

ジェンダーの視点から見る王朝物語絵

Gender and Courtly Narrative Painting

“Women’s painting” was the name given to a genre of narrative painting that was often done by women and targeted at a primarily female audience. The noblewomen of the Heian period were uniquely placed in Japanese history: they were well-educated, sophisticated, and blessed with wealth and leisure time, and with these advantages they created a distinctive feminine culture in both the literary and visual arts. I shall argue, however, that over the course of time, this distinctive feminine voice was absorbed into, and would fundamentally alter, male court culture.

【スライド左 源氏物語絵巻 竹河】 【スライド左 源氏物語絵巻 竹河 桜】

For the sake of simplicity, I will focus on a single masterpiece of Japanese painting, a large set of handscrolls that is also one of the earliest extant examples of the “women’s painting” style, illustrating the *Tale of Genji*.

Often considered the world’s first novel, the Tale of Genji is a work of sustained fiction that runs to well over 1000 pages in translation. The author is a woman known to us as Murasaki Shikibu, who served as governess to a young empress at the Japanese court. She wrote her tale over a period of several years during the early 11th century; and as she herself matured, the novel evolved from a fairy-tale romance into a profound exploration of human behavior. It can be read as a back-stage history of Heian politics, an allegory of Buddhist salvation, or a record of the lives of imaginary characters whom we come to know and love.

The Tale of Genji was an immediate success, and it seems certain that

many copies and pictorial versions were made during the author's lifetime. Knowledge of the Tale of Genji has been for centuries the hallmark of a well-educated person in Japan.

The paintings we'll see today come from the earliest extant illustrated Genji manuscript, which was made in the early 12th century, or just over a century after the novel was written.

We see here the central courtyard of an aristocratic mansion. In the center is a blossoming cherry tree; the ground beneath it was originally silver, but the silver has oxidized to a dark gray.

【スライド左 源氏物語絵巻 竹河 碁を打つ姉妹】

In a room at the left, two sisters play goh 碁, a Chinese board game; the younger sister, dressed in white, has her back to us, while the older sister's face is concealed behind the woven blind. Their maidservants relax on the balcony, enjoying the open air.

【スライド左 源氏物語絵巻 竹河 垣間見男】

At the far right, also hidden behind a blind, a young courtier secretly gazes at the women.

In the code of Heian aristocratic behavior, which is reflected in the *Tale of Genji* and these paintings, a noblewoman was not to be seen by any males other than those in her immediate family. SEEING led to sexual desire ... and sexual possession. There are numerous scenes in the novel where a man steals of glimpse of a woman, and falls hopelessly in love.

【スライド 右 源氏物語絵巻 橋姫】

Let us now contrast this with another scene of the stolen glimpse, which takes place at night. Once again the voyeur male is at the right-hand edge of the painting, this time peering through slats in a bamboo fence. Inside the villa at left, two sisters are playing musical instruments, a koto—a kind of Japanese harp, and a biwa, which is shaped like a lute. Just at the full moon emerges from the clouds, the younger sister beckons to it with her plectrum.

While the composition in both pictures follows the same pattern, they evoke an entirely different mood. The picture at left takes place in springtime, in the heart of the capital city, and the young ladies faces remain hidden even from us, as they should. The scene at right takes place in the autumn, in an isolated country house, and we share in the man's voyeurism. Those who have read the novel will recognize that these two “stolen glimpse” scenes will have dramatically different consequences. The light-hearted spring scene amounts to no more than an afternoon's heart-ache for the low-ranking young man; but the autumnal scene will lead to years of anguish for the principal players—Genji's son Kaoru and the two sisters with whom he falls in love.

As seen in these two examples, the twelfth-century *Tale of Genji* scrolls excel in capturing mood and nuances of human relationships through a sophisticated code of color and composition. I would like to digress now to look at the historical background of how and why such painting was labeled by its makers and consumers as “women's painting.” Perhaps surprisingly, the question of the “gender” of a style is inter-related with Japan's self-fashioning in relation to China.

【左スライド1 東アジアの地図】

Geographically, Japan consists of a long chain of islands just off the coast of northeast Asia, separated from the continent by a narrow but dangerous strait. Across the centuries, this distance allowed Japan to benefit from exposure to social and technological advances of Chinese culture, yet kept it free from political subjugation. In the 7th and 8th century, the most powerful clans in Japan consciously worked to adopt things Chinese, from the writing system and a centralized, bureaucratic government, to court costume and Buddhism as a state religion.

However, the Chinese bureaucratic system of government was difficult to sustain, and by the 9th century had been abandoned in favor of a hereditary aristocracy, in which rank was determined in part by closeness to the imperial family. Government became privatized around the person of the emperor and a small body of his advisors. At the same time, with the development of a syllabary for writing the vernacular language, native Japanese literary forms emerged, including narrative tales, poetry, and women's diaries.

【スライド左 漢字】

【スライド右 仮名文字】

The Chinese writing system makes use of characters that represent both sounds and concrete objects or abstract concepts. True scholarship was limited to a very small class of those who had the time and wealth to devote two decades to learning to read and write. The Japanese syllabary, by contrast, represents spoken sounds which are meaningless in themselves, but combine to replicate vernacular speech. The syllabary consists of a finite number of graphs.

From the 8th century until modern times, Chinese or a hybrid Sino-Japanese became the language of the male establishment in Japan, as it provided access

to the entire corpus of continental learning. But Chinese was considered too difficult for women, even of the upper classes, so they wrote exclusively in the syllabary—as did men when writing poetry or texts for a female audience.

Therefore, in Heian terms, Chinese calligraphy is “men’s writing” and the calligraphy in the Japanese syllabary is termed “women’s writing.” Note that this distinction of gender is associated with the FORM of writing, and to some extent with its intended audience, but not necessarily with the calligrapher.

This Chinese=masculine, Japanese=feminine dichotomy permeates Heian culture, that is, court culture of the 10th through 12th centuries. One of the clearest manifestations of this gendered construct can be found in the décor of the royal palace.

【スライド左 京都地図 内裏の位置を示す】 【スライド 紫宸殿写真】

The slide on the left shows the city plan of the capital city, Heian—which means “peace and tranquility”—while the right slide shows a modern reconstruction of the throne hall within the royal palace. Following Chinese precedent, the Throne Hall was placed exactly at the center of the palace compound, facing south, and was its most formal space.

【スライド 紫宸殿内部 障子絵】 【スライド 賢聖障子】

The Throne Hall was adorned with wall paintings depicting legendary **Chinese** sages, based on imported models. In other words, paragons of Chinese virtue were eternally on hand as witnesses to the official business of the court. Significantly, however, the Throne Hall came to be used less and less in the

Heian period, and the real activity moved to the “Pure and Clear Hall,” or in Japanese the Seiryoden—what was ostensibly the emperor’s private quarters, located behind the Throne Hall.

【スライド右 内裏 地図】

【スライド清涼殿 平面図】

The Seiryoden faced east, not south, and was not situated on the central north-south axis of the palace compound. By Chinese standards, that alone is sufficient to identify it as an informal building, but it was here where the Japanese emperor spent most of his days and nights. Public interactions with male officials took place on the southeastern side of the building: the emperor sat on an elevated platform in the center, while those who sought audience with him approached from the east. A courtier’s rank determined how closely he could approach the emperor, with only the very highest nobles permitted to sit on the veranda, while most were confined to the steps or the pebbled courtyard. On the western side of the building were spaces for the emperor’s private meals and rituals, and well as office space for the court women who attended him on these occasions. The northeastern quadrant held the sleeping quarters for the emperor and his highest ranking consorts.

It is fascinating that the wall paintings decorating these multiple spaces within the Seiryoden clearly demarcate differences in function. The public, male spaces were adorned with paintings of Chinese subjects: behind the emperor was a scene of the four seasons in Chinese scenery; and the south side of a screen on the veranda depicts a famous palace garden in China. By contrast, the western rooms were furnished with portable screens of Japanese subjects; and the north-facing side of the veranda screen depicted the nearby Japanese

countryside. To recapitulate, the more public and exclusively masculine spaces are associated with Chinese subjects, while the private and feminine spaces are made “Japanese.”

How are we to make sense of this bifurcated space? My argument is that China, although no longer the dominant power it had been in the 7th and 8th century, still loomed large in the Japanese imagination as the source of authority for the *state*. Therefore, whether in the Throne Hall or in his residence, the Japanese emperor sat in a “Chinese”—and exclusively masculine—space when performing official duties. On the other hand, the Japanese realm was a space that did not require masculine competition with a continental mentor or rival; here the court had uncontested control—and the controlled subject is construed as feminine.

【スライド右 源氏 竹河】

Now, I want to return to the narrative painting with which we began, the twelfth-century scrolls illustrating the *Tale of Genji*. This painting was done when the tradition of women’s painting had been flourishing for at least a century and a half. In our next examples, we will see how the heritage of that tradition is evident in scenes that poignantly capture complex emotions of the women in the tale.

【スライド左 源氏物語絵巻 東屋 全図】 【スライド 東屋浮舟 顔アップ】

This scene provides us with a bird’s-eye-view into the interior of a suburban villa, where the women of the household have gathered in an intimate setting. The woman with her back to us, having her floor-length hair combed by a maid,

is the hostess, Nakanokimi: she is the concubine—*not* the legal wife—of a royal prince. Seated opposite her, utterly engrossed in a picture book, is her long-lost younger half sister, Ukifune, who has just recently been found and brought to the comfort of this home. Between them, a maid reads from the text of a tale, and other female servants are seated at right. The arrangement of the figures and their poses establishes their relationships to one another, and the overall orderly composition suggests that this is a happy moment of female companionship.

However, those who have read the novel will realize that there are tremors beneath this calm surface. Only a few hours before, the prince—who is a young and rather uninhibited fellow—had come to the villa and discovered Ukifune. Delighted to find this beautiful girl in the house, and with no idea who she was, he attempted to seduce her, without success. Nakanokimi learned of the prince's behavior from her own maids, and must suppress her own heartache at his infidelity while comforting her terrified younger sister.

Upper class women in the Heian period often remained in their parents' home throughout life, while their husbands and lovers came to call. Only when a woman's natal family was impoverished or from a distant province did she move into her husband's residence. In the novel, Nakanokimi and Ukifune had recently lost their father, and so are now financially and emotionally totally dependent on the young prince. Female readers would have understood and sympathized with their plight. This scene demonstrates how the tradition of women's painting, developed by generations of educated ladies-in-waiting at the royal court, delved into the emotional dilemmas faced by women of their own class with subtlety and grace.

Let us examine a scene where the emotions are less restrained:

【スライド 源氏物語絵巻 夕霧】

This scene is famous in the twelfth-century scrolls as the only one to show a woman standing up. As you can readily see, she is stealthily approaching a man from behind, and reaches out to grasp the letter he holds in his hands—as two maids eavesdrop from the corridor.

The couple shown here are Genji's son Yugiri and his wife Kumoinokari, who have thus far in the novel been presented as the ideal husband and wife, deeply in love and faithful to each other. However, when Yugiri's best friend died, he asked Yugiri to look after his widow, so Yugiri had been absent a great deal. When Kumoinokari found him reading a letter, she immediately suspected that he was having an affair with the widow. In fact, the letter was an innocent note from the widow's mother, an old woman.

【スライド 雲居雁 顔アップ】

So, how does this scene fit into the tradition of women's painting? We may argue that women artists and audiences would readily identify with Kumoinokari here, having so often experienced men's infidelity themselves. On the other hand, a male viewer could see this as comical: after all, the wife's accusation is (as yet) unfounded, she has made a fool of herself, and the maids hear it all. Again, if we "read" this scene in light of the text, we realize that Kumoinokari's anger will doom the marriage: appalled by her unwarranted jealous behavior, Yugiri is driven into the arms of his friend's widow.

【スライド】浮舟 顔

「比較する」

Finally, let us examine a scene that deals exclusively with men's relationships.

【スライド左 鈴虫 全図】 【スライド右 源氏物語絵 鈴虫 源氏と冷泉院】

The *Tale of Genji* broke the mold in women's writing with its realistic treatment of political themes, such as the unjust exile of the protagonist Genji, and broaching the subject of irregularities in the line of descent in the imperial family. This scene may be considered one of the pivotal and most daring moments in both the novel and the illustrations.

Genji, his son Yugiri, and other young nobles have come to visit the young emperor Reizei for a moonlight concert and poetry party. The architectural setting clearly identifies the rank of each of the characters: the emperor sits in the innermost position, and Genji, the elder statesman of the group, sits opposite him in conversation), while members of the younger generation are arranged on the veranda. Each figure is depicted according to a well-established pattern for depicting aristocratic males, with face in three-quarter view, having a pear-shaped contour; they have narrow eyes and thick brows, and a small rosebud mouth, with the slightest of beards. Yet as we saw with the details of Ukifune and Kumoinokari, the artist here too distinguishes character and mood through the angle of the head and small nuances of expression.

What is especially poignant here is the encounter between Genji and Reizei.

【スライド】 源氏&冷泉

To the world, these two are brothers, both sons of the late emperor. Genji is the elder, but because his mother was of low birth, he was demoted to commoner

status as a child, and thus made ineligible for the throne. Reizei is much younger, and in theory the offspring of the late emperor and a concubine of his later years. In fact, Genji had betrayed his own father, and slept with his step-mother, so Reizei is **Genji's** son. ... But none of the parties involved could ever acknowledge that fact, as it undermined the very foundations of the imperial line's claim to legitimacy. However, as Reizei matured and reflected on his close resemblance to his "elder brother" Genji, he began to have doubts. On the night of this party, both Genji and Reizei compose poems that allude to their relationship, without making it explicit.

The artist has brilliantly portrayed this convoluted state of affairs: Genji and Reizei are shown in mirror poses, and as they lean toward one another, the contours of their bodies form a perfect circle, an enclosure only they can occupy. At the same time, the harsh line of a lintel keeps them rigidly apart.

Questions of the authority of the imperial house, succession disputes, and power struggles were male issues, not normal fare for female audiences. In earlier periods, narrative fiction was regarded as an instrument for women's education and entertainment, and both men and women wrote tales in the vernacular that dealt with romance or cheerful themes. Murasaki Shikibu had challenged those gender barriers in her extraordinary novel. Her work won the attention of the most powerful males at court, and in the process elevated fiction and women's writing to an unprecedented prestige.

By the time these handscroll paintings were done, the genre of women's painting had gone through a similar metamorphosis, and was now practiced by leading professional male painters. In other words, what had once been a cultural practice formed and nurtured in the women's quarters of aristocratic

mansions had emerged into the “public” sphere and become part of mainstream culture. Perhaps the best evidence for this process is that the early 12th century Tale of Genji scrolls were made at the behest of the most powerful members of the imperial court, to commemorate a political event.

In closing, I would like to suggest that there are two sides to this story of transformation of courtly narrative writing and painting from a women’s genre to one that engaged the ruling male elite. On the one hand, it seems clear that Heian court women produced an art so compelling that the men had to pay attention; but it seems to me that it is also true that men were active agents in this process, appropriating a feminine realm for their own purposes.