Japan Past & Present

Male-Male Love in Premodern Japan

This reading list was developed as a supplement for viewers of the *Blood, Tears, and Samurai* project who are interested in learning more about male-male sexuality in premodern Japan. While we do not claim this to be a comprehensive list of English-language materials on the subject, we hope that it will provide sufficient research background. We also anticipate that a number of these resources are well-suited for use as assigned readings for course syllabuses.

The list has been divided into three sections:

(1) secondary readings

(2) primary readings translated into English

(3) helpful readers

Secondary Sources

Atkins, Paul S. “Chigo in the Medieval Japanese Imagination.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 3 (2008): 947-970.

Childs, Margaret H. “Chigo Monogatari: Love Stories or Buddhist Sermons?” *Monumenta Nipponica* 35, no. 2 (1980): 127-151.

Faure, Bernard. *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Guth, Christine M. E. “The Divine Boy in Japanese Art.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 42, no. 1 (1987): 1-23.

Heldt, Gustav. “Between Followers and Friends: Male Homosocial Desire in Heian Court Poetry.” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal* 33 (2007): 3-32.

Jackson, Reginald. *A Proximate Remove: Queering Intimacy and Loss in* The Tale of Genji. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021.

Kaplan-Reyes, Alexander. “Flowers on the Battlefield: Intimacy and Hierarchy in the Construction of Japanese Warrior Masculinities, 1507–1636.” PhD diss., Columbia University, 2022.

Pflugfelder, Gregory M. “Strange Fates: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in *Torikaebaya Monogatari*.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 47, no. 3 (1992): 347-368.

Porath, Or. “The Cosmology of Male-Male Love in Medieval Japan.” *Journal of Religion in Japan* 4, no. 2-3 (2015): 241-271.

—. " Nasty Boys or Obedient Children? Childhood and Relative Autonomy in Medieval Japanese Monasteries." In *Child's Play: Multi-Sensory Histories of Children and Childhood in Japan,* edited by Sabine Frühstück and Anne Walthall, 17-40. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017.

—. “The Consecration of Acolytes (*Chigo kanjō*): Ritualizing Male-Male Sexuality in Medieval Tendai.” In *Rituals of Initiation and Consecration in Premodern Japan*: *Power and Legitimacy in Kingship, Religion, and the Arts*, edited by Fabio Rambelli and Or Porath, 343-376. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2022.

—. “A Poetic Voice for Autonomy: Child Subjectivity in Premodern Japan.” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 16, no. 2 (2023):

229-247.

Schalow, Paul G. *A Poetics of Courtly Male Friendship in Heian Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007.

Schmidt-Hori, Sachi. "The New Lady-in-Waiting Is a *Chigo*: Sexual Fluidity and Dual Transvestism in a Medieval Buddhist Acolyte Tale." *Japanese Language & Literature* 43, no. 2 (2009): 383-423.

—. "The Boy Who Lived: The Transfigurations of 'Chigo' in the Medieval Japanese Short Story 'Ashibiki.'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 75, no. 2 (2015): 299-329.

—. "The Erotic Family: Structures and Narratives of Milk Kinship in Premodern Japanese Tales." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 3 (2021): 663-681.

—. *Tales of Idolized Boys: Male-Male Love in Medieval Japanese Buddhist Narratives*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021.

Stoneman, Jack. "Between Monks: Saigyō *Shukke,* Homosocial Desire, and Japanese Poetry." *Japanese Language and Literature* 43, no. 2 (2009): 425-452.

Primary Literature in English Translation

(listed in approximate chronological order)

ca. 900s | *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語

e.g. episodes (dan) 7,8,9,11,16,38,46, 82, 83 and 85. See Schalow (2007) *above for details.*

For a recent English translation see:

Mostow, Joshua and Royall Tyler, trans. *The Ise Stories: Ise Monogatari.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.

ca. 1010 | ***Genji monogatari*** **源氏物語** by Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部

The most recent, full English translations are:

Dennis Washburn, trans. *The Tale of Genji*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.

Royall Tyler, trans. *The Tale of Genji*. New York: Viking, 2001.

Readers are encouraged to read passages of The Tale of Genji *that are variously discussed by scholars listed above, such as Reginald Jackson (2021) and Paul Schalow (*2007).

1190s | ***Ariake no wakare*** **有明の別**

An anonymous tale in the court-romance style detailing a number of non-heterosexual or only partly heterosexual relationships. Translation in:

Khan, Robert Omar. "Ariake no wakare: Genre, Gender, and Genealogy in a Late 12th-Century Monogatari." PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1998.

Excerpts later published in:

Khan, Robert Omar, trans. "Partings at Dawn." In *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature*, edited by Stephen D. Miller, 21-30. San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1996.

1136-1155 | ***Taiki*** **台記** by Fujiwara no Yorinaga (1120-1156)

A courtier diary written in literary Sinitic by Fujiwara no Yorinaga, who was

famously given the moniker "Evil Minister of the Left." Scholars such as Gomi Fumihiko have identified some entries as detailing his relationships with his male sexual partners. For discussion, see Stoneman (2009). *To our knowledge, there are no available English translations of the relevant entries. On Yorinaga, see also the following dissertation*:

Barndt, Jillian. "Scholar, Minister, Rebel: Fujiwara no Yorinaga (1120-1156)." PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2021.

1279-1283 | "The Scholar who Loved Poetry" from ***Shasekishū*** **沙石集** by Mujū Ichien 無住一円

An anecdote about the monk Genshin and an acolyte in Mujū Ichien's (1226-1312) collection of tales. Introduced and translated in:

Morell, Robert, trans. "The Scholar who Loved Poetry." In *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600*, edited by Haruo Shirane, 700-703. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Early 1300s | ***Chigo kannon engi*** **稚児観音縁起**

A tale simultaneously describing the origin of an eleven-faced Kannon in a Kōfukuji subtemple and a love affair between a Tendai monk and a youth. Translation in:

Childs, Margaret H., trans. "The Story of Kannon's Manifestation as a Youth." In *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature*, edited by Stephen D. Miller, 31-35. San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1996.

1300s | ***Torikaebaya monogatari*** **とりかへばや物語**

A tale of a pair of half-siblings who look similar and are raised as the opposite gender but later swap places. Translation in:

Willig, Rosette F. *The Changelings*: *A Classical Japanese Court Tale*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

1300s | ***Aki no yo no nagamonogatari*** **秋夜長物語**

A Muromachi-period acolyte tale (chigo monogatari). The priest Keikai, having lost his spiritual aspiration, seeks enlightenment through prayers to Ishiyama Kannon but becomes captivated by a young acolyte, Umewaka. Their relationship ultimately ends in tragedy when Umewaka is kidnapped by tengu, sparking a conflict between Enryakuji and Miidera that leads to the boy's suicide. This suffering, along with the ravages of war, brings about Keikai's awakening, which is later revealed to have been orchestrated by Sannō and Shinra Myōjin, the protector gods of the Tendai temples Enryakuji and Miidera, by sending Umewaka as a manifestation of Kannon and exposing Keikai to suffering and hardship as a means to enlightenment.

Translation in Childs (1980) *above*.

1400s | ***Genmu monogatari*** **幻夢物語**

An acolyte tale (chigo monogatari). A priest falls in love with a youth and journeys to meet him, but ends up spending a night with the slain boy's spirit. Later he meets the boy's murderer. Translation in:

Childs, Margaret H., trans. "The Tale of Genmu." In *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature*, edited by Stephen Miller, 36-54. San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1996.

1482 | ***Nyakudō no Kanjinchō***

Attributed to Ijiri Matakurō Tadasuke, this text not only praises male-male sexual relations but also prescribes guidelines for their proper practice.

Translation in Porath (2015) *above.*

Helpful Readers

Coates, Jennifer, Lucy Fraser, and Mark Pendleton, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture.* New York: Routledge, 2020.

Kimura Saeko. *A Brief History of Sexuality in Premodern Japan*. Tallinn: TLU Press, 2010.

McLelland, Mark, and Vera Mackie, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Reyes, Raquel, and William Clarence-Smith, eds. *Sexual Diversity in Asia, c. 600–1950*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Wiesner-Hanks, Merry, and Mathew Kuefler, eds. *Cambridge World History of Sexualities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.

Notes

The foundations of this list were generously provided by Eric Esteban, Angelika Koch, and Mary Gilstad.

Suggest Additions

If you would like to suggest additions to this list, you may do so on this page.