

Historiography of the “Phallic Contest” Handscroll in Japanese Art

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Representation of larger-than-life phalluses is one of *shunga*'s most memorable features. Such depiction is often explained to have originated in so-called *kachi-e*, a painting of a phallic contest (*yōbutsu kurabe*) among men with surrealistically huge male members. However, what *kachi-e* precisely is, including its origin, evolution, and range of variety has been left unstudied. This article's aim is to document *kachi-e*'s development from the earliest known form through its variations over the centuries, as well as to consider how the perception and depiction of this theme changed in visual and literary sources. The initial focus is on the oldest extant *kachi-e* example, *Kachi-e emaki* preserved in the Mitsui Memorial Museum in Tokyo, which consists of two parts: a phallic contest and farting battles (*hōhi gassen*). The Mitsui handscroll is most likely a combination of two faithful copies of medieval originals. Literary sources of the medieval period provide some insight into attitudes towards having a large phallus, but indicate no specific benefit physiologically or personally. Fascination for *kachi-e* continues throughout the Edo period until the early Meiji era. The current Mitsui handscroll was highly appreciated due to its attribution as Toba Sōjō's authentic work and copied by prominent artists with antiquarian interests, while innovative versions of phallic contests were created, in which having a large phallus was positively valued. In some later versions female protagonists are poised on the other side of men in an “intercourse battle.” These new elements indicate that the *kachi-e* were appropriated into popular *shunga* discourse in the Edo period. These new phallic contest representations also kept the original humorous tone with an ironical view towards the common admiration of large male genitals.

Keywords: *kachi-e*, *yōbutsu kurabe*, *hōhi gassen*, *emaki*, Toba Sōjō (Kakuyū), *oko-e*, *mohon*, Dōkyō, *shunga*, Japanese painting

One of the most memorable features of Japanese erotic art (*shunga* 春画) of the Edo period is, undoubtedly, the extraordinary size of the male genitalia. Such a manner of representation, however, is not limited to early modern times. *Kokon chomonjū* 古今著聞集, a mid-thirteenth century collection of anecdotes (*setsuwa* 説話), includes a passage in which the

monk and painter Abbot Kakuyū 覚猷 (1053–1140, popularly known as Toba Sōjō 鳥羽僧正) criticizes his pupil’s exaggerated representation of a fighting scene. The quotation below is the pupil’s response:

No, that’s not right. Look at those erotic paintings (*osokuzu no e* おそくづの絵) made by old masters.¹ They depict the size of “the thing” (*sono mono* その物) far too large. How could it actually be like that? If it were depicted in its actual size, there would be nothing of interest. For that very reason, don’t we say “art is fantasy” (*e-soragoto* 絵そらごと)? This kind of representation is in fact often found in your work, isn’t it, Master?²

The exaggeration in question is explained here as art for art’s sake, or as the use of a particular motif for its effect. However, when today we look at similar depictions in *shunga* in the Edo period, do we simply assume it to be an artistic effect? Do we not presume it to be an expression of male desire for a larger penis? Or possibly even of female fantasy?

It has become conventional to explain that the representation of larger-than-life phalluses in *shunga* has its likely origin in *kachi-e* 勝絵.³ Aside from its dictionary meanings, *kachi-e* is used by art historians to refer specifically to a medieval handscroll (*emaki* 絵巻) consisting of two themes: a “phallic contest” (*yōbutsu kurabe* 陽物くらべ) and “farting battles” (*hōhi gassen* 放屁合戦).⁴ In the former, naked men reveal their surrealistically huge male members to be measured, and in the latter, priests and male commoners excitedly engage in farting at each other. Neither sexual intercourse nor women are shown. The reason why *kachi-e* has been deemed to be one of the origins of *shunga* is, apparently, not only because of the depiction of large phalluses but, more importantly, because during the late Edo period the theme of the phallic contest was adopted by painters who added erotic contexts. Moreover, the original and later innovative forms of phallic contest paintings have often been confused because many copies (*mohon* 模本) exist and due to the lack of comprehensive research on this subject. This chaotic situation must have promoted the notion that the phallic contest was at its heart *shunga*.

In this historiographical article, I will examine the evolution of the phallic contest theme in Japanese visual representation and argue that its significance has changed over time. With this objective in mind, I firstly examine in detail the oldest extant *kachi-e* handscroll in the collection of the Mitsui Memorial Museum (Mitsui Kinen Bijutsukan 三井記念美術館) in Tokyo and consider the possible cultural contexts for its creation in medieval Japan. Secondly, I explore later copies of the phallic contest theme in the Edo period. My aim is to clarify, as much as possible from extant sources, the lineage and variety of this theme. I will also raise some questions regarding the way this theme was brought within the orbit of *shunga* and continued to remain within the enduring tradition of classical painting.⁵

1 For a short discussion of *osokuzu no e*, see Ienaga 1998, pp. 60–61.

2 *Kokon chomonjū* 11:16, pp. 316–17. All translations in this article are by the author.

3 See Lane 1979, p. 64; and Shirakura 2009, p. 4. Amaury A. García Rodríguez has questioned the assumption that *kachi-e*, in its original form, depicted sexual activity; see García 2011, pp. 84–85.

4 The entry for “*kachi-e*” in *Nihon kokugo daijiten* provides two meanings. The first is “a picture showing a competition.” The second is “another name for *shunga*.” The second meaning is said to derive from a popular belief that a warrior would never be defeated if he had *shunga* in his armor chest, but no references are noted.

5 A comprehensive analysis of the theme of the phallic contest would require research on topics such as Japanese popular beliefs relating to phallic worship, customs regarding bodily functions, and representation of the phallus in literature more broadly. This article, a first attempt to document the range of visual representations of this theme, focuses mainly on tracing the various versions in chronological order.

Terminology

Kachi-e refers, in the strictest sense, to the “original” handscroll with the dual subject matter mentioned above, claimed to be painted by Abbot Kakuyū of Toba. The earliest recorded use of the term is found in *Kōko shōroku* 好古小録 by Tō Teikan 藤貞幹 (1732–1797) dated to 1794 (preface).⁶ But, to avoid confusion, in this article, I use the term *kachi-e* to refer to the Mitsui handscroll and its faithful copies made from the Edo through early Meiji periods. Here I argue the Mitsui handscroll has a strong association with the “original.” In recent years, *kachi-e* has generally been interpreted to mean “pictures of victors,” although no winner is identifiable in any of the extant scrolls. Alternatively, according to one specious pseudo-historical explanation, the name was given to the handscroll painted by Kakuyū when it won first place in a picture contest (*e-awase* 絵合) hosted by the consort of Emperor Kameyama 龜山 (r. 1259–1274), while another suggests that the origin of the name dates to a time when a handscroll of similar content was shown to Emperor En'yū 円融 (r. 969–984), and cured his nervous breakdown by inducing a hearty laugh.⁷ Although we cannot accept any of these anecdotes as historically valid, it is interesting to see that *kachi-e* was, within legend, associated with those who were at the very highest positions in the Japanese court, notwithstanding its rather vulgar content.

1. The Mitsui Handscroll

More than a dozen copies of *kachi-e*, of varying levels of perfection, are known today. Most were painted from the Edo period into the early Meiji era. The version preserved in the Mitsui Memorial Museum is unanimously agreed by scholars to be the oldest. Its current title is *Kachi-e emaki* 勝絵巻 (Figure 1).⁸ Aside from the traditional attribution of authorship there is no consensus as to whether the Mitsui handscroll is an original or a copy. I believe it is most probably a copy, for reasons which will be explained later in this article. The condition of the first two or three sections of paper is considerably compromised by worm holes, tears and general weakness due to age. And the scroll as a whole is somewhat darkened by general soiling and has many thin horizontal creases. It has no text (*kotobagaki* 詞書), except for brief explanations of four of the scenes.⁹

6 *Kōko shōroku* represents the title *Kachi-e* by the Chinese characters 勝画. See *Kōko shōroku*, p. 188.

7 Hara 1959, p. 78.

8 *Kachi-e emaki* is a single handscroll, with ink and light colors on paper, 31.0 cm H x 1200.2 cm L. The scroll itself does not bear any title, but the cover of the box bears the title *Toba Kakuyū sōjō ga hōbi zu* 鳥羽覚融僧正画放屁図 or Pictures of Farting Battles by Toba Kakuyū Sōjō, inscribed by Tomioka Tessai 富岡鉄斎 (1836–1924).

9 The four brief texts in the pictures are as follows: 1) from phallic contest, “*Katsugatsu kari roku sun*” カツ／＼カリ六寸 (His glans grows [at its biggest] to six sun); 2–4) from farting battles, “*Mizu nomi, haraita ni biyashite, ya hagu tokoro*” 水ノミ、腹板ニヒヤシテ、箭ハグ所 (They prepare to fart [like] arrows by drinking cold water to chill their bellies), “*Shii tsumi, namaguri kui, hietaru, atsuki kayu susurite, ya soroe suru tokoro*” 椎ツミ、生栗クヒ、ヒエタル、アツキカユスハリテ、箭ソロヘスルトコロ (Picking sweet acorns and eating them with raw chestnuts, [their stomachs are] chilled. [Now] they line up to fart [like] arrows by eating hot rice porridge), “*Fukuro ni hiri atumete, fusuma ya no kamae suru tokoro*” 袋ニヒリアツメテ、フスマ箭ノカマヘスルトコロ (They collect the farts in a bag and prepare to volley fart arrows).

Provenance

The handscroll was given to the Mitsui Memorial Museum in 2006 by one of the eleven Mitsui branch families, Honmura-chō Mitsui ke 本村町三井家. There is no accompanying documentation to suggest any prior provenance. Every reference to *kachi-e* found in compilations on Japanese antiquities during the late Edo to Meiji periods shows the authors' efforts to locate the whereabouts of the "original" version. At the same time, however, these writers were aware of the existence and dissemination of copies. Various suggestions for the location of the "original" and additional reference sources are given:

"It was at the Konshōin of Tōji temple 東寺金勝院, but current location unknown."
(*Kōko shōroku*, 1794)¹⁰

"I saw the original (*honshi* 本紙) at Shirakoya 白粉屋 on the west side of Tomi no kōji street, up from Sanjō avenue (in Kyoto) 富小路三条上ル西側, on the third day of the tenth month, 1797." (Hashimoto Tsuneakira 橋本経亮 [1755–1805], *Kissō jigo* 橘窓自語, 1801)¹¹

"This handscroll is in Tōeizan 東叡山 (Kan'eiji temple 寛永寺, Edo)...but I wonder if it is authentic or a copy." (annotation to *Kissō jigo* by Komai Norimura 駒井乗邨 [1766–1846], in *Ōshuku zakki* 鶯宿雑記, ca. 1823–1845)¹²

"It is in the house of a certain merchant Tanaka, at Sanjō and Yanagi no banba of Nishi no kyō (Kyoto) 西京柳馬場三条商戸田中某家." (Kurokawa Harumura 黒川春村 [1799–1866] et al. *Zōho kōko gafu* 増補考古画譜, 1901)¹³

According to Yamada Akie 山田秋衛, the painter Tanaka Totsugen 田中訥言 (1767–1823) copied the scroll at Shirakoya, and the Shirakoya scroll was then passed on to the merchant Tanaka before being sold at auction at the Tokyo Art Club in the Taishō era (1912–1926).¹⁴ We can confirm that what Totsugen copied is the current Mitsui handscroll because the worm holes he obsessively copied in his painting, which is preserved in Morimura Museum (Morimura Kinenkan 森村記念館) in Nagoya, precisely match those in the Mitsui version. Taking all the above information into account, the Mitsui *Kachi-e emaki* is most likely the one that has been regarded as the "original" since at least the end of the eighteenth century.

Contents and representation

The phallic contest (*yōbutsu kurabe*) section begins with a scene of a crowd gathering to see something (Figure 1a). People at the front are being chased away by two guards. Behind the curtain protected by the guards, food and drink is provided on tables, beside which a couple of men are about to take off their clothes. Others are already naked and preparing to have their penises measured (Figure 1b). In the next scene, showing the competition arena, three men, completely naked, are being measured by an elderly official with a right-angled ruler (Figure 1c). Beyond this arena, four competitors are resting, seemingly reflecting on the

10 Entry for *Kachi-e* in *Kōko shōroku*, p. 188.

11 *Kissō jigo*, p. 449.

12 *Ōshuku zakki*, vol. 103. For the dating of the volume, see Taguchi 1989, p. 26.

13 *Zōho kōko gafu*, vol. 3.

14 Yamada 1938, pp. 194–96.



1a.



1b.



1c.



1d.



1e.



1f.

Figure 1. *Kachi-e emaki*, details. Mitsui Memorial Museum.

contest in which they have just participated (Figure 1d). In front of them, an official with his nose turned up and prominent teeth in a wide mouth, rushes in pointing leftward, to tell something to his superior. However, he is pointing towards a blank space, where this sequence abruptly ends. The lone striped curtain signals the end of the phallic contest section. It is hard to understand why almost all the competitors look so unenthusiastic, even grim, in contrast to the amused facial expressions of the judges and attendants (Figure 2). Even though they are being well attended to, the contestants do not look particularly delighted. Their seriousness may appear comic, but the pictures give no sense of the significance of having a huge phallus.



Figure 2. Faces of contestants (upper row), officials, and attendants (lower row) from *Kachi-e emaki*. Mitsui Memorial Museum.

Following the end of the phallic contest, from the next section of the handscroll, a completely different story begins of farting battles (*hōhi gassen*). This sequence is much longer than the phallic contest part; the proportion of phallic contest to farting battles is about 3:7. Several dozen priests and male commoners are gaily participating in farting (Figure 1e), and in one scene, defecating at each other.¹⁵ “Who is the winner?” seems of no importance to anyone anymore. In the last scene, a single mighty fart from a priest blows everything sky-high (Figure 1f).

The Mitsui handscroll overall is skillfully drawn. This is particularly apparent in the phallic contest part. The artist’s brush strokes are boldly drawn in dark ink, with a swift and light touch. The complexions of the competitors’ bodies are varied, and a pale red is added along the outlines to enhance the three-dimensionality and warmth of the depiction. A wide variety of facial expressions, differences in age, social statuses and even personalities are eloquently represented. The farting battles section shows a similar technique, but the depiction of bodies seems flatter, and the manner of personal characterization seems more generic in spite of the exaggerated poses and facial expressions. Whereas the phallic contest, although

15 This treatment of the subject may be regarded as scatological. Nevertheless, whereas early modern Western scatology in literature and visual art tends to point to a specific object to criticize, in the case of the *hōhi gassen*, its critical intention is not obvious. See Persels and Ganim 2004.

fictional, can be assumed to be an event somehow related to the court, due to the presence of court officials, the setting for the farting battles is not clear and the background is simply blank. Although the depiction is generally skillful, we can nonetheless observe a few figures that seem meaninglessly distorted in both halves of the scroll. One clear example is the shape of the priest’s body in the very last scene of the farting battles (Figure 1f). This kind of distortion typically indicates that the painting is a copy. In fact, I think that two different artists each copied the two subjects, and that the present state of the Mitsui handscroll is the result of two different works having been combined at some point in the past.¹⁶ Exactly when this took place is virtually impossible to know, unless some additional source comes to light in the future.

Authorship and dating of the Mitsui handscroll

The Mitsui *Kachi-e emaki* has an unsigned authentication note at the end of the scroll (Figure 3). It reads, “The pictures show the true brush of Abbot Kakuyū of Toba, and the calligraphy represents the hand of Abbot Jōgen 成賢 of Daigo. This is a most treasured scroll that has already been handed down for five generations.”¹⁷ However, this text is written on a small piece of paper pasted onto the top half of a narrow section of paper adjacent to the last scene of the farting battles. This manner of placement inevitably leads us to question the note’s credibility. Furthermore, the statement clearly contradicts the actual physical aspects of the Mitsui handscroll. There is no substantial calligraphic text and at least two different painters’ hands can be identified. In addition to these inconsistencies, the relative lengths assigned to the phallic contest and farting battles are quite disproportionate. By the time the copy was made, the original phallic contest handscroll must already have been incomplete.

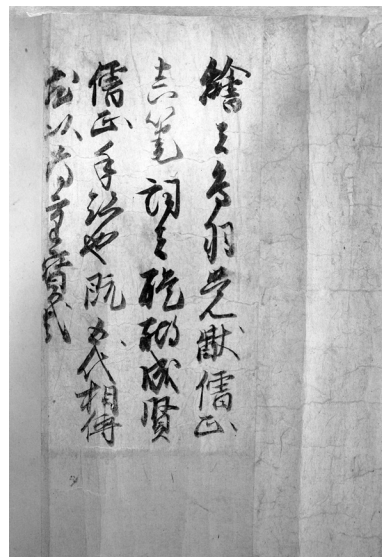


Figure 3. Authentication note in *Kachi-e emaki*. Mitsui Memorial Museum.

Regarding the artist and dating of the Mitsui *Kachi-e emaki*, scholars have previously made the following suggestions. Sakakibara Satoru 榊原悟 has commented that the handscroll is a very good quality copy, and the date of copying is probably no later than the sixteenth century.¹⁸ Tsuji Nobuo 辻惟雄 has suggested that it is a copy made no later than the Muromachi 室町 period (1336–1573), and that the original of the phallic contest part was probably painted by a late twelfth century court painter and the original of the farting battles part may have been produced between the Kamakura 鎌倉 (1185–1333) and Nanbokuchō 南北朝 (1336–1392) periods.¹⁹ On the other hand, Komatsu Shigemi 小

16 *Kōko shōroku* (1794) states that *kachi-e* consists of two handscrolls.

17 絵者鳥羽覚猷僧正真筆、詞者醍醐成賢僧正手跡也、既五代相伝、尤以為重宝哉。

18 Sakakibara 1987, p. 34.

19 Tsuji 1991, p. 78.

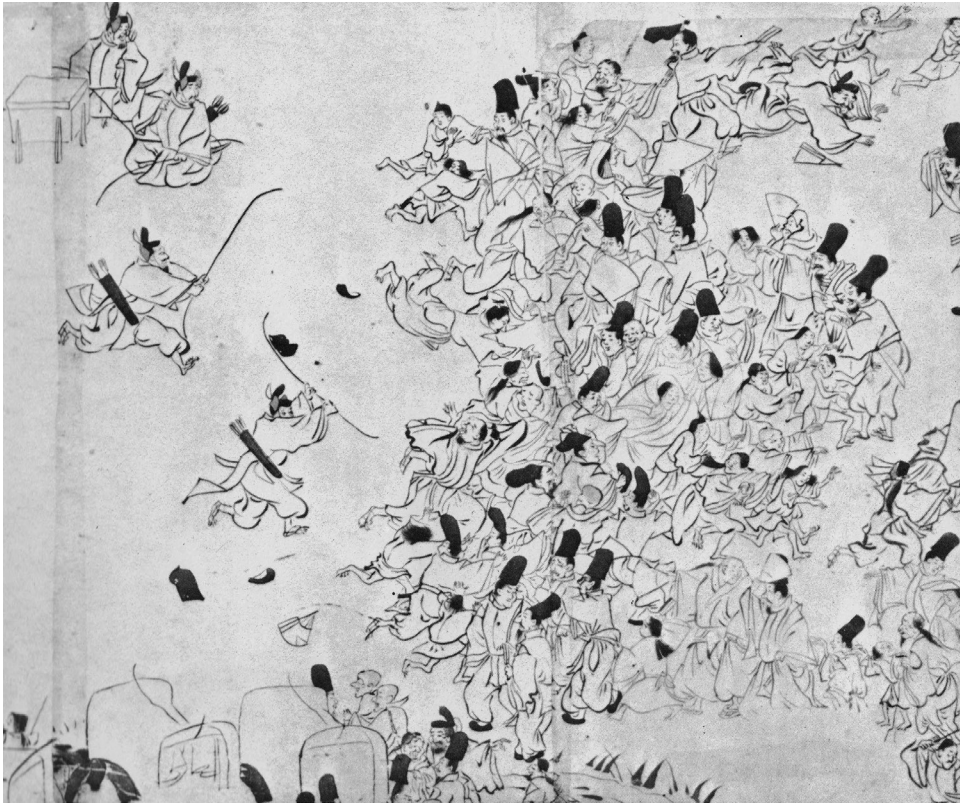


Figure 4. *Nenjū gyōji emaki*, vol. 14, detail. Reproduction from Fukuyama Toshio, ed. *Nenjū gyōji emaki (Nihon emaki mono zenshū, vol. 24)*. Kadokawa Shoten, 1968.

松茂美 has judged, based on the calligraphic style of its brief texts, that the handscroll is not a copy and that the phallic contest part dates from the end of the Heian 平安 period (794–1185) and the farting battles part from the mid Kamakura period.²⁰

As we can see from this wide range of time frames given for the Mitsui *Kachi-e emaki*, it is not so straightforward to determine a date of production. I would like to suggest two further points that might help to estimate the date of the original two works:

1) A similar set of images of two guards chasing a crowd away, with a few people falling over, is found in three scenes among the set of sixteen handscrolls entitled *Nenjū gyōji emaki* 年中行事絵巻. These scrolls illustrate court rituals of the late twelfth century, when the scrolls were commissioned by Retired Emperor Go Shirakawa 後白河 (r. [as retired emperor] 1158–1192), as well as animated scenes of commoners' lives of the period. The originals have been lost, but numerous faithful copies survive which date from the late seventeenth century onward (Figure 4). It is worth remembering that the setting for the Mitsui phallic contest defines itself as a court-related event. These points may indicate that the original inspiration for creating the phallic contest was humorously to emulate the *Nenjū gyōji emaki*, or another similar kind of painting. The novelty of choosing contemporary court rituals as the subject

²⁰ Komatsu 1993, pp. 105–106.

for handscrolls during the reign of Go Shirakawa likely had a considerable influence on the creation and appreciation of art in aristocratic circles.²¹

2) A *Hōbi gassen emaki* 放屁合戦絵巻 handscroll in the Suntory Museum of Art (Santori Bijutsukan サントリー美術館), dated 1449, shares a similar central subject matter, style and some designs with the farting battles in the Mitsui handscroll (Figure 5).²² The Suntory version has a more complex plot incorporating part of the story of *Fukutomi sōshi* 福富草紙, which developed from a medieval folk tale. Therefore, within the pictures there is considerably more text. And the representation of foul odors is even more direct and exaggerated than in the Mitsui version. Hence, I would surmise that the simpler Mitsui “farting battles” predates the Suntory one.

To summarize my conclusions drawn from the above two points, the original version of the phallic contest copied in the Mitsui *Kachi-e emaki* could date from the late twelfth century, and the original version of the farting battles could be no later than the mid-fifteenth century. But at this time we are still unable to decide on two important points: firstly, when these two works were copied and combined into one scroll; and secondly, what the fundamental motivation was for commissioning and painting the Mitsui handscroll.



Figure 5. *Hōbi gassen emaki*, detail. Suntory Museum of Art.

Medieval contexts for the phallic contest and the farting battles

Aside from the matter of who actually painted the Mitsui handscroll, it is also significant that the authorship was assigned to Abbot Kakuyū of Toba. The anecdote about him cited at the beginning of this article has been well known historically, and thanks to this he has always been renowned as an artist of larger-than-life male genitalia. Kakuyū was also known for inventing irreverent representations of the esoteric Buddhist deity Fudō Myōō 不動明王, including showing Fudō wiping his bottom with his sword after defecating, and frolicking in bed with one of his boy attendants.²³ Moreover, anecdotes regularly suggest that Kakuyū

21 Komatsu 1977. Go Shirakawa is also known for having commissioned *Hōgen sumai zu (emaki)* 保元相撲図 (絵巻). The subject is supposed to have been taken from the sumo wrestling matches hosted by him in the Hōgen 保元 era (1156–1158). This kind of handscroll of competitive matches may have been a stimulus to the creation of *yōbutsu kurabe*.

22 The colophon, in the handwriting of Imperial Prince Sadafusa 貞成親王 (1372–1456), claims that it is a copy of a handscroll by Jōchi 定智 (act. mid-twelfth century) preserved in Nin'naji 仁和寺 temple. For a detailed examination of the Suntory handscroll, see Sakakibara 1987.

23 Tokushi 1932, pp. 305–306; Tsuji 1977, pp. 110–13.

was an eccentric, like his father Minamoto no Takakuni 源隆国 (1004–1077).²⁴ All these associations are reason enough to attribute works such as phallic contest and farting battles to the hand of Kakuyū.

Turning now to the issue of the traditional representation of phalluses in Japan, association can perhaps be made with ancient stone phallic-shaped objects, excavated from many archaeological sites dating from the Jōmon period (12,500–300 B.C.). Scholars have proposed that these might have had magico-religious, practical or weaponry functions.²⁵ Links can also surely be made to Shinto shrine festivals, such as the harvest festival at Tagata Jinja 田縣神社 in Komaki, Aichi prefecture, performed even today, and to Japanese folklore beliefs in which a phallic object is worshipped.²⁶

Another approach might be to look into the medical texts that were available in early medieval Japan. Medical and physiological interests must have been firmly established among courtiers by 984, when the influential compilation of Chinese medical texts, *Ishinpō* 医心方, was completed and presented to the emperor. Chapter 27 of volume 28 of *Ishinpō*, subtitled *Bōnai* 房内, teaches how to prepare medications for the enlargement of the male member. Nevertheless, the extent of enlargement possible is limited to a modest one *sun* 寸 (approx. 3 cm), and there is no mention of any more extraordinary degree of enlargement or that having a larger penis enhances sexual performance.²⁷ Moreover, the main concern of the volume appears not to be the size of the penis, but rather the practice of various sexual activities necessary for the maintenance of health and longevity.

It is quite common to find fables connected to penises (including sexual intercourse), farting, urinating or defecating in literature of the late Heian to early Kamakura periods, especially in works from the genre of anecdotal literature, such as *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集 (ca. 1120), *Uji shūi monogatari* 宇治拾遺物語 (ca. 1221), *Ima monogatari* 今物語 (ca. 1240) and *Kokon chomonjū*.²⁸ The fact that the protagonists of these fables are male and female courtiers, priests and nuns indicates that the sense of taboo relating to these topics in early medieval times was considerably less than today. Whereas stories related to farting tend to be funny and light-hearted, those related to the penis, although sometimes humorous, also have a tone of Buddhist admonition against lust, or represent the penis as a symbolic object, the focus of jealousy, violence or supernatural powers. However, the size of male genitalia is never specifically mentioned in these stories.

The only references to a larger-than-average penis I have encountered thus far are in *Shin sarugaku ki* 新猿楽記 and *Tettsui den* 鉄槌伝, both written by the court scholar Fujiwara no Akihira 藤原明衡 (989–1066) in the early eleventh century. In *Shin sarugaku ki*, which depicts the fictional family of a lowly official Uemon no jō 右衛門尉 coming to see *sarugaku* 猿楽 performances in the capital, the husband of the fourteenth daughter is

24 For detailed annotations on the life of Kakuyū, see Sawa 1958. See also Komine 1988, pp. 38–39. Takakuni is also known in an anecdote in *Kojidan* 古事談 (before 1215) for touching Emperor Go Ichijō's private parts, when he was helping the Emperor to dress himself (*Kojidan*, 1:54, p. 72).

25 Harunari 1996 and Hirakawa 2006. In his summary of Japanese scholarship on pre-historic phallus-shaped stones Harunari noted that it was not until the 1960s that the stones' representation of sexual organs came to be commonly acknowledged (Harunari 1996, pp. 70–73).

26 Sugioka 2007 and Suzuki 2013.

27 *Ishinpō: Bōnai hen*, pp. 113–14.

28 *Konjaku monogatari shū*, vol. 3, 14:26, pp. 330–31, and 16:38, pp. 567–68; vol. 4, 20:10, pp. 242–48; and vol. 5, 27:21, pp. 128–30; 28:25, p. 239; and 29:40, pp. 387–88. *Uji shūi monogatari* 1:6, pp. 15–17; 3:2, pp. 76–77. *Ima monogatari*, pp. 165–67. *Kokon chomonjū*, pp. 425–27, 429, 433–36, and 538–39.

described as a most idiotic character as well as being a greedy trickster. Nonetheless, he has one good point (*tadashi hitotsu no torie ari* 但シーツノ尿有リ), an extraordinary phallus.

His phallus is said to be as thick as a beam and curved like a rainbow. The glans is huge as if wearing a woven hat. Its length is eight *sun* (approx. 24 cm), and the width is about four fingers worth. The veins look like a crawling spider. It is as strong as a tree stump, and as hard as an iron hammer. It wakes up in the night and relaxes at dawn. Therefore, there were no women who dared to marry him.²⁹

The story then relates that only the unattractive fourteenth daughter can take his large penis, and so they are well suited as a couple. Having a larger-than-average penis is not presented here as something superior or to be proud of. Similarly, in *Tettsui den*, a poem in Chinese included in *Honchō monzui* 本朝文粹,³⁰ “Tettsui” (the name of a personified penis) is described as the size of seven *sun* (about 21 cm), as wide as a wolf’s mouth and its head pointed like a mackerel’s head. Although Tettsui enjoys sexual encounters with high-ranking ladies and young girls thanks to his endowment, after he marries and then grows old, his wife (a female sex organ) weeps every time she sees his flaccid state. Eventually the couple, as the ideal husband and wife, together abandon their sexual lives. Tettsui’s life is narrated with irony and some didactic nuance.

Neither the phallic contest nor the farting battles are referred to in *setsuwa* collections, nor are they, of course, elegant enough to be canonized in court tales. Nevertheless, they could at least have been the subjects of oral story telling in Heian aristocratic society. According to Masuda Katsumi 益田勝実, the spaces for story telling among Heian aristocrats, from relatively casual gatherings to more formal ones, were gender-specific.³¹ If so, topics such as the phallic contest and the farting battles were probably of interest to men rather than women.³² Maybe this could explain why we see almost no women present in the Mitsui handscroll illustrations, except for one or two in the crowd.

It may also be helpful to understand these two themes within the aesthetic of *oko* (をこ／嗚呼／鳥澁／尾籠／痴), as Tsuji Nobuo has argued.³³ The common meaning of *oko* today is an act or a person being “silly” or “ridiculous.” Referring to studies by the folklorist Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 and the literature scholar Okazaki Yoshie 岡崎義恵, Tsuji outlined the change in the meaning of *oko* from “too clever and ridiculous” (approving) to simply “ridiculous” (disapproving) in the course of the early medieval period, and he has argued persuasively that there was a range of *oko-e* をこ絵 (*oko* pictures) in this period that presumably included representations of moving objects and erotic pictures, as well as the phallic contest and farting battles. Okazaki’s research is pertinent to speculations about the circumstances of the creation and appreciation of these two themes. He has argued that the meaning of *oko* (as the parent word of *okashi* をかし) in Heian aristocratic aesthetics would have been frivolous and ridiculous, but without negative connotations, and that such

29 For the original text, see *Shin sarugaku ki*, pp. 179–81.

30 *Honchō monzui*, pp. 429–36.

31 Masuda 1965.

32 Miya Tsugio has interpreted the two themes of *kachi-e*, arguing that they are topics related particularly to men’s psychology and that (male) viewers of *kachi-e* would recall childhood days of comparing penises and laughing about farting, and enjoy again an infantile sense of humor. See Miya 1979, p. 33.

33 Tsuji 1991, p. 79. For Tsuji’s argument concerning *oko-e*, see Tsuji 1977.

qualities elicit a light, pleasant laugh.³⁴ Vulgar elements in late Heian secular paintings have tended to be characterized as an expression of banal silliness,³⁵ and this has been a common assessment for the Mitsui *Kachi-e emaki* in recent years.³⁶ Nevertheless, appreciation of such absurd themes as the phallic contest and the farting battles over many centuries in the premodern period surely proves that there was a positive view towards them, and this should keep us from dismissing them as meaningless, trifling or ridiculous.

2. *The Phallic Contest in the Edo period: Copies and Appropriations* *Copying classical handscrolls*

It is significant, in the history of appreciation of *kachi-e*, that many faithful copies continued to be made by prominent artists in early modern Japan, right until the beginning of the twentieth century. *Kachi-e* gained a level of appreciation on a par with other classical works such as *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* 伴大納言絵詞. This is most likely due to its attribution to Abbot Kakuyū and the skill of its execution, as well as the hilarious nature of its content. In the previously-mentioned *Kōko shōroku* of 1794, following the entries for “Sō Kakuyū gakō” 僧覚融画藁 and “giga” 戯画 (presently known together as *Chōjū jinbutsu giga emaki* 鳥獣人物戯画絵巻), the author makes the assertion that “they should be appreciated just as much as the *kachi-e*” (*kachi-e to narabe shōsu besbi* 勝画トナラベ賞スベシ).³⁷

I have so far discovered references to some fifteen copies of *kachi-e*, including versions whose current whereabouts cannot be confirmed. The artists (including attributions) of these copies include Tosa Mitsuoki 土佐光起 (1617–1691),³⁸ Kanō Tsunenobu 狩野常信 (1636–1713), Kanō Eishuku 狩野永叔 (1675–1724),³⁹ Tanaka Totsugen (1767–1823),⁴⁰ Sakai Hōitsu 酒井抱一 (1761–1828),⁴¹ Ukita Ikkei 浮田一蕙 (1795–1859),⁴² Reizei Tamechika 冷泉為恭 (1823–1864),⁴³ Suzuki Shōnen 鈴木松年 (1848–1918),⁴⁴ and Takahashi Kōko 高橋広湖 (1875–1912).⁴⁵ In the cases where illustrations are available, the copies look almost identical to the Mitsui handscroll. This fact reinforces my hypothesis that during the Edo period the Mitsui version was regarded as the original Kakuyū masterpiece.

The practice of copying masterpiece classical handscrolls extended to paintings with

34 Okazaki 1969.

35 In contrast to Okazaki’s view of *oko* as a positive concept, Toda Teisuke 戸田禎佑 takes a more negative view. He analyzes the representation of vulgar commoners in *Shigisan engi emaki* 信貴山縁起絵巻 (late twelfth century) in relation to the nature of *sarugaku* (*sarugō*) 猿楽 popular performances in the Heian period. He uses *oko* and *sarugaku* synonymously to describe the vulgar essence of these performances. Employing a study by Ogata Kamekichi 尾形亀吉, Toda describes Heian *sarugaku* as “strange and funny” (*kii kokkei* 奇異滑稽) and as “the actions of idiots” (*gujin no shoi* 愚人の所為), and containing “gross aspects” (*zokuaku na mono* 俗悪なもの). See Toda 1960, pp. 347–48.

36 See recent exhibition catalogue commentaries in Santorī Bijutsukan 2007 and Nagoya Shi Hakubutsukan 2008.

37 *Kōko shōroku*, p. 188, entry for “Sō Kakuyū giga.”

38 For illustrations, see Takashima 2000.

39 Sakakibara 1987, p. 61.

40 For an illustration, see Santorī Bijutsukan 1986.

41 Sakakibara 1987, p. 61.

42 For an illustration, see Nagoya Shi Hakubutsukan 2008.

43 Tamechika’s copy contains only *Hōbi gassen*. For illustrations, see Itō and Takubo 2004.

44 For illustrations, see Lane 1979.

45 Sakakibara 1987, p. 61.

erotic themes. Several copies survive of *Koshibagaki zōshi* 小柴垣草紙⁴⁶ and *Fukuro hōshi ekotoba* 袋法師絵詞,⁴⁷ both rare examples of handscrolls featuring explicit sexual depictions that originated in the medieval period (although both originals are thought to have been lost). Copies of these two works were said to have been presented to the Tokugawa 徳川 shogunate at the end of the Edo period.⁴⁸ The fact that erotic-themed handscrolls were copied in a lavish manner and presented to high officials evidently suggests a different attitude in premodern society towards erotica.

Another example of an erotic-themed handscroll from the medieval period is *Chigo no sōshi* 稚児草紙, which illustrates male-male sexual relationships between *chigo* 稚児 (adolescent males who studied and worked as apprentices in Buddhist temples) and older priests.⁴⁹ The original work is said to be dated to 1321 and preserved in Sanbōin 三宝院, Daigoji 醍醐寺 temple.⁵⁰ Although its popularization in early modern times is not as apparent as the other two titles mentioned above, at least one late Edo period copy is known.⁵¹



Figure 6. Phallic contest in *Kagetsu jō*. Ebi Collection, ARC database, Ritsumeikan University, Ebi0494. (The Ebi copy is a later edition of the title first published in 1836.)

One section from *Kachi-e* phallic contest was included among a collection of *shunga* masterpieces brought together in the album *Kagetsu jō* 華月帖 (1836), in which all of the images are tastefully printed in grey silhouette (Figure 6). The phallic contest image in *Kagetsu jō*, which was created by Kanō Eishin 狩野永信 (worked mid-nineteenth century), was rearranged so that two naked men holding their huge phalluses compete face to face, and one line of the text reads, “This design is based on a handscroll by Toba Sōjō copied by our master Kanō Einō 狩野永納 (1631–1697).”

46 One example of the later copies (dated 1828) is fully reproduced in Lane 1997, and another (only the pictures) is reproduced in *Bessatsu Taiyō* 2009, pp. 6–11. Although it is generally explained that the title *Koshibagaki zōshi* can be replaced with *Kanjō no maki* 灌頂卷, the relationship between these two titles is not easy to untangle. *Honchō gazu hinmoku* 本朝画図品目 (1834) lists *Kanjō no maki* and *Koshibagaki zōshi* separately, as well as another version (*ihon* 異本) of the latter. Some copies of the so-called *Koshibagaki zōshi* bear the phrase “*Kanjō no maki*” in the end text to describe the handscroll itself, whereas the keyword *koshiba* appears in the text describing the setting of the protagonists’ first meeting as “*koshiba no moto ni fushitaru*” こしばのもとにふしたる ([the man] lying at the base of the brushwood fence).

47 One example is reproduced in *Bessatsu Taiyō* 2009, pp. 64–69.

48 Tanaka and Miya 1964, pp. 247–49.

49 According to Ozaki Kyūya, the title *Chigo no sōshi* is a modern creation. See Ozaki 1973, p. 175. *Zōho kōko gafu* (1901) lists it as “Daigo nanshoku-e” 醍醐男色絵.

50 Komatsu 1983, p. 97.

51 It has been reproduced in *Bessatsu Taiyō* 2009, pp. 12–17, and is now in the British Museum. For a text transcription, see Ozaki 1973, pp. 181–88.

During the Edo period, the copying of old *shunga* handscrolls originally from the medieval period continued in parallel with the creation of popular *shunga* prints and books. The former was carried out mostly for antiquarian interest, but the artists participating in the latter often found inspiration from classical works and utilized them in their new compositions. The phallic contest continued to be a stimulus for artists.

Appropriations and innovations of the phallic contest

While many copies were being made of *kachi-e*, the subject matter of the phallic contest took on a new life in the Edo period. The abrupt ending of the Mitsui phallic contest may have inspired others to invent further episodes. These innovative phallic contest works, as far as I have examined, can be categorized into three types, listed here in chronological order, based on the dates inscribed in the colophons, where available, and on the works' artistic styles:



7a. A crowd being chased away.



7b. Mighty and acrobatic phallus competition.



7c. A man with a “small” penis (second from the right).

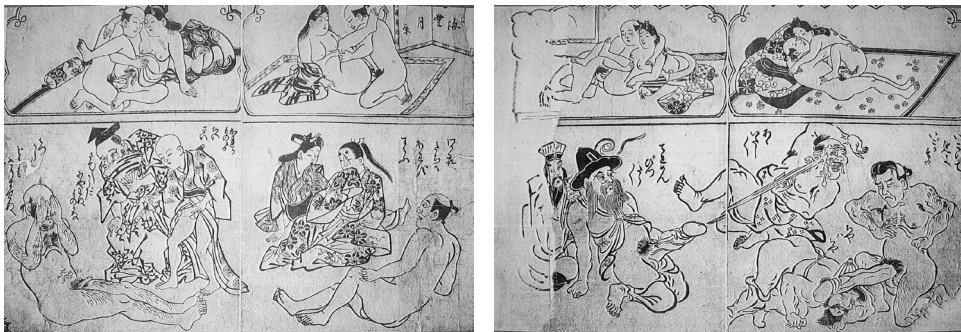
Figure 7. Title unknown handscroll, details. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Type 1) Mighty Phallus Competitions

Examples falling into this category represent the phallic competition as an attempt to win based on not only size but also physical strength and acrobatic prowess. We find various versions of this theme throughout the Edo period, but it seems that the model was created in the late seventeenth century.

An early example is an untitled handscroll in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Figure 7). Its artistic style shows close proximity to that of the school of Hishikawa Moronobu 菱川師宣, although the painting does not bear any artist’s signature. In the scene just before the contest, a man, probably one of the organizers, chases away a small crowd trying to peep through the curtain behind which the competition is taking place (Figure 7a). This composition is certainly taken from the scene in the *kachi-e* phallic contest, but the costumes and hairstyles are contemporary with the Edo period. Strong men are proudly performing weight-lifting and other exertions with their phalluses (Figure 7b). One distinctly new motif is the man with a smaller phallus who is covering his face in shame (Figure 7c). So the attitude towards having a larger phallus is apparently positive here, in contrast to that in the medieval Mitsui handscroll in which we cannot find any obvious sense of triumph.

A representation similar in theme and style to the Boston handscroll is found in a few surviving fragmentary pages from a printed illustrated book (Figure 8). Marco Fagioli has attributed the book to Moronobu in terms of style.⁵² Across the top of each page are illustrations within horizontal boxes showing heterosexual intercourse, while below the dividing line on the page all kinds of phallic competitions are taking place in an ever more exaggerated manner. A man with a smaller member is publicly shamed by a boy’s words: “(His is) even smaller than mine” (*ore ga mono yori chiisai* おれがものよりちいさい, Figure 8a), and even foreigners are involved in the competition (Figure 8b).



8a. A man with a “small” penis (far left).

8b. A foreigner.

Figure 8. Fragmentary pages from an ink-printed book, title unknown. Private Collection.

The Hishikawa-school artists were prolific in their creation of erotic paintings, prints, and books. Interestingly, nevertheless, they did not as a rule incorporate explicit depictions of sexual intercourse within the phallic contest, but kept this theme within the world of men’s games, keeping women out. We can assume that there was still a narrow barrier

⁵² Fagioli 2004, pp. 86–87.

separating the depiction of male-female sex and the male only phallic contest in the early years of the Edo period.⁵³

Type 2) The Tale of Emperor Shōtoku and the Monk Dōkyō

Even though the Type 1 phallic contest is updated in terms of the evaluation of larger phalluses to suit contemporary audiences in the Edo period, it still resembles the atmosphere of the medieval phallic contest because the competition is held solely among men, just for the sake of men's pride in their own penises. Types 2 and 3, on the other hand, significantly alter the context of the phallus competition and add depictions of heterosexual intercourse.



Figure 9. *Dōkyō chōhō no zu*, detail. Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University, hayBKE6-0013.

The Type 2 phallic contest is combined with the fabled affair between female Emperor Shōtoku 称徳 (r. 764–770) (popularly known by her earlier name Kōken 孝謙 [r. 749–758]) and the monk Dōkyō 道鏡 (d. 772) in the late eighth century.⁵⁴ A handscroll, dated 1821, preserved in the Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University (Ritsumeikan Daigaku Āto Risāchi Sentā 立命館大学アート・リサーチセンター) in Kyoto, depicts a phallic competition with the aim of finding the man with the largest penis in the country who can serve Emperor Shōtoku (the text describes her as an “imperial princess” [*kōjo* 皇女]) (Figure 9).⁵⁵ The story concludes with Dōkyō being successfully appointed to “Grand Minister” (*Dajō daijin* 太政大臣) thanks to his sexual prowess. This sounds like a rather naive happy ending, considering the notorious reputation of their relationship in medieval Buddhist discourses on the evils of mixing sex and politics as well as of Shōtoku’s being unmarried and not bearing a legitimate heir.⁵⁶ Due to their infamous reputation, Shōtoku and Dōkyō were natural subjects for *shunga*. Dōkyō especially, for his legendary penis, regularly appears in popular erotic books in the Edo period. Both Shōtoku and Dōkyō were even deified in premodern popular beliefs.⁵⁷

53 The Hishikawa school also seems to have created a contemporary version of *hōhi gassen*. A handscroll entitled *He gassen emaki* 屁合戦絵巻 (Waseda University Library) painted by Murakata Ōmi 村片相覧 (1774–1847) has a colophon stating that he made it based on a copy of an old picture(s) supposedly painted by Hishikawa Moronobu 師信 [sic] in 1680.

54 For a discussion on the history of narratives about the relationship of Shōtoku and Dōkyō, see Tanaka 1992, pp. 25–32.

55 Its preface states the title as “*Dōkyō chōhō no zu*” 道鏡龍奉之図. *Teisei zōho kōko gafu* vol. 7 cites an opinion that the handscroll entitled “*Yuge no Dōkyō chōkō zu*” 弓削道鏡龍幸図 and a handscroll entitled “*Dōkyō hōshi ekotoba*” 道鏡法師絵詞 by Toba Sōjō are the same. Although we have no clue regarding the contents of these handscrolls, we can conjecture that the traditional association of Toba Sōjō with paintings of large phalluses was further linked to representations of Dōkyō.

56 Tanaka 1992, pp. 37–38.

57 *Honchō zokugen shi* 本朝俗諺志 (1746 [preface]) by Kikuoka Senryō 菊岡沾涼 (1680–1747) includes examples in Hitachi (present Ibaraki). See, section 6 “Hitachi Dōkyō no miya” 常陸道鏡宮, *Honchō zokugen shi*, vol. 2.



10a. Phallic contest.



10b. Orgy.



10c. Men exhausted and a woman receiving a prize.

Figure 10. Title unknown; handscroll (Inscribed text: *Kōken tei no miko Yuge no Dōkyō inkō no zu*), details. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Type 3) Women as Sexually Stronger than Men

The third type also develops the phallic contest theme into the sphere of heterosexual intercourse. This type appears to have been the most popular among the three, and several copies in almost identical design are extant. I have encountered five examples in the form of painted handscrolls, and one that is a color-printed folding album. The artists' names, either inscribed or attributed, indicate they were made mostly from the mid-to-late-nineteenth century onwards by artists such as Kobayashi Eitaku 小林永濯 (1843–1890),⁵⁸ Kawanabe Kyōsai 河鍋曉齋 (1831–1889) and Tasaki Sōun 田崎草雲 (1815–1898).⁵⁹ One example in

58 For an illustration, see Ehon Kenkyū Kankōkai 1960, p. 21.

59 For an illustration, see Takahashi 1960.

the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was painted by Utagawa Hiroshige III 三代目歌川広重 (1842–1894) (Figure 10).⁶⁰

The first scene is of a phallic competition among priests, male commoners and courtiers, with court ladies peeking from some distance (Figure 10a). As soon as the measuring is finished, a group of men and women start an orgy, with depictions of various fantastical intercourse positions and acrobatic poses, as though it were a comical performance (Figure 10b). As the orgy scenes go on, the men become exhausted and powerless, while the women are still as energetic as at the start, and even chase after the men for more sexual activity. In the last scene, one woman receives what is presumably a prize from an empress or a high-ranking lady half hidden behind the screen (Figure 10c). Type 3 representations synthesize all the other types originated in *kachi-e*: a phallic contest, a court context, acrobatic elements, male-female intercourse, and an empress.

The inspiration of representing women as sexually stronger than men, and at the same time of the men becoming exhausted after countless bouts of intercourse and even trying to flee from women, might have come from the popular traditional tale of Nyogogashima 女護ヶ島 (Island of Women). Nyogogashima originated in the Buddhist concept of Raset-sukoku 羅刹国, a place where demons disguised as beautiful women seduce and eat men who have drifted ashore, and was then transformed into the Island of Women and seen as a sexual paradise for men in premodern Japan.⁶¹ Although men who went to the island were supposed never to return, it was nonetheless symbolic of men's ultimate sexual pleasure and is famously represented as such at the very end of the *ukiyo zōshi* 浮世草子 novel *Kōshoku*



Figure 11. *Makura bunko*. Ebi Collection, ARC database, Ritsumeikan University, Ebi0468.

60 Its inscription by Utagawa Hiroshige III states the title “*Kōken tei no miko Yuge no Dōkyō inkō no zu*” 孝謙帝の御子弓削の道鏡姪行之図. Here we can see a clear thematic connection between Types 2 and 3. However, no *Kōken* or *Dōkyō* is identifiable in the work, and no other examples of Type 3 with designs basically the same as the Boston handscroll refer to *Kōken* (Shōtoku) or *Dōkyō*.

61 Moerman 2009.

ichidai otoko 好色一代男 (1682) by Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴. In contrast to this kind of perception of the island, in the sphere of *shunga*, Nyogogashima is not necessarily perceived as a place of male pleasure. *Makura bunko: Shohen* 枕文庫: 初編 (1822) by Keisai Eisen 溪斎英泉 includes a double page illustration of a woman on Nyōgo no shima 女護の島 (Figure 11). She is lying by herself on a rock bed with her legs wide apart towards the viewer. The brief inscription in the picture explains her deed: “Women in Nyōgo no shima become pregnant by facing (their vulvas) to the southern wind (*Nyōgo no shimabito nanzū ni mukatte kaitai suru* 女護の島人南風に向懐胎する). Can we interpret this picture of a woman, who at a glance is lying seductively with her head tilted and her lower robe pulled back, as her declaration that men are needed neither for conception nor for her sexual pleasure?⁶² How dreadful could the image of Nyōgo no shima be for men? Utagawa Kunimaro’s 歌川国麿 erotic book *Nyogogashima takara no irifune* 女護島宝入船 (ca. 1850) tells the story of three men who reach Nyogogashima, and first enjoy countless sexual encounters but gradually become emaciated and eventually almost die from their exertions. The book chooses, however, a rather easy conclusion: it was all merely a dream. In *shunga* Nyogogashima seems to have functioned as the antithesis of male sexual fantasy. And so, in a sense, did the Type 3 version of the phallic contest, albeit in a humorous way.

Conclusion

The subject matter of the phallic contest evolved beyond the format of painted handscrolls into the realm of popular publishing. Let me introduce one erotic book from the *ukiyo zōshi* genre, *Shinshiki neya no torigai* 新色閨鳥貝 (1715, Figure 12), to show the extent of interest in this theme.⁶³ The narrative focuses on Ōinosuke 覆之助, a handsome Kyoto townsman, aged 25, who laments over the modest size of his penis. He prays to a picture of his ancestor, the famously well-endowed monk Yuge no Dōkyō 弓削の道教, and miraculously gains a three *shaku* 尺 (approx. 90 cm) phallus. However, this dream penis becomes a tremendous burden for him because it proves impossible to have sex. In the story, he wanders about looking for somebody who can accommodate his huge member. This



Figure 12. *Shinshiki neya no torigai*. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

62 Female sexual pleasure and conception were not paired in the didactic discourse in the Edo period, but *shunga* books, such as those by Tsukioka Settei 月岡雪鼎 (1726–1786), promoted female sexual pleasure as a means to get pregnant. See Gerstle and Hayakawa 2007, p. 47.

63 This is a rare book. The one I refer to was previously in the collection of Shibui Kiyoshi 渋井清 and is now in the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto. See Shibui 1932, Hayashi 1972, and Shirakura 2007.

parody of male competitiveness and penis envy evidently makes fun of the male fantasy of “the bigger the better.”

This competitiveness over the size of penises may have been fostered by the depiction of larger-than-life phalluses in *shunga*, with the phallic contest at its root. However, whether the subject matter of the phallic contest was originally intended to praise larger male genitalia remains uncertain. It is in the popular culture of the Edo period that the phallic competition developed into either a representation of male pride or a competition between the sexes. But even the later appropriations of the phallic contest did not simply elicit the admiration of the viewer or reader for larger penises, but simultaneously presented ironical views concerning such a fascination.

My conclusion is not that the original representation of the phallic contest (*yōbutsu kurabe*) bore no relation to later Edo period erotic art. The exaggerated and humorous depiction of male organs found in *kachi-e* certainly forms the foundation for images of the male body in *shunga*, and it is clear that the world of *shunga* appropriated this iconography wholeheartedly during the Edo period. The enthusiasm among a wide range of artists for making copies of the phallic contest as well as the farting battles (*hōhi gassen*) also attests to their significant position within the history of Japanese art. Moreover, finally we can observe that the phallic contest has been a seminal work in the history of Japanese iconography of the body from its creation in the medieval period through at least the Meiji era, and should not—along with *shunga* more broadly—be dismissed and ignored simply as vulgar, frivolous or ridiculous. It is not an easy task to understand the medieval or even Edo period sense of sexuality from our modern perspective. This article has attempted to document the lineage of the “phallic contest” motif in painting and printed materials in order to lay a foundation for further research, from different perspectives and disciplines, on the topic of the representation of sexuality in Japan.

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