was done by me, now when I recall, it seems to be a dream, and there is no evidence to prove it. Although I should not suspect this, my vendetta in the Kitayama palace might be an illusion my teacher [Kuro-hime] showed me with her magic to ease my deep grudge. I will never know the answer though."
> 実に我做せし事ながら、今さら思へば夢に似て、かへり見をせん証拠もなし。疑ひまつるにあらねども、往る北山の復讐は、只是我師の仙術にて、幻に見せて、我年来の、怨を慰めたまひし歟。是も亦知るべからず。[58]

[57] Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 749.

[58] Kyokutei, 330.

Bakin skillfully employs this narrative ambiguity to prompt readers to contemplate the dichotomy between idealized utopia and harsh dystopia. Through Koma-hime's introspective musings, Bakin challenges readers to navigate the nebulous terrain between reality and illusion, compelling them to confront the inherent ambiguity of justice within the narrative.

Given that *Kyōkakuden* belongs to the *yomihon*, characterized by its substantive textual content, my analysis is also mainly text oriented. In the next chapter, I will examine the heavily illustrated *Shinpen Kinpeibai* series, and I will incorporate a more comprehensive examination of pictorial elements. Moreover, in this chapter, I have narrowed down the scale from the state-level orthodox rulership to righteousness and loyalty between individual and the external society. Next, I will further narrow down the focus to an individual's internal conflict between desire and virtue by exploring the *dokufu* character Oren in *Shinpen Kinpeibai*.

CHAPTER IV

SELF VS. FAMILY: *DOKUFU* OREN IN *SHINPEN KINPEIBAI*

"The powerful impose upon the weak and rob them, the many terrorize the few and extort from them, and in no time the whole world will be given up to chaos and mutual destruction."

–"Man's Nature Is Evil" in *Xunzi*.[1]

In the previous chapters, I examined Bakin's critique of the Confucian ideals of how a ruler should govern and to whom a virtuous man should devote his loyalty and righteousness in *Kyōkakuden*. In this chapter, I will further narrow the focus to examine the cruel exploitation beneath the Confucian expectation placed on individuals within a household. Bakin's *Shinpen Kinpeibai* serves as an ideal text for this topic, as its narrative centers entirely on internal family conflicts. Through an analysis of the transformation of a filial daughter into a *dokufu* or "poisonous woman," I argue that *Shinpen Kinpeibai* critiques the traditional Confucian virtues, such as filial piety and women's obedience, as ineffective means to sustain and restore family stability. Instead, the oppressive nature of Confucianism exacerbates the misery of an obedient woman, ultimately leading her to become a *dokufu* who subverts these virtues to break out from the cage that is family.

Dokufu is a key concept explored in this chapter. Unlike the *kyōkaku* archetype which Bakin explained in detail in the preface to the first volume of *Kyōkakuden*, he had never provided any clear definition of *dokufu*. I suspect that he gradually formed the specific image of *dokufu*

[1] Xunzi, *Xunzi: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia university press, 2003), Chapter "Man's Nature Is Evil," paragraph 10. 則夫彊者害弱而奪之，衆者暴寡而譁之，天下悖亂而相亡，不待頃矣。Xunzi argues that human nature is inherently evil. To support this claim, he presents a hypothetical scenario: if human nature were truly good, there would be no need for government, laws, or social norms to regulate behavior. Without such structure, however, the powerful would harm the week, the many would oppress the few, and the entire world would quickly descend into in chaos.

through the serialization of *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. Glynne Walley argues that Bakin preferred to use the term *zokufu* 賊婦 (brigandess) over *dokufu* when composing *Hakkenden* because the former term encourages audiences to notice the Chinese origins of the term, especially the outlaws of *Shuihu zhuan*.[2] In *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, the narrator refers to her as a *dokufu* for the first time after she kills a number of people through poison in Volume Eight: "Oren's evilness and her methods, using poison to kill poisonous people, surpass demons and rakshas. She is really a *dokufu* who should be feared. おれんがかんあくどくをもてどくをせいするしゅだんはあくまらせつにまされりじつにこれおそれてもなほおそるべきどく婦也."[3]

This shift to the term *dokufu* may have been inspired by the metaphorical meaning of poison explored in the Chinese original on which *Shinpen Kinpeibai* is loosely based. It is also possible that Bakin intentionally employed the term to underscore the association between Oren's evil nature and the imagery of poison, which she frequently uses to kill her victims. Additionally, the portrayal of wicked women had become increasingly popular in contemporary theater,[4] which may have influenced this characterization. However, *dokufu* was not yet a widely established term at the time, suggesting that Bakin may have been one of the earliest writers to help establish this archetype. In the Meiji period, the *dokufu* figure gained significant traction, with a proliferation of narratives centered on them.[5]

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[2] Walley, *Good Dogs*, 100.

[3] Kyokutei, *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 1841, 8:18 ura-19 omote.

[4] Noguchi Takehiko, "Dokufumono no keifu," *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* <Tokushū> Edo kara Tōkyō e 21 (August 1976): 57.

[5] Christine L. Marran, *Poison Woman: Figuring Female Transgression in Modern Japanese Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xiii.

In the following sections, I will begin by introducing the text, discussing its content, genre, style, and influence. Following this, I will demonstrate how the Yase 矢瀬 family serves as a microcosm of society and how its internal conflicts mirror broader societal corruption. The focus then shifts to the life of the protagonist Oren 阿蓮. As the central character in *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, her transformation from a dutiful daughter to a *dokufu* challenges the fundamental assumption of filial piety and exposes the latent violence within it. A comparative analysis of Oren and two other female characters further highlights her charm and agency. Just as the *kyōkaku* characters reinterpret loyalty and righteousness to challenge the oppressive ruling class, *dokufu* like Oren skillfully manipulate filial piety and chastity to ensure their survival in the household. However, unlike *kyōkaku* who embody people's desire for saviors who can bring them hope and justice, *dokufu* represent a destructive impulse generated by a corrupted society. They rely solely on themselves and there is no hope or justice for them. Their tragic ending is predetermined and all they can do is to survive as long as possible.

4.1 *Shinpen Kinpeibai*: Plot, Genre, and Influence

Shinpen Kinpeibai is the last work of popular fiction that Bakin completed before his death in 1848, and it enjoyed great popularity both during his lifetime and posthumously. As the "金瓶梅" in its title suggests, it is a loose adaptation of the famous Chinese vernacular novel *Jin Ping Mei*, which is also written as "金瓶梅". However, both the narrative and style of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* largely diverge from the original. Although the main characters are clearly modeled on those from *Jin Ping Mei*, Bakin also incorporated plots and ideas from various other Chinese novels, including *Gelian huaying* 隔簾花影 (*J. Kakuren kaei*, Flower shadows behind the

curtain, late seventeenth century to early eighteenth century),[6] several episodes from *Chuke pai'an jingqi* 初刻拍案驚奇 (J. *Shokoku haku'an kyōki*, Slapping the table in amazement, the seventeenth century),[7] and *Jinlan fa* 金蘭筏 (J. *Kinranbatsu*, Friend-ship, early Qing dynasty).[8]

Its narrative centers on the conflicts among three cousins: Oren and Keijūrō 啓十郎, who are on the evil side, and Takematsu 武松, who represents the side of good. Oren and Keijūrō engage in an adulterous relationship and conspire to murder Oren's husband, who is Takematsu's elder brother. They also falsely accuse Takematsu of a crime and have him exiled. However, Takematsu ultimately returns and avenges his brother by killing Oren and Keijūrō. Although this might initially appear to be a story focused equally on all three characters, a closer examination of the narrative emphasis, character development, and symbolic weight reveals that Oren is the central figure. She is the true protagonist, a role I will explore in further detail in section 3.

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[6] Kanda Masayuki, "*Shinpen Kinpeibai* to *Kakuren kaei*," *Kinsei bungei* 82 (2005): 19; *Beyond the Golden Lotus: [A Sequel to] Chin P'ing Mei*, trans. Vladimir Kean (London: Kegan Paul, 2004), 7. Due to the lack of publication and authorship information, it is hard to determine the exact date and author of this novel. Franz Kuhn, who wrote the introduction to *Beyond the Golden Lotus*, believes that the date should be around 1880, but Kanda Masayuki believes that its date should not be later than 1779, the year this novel was imported to Edo Japan. Considering the fact that *Xu Jing Ping Mei* 続金瓶梅 (J. *Zoku kinpeibai*, Continuation of *the Plum in the Golden Vase*), on which this novel is modeled, was published in 1660, its date should be located between 1660 and 1779.

[7] Tokuda Takeshi and Kanda Masayuki, "Kyokutei Bakin *Shinpen Kinpeibai* daiisshū honkoku to eiin," *Edo Fūga* no. 28 (November 21, 2023): 138–43.

[8] Kanda Masayuki, "*Shinpen Kinpeibai* to *Kinranbatsu*," in *Bakin to shomotsu: denki sekai no teiryū* (Tōkyō: Yagi Shoten, 2011), 575–84. Kanda also lists other Chinese novels Bakin utilized. For more details, see 3.2 and 3.4 from the same book. As for the title of *Jinlan fa*, I translate it as "Friend-ship" to reflect the layered meaning of the original. *Jinlan* 金蘭,which literally means "golden orchid," is a classical term referring to sworn brotherhood or deep friendship. The word *fa* 筏 means "raft." This novel centers on a scholar who becomes entangled with "bad" friends through an organization called *Jinlan dashe* 金蘭大社 ("The Grand Society of Golden Orchid").

In terms of writing style, *Shinpen Kinpeibai* diverges from its text-based Chinese original,[9] as it belongs to the heavily illustrated *gōkan* genre.[10] *Gōkan* is part of the broader genre *kusazōshi*, which were popular comic books made of inexpensive paper. Traditionally, *kusazōshi* were bound in units of five sheets of paper (ten pages) per volume.[11] While ten pages sufficed for short and simple stories, more complex narratives required additional space, leading to the binding of multiple volumes together. The scope of *gōkan* stories continued to expand, with the first *chōhen gōkan* 長編合巻 (long-form *gōkan*), also authored by Bakin, appearing in 1824.[12] *Shinpen Kinpeibai* emerged during the heyday of *chōhen gōkan* and achieved tremendous popularity following the release of its first volume in 1831.

Although *Shinpen Kinpeibai* is relatively less well-known today than Ryūtei Tanehiko's 柳亭種彦 (1783–1842) *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* 偐紫田舎源氏 (A fraudulent Murasaki's bumpkin Genji, 1829–1842; hereafter, *Inaka Genji*), which is celebrated as the most popular *gōkan*, it enjoyed comparable popularity during the late Edo period. At that time, initial sales of

[9] *Jin Ping Mei* exists in at least three major editions, and the version Bakin read and referenced is the one annotated by Zhang Zhupo. This edition begins with a preface dated 1695, followed by several essays, a list of character names, and a brief description of the protagonist's household layout. It then presents a set of approximately two hundred illustrations before the main text begins.

[10] Satō Yukiko, *Bakumatsu no gōkan: Edo bungaku no shūen to tensei* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2024), 4–5.

[11] Laura Moretti and Satō Yukiko, "Introduction to the World of *Kusazōshi*," in *Graphic Narratives from Early Modern Japan: The World of Kusazōshi* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 1, 4–10. This introduction points out that *reading* and *looking* work in tandem in the construction of meaning in this genre, and the term *kusazōshi* reflects its playful, improper, and popular nature. It also highlights the danger of trying to comprehend this genre as comic books in the Anglo-American context of the twentieth century.

[12] Satō, *Bakumatsu no gōkan: Edo Bungaku No Shūen to Tensei*, 16–17.

5,000 copies were considered strong for a renowned *gōkan* writer, with 7,000 copies marking a best seller.[13] In a letter written in Tenpō 2 (1831), Bakin noted,

> *Shinpen Kinpeibai*'s first volume received great popularity. On the eighth day [of this month], the publisher came and told me that 6,000 copies had been sold by the early spring of Tenpō 2 (the publication year). He expected that by the Ebisu festival [the twentieth day of the tenth lunar month], the sales could reach 7,000 copies.
>
> 初編『金瓶梅』、世評尤よろしく、早春迄ニ六千部うり候よし、去ル八日ニ板元参り、物がたりニ御座候。夷講前迄ニは、七千ニ至り可申ト被存候。[14]

In later correspondence, he also mentioned that *Shinpen Kinpeibai* continued to sell well, much to the publisher's satisfaction. In 1834, the publisher, Izumiya Ichibē 泉屋市兵衛 of Kansendō 甘泉堂, sent his *bantō* 番頭 (head shop clerk) to tell Bakin that *Shinpen Kinpeibai* was a great success, and that the publisher had purchased a large amount of paper for both new volumes and reprints of earlier ones.[15] A publisher's note was attached to the reprinted volumes one and two, along with the newly released Volume Three in 1834 (Figure 11). The note reads:

> *New Edition of Shinpen Kinpeibai* Volume Three and Four Publication issue
>
> This novel was originally intended for the *yomihon* genre, but with the increasing popularity of *akahon* (cheap chapbooks) in recent years, we decided to publish it in the form of *gōkan*. In the past years, volumes one and two were released accordingly, and to our surprise, they satisfied a large readership and earned a good reputation. We sincerely appreciate that so many people purchased this novel. Therefore, we are publishing the third and fourth volumes this year. Many readers have lamented that it is a pity to print such a remarkable work in the *gōkan* genre, and they have suggested that [the publisher] at least reprint them with high-quality paper and put them in paper protectors before selling them. We heard their voice and decided to reprint the first and second volumes with [new] covers and protectors designed by Kunisada. We promise that we will never print this series in the form of cheap chapbooks. We humbly hope you will purchase the whole series from volume one and enjoy them.

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[13] Michael Emmerich, *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 47. The sales for Bakin's *kusazōshi* were generally around 5,000 to 7,000 copies (for one year). See Hamada, "Bakin ni okeru shoshi, sakusha, dokusha no mondai," 240.

[14] Kyokutei, *Bakin shokan shūsei*, 2003, 2:4.

[15] Kyokutei, 4:5–6.

Published in the spring of 1834

Sincerely,

The publisher

新編金瓶梅　第三集第四集　出板

此冊子は元来読本にもいたし出板可仕趣向なるを、近年赤本流行ニ付略して合巻の策子ニ仕立、先年初集二集引つゞき売出し候処、殊の外、各々様方の御意ニ相かなひ、猶御評判宜しく、沢山御求め下され候段、誠以難有仕合奉存候。依而当年三集四集と開板仕候。然ル処去ル御方様ゟ被仰聞候は、かゝるあたら妙作を並の合巻物にいたすことあまりに心なし。せめては能紙ニ為摺袋入上本ニ仕立売出し可申との御すゝめにまかせ、如形美本ニ仕立、且初集二集をも此度表紙上袋とも、国貞画を以再板仕候。尤末々に至迄赤本ニは決していたし不申候。依之初集より取揃御求御覧可被下様、偏ニ奉希上候。以上

天保五甲午年孟春発行　　板元謹白

Figure 11. Publisher's note. *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, inside back cover (pub. 1834), vol. 3. Shirakaba collection, Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University. https://www.dh-jac.net/db1/books/shiBK03-0109-03/portal/ (image 12).

This notice clearly demonstrates the popularity of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* and the enthusiasm it generated among readers. It was widely understood at the time that *yomihon* was generally

considered a more prestigious literary form aimed at a more educated readership compared to *gōkan*, so the mention of an original plan to publish *Shinpen Kinpeibai* as a *yomihon* could be interpreted as an attempt to emphasize the work's literary value. In this context, the improvement in paper quality and the appointment of Utagawa Kunisada 歌川国貞 (1786–1865), who was much more famous than the former illustrator Utagawa Kuniyasu 歌川国安 (1794–1832),[16] as the new illustrator can also be read as efforts to elevate the literary status of *Shinpen Kinpeibai*.

Other pieces of indirect evidence also suggest this serialization's popularity. In 1840, an erotic parody with the title *Chinpen shinkeibai* 枕邊深閨梅 (Plum next to the pillow in the boudoir) appeared, likely during the peak of *Shinpen Kinpeibai*'s popularity.[17] This project seems to have been led primarily by the illustrator Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳 (1798–1861), with contributions from the writer Hanagasa Bunkyō 花笠文京 (1785–1860).[18] Another hand-drawn *shunga* version with the title *Kinpeibai* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the golden vase) was produced between 1841 to 1844, reinterpreting several famous scenes from *Shinpen kinpeibai* in a pornographic way.[19] Interesting, the illustrator of this *shunga* version was also Kunisada, the same artist who illustrated *Shinpen kinpeibai* after Volume Two. Therefore, this version created

[16] Kuniyasu was responsible for the illustrations of the first two volumes, while Kunisada designed the pictures for the remaining eight volumes. Kuniyasu passed away in 1832, so the publisher had to find a new illustrator. The appointment of an illustrator as famous as Kunisada not only reflects how popular *Shinpen Kinpeibai* was but also the publisher's hope to further enhance its reputation.

[17] Hayashi Yoshikazu, *Edo ehon e no shōtai* (Tōkyō: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2011), 148.

[18] Hayashi, 144–45.

[19] Higuchi Kazutaka, "*Kinpeibai*," in *Nikuhitsu shunga kessakusen* (Tōkyō: Taiyō Tosho, 2016), 114.

a vivid visual world for readers who were interested in the sexy stories hidden beneath the gōkan's text.

A kabuki play titled *Kinpeibai Soga no tamamono* 金瓶梅曽我松賜 (*Kinpeibai*: The Soga's offering) was performed by the Nakamura Theater on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month in1860. The story of the Soga brothers' revenge was immensely popular during the Edo period, and it became customary to stage a new Soga-themed *kabuki* play every New Year.[20] The decision to blend *Shinpen Kinpeibai* with the Soga world thus reaffirms the enduring appeal of the latter. According to the cast information, the famous kabuki actor Nakamura Fukusuke I 初代中村福助 (1831–1899) played the role of Takematsu, Kataoka Nizaemon VIII 八代目片岡仁左衛門 (1810–1863) portrayed Keijūrō, and Onoe Kikugorō IV 四代目尾上菊五郎 (1808–1860) played the role of Oren.[21]

Along with the theater, a *gōkan* titled *Kinpeibai soga no tamamono* 金瓶梅曽我賜宝 (*Kinpeibai*: Soga's offering, 1860), written by Ryūsuitei Tanekiyo 柳水亭種清 (1823–1907) and illustrated by Utagawa Kuniyoshi, was also released.[22] This work is a *shōhon utsushi* 正本写し (copied scripts), a term for a *gōkan* that recreates a kabuki performance through a combination of text summarizing the plot and illustrations featuring *nigao-e* 似顔絵 (portraits resembling kabuki actors).[23] In the preface contributed by Segawa Jokō III 三世瀬川如皐 (1806–1881), the script

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[20] Laurence Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance: Japanese Drama and the Soga Literary Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1995), 182–85.

[21] *Kinpeibai soga no tamamono* (Edo: Saruwakachō Sawamuraya Riheijō, 1860).

[22] Takahashi Noriko, "Gōkan *Kinpeibai soga no tamamono* kō," in *Edo shōsetsu to kanbungaku* (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 1993), 275–76.

[23] Satō Satoru, "Shōhon utsushi ryakusetsu," in *Shōhon utsushi gōkan nenhyō: Bessatsu*, ed. Kokuritsu gekijō chōsa

writer of the kabuki play, he expressed his admiration for Bakin's *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, and praises it as "the *gōkan* masterpiece (*gōkan no ichidai kisho* 合巻の一大奇書)."[24]

Recently, Tokuda Takeshi and Kanda Masayuki have collaborated to produce a careful transcription of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* with annotations and explanations. The first two volumes have been published, and more are expected soon. However, English scholarship on *Shinpen Kinpeibai* remains extremely limited. This may be due, in part, to the historical lack of attention to the *gōkan* genre and the larger *kusazōshi* genre, which were often dismissed as pulp fiction and relegated to the realm of "meaningless entertainment."[25]

4.2 From the Military Romance to Family Conflicts: The Yase Family as a Microcosm of the World

During the nineteenth century, the interests and preferences of urban audiences gradually shifted from large-scale military romances to more intimate narratives centered on family conflicts and marital relationships.[26] For instance, the most popular kabuki play during this period was Tsuruya Nanboku IV's 四代目鶴屋南北 (1755–1829) *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* 東海道四谷怪談 (The eastern seaboard highway ghost stories at Yotsuya, 1825), which could be viewed as a reimagining of the famous *Kanadehon chūshingura* 仮名手本忠臣蔵 (The treasury of loyal retainers, 1748). As Satoko Shimazaki argues, unlike *Kanadehon chūshingura* which

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yōseibu (Tōkyō: Nihon Geijutsu Bunka Shinkōkai, 2011), 1.

[24] Ryūsuitei Tanekiyo, *Kinpeibai soga no tamamono* (Edo: Kansendō, 1860), 1: inside cover-1 omote.

[25] Adam L Kern, *Manga from the Floating World: Comicbook Culture and the Kibyōshi of Edo Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019), 14.

[26] Noguchi, "Dokufumono no keifu," 64.

highlights and worships samurai virtues such as loyalty and righteousness, *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* centers on a woman's private quest for revenge, highlighting her disavowal of the values upheld by the samurai community to which she once belonged.[27]

Similarly, the narrative of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* moves away from the military tradition, focusing instead on family conflicts and personal desires. Unlike *Kyōkakuden*, which opens with a detailed examination of the conflict between the Southern and Northern courts and the family history of the *kyōkaku* character Akinobu, *Shinpen Kinpeibai* offers no specific background on historical period or the origins of the protagonists' families. Rather, it concentrates on the immediate struggles of the current members of a single family and the famine that disrupts the family's harmony.

Shinpen Kinpeibai is set in Yamashiro Province (present-day southern Kyoto Prefecture) during the final years of the Ashikaga rule, a chaotic period in which the Great Way has been long forgotten. The region experienced continuous droughts and floods, intensifying a severe famine that profoundly disrupted the lives of the Yase family: Yase Bungubei 矢瀬文具兵衛 (the elder brother), Ōhara Buguzō 大原武具蔵 (the younger brother), and their younger sister Osoma 遅馬 (as shown in Figure 12).[28] Bungubei and Buguzō once lived harmoniously under the same roof, but in order to survive, the younger brother, Buguzō, has to leave the house to find a living in Eastern Japan. Before his departure, he and Bungubei sign a document to verify

[27] Satoko Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 118–19.

[28] Bungubei and Buguzō have different family names because Buguzō was given to the Ōhara clan, who comes from the same bloodline as Yase, due to the lack of a male heir. The family name Yase can mean "emaciation" while Ōhara can be read as "big belly," both corresponding to the famine that destroys the harmony of this family.

Buguzō's ownership of land and assets, with Osoma's husband, Shinobe Kurogorō 篠部黒五郎, serving as a witness.

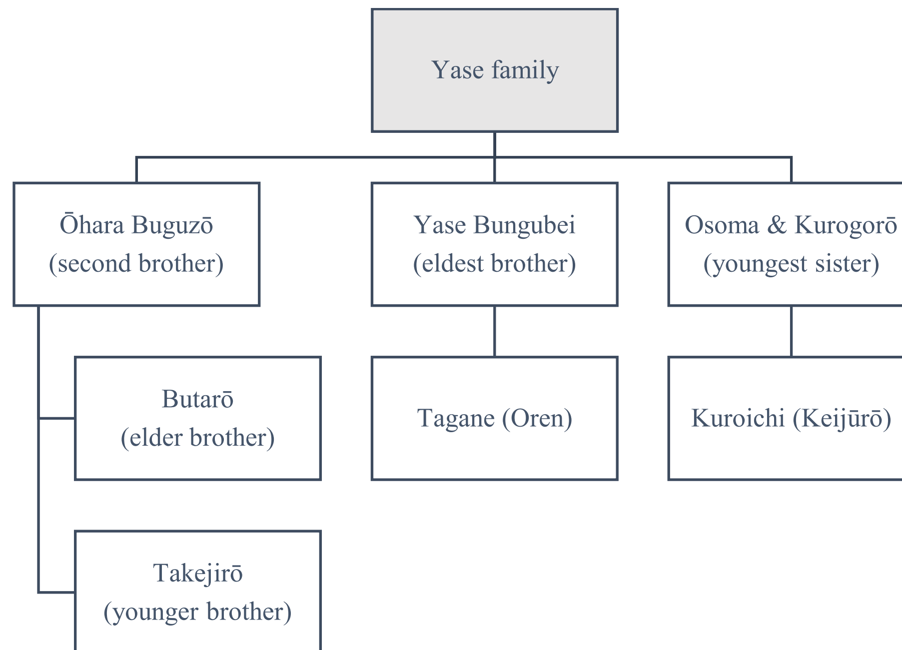

Figure 12. Yase family tree.

The theme of family conflict is central to *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. As the Neo-Confucian classic *Daxue* suggests, the harmony of a family reflects the stability of the state and the peace of the realm. In *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, the Yase household serves as a metaphorical microcosm—a miniature state or world under heaven. At the beginning of the story, Bunbubei and Buguzō are described as follows:

> The brothers live [in the same household] in harmony. Both are married. They eat from the same pot, and they have never quarreled with each other. They are so rare in the world, and everyone in the village praises them.
>
> はらからむつましかりければこれかれともにつまをめとりてひとつかまどでありながらちとのくぜつもなかりしを世にはまれなること也とてさと人らほめぬはなし.[29]

[29] Kyokutei, *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 1831, 1:5 omote. Kanda and Tokuda's transcription, though well written, has not yet been completed, while other modern printed versions such as Wakayama Masakazu's transcription (2009) have

This harmonious family resembles the ideal world of the Great Way I discussed in Chapter II. However, the family's stability begins to deteriorate as the famine, driven by draughts and floods, takes its toll. In premodern Japan, natural disasters were often interpreted as signs of social instability and symptoms of governmental corruption.[30] Thus, the famine in the narrative symbolizes the end of the harmonious Great Way.

The journey of the younger brother to Eastern Japan marks the beginning of the secondary world of Confucian virtues. The names of the two brothers reflect their symbolic roles in representing key qualities of self-cultivation. The elder brother, Bunbubei, carries the character *bun* 文 in his name, which generally refers to scholarship and study of literature and history, while the younger brother, Buguzō, bears the character *bu* 武, meaning martial art. In the Edo period, these two qualities were considered essential for self-cultivation. For example, the Confucian scholar Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 (1608–1648) argued that *bun* and *bu* were originally one virtue and they should not be separated. Similarly, Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 (1759-1829) emphasized the importance of *bunbu ryōdō* 文武両道 (the twofold path of learning and martial arts) during the Kansei Reforms.

The significance of *bun* and *bu* was also acknowledged by Bakin's friend and reader, Mokurō. In his critique of the fifth volume of *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, he writes,

> The Ōhara brothers [Bungubei and Buguzō], who are the fundamental figures in this story, are named with *bun* and *bu*. Nowadays, there are too many people who prefer

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errors and other issues. Therefore, I decide to transcribe the text from *Shinpen Kinpeibai* by myself in this dissertation. Also, for the purpose of this research, I choose to keep the text in a status as close as possible to the original.

[30] David Atherton, *Writing Violence: The Politics of Form in Early Modern Japanese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 33.

illusory *bun* over practical actions. Their literary pursuits make them weak and blind them with arrogance. People who follow the way of martial arts may be rough, but their modesty prevents them from becoming extravagant. Thus, the author names them with Bunji[gu]bei and Buguzō with this consideration of right and wrong.

大原兄弟文と武との名を付られたる今の世虚文の人は多く実行なく文弱に陥り遂には奢侈になるなり武道の人は野なる事は野なれとも質朴の所ありて驕奢には流れさるなり故にそこらの勧懲を考へて文次（具）兵衛武具蔵の名をおはせしならん.[31]

Mokurō's interpretation clearly regards *bun* and *bu* as interrelated virtues that contribute to self-cultivation, and he views the two brothers as metaphors for these values. In this sense, the separation of the brothers in the narrative symbolizes a rupture in the Great Way. However, the moral and social decay does not end here; the offspring of the Yase family are embroiled in even more severe and bewildering conflicts.

After Buguzō's death, his elder son, Ōhara Butarō 大原武太郎, returns to Yamashiro Province to claim his father's land, only to face opposition from his uncle and aunt. With the help of his younger brother, Takematsu, and another uncle, Kurogorō, Butarō not only regains his father's land but also acquires Bungubei's assets. Having lost both his land and wealth, Bungubei is abandoned by his wife, who takes away their daughter, Tagane たがね (later Oren), and remarries. However, due to poverty, Tagane is sold by her mother and stepfather to a wealthy man, who later gives her to Butarō as his second wife. Meanwhile, Kurogorō betrays Butarō by stealing his money, but he eventually loses it all and is forced to sell his son, Kuroichi 黒市 (later Keijūrō), to survive. Upon discovering the situation, his wife, Osoma, decides to throw herself into the river to atone for their sin. In a twist of fate, the lost money is accidentally

[31] Kimura Mokurō and Kyokutei Bakin, "Shinpen Kinpeibai gohen Mokurō setsu hihyō," in *Kinpeibai goshū JōMokuKei sanpyō* (Tōkyō: Waseda University Library, 1838), 17 omote.

found by Bungubei, who uses it to start a business in Naniwa (modern-day Ōsaka area).[32] Lacking an heir, Bungubei adopts a little boy from the market, renaming him Keijūrō, unaware that this boy is, in fact, his nephew Kuroichi.

At the heart of these conflicts lies human desire. For the sake of money, brothers betray one another; parents sell their children; husbands and wives deceive and abandon each other. The secondary order of virtues has crumbled, and the chaotic world is now rife with violence and treachery. The main narrative of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* begins in this world of desire and moral decay.

4.3 Oren—the True Protagonist

When the narrative shifts to the second generation of the Yase family, the central figure connecting all other characters becomes Tagane, later known as Oren. Although her name Tagane is primarily written in hiragana, the *g(k)ane* in it immediately reminds the reader of the

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[32] Naniwa is also the place where the main story is set. In the Chinese original, the story is set in Qinghe 清河 (j. *Seika*), which can be interpreted as both "clear river," which signifies the proper way of the ruler, and "money pile," which accurately reflects the values of the world where money is all powerful. See Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei - Volume One*, xxxvi. In *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, Naniwa also has double meanings. On the one hand, Naniwa was the marketplace to the entire nation and had Japan's first early modern business conglomerates. See Sumie Jones, Adam L. Kern, and Kenji Watanabe, eds. *A Kamigata Anthology: Literature from Japan's Metropolitan Centers, 1600-1750* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 40. In other words, it represents the power of money. On the other hand, Naniwa reminds readers of the *nō* play *Naniwa no ume* 難波梅 (The Naniwa Plum) by Zeami 世阿弥, which praises Emperor Nintoku 仁徳, whose reputation for benevolence wins him the name of the Saint Emperor. In *Naniwa no ume*, a minister of the court stops by a village of Naniwa on his way back to Kyōtō. He sees a well-grown plum tree and asks an old man and a young villager next to the tree whether this tree is a famous historical icon or not. The old man replies with a poem from *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (Collection of Japanese poems of ancient and modern times, the Heian period), "In Naniwa Bay,/ Now the plum flowers are blooming,/ After lying dormant all winter./ Spring has arrived and they are in full bloom,/ These flowers. 難波津に 咲くやこの花 冬籠り 今は春べと 咲くやこの花." However, Emperor Nintoku is also known for his interest in women, which causes conflict between him and the Empress, in *Kojiki* 古事記 (Records of Ancient Matters). In this sense, the use of Naniwa also implies that *Shinpen Kinpeibai* is also about the conflict between sexual desire and husband-wife duty.

Chinese character 金, meaning gold or money. For example, in their transcription, Tokuda Takeshi and Kanda Masayuki use 煅金 for her name. This character is later renamed Oren, and the Chinese character for *ren* means 蓮 lotus. Both 金 and 蓮 evoke the character Pan Jinlian 藩金蓮 (J. Han Kinren) from the Chinese original and reflect two key concepts explored in *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. *Kin* 金 obviously refers to the concept of money, while *kinren* 金蓮, or golden lotus, a euphemism for women's bound feet, is associated with women's sexual allure.[33] In other words, this character embodies the human desire for wealth and sex, forces that wield destructive power.

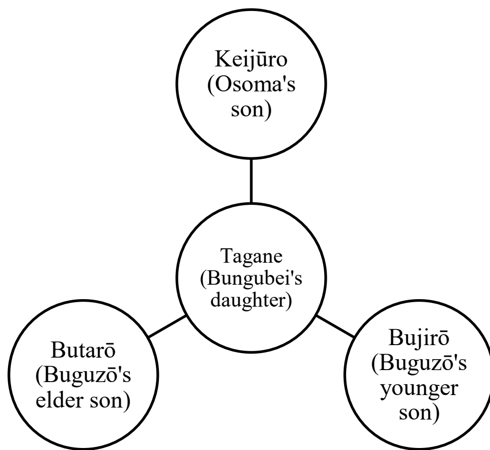

Figure 13. Tagane's cousins

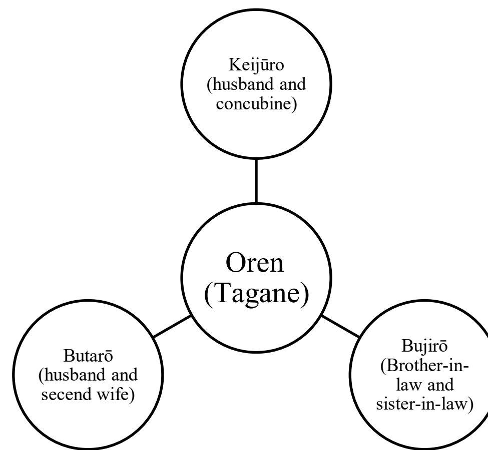

Figure 14. Oren's social connections

Unlike the Chinese original, where the narrative centers on the social connections of the male protagonist Ximen Qing 西門慶 (J. Saimon Kei), the dominant character in *Shinpen Kinpeibai* is undeniably Oren. Her father Bungubei's identity as the eldest brother and the head of the Yase

[33] Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel = Ssu Ta Ch'i-Shu*, 101. In premodern Chinese literature, gold lotus often refers to women's bound feet, which has a strong sexual implication. Bakin himself, who had read the original, was obviously aware of this implication, but because neither the lotus nor bound feet were eroticized in Japan was not clearly associated with sexuality in Edo literature, Bakin frequently associated Oren with the more obvious plum motif by drawing her kimono with plum pattern.

family makes him the central figure of his generation. By extension, Oren logically becomes the center of her generation as well (see Figure 13). In the narrative, she is the first to understand the conflicts within the parents' generation and her relationship with her cousins. She also serves as the crucial link connecting all members of the younger generation of the Yase family (see Figure 14).

As Bungubei's only daughter, Oren could have enjoyed a happy life if the conflicts among her father, uncle, and aunt had not occurred. However, the family's disintegration forces her to recognize the commodity value of her beauty and the sexual value of her body. Initially, she is an innocent and filial daughter, sold by her parents and exploited by her master. Yet, over time, she learns to manipulate men to serve her own interests. While Keijūrō might at first appear to be the protagonist, Oren's presence gradually becomes more prominent, and her significance was recognized and celebrated by contemporary readers.

Oren's agency reaches its peak in Volume Five, where she not only avenges her mother and stepfather but also eliminates three of her rivals. Bakin himself acknowledged that this volume is the most popular in the entire series. In a letter to Jōsai on the twenty-first day of the first lunar month of Tenpo 9 (1838), he wrote:

> The fifth volume of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* is exceptionally popular. It is selling so well that production cannot keep up with demand. Perhaps out of jealousy, Tsuruya asked me to draft [the new volume of] *Keisei Suikoden* 傾城水滸伝 (City-Toppling Beauties of the Water Margin, 1825-1835) so that he can carve [the wood blocks] this year and publish it. … The recent volumes of *Inaka Genji* are no longer very popular. This series has been surpassed by *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, so Tsuruya does not want to put all his bets on Tanehiko anymore. He decided to surrender and visited me early this spring to offer New Year's greetings. His purpose was to ask me to write *[Keisei] Suikoden*.
>
> 然に、『金瓶梅』五集、ことの外評判たかく、製本間ニ不合候迄ニうれ候故、鶴屋うらやましく存候哉、『傾城水滸伝』、当年ハ是非／＼ほり立、出板仕度候間、いかで／＼、御稿本をねがひ候ト申候。…畢竟、『田舎源氏』、追々不評判

ニて、『金瓶梅』に蹴ちらされ候故、鶴屋も種彦を一点張りニいたしがたく、兜を脱て、をめ／＼と当早春ハ年礼ニ罷越シ候は、『水滸伝』の稿本を乞ん為ニ御座候。[34]

Tsuruya refers to the publisher Tsuruya Kiemon 鶴屋喜右衛門, who was responsible for publishing both Bakin's *Keisei Suikoden* and Tanehiko's *Inaka Genji*. Bakin may be exaggerating a bit here to suggest that *Shinpen Kinpeibai* surpassed *Inaka Genji* in popularity, yet it is clear that he is proud of how popular *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, especially the fifth volume of it, had become.

Furthermore, the fifth volume of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* is the only *gōkan* for which all of the *Bakin sanyū* wrote commentaries.[35] Due to the low literary status of *gōkan*, it was uncommon for well-educated literati to comment on such picture books. However, these three commentaries indicate that all three commentators recognized the literary value of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* and the importance of the character Oren.

Jōsai begins his analysis with Oren, describing her as a "lustful and evil woman" (*in'aku no fu* 淫悪の婦) whose craftiness surpasses that of wicked concubines from military houses and outlaw women from mountain bandit dens. Comparing her with Keijūro, the supposed male protagonist, Jōsai argues, "Though a woman, Oren's evilness even surpasses Keijūro's."[36] After reading this analysis, Bakin annotates, "Great comment and absolutely correct."[37] Mokurō shares

[34] Kyokutei, *Bakin shokan shūsei*, 2003, 5:8.

[35] Kanda Masayuki, "*Shinpen Kinpeibai* no nizu o megutte," in *Bakin to shomotsu: denki sekai no teiryū* (Tōkyō: Yagi shoten, 2011), 711.

[36] Tonomura Jōsai, "Shinpen Kinpeibai goshū no guhyō," in *Kinpeibai goshū JōMokuKei sanpyō* (Tōkyō: Waseda University Library, 1838), 9 ura. おれんが奸悪女にしては其割啓十より一もくつよく.

[37] Tonomura, 9 ura. 好評至当.

a similar view, writing, “Oren’s cunning wit surpasses Keijūrō’s and is a rank higher,”[38] to which Bakin annotates, “people who read these parts carefully share the same opinion,”[39] confirming that his and Jōsai’s evaluations of Oren as the most cunning character in *Shinpen Kinpeibai* are accurate. Lastly, Keisō also begins his character analysis with Oren, remarking, “Oren’s cunningness and evilness are most hateful.”[40] In response, Bakin replies, “You understand my intention.”[41]

Although all three commentators criticize Oren’s immorality, they also recognize her as the foremost villain in the story and praise the episode in which she skillfully eliminates Keijūrō’s father, three of Keijūrō’s concubines, and her own secret lover as “interesting,” “brilliant,” and “the most brilliant.”[42] Such celebration of evil echoes Noguchi Takehiko’s discussion of the popularity of poisonous women on the kabuki stage: “Compared to good virtues such as loyalty and righteousness, [the audience] mysteriously gains more pleasure from the open celebration of evil on the stage. In Nanboku’s dramaturgy, there is a bizarre charm. The splendid performance of ‘evil’ sensually dismantles, or at the very least numbs, the very foundations of conventional morality.”[43] In the following analysis, I will focus on the splendid

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[38] Kimura Mokurō, “Shinpen Kinpeibai gohen Mokurō setsu hihyō,” in *Kinpeibai goshū JōMokuKei sanpyō* (Tōkyō: Waseda University Library, 1838), 17 ura. お蓮が奸智は啓十郎の又一等を越たり.

[39] Kimura, 17 ura. こゝらすべてよく見る人はみなおなじ.

[40] Ozu Keisō, “Kinpeibai goshū ryakuhyō,” in *Kinpeibai goshū JōMokuKei sanpyō* (Tōkyō: Waseda University Library, 1838), 17 ura. お蓮ガ奸悪尤にくむべく.

[41] Ozu, 17 ura. 見巧者.

[42] Tonomura, “Shinpen Kinpeibai goshū no Guhyō,” 3-omote, おもしろし; Kimura, “Shinpen Kinpeibai gohen Mokurō setsu hihyō,” 25-omote, 最妙なれとも; Ozu, “Kinpeibai goshū ryakuhyō,” 17-omote, 妙なるに.

[43] Noguchi, “Dokufumono no keifu,” 65.

evil committed by Oren and examine how her conducts solidify her position as the primary villain in the narrative, ultimately making the fifth volume of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* into the most popular installment of this already-super-famous series.

4.4 Oren and Kameko—Agency and Power in the Household

At the end of Volume Four, during a flirtatious moment with Oren, Keijūrō's father, Kurogorō, reveals that he killed a couple many years ago, unaware that this couple was actually Oren's mother and stepfather. Upon learning that Kurogorō is the murderer of her parents, Oren devises a meticulous plan for revenge. She first tells Kurogorō to meet her in her room that night, and then kills her pet cat and shows his corpse to Karumo 苅藻, one of Keijūrō's concubines who Oren views as rivals. She convinces Karumo that the cat had transformed into a monster in the form of Kurogorō the previous night and attempted to harm her, leaving her no choice but to kill him. Oren warns that another cat in the household may seek revenge and persuades Karumo to sleep with her in her room for safety.

That night, when Kurogorō sneaks into Oren's bedroom and lies beside what he believes to be her, it is actually Karumo in the bed. Mistaking Kurogorō for the monster cat, Karumo stabs him deeply in the chest. At that moment, Oren appears and kills Karumo with a dagger. Awakened by the noise, another concubine, Rikino 力野, enters the room to check. Oren quickly seizes the opportunity, moving towards Rikino and killing her as well. Then, she cleans the dagger and hides it, waiting innocently for others in the household to arrive.

This episode demonstrates Oren's exceptional cunning and establishes her as the preeminent villain of the story. She is intelligent, resolute, meticulous, and fearless. In a single night, she eliminates three enemies without arousing suspicion. Though Kurogorō, as Keijūrō's

father, holds a position of authority, he has a reputation for harassing the women in the household when his son is away. Oren hates him even more upon discovering he is her parents' killer. However, recognizing the complications of directly attacking her father-in-law, she skillfully manipulates Karumo into carrying out the initial act, then silences Karumo to ensure secrecy. To execute her plan flawlessly, Oren makes Karumo heavily intoxicated, so she cannot tell if the intruder is a human or a monster. She also dims the room by cutting the lamp wick in half. Moreover, when Rikino arrives, Oren swiftly strikes, fatally stabbing her in the side.

While Oren justifies this plan as her filial revenge, her true intention lies in consolidating power and asserting dominance within the household. As shown in Figure 15, the household hierarchy is initially headed by Keijūrō, with Kurogorō and his primary wife, Kureha, ranking just below him.[44] Oren and the other concubines occupy a lower position. However, by the end of that night, Oren's actions halved the competition, leaving only two contenders for influence (see Figure 16).

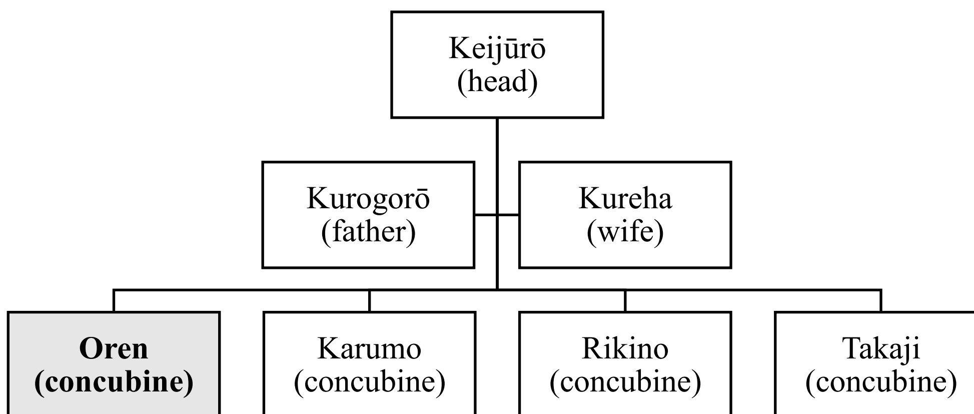

Figure 15. Power structure of the household before the incident

[44] Kurogorō once sold Keijūrō. Later, upon realizing that Keijūrō had become a rich merchant, Kurogorō visited him and asked for his support. Therefore, his position is subordinate to Keijūrō.

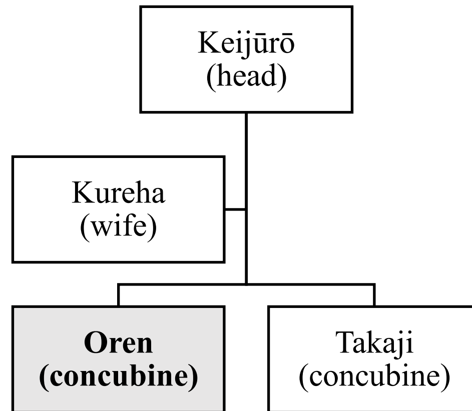

Figure 16. Power structure of the household after the incident

Clearly, Oren's next target is the last remaining concubine, Takaji 卓二. Takaji also senses that Oren may want to eliminate her, so when she discovers a love letter that the servant Emiji 笑次 wrote to Oren, she reports this to Keijūrō with the hope that he will punish or even kill Oren with Emiji. In a fit of rage, Keijūrō summons both Oren and Emiji the following day to question them about their alleged adultery. As neither of them admits guilt, the furious Keijūrō burns Emiji's face with a red-hot iron. Observing the comatose Emiji, Oren remains calm and replies with a smile:

> This is unfortunate. If you want to burn me with the iron, I will not avoid it, but I hope you have not forgotten that you killed someone to get me marry you. How can you believe in someone's rootless calumny when our relationship is so deep? If [what I just said] still cannot save my life, I hope at least I will die in your hands, so that I can die with this memory [of you] as the last moment of my life. Kill me.
>
> ときのふせうにはべりわらはもてつくわのせうばんをさせんとならばにげはせねどおん身も亦人をうしなはせてわらはをめとり給ひたるを今さらわすれ給はずはよしなき人のざんげんに思ひかへらるゝなかならんやかくてものがれぬいのちならばせめておん身の手にかゝりて死ぬるをこの世のおもひでにせんころしてたべ.[45]

[45] Kyokutei, *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 1838, 5:16 ura.

Her words are calculated with precision. First, she makes a concession by expressing her willingness to be punished by Keijūrō in order to pacify his anger. Next, she reminds him of her former husband, Butarō, whom he had killed. Although Oren herself suffocated Butarō, she shifts the blame to Keijūrō, intentionally increasing the cost he has paid to obtain her while also reminding him of her sexual value. The implication here is that, as a merchant, Keijūrō should refrain from burning her face, which would decrease her commodity value. She further implies that because they are accomplices, their bond should be stronger than those he shares with his other concubines. By asserting this, she cleverly distinguishes herself from the other concubines and highlights her uniqueness.

Last, she concludes her speech by expressing her selfless devotion and love for Keijūrō, along with her willingness to die in his hands. Her speech manipulates both rationality and sensibility. On one hand, by portraying herself as a miserable, devoted, and chaste woman, she seeks to elicit Keijūrō's pity. On the other hand, by emphasizing her value as a sexual commodity, she reminds him of his sunk costs and the potential losses he might suffer. After listening to her speech, Keijūrō regains his senses, throws the hot iron aside, and leaves the room. In other words, Oren wins this first battle with Keijūrō, the head of the household.

Slightly before this scene, Kameko 瓶子 is introduced as a foil to Oren. Both Oren and Kameko betrayed their former husbands for Keijūrō and both committed adultery after forming a sexual relationship with him. In the case of Kameko, she is physically punished by Keijūrō for her infidelity. After bringing her into his house, Keijūrō kicks her down to the ground, loosens her obi, and removes all her clothes. Then he ties her to a pillar with a rope and beats her harshly with a bamboo whip. Two concubines come to plead with Keijūrō for mercy, but he continues whipping her until his wife, Kureha, stops him.

The structure of the illustration of this scene is of great importance. As shown in Figure 17, Keijūrō is depicted in the center of the two pages, with two concubines kneeling on either side, trying to stop him. Kameko is positioned on the far left, her body naked and hair disheveled. She looks down as if ashamed, with her clothes scattered around on the floor. This is one of the only two illustrations in the entire series that depicts naked women. (The other is a scene of a young girl performing a religious prayer in a river, and her body is unlikely to be viewed as a sexual object.) This scene clearly illustrates the power dynamics within the household, with the man at the top, the wife second, and all other women as the man's belongings. Kameko, who once had her own property and sponsored her second husband in starting a medicine business, loses all her agency upon entering Keijūrō's house. Her money, jewelry, clothes, and even her own body become Keijūrō's property, and he can do with them as he pleases.

Figure 17. Keijūrō punishes Kameko. *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 13 ura-14 omote (pub. 1838), vol. 5. Author's personal collection.

In contrast, Oren not only convinces Keijūrō not to harm her but also exploits him for her own advantage. The illustration of their confrontation reflects the balance in their relationship (Figure 18). Keijūrō is positioned on the left page while Oren sits calmly on the right. As Keijūrō angrily burns Emiji's face, Oren calmly exhales tobacco smoke with a smile on her face. Unlike the previous illustration where all female characters are depicted as lower than Keijūrō, Oren and Keijūrō occupy the same horizontal level. The blank line in the middle that crosses the two pages further emphasizes the equality between the two characters.

Figure 18. Oren convinces Keijūrō. *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 15 ura-16 omote (pub. 1838), vol. 5. Author's personal collection.

The contrast between heat and cold is also significant in this illustration. The angry Keijūrō, the burning iron, and the struggling Emiji all symbolize heat, while the cool Oren, the smoke she exhales, and Mt. Fuji on the screen behind her all create a cold atmosphere. In this context, she emerges as the dominant figure in control.

Later, Oren manipulates Emiji to kill Takaji, and Emiji himself is subsequently killed by other servants of the household. It appears that Oren has succeeded in achieving her original goal of eliminating Kurogorō and her three rival concubines. However, during this process, Keijūrō's wife Kureha gives birth to a son, Shiroichi 白市, and Keijūrō brings back two new concubines, Kameko and Ofuta 阿弐, with one more, Noume 野梅, set to join soon. As Figure 19 shows, although Oren successfully eliminates all of her old enemies, as long as Keijūrō remains alive, new women will continue to appear, and the patriarchal structure of the household will never change.

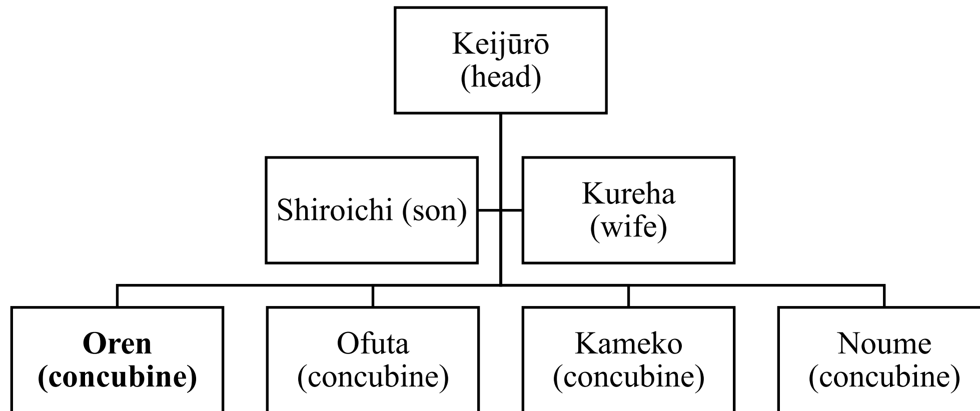

Figure 19. The new power structure of the household.

4.5 Oren the *Dokufu* and Her Symbolic Patricide

The previous section explores how Oren attempts to increase her familial status by eliminating her enemies and competitors but fails. In this section, I will examine how Oren becomes a true *dokufu* and completes a symbolic patricide by poisoning Keijūrō. After Oren has realized the reality that Keijūrō—the head of the family—holds absolute power over her fate, her next step is to challenge this patriarchal structure. She no longer pays much attention to the other concubines and instead focuses on seducing men during Keijūrō's frequent absences.

She first develops an improper relationship with a handsome young blind monk, Inka 允可, under the pretense of seeking his therapeutic services, such as acupuncture and massage, which themselves carry sexual implications. When the young Hokurō 帆九郎 comes to Keijūrō's place seeking help, Keijūrō hides him in the basement and instructs Oren to bring food to him every day. In fact, Keijūrō gives Oren a deadly poison and instructs her to secretly kill Hokurō after he leaves the house. However, Oren disobeys his order and takes Hokurō as her new lover.

Subsequently, she finds the blind Inka annoying and manipulates him into delivering some money to an old friend, which ultimately leads to Inka's death. After a while, a young boy named Hijimatsu 秘事松 begins working as a servant in the house. Enchanted by his beauty, which even surpasses Emiji's, Oren immediately develops a secret relationship with him. Meanwhile, Hokurō betrays her by starting an affair with Oume, another concubine. Enraged, Oren uses the poison Keijūrō gave her to kill both Hokurō and Oume, then, with Hijimatsu's help, disposes of their corpses in a well.

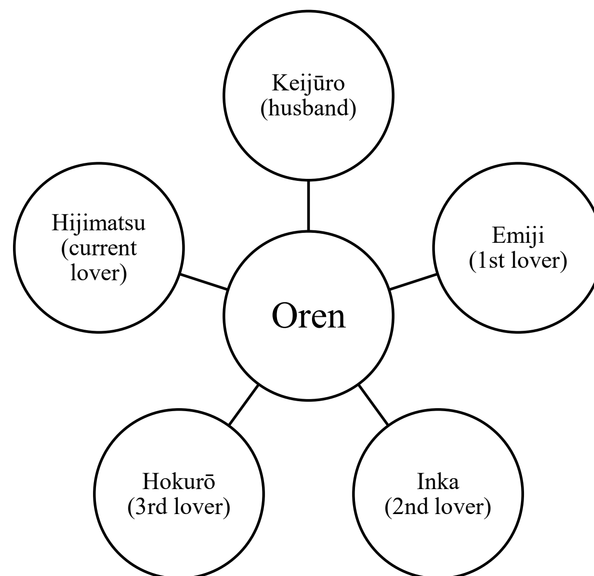

Figure 20. Oren's lovers

These events illustrate that Oren is no longer one of Keijūrō's possessions or part of his household/power structure. Instead, she gradually obtains her own agency and develops her own sexual network. As shown in Figure 20, Oren continually seeks new lovers, and as soon as she finds a better man, she extracts the residual value from the former one and then discards him. For example, she incites Emiji to kill Takaji, leading to his death. Similarly, she sends Inka on a journey that turns out to be a death trip. In the case of Hokurō, due to his betrayal, Oren cruelly poisons both him and his lover as punishment.

However, as long as Keijūrō remains the head of the house, Oren's sexual journey is always at risk of exposure. In Volume Seven, the other two concubines have the following discussion:

> Kameko and Ofuta speculate [that Oren and Hijimatsu must be having an affair]. Out of jealousy, they secretly converse: "We all know that Oren is a lewd and wanton woman. First, she secretly saw Emiji without feeling embarrassed by her friends' accusations. After Emiji died in vain, she started to see Inka. Recently, after she was assigned to take care of the basement, she developed a secret relationship with Mr. Hokurō. Although no one knows [what really happened], the deaths of Noume and that man [Hokurō] are suspicious. Anyway, if we ignore this situation [Oren's adultery with Hijimatsu], the master [Keijūrō] will think that we are as lewd as her. This is unbearable! However, considering the incidents involving Takaji and Rikino, even if we inform the master about her when he comes home, he will easily fall for her sweet talk and blame us for our jealousy. We will be tricked by her and ruin ourselves."
>
> かめ子おふたはこれをすいしてそねみ心のやるかたなさにしのび／＼にだんかふするやうあのおれんはうすなべにてしりのはやきはいふまでもあらねどはじめはゑみ次としのびあふてほうばいのそしりをものともおもはずえみ次がむなしくなりてのちは又いんかにもわけありしに又ちかころはかのあなくらかよひをまかされしよりほ九郎ぬしとわけありしかこれも亦しるべからずさればにや野うめとのとかの人のしにざまにうたがひなきにあらずそはともあれかくもあれ此たびのことをうちすておきてのちにだんなにしられなばわれ／＼もひとつあななるむじなならんと思はれなばさぞなくやしかるべけれしかれどもさきにたか二りき野が事を思ふにだんなのかへり給ふをまちてよしやこのことをつぐるともだんなはのろく又おめ／＼とおれんがくちくるまにのせられてかへつて又われ／＼がねたみ

こゝろのさかしらならんとおもはれなばつひに又かやつが為にはかられて身のわざはひになりぬべし[46]

Obviously, they are aware of, or at least suspicious of, Oren's crimes and adultery. They also understand that they should not follow Takaji's old path by informing Keijūrō about her, as Oren has outwitted him. Consequently, they decide to inform the wife, Kureha, about their suspicions, hoping she will advise Keijūrō to punish Oren. However, Kureha rejects their suggestion and instead proposes that they wait for Keijūrō's return.

Figure 21. Oren and Hijimatsu. *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 21 *omote* (pub. 1840), vol. 7. Author's personal collection.

The illustration of this scene is also extremely interesting. The secret conversation between Kameko and Ofuta is paired with the illustration shown in Figure 21. In the illustration, Oren and Hijimatsu are looking at each other, which might suggest that this is a scene from one of their

[46] Kyokutei, *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 1840, 7:21 omote-21 ura.

secret meetings, as referred from Kameko and Ofuta's discussion. However, Oren places her left hand on Hijimatsu's shoulder while her right hand points towards the sliding door behind her, implying that something important might be happening next door.

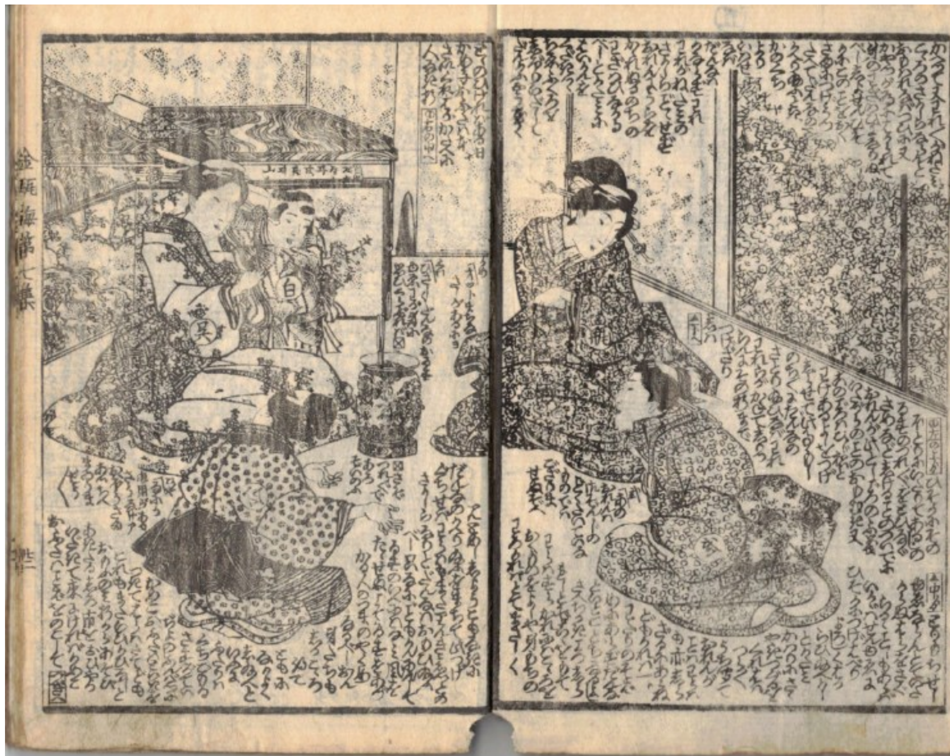

Figure 22. Kameko and Ofuta's conversation with Kureha. *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 21 *ura*-22 omote (pub. 1840), vol. 7. Author's personal collection.

The turning of the page offers readers a metapictorial experience, allowing them to rotate the stage themselves to discover what is occurring on the other side.[47] On the following page, or in the next room, the two ladies are complaining about Oren to Kureha. Careful readers will immediately notice that Oren is eavesdropping. In this context, the fact that the text of the secret conversation between the two concubines begins on page 21 *omote* (Figure 21) and continues on

[47] Michael Emmerich calls such pictorial arrangements a type of metapicture. He writes, "the thickness of the paper comes to represent physically the thickness of the door." See Emmerich, *The Tale of Genji*, 137–40. Furthermore, Satō Satoru argues that such visual sensibility might be inspired by the revolving stage used in kabuki. See Satō Satoru, "*Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* no sashie," in *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō bessatsu: Edo bunka to sabukaruchā* (Tōkyō: Shinbundō, 2005), 123–27.

page 21 *ura*-22 *omote* (Figure 22) further suggests that this secret has already been discovered by Oren. Clever as she is, Oren will not remain passive but will solve the situation in her own way.

As soon as Keijūrō returns, Kameko and Ofuta express their doubts about Oren to him. Keijūrō thinks to himself:

> Oren is a woman whose wit even surpasses mine. If I argue with her without evidence, she will get the chance to educate me again, and I won't learn what I want to know. おれんはわれにいちもくつよきちゑたくましきをんななるにせうこなきことをいひつのらば又もやあれにたしなめられてもとねにしかぬることもあらん.[48]

Clearly, Keijūrō is intimidated by Oren, and he lacks the courage to confront her directly. Consequently, he decides to drink more wine to gain some courage before heading to her bedroom. However, this snitching scene is again overheard by Hijimatsu, who secretly informs Oren of what he heard. Oren understands that in order to survive, she has only one option. She retrieves the poison that Keijūrō had given her and instructs Hijimatsu to create a trap with two of her obi sashes.

When the drunk Keijūrō is about to step into her bedroom, he stumbles over the trap and falls to the floor. Hijimatsu quickly jumps onto his body and holds both his arms tightly. Then, Oren takes out the poisonous wine and pours it into Keijūrō's mouth before he has the chance to shout. After struggling for a while, Keijūrō takes his last breath. Oren and Hijimatsu place his corpse next to Kameko's bedroom, and then return to Oren's chamber, where they have sex for the rest of the night. The narrator concludes, "A human, yet not a human! She is truly an extremely evil and bold woman."[49]

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[48] Kyokutei, *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 1840, 7:26 ura.

[49] Kyokutei, 7:28 ura. げに人にして人ならぬ大あくふてきのをんな也.

The killing of Keijūrō can be read as a symbolic patricide and a woman's rejection of the Confucian patriarchal order. The Confucian *wulun* "five cardinal relationships" consistently put Oren in the subordinate position. She begins life as a properly demure woman. As a filial daughter, she did not protest when her when her mother and stepfather sold her to an old man as his concubine. As a dutiful concubine, she served her husband and his wife obediently, only to be cruelly given way to a short, unattractive, and slow-witted man as his second wife. Society forces her to accept the miserable fate predetermined for her, but instead, she comes to embrace the identity of a *dokufu* and destroy the patriarchal structure that confines her.

If Keijūrō represents the self that, according to *Daxue*, must be cultivated to pacify the family, the state, and the world under heaven, his death symbolizes the failure of self-cultivation and implies that the world is beyond repair. The *dokufu* who kills him functions as a force from the periphery, exposing the sickness of the corrupted world and revealing the oppressive nature of Neo-Confucianism. Beneath the Confucian ideal world of peace and harmony lies violence and malice.

However, the following morning, people find Keijūrō still alive. This twist serves an extremely important function in the story. The text reads:

> [Keijūrō] can neither speak nor stand up. More surprisingly, both his face and body are fully covered in numerous pustules. His appearance is completely different from [the handsome man] he used to be. Both his eyebrows and hair have fallen out, and he resembles the *oni* (ogre) in paintings.
>
> ものを得いはずこしただずそれよりもなほふしぎなるはけい十郎が面部総身(めんぶさうしん)一夜のうちに得もいはれぬかさいで来ていさゝかもすきまなければめんていかはりはててはじめにずまゆもかみのけもおほくぬけてたとへばゑがけるおにのごとし.[50]

[50] Kyokutei, 7:29 omote.

Keijūrō loses not only his ability to speak or stand but also his attractive appearance. In other words, he can no longer continue his sexual conquests or dominate the household. In this sense, Oren succeeds in eliminating his agency. However, the fact that he is still alive like an *oni* both reveals the corrupted nature of the patriarchal society and implies its persistent influence, as well as the impossibility of completely dismantling such a structure.

The pustules on his face and body might suggest that Keijūrō suffers from the affliction of *rai* 癩, which in modern Japanese denotes leprosy but historically referred to various afflictions. In premodern times, it was believed to be a type of disease caused by one's bad karma.[51] In Jōsai's commentary, he writes:

> Although it was the two [Oren and Hijimatsu] who poisoned him, it [Keijūrō's disfigurement] should be viewed as nature's judgement, or the so-called "disease of divine punishment." [That is why he must] experience various forms of disgrace.
>
> どくやくは二人がしわざなれどもそれすなわちぞうくわのはいざいいわゆるてんけいべうしゅ〳〵のはぢにあひつくす.[52]

Tenkeibyō てんけいべう(天刑病), another term for *rai*, literally means "disease of divine punishment."[53] Jōsai's choice of this term clearly emphasizes Keijūrō's immorality.

However, Keijūrō's disease may be more than *rai*. According to Nihon Kokugo Daijiten, the term *kasa* かさ/瘡 often refers to symptoms associated with syphilis, which suggests that Keijūrō's affliction could stem from his excessive indulgence in lust. Syphilis is written as

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[51] Andrew Edmund Goble, "Determining Karmic Illness: Kajiwara Shōzen's Treatment of *Rai*/Leprosy in *Book of the Simple Physican*," in *Buddhism and Healing: An Anthology of Premodern Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 553–54.

[52] Tonomura, "Shinpen Kinpeibai dainanashū ryakuhyō," 28 omote. Due to Bakin's deteriorated eyesight, Jōsai chose to write in *hiragana* so that Bakin's daughter-in-law can read the commentary to Bakin.

[53] Harada Nobuo, "Tenkeibyō kō," in *Tenkeibyō kō* (Tōkyō: Gensōsha, 1983), 132–33.

baidoku 梅毒 in Japanese, which literarily means "plum poison." Because of Oren's frequent associations with plum patterns and her identity as a *dokufu* (poisonous woman), this can be viewed as a wordplay linking her character to syphilis. Furthermore, the plum motif reminds readers of the book's title, which literarily translates to "a plum in a golden vase." If the plum is a poisonous flower growing out of a vase, the gold (or money) that constitutes the vase can be understood as the force that transforms Oren from a pure girl to a poisonous woman, as well as the origin that generates all distortions and corruptions in the narrative.

4.6 Two Filial Daughters and Two Hundred *Ryō*

The "*kinpeibai* 金瓶梅" in the title is a combination of three female characters in the story: Oren, whose maiden name Tagane 煅金 contains the character *kin* 金 (gold); Kameko 瓶子, whose name includes the character *p[h]ei* 瓶 (vase); and Noume 野梅, whose name features *bai* 梅 (plum). According to the principle of *myōsen jishō* 名詮自性 (the name names the thing), a narrative tool Bakin frequently used to foreshadow events or underlying lessons,[54] Oren's fate must be closely connected to gold or money. In the narrative, one covert plot about her is based on the circulation of a bag of money.

Oren's tragic fate begins when her mother and her stepfather sell her to an elderly man as his concubine for two hundred *ryō* 両 (a monetary unit).[55] In other words, her parents use the

[54] Walley, *Good Dogs*, 206. One example of *myōsen jishō* discussed by Walley is the name of Princess Fuse (伏), which combines the characters for "person" and "dog" and foreshadows her eventual marriage to a dog.

[55] In volume two, Oren is sold for one hundred *ryō*. However, from volume three, the money in the bag becomes two hundred *ryō*. It is possible that Bakin confused the money in the bag for Takematsu's salary, which is described as two hundred *kan* 貫 in volume two. Mokurō also seemed to forget the original one hundred *ryō* and suggested that Oren was sold for two hundred *ryō* in his commentary on the sixth volume. However, he did notice the significance of the circulation of this money, and this observation of his is praised by Bakin. See Kimura Mokurō , "*Shinpen*

name of filial piety to transform her into a commodity with a specific value. However, her sacrifice proves futile, as the couple is soon killed by Kurogorō, who absconds with the striped bag containing the two hundred *ryō*. On his escape, he falls into a river and loses the bag of money. Although Oren dutifully serves the elderly man and his wife, the wife becomes jealous of her beauty, prompting the elderly man to resolve the conflict by giving Oren to Butarō, whose wife has recently died. Oren subsequently learns from Butarō that he is her cousin and that he had inherited her father Bungubei's assets, which indirectly caused her parents' divorce and led to her own misery. From this perspective, her murder of Butarō with her secret lover, Keijurō (also the adopted son of Bungubei), can be seen as an act of filial piety, even if it is partially motivated by her personal desire for a better sexual partner and a more prosperous life.

Later, Keijurō bribes the local official to frame Butarō's younger brother, Takematsu, for theft. In an effort to save her uncle, the filial Kotoji 琴柱 (Butarō's daughter with his former wife) prays for divine help by performing a cold-water ablution in a river. By luck, she discovers a striped bag of money in the river and uses it to bribe the official, thus, saving Takematsu's life. Kotoji is subsequently adopted by her maternal aunt, Shiorito 栞戸, a lady who serves the *kanrei* 管領 (a shogunal deputy) in Kyōto.

The official later transfers the money to Keijurō as expense, and Keijurō presents it to Oren to please her. Oren immediately notices that the familiar pattern and style of the bag, which resemble her mother's, and she realizes that Kurogorō—Keijurō's biological father and her father-in-law—is the killer of her parents. In this light, Oren's subsequent killing of Kurogorō

Kinpeibai rokushū setsuhyō," in Hakkenden *daikyūshū gechitsu ge chū hen,* Shinpen Kinpeibai *dairokushū,* Zōho haishi gedai kagami *Mokurō hyō*, ed. Kyokutei Bakin (Tōkyō: Waseda University Library, 1839), 4 ura-5 omote, 7 ura-8 omote.

can also be justified as an act of filial piety. After taking her revenge, she instructs Inka to deliver the bag of money to an old friend, as a precaution in case Keijurō's business fails. However, the money is stolen by Hijimatsu. On his way to spend the money, a kite snatches the bag and drops it into Kotoji's hands once again. At the story's conclusion, Kotoji witnesses Oren and Keijurō's death and donates this money to hold a mass for the repose of the dead.

This narrative structure weaves together Oren's complex motives of personal ambition, revenge, filial piety, and sexual desire, culminating in a tragic cycle where the same bag of money—originally the price for her commodification—circulates among the characters, symbolizing both her lost innocence and the pervasive corruption surrounding her life.

Additionally, Oren and Kotoji serve as comparative figures in terms of filial piety. The episode of Oren being sold for two hundred *ryō* contrasts with Kotoji discovering two hundred *ryō* in the river. Mokurō also notices this connection between the money and the two women. In his commentary on Volume Six, he writes:

> The two hundred *ryō* was originally the unrighteous profit earned by the Wataichi couple [Oren's parents] by selling Oren to an old man as his concubine. … Kotoji first underwent lustration in order to save her uncle, and she unexpectedly obtained two hundred *ryō* from the water. … Money brings happiness to good people while bringing misfortune to bad people. This mere two hundred *ryō* reflects the difference between good and evil retribution. Interesting! Wonderful!
>
> 此二百金之最初わた市夫婦が娘を老人の妾に出して無義の利を得し…琴柱は最初叔父を助んとてこりをとりて謀らずも水中にて弐百金を得て…金は善人の為には幸となり悪人の為には凶事を招く纔二包の金にて善悪応報の異なる事奇也妙也.[56]

Bakin also praises Mokurō's careful contextual analysis. However, I argue that Mokurō overlooks a crucial aspect: Oren's initial identity as a filial daughter. Both Oren and Kotoji are

[56] Kimura, 5 omote. 二包の金 literally means two packages of money. In general, one package of money equates one hundred *ryō*.

introduced into the story as innocent girls. When Yamaki brings Oren to the old man's house, she describes her to him and his wife as "[Oren] is a cloistered maiden who knows nothing of the world."[57] Oren herself "innocently (*uiuishiku* うい／＼しく)" believed she would serve as a musician to the family until the old man comes to her room at night. As the story progresses, however, the wife grows jealous of Oren and beats her whenever possible. The text states:

> Although Oren suffered from many extremely sorrowful things, because she was paid a large amount of money to serve [them], she has no means of escape.
>
> おれんはいとゞあさましくかなしきことのみおほかれどもあまたのかねに身をまかしてつかはるゝことにあれば今さらのがるゝみちはあらず.[58]

Despite her filial devotion, Oren's sacrifices bring her no reward. Her greedy mother and stepfather die, the money she earned for her parents is stolen, and her master disposes of her, leaving her as the second wife of Butarō, her enemy, who is both unattractive and foolish. Her story reveals a critical flaw in the Confucian ideal of filial piety. Educational texts such as the widely-read *Ershisi xiao* 二十四孝 (J. *Nijūshikō*, Twenty-four filial acts, the Yuan dynasty) promote the belief that filial piety has the power to move heaven and earth, and that filial sons and daughters will ultimately be rewarded. However, in Oren's case, filial piety only leaves her vulnerable to exploitation by her greedy mother and avaricious master. Gradually, she learns to embrace her own desires and cleverly justifies these desires through the manipulation of the concept of filial piety.

Oren's killing of Butarō marks the completion of her transformation, symbolizing her departure from traditional moral constraints. Interestingly, Bakin includes a screen behind her as

[57] Kyokutei, *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 1831, 2:15 ura. せけんをしらぬふところ子.

[58] Kyokutei, 2:19 ura.

she suffocates Butarō in the illustration (Figure 23). Some of the Chinese characters on the screen are hidden by the characters in front of the screen, but the distinguishable text goes "諸悪〇作　衆善〇〇 (*shoaku ? sa, shuzen ? ?*)."　This fragmentary text clearly references the famous Buddhist teaching "諸悪莫作・衆善奉行 (*shoaku makusa, shuzen bōgyō*, do not do any kind of evil; do all kinds of good)," which can be found in scriptures such as the *Dhammapada* and is often regarded as a concise summary of all Buddhist doctrines.

Figure 23. Oren suffocating Butarō. *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 39 *ura*-40 omote (pub. 1832), vol. 2. Author's personal collection.

At first glance, this teaching seems to serve as a moral lesson to the readers. However, the fact that Oren's body obscures two key sections—*baku* 莫 (not to do) and *bōgyō* 奉行 (to do)—casts ambiguity on the distinction between good and evil. Should one promote or punish good, criticize or support evil? In light of Oren's experience, the border between good and evil

becomes blurred. Her act of killing Butarō can be interpreted as both evil and filial.[59] On one hand, she kills him out of personal desire, as she and her secret lover are caught by her husband in an incriminating situation. On the other hand, she sees Butarō as her enemy from the perspective of filial piety. Upon marrying him, she learns that they are cousins.

> She thinks to herself, "This must be bad karma from my previous lives. I not only become the wife of one of a kind ugly man but also married him without knowing that he is the enemy of my parents. What a misfortune!"
> いかなるすくせのあくえんにて世におほからぬぶをとこの女ばうになりしのみならでおやの為にはあたかたきぞとしらでよめりしくやしさよと思ふ.[60]

Figure 24. Kiresuke suffocates Butayo. *Keisei Suikoden*, 34 *ura*-35 *omote* (pub. 1828), vol. 5. Owned by School of Letters, Graduate School of Humanities, Faculty of Humanities, Kyushu University, retrieved from Union Catalogue Database of Japanese Texts. https://doi.org/10.20730/100023658 (image 234).

[59] She later kills Kurogorō through the same logic. Both Jōsai and Keisō mention in their commentaries that although she is an evil and poisonous woman, her revenge can be viewed as filial. See Tonomura, "Shinpen Kinpeibai goshū no guhyō," 1 ura-2 omote; Ozu, "Kinpeibai goshū ryakuhyō," 17 ura.

[60] Kyokutei, *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 1831, 2:22 omote.

The ambivalence between good and evil appears in a similar scene in *Keisei Suikoden* (Figure 24). In Volume Five, published in 1828, three years earlier than the second volume of *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, the character Kiresuke 金蓮助 (the male counterpart of Oren) kills his wife Butayo 豕代 (female counterpart of Butarō). Behind Kiresuke is a screen with partially obscured text: "衆〇勿作 諸〇奉〇 (*shu ? makusa, sho ? bō ?*)." This time, Kiresuke's body conceals the characters for *zen* 善 (good) and *aku* 悪 (evil). When compared with the standard phrase "諸悪莫作 衆善奉行," it is clear that the hidden character following 衆 should be 善 and the character after 諸 should be 悪. Following this logic, the text on the screen can be completed as "衆善勿作・諸悪奉行 (*shuzen makusa, shoaku bōgyō*)," which literally translates to "Do not do any kind of good; do all kinds of evil."

This reversal of the familiar moral teaching shocks the reader, subverting conventional ideas about good and evil and suggesting that good deeds are rare, while evil deeds abound. Although this wordplay does not appear in *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, the toppled screen serves a similar purpose. Unlike the stable screen in *Female Water Margin*, the screen behind Oren is tilted and about to fall to the left, symbolizing the instability and unreliability of this Buddhist teaching when applied to real-life situations and challenging the conventional belief in good and evil.

Kotoji serves as a striking foil to Oren in *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, embodying the archetype of a "good" filial daughter in contrast to Oren's more morally ambiguous and poisonous character. Her story aligns with traditional Confucian and Buddhist ideals, highlighting qualities like obedience, purity, and passive devotion. However, her role in the narrative is heavily constrained, as her path to agency is continuously obstructed by the values that define her character.

When her uncle Takematsu is wrongly imprisoned, Kotoji is confronted with an impossible task: raising two hundred *ryō* to secure his release. She turns to the gods and Buddha for help, entering a river to undergo a purification ritual for seven days. Miraculously, on the seventh day, a bag containing exactly two hundred *ryō* brushes against her leg.[61] This event underscores her narrative as a conventional story of filial piety, where her unwavering devotion is rewarded by divine intervention. Unlike Oren, who seizes control of her destiny through deliberate and often ruthless actions, Kotoji can only passively hope for help from external forces.

The setting of Kotoji's episode further highlights her lack of agency. Her prayers take place near the fictional "bridge of karma" (*ingabashi* いんぐわばし), which symbolizes the Buddhist principle of cause and effect. By situating her story in this allegorical location, the narrative confines Kotoji's agency within the realm of idealized morality, whereas Oren's story, grounded in real locations, reflects a more complex and often corrupt social world. This contrast not only reinforces Kotoji's limited autonomy but also draws attention to her function as a moral symbol rather than a fully autonomous character.

Kotoji's narrative arc takes another turn when she is noticed by a court lady—a surprising twist that appears to be a miraculous reward for her filial piety. This court lady, who turns out to be her aunt, offers to raise Kotoji in the capital and groom her to become a court lady herself. The opportunity to escape her circumstances might suggest a form of agency, but in reality, this

[61] The illustration of this scene is the other one of the only two pictures depicting naked women. (The first one depicting Kameko was explored in section 4.)

development pushes her further into passivity and submission within a highly controlled and hierarchical environment.

Moreover, her adoption also marks her disappearance from the narrative. She only returns at the very end of the story, when her uncle Takematsu prepares to kill Oren and Keijurō. However, even though she is present at the site of revenge, she is not allowed to participate. The center of revenge is never Kotoji, the filial daughter, but always Takematsu, the righteous uncle. Kotoji can only passively witness how Takematsu first cuts off Oren and Keijūrō's fingers, arms, and feet, and then opens their chests and removes the insides, and finally beheads them. She laments, "If I were a man, I would avenge my father with you, my uncle. However, I am a useless woman."[62]

Her "uselessness" is confirmed by her uncle, who comforts her by saying that "Your words are correct, but you happen to come to the place of revenge. If you worship your dead parents with me, it is the same as if you had killed these enemies with your own hands."[63] Takematsu's words cleverly eliminate her last struggle for agency. By arguing that as long as she prays, her filial piety will be recognized, Takematsu completely ignores her desire for revenge and excludes her from the patriarchal power structure.

Convinced by her uncle, her line in the illustration goes：

> "Heaven's force prevails over human effort. This place stands in for my parents' memorial tablets. I should pray first."

---

[62] Kyokutei, *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 1847, 10:5 ura. わが身男であるならばをぢこととともに父のあたをうつべかりしにとにもかくにもかひなきものはをなご也.

[63] Kyokutei, 10:5 ura. しかおもはるゝはことわりなれどもはからずあたうちの場(には)に来てともになきおやをまつりなばてづからかたきをうちしにおなじ.

天さだまつて人にかつ事をなきちゝはゝのゐはいにかへたるよういのかけ地こゝ
にありまづ/ \ 御はいをなされませ.[64]

This line again confirms her passiveness. All she can do is to believe in the abstract Heaven's force and pray devoutly, while ignoring the fact that her uncle, as a man, is allowed to track down the enemies and kill them brutally.

In short, while Oren is given the space to enact her will, challenge social norms, and pursue her desires, albeit through morally questionable means, Kotoji's narrative is overly didactic and constrained, a clichéd reflection of Confucian values. The juxtaposition of Oren's dynamic, even transgressive character with Kotoji's obedient and restrained role draws attention to the inherent limitations placed on women in the moral structure of *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. In this way, Kotoji's "goodness" becomes a passive, almost futile virtue, lacking the vibrant agency that defines Oren, who, despite her predetermined tragic end, ultimately resists the confining expectations imposed on her as a woman. Through these contrasting characters, *Shinpen Kinpeibai* subtly critiques the efficacy and relevance of Confucian ideals as well as the specific limitations placed on women, especially in a corrupt world where rigid moral doctrines often fail to protect those who adhere to them.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter explores Oren's transformation from a filial daughter into a *dokufu*. Her greedy mother and lustful master represent the power of money and sexual desire that destroy her life, revealing the oppressive nature of the Confucian family structure. Rather than passively

[64] Kyokutei, 10:5 ura. This line does not belong to the body of the main text. It is the tradition of *gōkan* that each important character depicted in the illustration has a line which is separated from the main text and is more colloquial.

waiting for the appearance of a savior, she chooses to manipulate Confucian virtues such as filial piety and women's devotion to her husband to pursue her own needs and desires. After realizing that she can never be completely safe and free as long as her husband and the family head, Keijūrō, is alive, she poisons him without hesitation, dismantling the oppressive household that confines her and completing the symbolic patricide.

Although she must be punished at the end of the story to conform to the *kanzen chōaku* framework, the popularity Oren brings to this series, the attention she receives from both Bakin and his three literati friends, the dominant stage time she enjoys compared with other characters, and the broader celebration of evil female characters in the late Edo period all reflect the symptoms of the age and the hidden desire for a new social order, even if it has to be achieved through violent means.

The analysis of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* reaffirms Bakin' critical stance towards Neo-Confucianism. This narrative serves as a sharp critique of a rigid social hierarchy and underscores the futility of Confucian moral ideals in preserving familial harmony. Moreover, unlike the *kyōkaku* characters in *Kyōkakuden*, who symbolize the faint hope for justice and moral order, the *dokufu* in *Shinpen Kinpeibai* embody destructive, chaotic energy born of despair. If the irony of *Kyōkakuden* is veiled in the fantastical nature of its *kyōkaku* heroes and humorous portrayals of recluses, *Shinpen Kinpeibai* lays its irony bare through the flamboyant wickedness of characters like Oren. The intensifying pessimism from *Kyōkakuden* to *Shinpen Kinpeibai* mirrors Bakin's own struggles with publication and censorship. In the concluding chapter, I shift the focus from textual analysis to real-world challenges Bakin faced during the publication of these two serialized works.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

> "Let the end of this book also be its beginning. Like Masaki's ivy, may it be passed around again and again, and may it long bring pleasure to the readers of the world."
>
> —Preface to *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, vol. 10, Kyokutei Bakin[1]

In this dissertation, I investigate the seemingly paradoxical relationship between the hierarchical, state-endorsed Confucian ideology imported from imperial China and the iconoclastic, popular literature of Edo Japan. Although the Tokugawa shogunate implemented Neo-Confucianism to reinforce social order from above, Bakin—whose audience primarily consisted of commoners—reinterpreted and appropriated this ideology in his fictional works as a means of critiquing and resisting governmental oppression.

The main chapters have explored the highest-level legitimacy of rulers, the secondary-level loyalty and righteousness of samurai, and the family-level filial piety and chastity of commoners. In *Kyōkakuden*, Bakin challenged the monolithic Confucian interpretation of *seitō* through nuanced and diverse perspectives of various characters, including a Daoist immortal and a Buddhist monk who, ironically, become the primary voices teaching the meaning of this Confucian concept to both characters within *Kyōkakuden* and readers in reality. The multi-layered reinterpretations of *seitō* reveal the conflict between political power and moral virtue

[1] Kyokutei, *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, 1847, 10:1 omote. この書の終りありを亦始より、正木の蔓繰り返して、長く久しく世の看官に、弄るゝ幸あれかし、

hidden in this concept and imply the impossibility to restore worldly peace through Confucian self-cultivation.

In such a world, corrupted beyond repair, loyalty and righteousness—two other key Confucian moral virtues—are likewise contested, as evidenced by the celebration of *kyōkaku*, who defy the prevailing social hierarchy. Refusing to serve the ruling class and those in power, they instead fight against them to protect the oppressed and marginalized. However, Bakin also intentionally reveals the fictionality of *kyōkaku* and hints the lack of such heroes in reality who can really fight the shogunate and change people's life.

If the celebration of *kyōkaku* in *Kyōkakuden* still suggests that Bakin holds out a little hope for justice, his decision to begin the *Shinpen Kinpeibai* series—shifting the narrative focus from the virtuous to the villainous—reflects a deepening disillusionment with Confucian morality and the *Daxue*'s theory of self-cultivation. He criticized virtues such as filial piety and women's obedience and chastity as ineffective means to sustain and restore family stability. Instead, the transformation of a woman from a filial daughter into a poisonous woman reveals the oppressive nature of Confucianism, while her popularity among readers signals a collective yearning for a reimagined social order.

However, Bakin's attempts to center marginalized voices and reject Confucian social hierarchy—as seen in *Kyōkakuden* and *Shinpen Kinpeibai*—faced significant obstacles in reality. Both works were shaped by external pressures and concluded in unexpected ways. In this chapter, I will briefly examine the difficulties Bakin encountered while writing these two series as well as his dream of an alternative world implied in the final volume of *Shinpen Kinpeibai*.

5.1 Obstacles in Reality and Bakin's Grand Dream

Bakin ceased work on the *Kyōkakuden* project in 1835. One major reason was his ongoing conflict with the publishers. In a letter to his friend Keisō in 1833, Bakin complained that the Edo publisher Chōjiya Heibei pressured him so intensely that he was forced to work day and night throughout the eighth and ninth months, leaving him unable to care for his son Sōhaku, who was gravely ill at that time.[2] Despite Bakin's efforts, the main publisher in Osaka, Kawachiya Mohei, delayed publication for other reasons. The following year, Sōhaku passed away and this incident deeply disheartened Bakin.

Although Bakin continued to express his intention to draft more volumes of *Kyōkakuden* in letters exchanged with his friends and the publisher in 1834, the continued delays and complications caused by Kawachiya ultimately led him to abandon the project entirely. In a letter to Keisō in 1835, Bakin voiced his dissatisfaction with Kawachiya and his determination to cease the series:

> Overall, Kawachiya Mohei acted selfishly and did many extremely detestable things, which I could no longer tolerate. As such, I have decided to suspend writing the fifth volume of *Kyōkakuden* for the time being. I have already sent a word to Osaka regarding this matter, so the publication of this series will be halted after the fourth volume for a while. Although I had various plans and ideas in mind for the fifth volume, things have turned out this way, which is truly a most regrettable situation.
>
> 全体、河内屋茂兵衛、手前勝手のミいたし、甚可憎事多く、堪かね候間、『侠客伝』五集ハ、当分休筆のつもりニ決着いたし、其段、大坂へも □(ムシ) 申遣し候間、右之書、四集切ニて、しバらく □(ムシ) 絶可致候。五集の腹稿、種々御座候処、ケ様之わけになり行、尤不本意の仕合ニ御座候。[3]

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[2] Kyokutei, *Bakin shokan shūsei*, 3:118–119.

[3] Kyokutei, 4:71. Bakin mentioned more details in another letter to Keisō. Due to Kawachiya's delay, initial sales of the fourth volume did not meet expectations. Bakin attributed this fault to Kawachiya's dishonesty. He also mentioned that Kawachiya used paper of bad quality to print the book, which might also have contributed to the decrease in the initial sales of this volume. See Kyokutei, 4:95.

The suspension of *Kyōkakuden* reflects the cruel realities Bakin faced. In the narrative, *kyōkaku* like Akinobu fight against corrupt officials and exploitative villains to protect the innocent, but in real life, even a writer as famous as Bakin struggled to resist the unreasonable demands of the publishing world. At the time, Bakin was not only burdened by his son's illness and death, but also by his wife's serious foot swelling and his own worsening eye disease. Despite submitting his manuscript on time, publication was still delayed due to other reasons. When it was finally released, the books were printed on paper of low quality, and the sales fell short of expectations, which further displeased Bakin.

Bakin's decision to abandon the project reflects both personal grief and professional frustration. His work and dedication did not receive the respect they deserved. Although friends later encouraged him to revive the series, Bakin remained resolute in his refusal. While he could not transform society like *kyōkaku* in his fiction, his refusal to continue this project can be read as a personal act of defiance—a silent rejection of exploitation and an implicit critique of an oppressive society.

Unlike the unfinished *Kyōkakuden*, *Shinpen Kinpeibai* was completed in 1847, one year before Bakin's death. However, Bakin temporarily halted this project for five years, from 1842 to 1847, due to the severe censorship imposed during the Tempō Reforms. A devastating famine, which reached its height in 1836-37, triggered a nationwide civil crisis. In response, the shogunate launched the Tempō Reforms in the summer of 1841. Instead of addressing urgent actual problems such as famine relief and quelling rebellions, the reforms focused on restoring Confucian morality to those over whom it ruled.[4]

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[4] Harold Bolitho, "The Tempō Crisis," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge

The government attempted to control public behavior through punitive measures, particularly by targeting prominent cultural figures. For example, the famous *ukiyo-e* artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳 (1798-1861) was put in manacles for caricaturing the shogun and his chief minister, while the renowned *ninjōbon* 人情本 (sentimental fiction) writer Tamenaga Shunsui 為永春水 (1790-1844) was shackled for spreading obscenity through his novels. Furthermore, Ryūtei Tanehiko, the author of *Inaka Genji*, received a reprimand and died shortly thereafter.[5]

Bakin's awareness of and anxiety about censorship are evident in several letters he exchanged with his friends. In one letter to Jōsai and Keisō in 1842, Bakin referenced the suspension of *Inaka Genji* and the growing regulation of other writers and artists, and expressed his concern over his own career:

> With all due respect, while I fully understand and deeply acknowledge the reasonableness of the reform, the old ways have been followed for decades, and now, with this sudden reform, all of us foolish commoners find ourselves unable to navigate the world as before—there seems to be no one unaffected by hardship.
>
> Although it might sound selfish to say that "we are troubled," and while it is true that if people were to change their ways of life, thanks to the blessings of the metropolis, it is not impossible for them to somehow find another living, many are distressed at the initial pain of change and speak of their struggles.
>
> As for myself, in my old age and with failing eyesight, I have now lost my means of living, and I am unable to switch to another way of life. Nevertheless, if I resign myself to the thought that this is simply how things are, then perhaps I could say I have come to know the error of my past fifty years.
>
> 乍恐、御改正の御旨ハ御尤至極ニ奉存候へども、数十年其通ニて仕来り候処、只今急ニ御改正ニ付、愚民等一同世渡ヲ失、困らぬ者ハなき様ニ聞え候。こまると申ハ身勝手ニて、世渡ヲ替候ハヾ、大都会の御蔭ニて、左も右も暮されぬ事ハ有間敷候得ども、各皮きりを苦しがり、難義の由申候。就中小子抔ハ老衰不眼之

University Press, 1989), 142.

[5] Bolitho, 145.

上、世渡ヲ失ひ候へバ、外ニ世渡ヲ替候事も成かね候得共、是迄の事と思ひあきらめ候得ば、実ニ五十年の非を知り候ニ足とや申べき。[6]

This letter vividly conveys the fear and helplessness felt by Bakin—a blind, aging writer who had devoted his life to popular fiction, now stripped of his professional pride and a large part of his source of income. Regarding *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, Bakin admitted that continuing the series under the current circumstances was difficult. Three years later, in an 1845 letter to Jōsai, who asked whether he would consider resuming the series, Bakin replied that although he wished to draft the final volume and bring the project to a close, the publisher, ever since being penalized years ago, remained extremely cautious and had not even mentioned the possibility of the final volume.[7]

One year later, with the loosening of censorship, Bakin finally had the opportunity to complete *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. However, a close analysis of the final volume reveals a surprising embrace of harsh consequences, most notably a morbid obsession with regulating the body. At the end of Volume Nine, although Takematsu finds Oren and Keijūrō, Oren's body is not yet fully subdued in the illustration (Figure 25). Her posture and the knife she holds suggest the possibility of escape. By contrast, at the beginning of Volume Ten, although the same scene, both Oren and Keijūrō are shown being stepped on by Takematsu (Figure 26), as if he has complete control over them.

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[6] Kyokutei, *Bakin shokan shūsei*, 6:31.

[7] Kyokutei, 6:115.

Figure 25. Oren is about to escape. *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, volume 9, 39 *ura* (pub. 1842). Owned by School of Letters, Graduate School of Humanities, Faculty of Humanities, Kyushu University, retrieved from Union Catalogue Database of Japanese Texts. https://doi.org/10.20730/100023644 (image 319).

Figure 26. Oren is controlled completely. *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, volume 10, 4 *ura* (pub. 1847), vol. 10. Author’s personal collection.

The accompanying text further describes how Takematsu brutally kills them:

> He shouts in anger, "There is no time to enumerate again the countless crimes *dokufu* Tagane [Oren] committed. Moreover, that she even became the wife of both the bandit leader Arakurō and Hijimatsu in Mt. Muko and continued committing evil deeds turns her into an unforgivable traitor of the country. And this wicked man Keijūrō, who reveled in ill-gotten wealth, stole the wives of others, tormented and murdered many—his crimes are too numerous to count. To Kotoji, they are the slayers of her father; to me, the enemies of my brother; and to the nation, rebels and traitorous villains. These heinous man and woman must be torn limb from limb, as an example to all future traitors and rebels!"
>
> Before he had even finished speaking, he drew his sword and first severed the fingers of Keijūrō and Oren's left and right hands. Then he cut off their arms. The pain was so unbearable that Keijūrō and Oren's screams grew faint. But Takejirō, saying "As it should be," then chopped off their legs, split open each of their chests, tore out their entrails, and at last beheaded them both. This is the so-called punishment of dismemberment.
>
> いかれるこゑをふりたてて、「どく婦たがねが五ぎやく十あく、いまさらにかぞふるにいとまあらず。いはんや又むこ山のぞくのとうりやうあら九郎とひじ松が二代のつまにさへなりて、しばしぎやくゐをふるひしは、ゆるされがたき国賊(こくぞく)なり。又此奸民(かんみん)けい十郎ハふ義の富におごりをきはめて、あるひは人のつまをうばひおほく人をしへたげころし、そのつみかぞへつくしがたかり。ことぢがためには父のあた、わがためには兄のかたき、国のためにはぎやくぞく奸民(かんみん)。おほよそ此大あく男女は八ツさきにして、のち/\の乱臣賊子(らんしんぞくし)をこらすと」いひもをはらず、かたなをぬきて、まづけい十郎おれんらがさゆうの手のゆびをきりおとし、又左右のかひなをきりおとせば、けい十おれんはくつうに得たへす、さけぶこゑさへほそりしを、武二郎は「さもこそ」とて、又そのあしをきりはなち、ひとり/\にそのむねをつんさきつ、はらわたをつかみいだして、のちつひにふたりがくびをうちおとす。これやつさきの刑(けい)なるべし。

Given Oren's popularity throughout the series, it is understandable that Bakin chooses to punish her severely at the end to reinforce the moral framework of good triumphing over evil. However, this is the first time in the entire series that Oren is labeled as *kokuzoku* ("thief of the nation") and *ranshinzokushi* 乱臣賊子 ("the minister who disrupts [the order of the nation] and traitorous child [who is unfilial to the parents]"). By linking her personal wickedness to treason, Bakin added a political dimension to *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. Her brutal execution becomes not just a

punishment of an individual criminal, but a symbolic act of purging the whole country through bodily regulation.

Clearly, the over-regulation of Oren's body reflects Bakin's self-censorship and careful navigation of the restrictions imposed by the Tempō Reforms. Yet the horror of bodily discipline does not end with her death. Oren and Keijūrō are reincarnated as a two-headed dog and killed again. Then they are reborn as a two-headed insect, universally despised. Finally, a Buddhist nun performs a religious ceremony that brings ultimate peace to all villains in the story (Figure 27). This grotesque repetition of bodily punishment and the final act of spiritual cleansing function as a metaphor for restoring a corrupted society within the realm of fiction, articulating the frustrations of an aging, blind writer living under intense surveillance.

Figure 27. The final Buddhist ceremony. *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, volume 10, 36 *ura*-37 omote (pub. 1847), vol. 10. Author's personal collection.

However, the very existence of the tenth volume and the excessive punishment of the villains also reveal and confirm the symptoms of an age beyond repair, as well as a yearning for a new social order. At the very end of the story, Bakin undermines the restored utopia achieved by

Takematsu and the nun by emphasizing its fictional and fragile nature. In their sixties, Takematsu and his wife suddenly die. Yet, in the dream of their son Yumematsu 夢松, they reappear, riding the waves and entering the Dragon's Palace under the guidance of the nun.

If the world had truly been fixed and morality fully restored, why did Bakin make them leave it? He could have simply concluded the story with the heroes enjoying longevity and their descendants thriving. The fact that all three heroes depart the world for a mythical undersea realm reflects Bakin's fundamental doubt about the viability of a Confucian utopia.[8] Moreover, the name "Yumematsu" is a pun—it can mean both "dream pine" and "to wait for dreams to come true." In this sense, what happens in his dreams is the ultimate fantasy Bakin longed for: an alternative world distinct from both the corrupted realm of evil and the over-regulated utopia based on Confucian morality.

To summarize, Bakin expressed his dissatisfaction with the shogunate through the assassination of the shogun in *Kyōkakuden*, and he envisioned a world where social obligation could be rejected and hierarchy reversed through the actions of a *dokufu* in *Shinpen Kinpeibai*. Yet, due to the social pressures and censorship of his time, these critiques could only be implied. *Kyōkakuden* was left unfinished, with the great thief escaping forever, while the final volume of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* was severely self-censored, offering an ending in which good and evil are not only restored, but over-restored to a disturbing degree. Still, the seeds Bakin planted in his

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[8] Bakin's other works similarly offer readers visions of fictional utopias. For example, in *Hakkenden*, rather than ending the story with a stable utopia under the virtuous rule of the Satomi clan, Bakin sketches a future in which the morality of the Satomi rulers gradually declines. While Walley interprets the ending of *Hakkenden* as Bakin finding a way for his fictional narrative to rejoin historical reality (see Walley, *Good Dogs*, 344–46), the collapse of the utopia in *Shinpen Kinpeibai* carries a different significance, as its main characters are not based on historical figures or clans. In this sense, the ending of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* more directly confirms Bakin's critical view of Confucian ideals.

readers' hearts continued to grow. Only twenty years after his death, the world he once considered "flower in the mirror, moon on the water" (*kyōka suigetsu* 鏡花水月) became a reality: The Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown, and Japan entered the so-called modern era.

5.2 The Influence and Afterlife of *Kyōkakuden* and *Shinpen Kinpeibai*

Both *Kyōkakuden* and *Shinpen Kinpeibai* enjoyed enduring popularity, and the rebellious spirit represented by *kyōkaku* and poisonous woman characters continued to inspire readers. One year after Bakin's demise in 1848, the *Kyōkakuden* project was revived by the publisher, and a fifth volume, by Hagiwara Hiromichi, was released. Hiromichi carefully examined the initial four volumes and complemented several unfinished episodes of Koma-hime and Koroku according to the clues and hints Bakin left and the Chinese novel *Nüxian waizhuan* 女仙外史 (J. Josen gaishi, An unofficial history of women immortals, early seventeenth century) which Bakin heavily used to characterize Koma-hime.[9] In 1865, amid the transition from the early modern Edo period to the modern Meiji period, *Kyōkakuden* found its way onto the kabuki stage.[10]

The work continued to enjoy popularity in the Meiji period, influencing subsequent writers and scholars. Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遥 (1859–1935) translated the British writer Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes* into *Kaikan hifun gaiseishiden* 開巻悲憤慨世士伝 (Lives of the patriots: Read them and weep, 1885), a title that clearly indicates the influence of *Kyōkakuden*.[11] According to the NDL database, *Kyōkakuden*

[9] Hiromichi even included an appendix explaining the hints Bakin had left, which he used to construct the fifth volume. See Bakin Kyokutei, *Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden*, 708–13. Although Hiromichi appeared eager to continue the project, perhaps because the sale did not match the publisher's expectation, a sixth volume was never published.

[10] Hattori, "'Kaikan kyōki kyōkakuden' no kuchie sashie zokushō," 124.

[11] Tokuda, "Gonanchō hiwa: Teishō, Bakin, Shōyō," 72–73.

was reprinted at least twice, in 1886 and 1929, and the latter was edited by the famous writer Kōda Rohan 幸田露伴 (1867–1947). Kitamura Tōkoku 北村透谷 (1868–1894), a prominent poet and critic, fervently embraced Bakin's concept of gallantry. He once cited the preface of the first installment of *Kyōkakuden* to articulate his ideal, and he also often used the term *kyō*, a shortened version of *kyōkaku*, to refer to his comrades.[12] The timeless appeal of *Kyōkakuden*'s themes continues to influence contemporary Japanese literature and culture and the *kyōkaku* spirit continues to inspire reinterpretations and adaptations in genres such as manga, historical dramas, and yakuza films.

Similarly, the entire series of *Shinpen Kinpeibai* was reprinted multiple times after Bakin's death, demonstrating its popularity.[13] In the 1840s, two erotic parodies were published, and in the 1860s, *Shinpen Kinpeibai* was brought onto the kabuki stage. Interestingly, in the early Meiji period, many readers might have considered *Shinpen Kinpeibai* as a "replacement" of the Chinese original *Jin Ping Mei*,[14] because only a small group of people had both the access to and the ability to read the Chinese original.[15] For example, in Mori Ōgai's novel *Wita Sekusuarisu* ヰ

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[12] Maeda, "Bakin to Tōkoku: 'Kyō' o megutte," 134–35.

[13] According to my knowledge, the entire series was reprinted by its publisher at least two times. One version's cover is in light lavender color. See Tokuda and Kanda, "Kyokutei Bakin *Shinpen Kinpeibai* Daiisshū Honkoku to Eiin," 145. Another version has a brown cover with flower and grass patterns. Moreover, during the Meiji period, several modern reprints appeared.

[14] Emmerich, *The Tale of Genji*, 11. Emmerich uses "replacement" to refer to the "texts that are read instead of the (unknown or unknowable) original. For example, while *Kogetsushō* 湖月抄 (1673), a serious commentary on *Genji monogatari* is a "replacement" of the original, *Inaka Genji*, a parody which largely deviates from the original narrative, is also a "replacement," because both "answer to the needs not only of authoritative institutions intent on preserving and propagating their own values and ideologies, but also of their consumers."

[15] Yūko Kawashima, "Meiji Taishōki no *Kinpeibai*: Sanshu no yakuhon o chūshin toshite," *Nicchū hikaku bunka ronshū*, 2019, 349.

タ・セクスアリス(*Vita sexualis*, 1909), the protagonist, who later becomes a philosophy professor, mentions his understanding of the two books when he was fifteen:

> One day I happened to find a Chinese book tucked away under my teacher's desk. It was *Kinpeibai*. Though I had read only Bakin's *Kinpeibai*, I had known the Chinese *Kinpeibai* was quite different. It was then that I realized how cunning my supposedly austere and dignified teacher was.[16]
>
> 或日先生の机の下から唐本が覗いているのを見ると、金瓶梅であった。僕は馬琴の金瓶梅しか読んだことはないが、唐本の金瓶梅が大いに違っているということを知っていた。そして先生なかなか油断がならないと思った。

The fact that the protagonist, a well-educated student, has only read Bakin's *Shinpen Kinpeibai* highlights how difficult it was to obtain a copy of the Chinese original and how challenging its language was for the Japanese readers in the Meiji period. Only his wealthy teacher of Chinese studies, who owns a storehouse loaded with numerous books imported from China, has the prestige and resources to access the original. Furthermore, when the protagonist refers to the two books, he uses the same title *Kinpeibai* 金瓶梅. Although he appears to recognize that they are different, his understanding is entirely based on Bakin's *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, since he has never actually read the Chinese original. For him, the original work remains little more than a mysterious reference while Bakin's *Shinpen Kinpeibai* is the real *Kinpeibai* that matters.

In addition to the popularity of the series itself, stories featuring *dokufu* also became extremely popular during the Meiji and Taishō periods, giving rise to the term *dokufu-mono* 毒婦物 (*dokufu* stories) to describe this genre. A notable feature of these stories is that they often centered on real-life female criminals who committed murder and/or robbery. For instance, "Demon" Takahashi Oden was said to have poisoned her sick husband to escape caregiving

[16] I translated this passage myself, but used the following translation as reference. Ogai Mori, *Vita Sexualis*, trans. Kazuji Ninomiya and Sanford Goldstein (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1972), 97.

responsibilities, and "Night storm" Okuni was believed to have poisoned her patron in order to live with her lover.[17] Christine Marran argues that this archetype was used in Meiji-era literature, newspapers, and other cultural forms to manage anxieties about modernization, gender roles, and national identity.

Although Marran dates the first *dokufu-mono* to a story serialized in the 1870s, the characterization of *dokufu* in these stories obviously echoes Oren from *Shinpen Kinpeibai*, and the anxieties they represent are reminiscent of Bakin's own frustrations with the signs of decline in his time. One major factor that creates a division between Oren and later *dokufu* characters is the shifting status of Confucianism: once the ideological backbone of Tokugawa society and a major influence on early modern literary production, Confucianism came under increasing scrutiny in the late nineteenth century as Japan embarked on a project of rapid modernization.

As Western knowledge systems gained authority and new social paradigms emerged, Confucian values such as legitimacy, filial piety, loyalty, and hierarchical order were reexamined, often recast as obstacles to progress. Ironically, Bakin was also later viewed as a didactic Confucian dogmatist of the old times, and the characters in his novels were criticized as "manifestations" of Confucian virtue.[18] By exploring how Bakin's fictional works challenge Confucian hierarchy and how his rebellious characters redefine virtue to give voice to the marginalized, this dissertation aims to deepen our understanding of Bakin's critical stance

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[17] Marran, *Poison Woman*, xiii.

[18] Tsubouchi Shōyō called the dog warriors in *Hakkenden* "the manifestations of the eight Confucian virtues" (仁義八行の化物). See Shōyō Tsubouchi, "Shōsetsu shinzui," in *Tsubouchi Shōyō shū*, ed. Kan Nakamura, vol. 3, Nihon kindai bungaku taikei (Tōkyō: Kadokawa Shoten, 1974), 60. *Bakemono* 化物 has the meaning of "monsters," which matches the dog warriors half-human and half-canine nature. However, Walley suggests that "monsters" might not be a proper translation because what Shōyō means is that the dog warriors' perfect virtue makes them unrecognizable as human. Walley, *Good Dogs*, 193.

towards Confucianism and its complex functions in his novels. Far from offering an uncritical endorsement, Bakin's works anticipate the Meiji-era critique of Confucian thought.

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