

# Binary Opposition and Gender Representation in *The Tale of the Heike*

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## Abstract

Gunki monogatari (war tales) reflected the state of Japan during medieval times. An example of such stories, *The Tale of the Heike* (Note 1) describes the time surrounding the destruction of the Taira clan, illustrating how those events shifted the history of Japan. Concepts central to the narrative, including “mujōkan 無常観” and “hōganbiiki 判官鼻貞,” remain rooted in modern Japanese society. However, gender-oriented research on *The Tale of the Heike* is still limited.

By applying semiotic analysis along with socio-historical approach, this study discusses the societal position of *The Tale of the Heike* in Japan, drawing attention to the female characters represented and analyzing the nature of gender in the story. This research also considers the historical and social backgrounds that produced the foundations for that gender representation.

The study reveals that the representation of female characters, especially *shirabyōshi* (Note 2), had a deep political role. It also recognizes that Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa involved many women in his approach to fighting the Heike clan. Finally, it demonstrates how binary opposition and gender representation in *The Tale of the Heike* may have been used to promote the Heike clan stereotypes, resembling certain forms of modern-day media.

**Keywords:** genpei war, go-shirakawa, kakuichi-bon, shirabyōshi, taira no kiyomori, tomoe, samurai, minamoto no yoritomo, socio-al historical approach, semiotic analysis, text environment

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, *The Tale of the Heike* research has undergone various developments. Despite the many achievements made, many studies have approached *The Tale of the Heike* from a literary or a performing arts perspective, with gender-oriented studies remaining limited. Nonetheless, some studies focused on the women in *The Tale of the Heike* have been conducted. Among these studies, Michiko Nagai's book *Women in The Tale of The Heike* (1979) notably considers a series of female images in *The Tale of the Heike*. However, that book does not analyze the social and historical background of the story. Elsewhere, Tanaka (1998) examined *The Tale of the Heike* from the perspective of the history of women in the Middle Ages, observing several instances of women characters being caught up in the patriarchal system that manifested in various forms. However, behind the historical background of *The Tale of the Heike*, there are individualized human stories. This requires that each woman's episode be illuminated from multiple angles. Further valuable studies have also been conducted from a women's history perspective by, for example, Hosokawa (1989; 1998), Wakita (1997; 2001), and Tabata (1994; 1996), and Fukuto (2013). Meanwhile, although a study by Ashie (2003) investigated *The Tale of the Heike* through the stories of women in the tale, he did not explore its representations of women in the medieval era. Thus, although various gender-oriented studies have analyzed the gender related problems in *The Tale of the Heike* and other investigates its socio-historical context as a cultural phenomenon that reflects important aspects of Japanese culture, comprehensive accounts combining the two and focus on gender-representation remain rare.

## 2. Method

This study applies both semiotic analysis and socio-historical analysis to analyze the horizontal and vertical patterns of relationships and to identify the patterns of relationships in a more conscious manner. A semiotic analysis is applied to examine the gender-representation problem by analyzing the images of female characters featured in *The Tale of the Heike* by assigning those female characters titles corresponding to certain episodes of the story. Then, the study considers the socio-historical background that made these female characters possible and the representations of these female characters. However, because *The Tale of the Heike* has many versions

featuring different episodes--meaning, for example, that episodes that appear in one edition may not appear at all in another edition--before studying the female characters of *The Tale of the Heike*, the problem of which edition should be used as the foundational text to develop any theory must be addressed. This leads to the choice of the most popular edition of the narrative, the “Kakuichi-bon” edition, because its form and development are characterized by the relationship between the narrators and the listeners.

Then, upon analyzing the societal position of *The Tale of the Heike* in Japan, the study investigates the story’s development with a focus on its images of women before considering the socio-historical background that influenced those images. Finally, gender representation is analyzed in terms of historical and social impact.

### 3. The Societal Position of *The Tale of the Heike* in Japan

Shimazu Hisamoto wrote that “Japan, the land of beauty, is also the land of warriors” (1935), referencing the position of samurai in Japanese society until the first half of the 20th century. The samurai played a central role in Japanese medieval society because the medieval era of Japan was unstable and rife with political fluctuations and civil war. Literature was also influenced by these circumstances and gunki monogatari seemingly accurately reflected the state of Japan during this time. An example of such war stories, *The Tale of the Heike* describes the time of the collapse of the Taira clan and how this shifted the history of Japan. Concepts central to the narrative, including “mujōkan 無常觀” and “hōganbiiki 判官鬮,” remain rooted in modern Japanese society. During the Edo period, *The Tale of the Heike* became the subject of kabuki and various reading materials and acted as a source of inspiration for “senryū 川柳” (Note 3) and “haiku 俳句,” (Note 4) as well as inspiring many paintings. In short, *The Tale of the Heike* was regarded as a masterpiece of medieval literature and art, inspiring art, literature, and drama for centuries. This also made it a masterpiece of Japanese culture.

The female characters of *The Tale of the Heike* have attracted the attention of Japanese people from medieval times to the present, and the text of *The Tale of the Heike* has been used as raw material for “Otogi-zōshi 御伽草子” (Note 5) works related to female characters including Yokobuezoushi and Giō. Among the female characters in *The Tale of the Heike*, the interest in *shirabyōshi* is reflected in other Japanese arts and literature (e.g., Among Noh plays, there are many works in which *shirabyōshi* women are the main characters, such as Futari Shizuka 二人静 (The Two Shizukas), Gio 祇王 and Hotoke no Hara 仏原 (Okimoto, 2016, p. 169). Moreover, interest in the unique character Tomoe (Note 6) is reflected in modern songs, manga, and other media, although it is notable that Tomoe did not play a central role in *The Tale of the Heike* compared to other female characters, as this study discusses in detail later.

Among the versions of *The Tale of the Heike*, the Kakuichi-bon edition is unique because of the Initiates’ Book (“Kanjō no maki”), which tells of the fate of Tokuko, the daughter of Taira no-Kiyomori (Note 7) (1118-1181; hereinafter, Kiyomori) and the last member of the Kiyomori family. The Initiates’ Book was a “secret piece” performed only by the most accomplished members. The “initiates” of the title were presumably those who had received kanjō (initiation, in this context a religious term) as masters in their line (Tyler et al., 2014, p. xxi). It is supposed that this book is based on the text that was written down as a testimony of *The Tale of the Heike* that the Biwa hōshi (Note 8) Kakuichi chanted himself before his death in 1371 (Sugimoto, 1985, p. 22).

### 4. Development of *The Tale of the Heike*

It is not clear exactly when and how *The Tale of the Heike* was established, and it is unclear what the narrative was originally about. The most famous description of its formation can be found in *Tsurezuregusa* (徒然草) (Note 9). At the time of Cloistered Emperor Go-Toba (Note 10) (1180-1239), a person named Shinano Zenji Yukinaga (信濃前司行長), who was under the patronage of the Buddhist monk Jien (慈円; 1155-1225) (Note 11), was asked to produce a tale of the Heike and let the blind monk Shōbutsu chant it. Shōbutsu was said to have known about the samurai of the eastern tract (i.e., Tougoku 東国) and had told Yukinaga about him (Atsumi 1962, p. 26). However, the existence of persons named Yukinaga and Shōbutsu has not been confirmed in historical materials (Sugimoto; 1985, pp. 17-18).

*The Tale of the Heike* spans the rise of Kiyomori to the end of the Taira clan. There is almost no description of the Hōgen-Heiji rebellion that triggered the rise of the Heike clan, and details of the intervening years before Kiyomori was appointed Daijō-daijin (Chancellor of the Realm) in 1167 (Nin’an 2) are only briefly mentioned. Subsequently, the anti-Heike movement grew, and later, the clan was defeated in the Battle of Dan-no-ura in 1185 (Genryaku 2) by the Genji clan. This chain of events forms the core of the tale’s content. Given the content in the existing books ended around the time of the Jokyu War in 1221 (Jokyu 3) (Sansom, 1958, pp. 378-382), the consensus is that the tale was mainly produced in the 1230s.

Notably, there are many different versions of *The Tale of the Heike*; furthermore, the female characters included

in some versions are modified or not found in some other versions of *The Tale of the Heike*. According to Matsuo (2015), *The Tale of the Heike* expanded from its initial form with a considerable amount of additional information, and the text corresponding to the reading type versions (yomihon) was established relatively earlier than the text of the narration type versions (kataribon), with the text attributed to Kakuichi-bon known as the earliest finalized narration edition. Still, no edition can be confirmed to be the original Heike. However, one theory has attempted to solve the story of *The Tale of the Heike*'s development by pursuing the facts of folklore. The main pillar of this theory is Kunio Yanagita's elucidation from a folkloric point of view; he assumed that *The Tale of the Heike* was not written by a certain author as a literary work, with the "narrative" established before the work was written (Sugimoto, 1985, p. 20).

Regarding the female characters, who seem to first appear in *The Tale of the Heike* from the early period of the twelve-volume version. The addition of these women would seemingly intend to soften the content of *The Tale of the Heike*, which is built around the conflict between samurai. However, according to a study by Atsumi (1962) focuses on Giou, Kogō, Dairi Nyobo, Senju, and Yokobue, this is not the case. Atsumi demonstrates that in the period of the Heike six-volume version, when "Women's Rebirth" (nyonin ōjō 女人往生) likely first appeared (around 1240), many female priests were represented, with these female episodes related to the Heike clan flowing into *The Tale of the Heike* (Atsumi 1962, p. 342). Supporting this perspective, Tobe (1974) asserted that the female episodes in Heike appear to be supplemented in the probable era of "Women's Rebirth"; according to this theory, it seems that the demands of female listeners of heikyoku (chanting to biwa accompaniment) carried considerable weight, and there were requests from the female audience indicating that heroic and bloody episodes were not enough for them. However as this paper goes on to discuss, the most celebrated representations of female characters were produced for purposes similar to today's media, supporting the notion that the narrative was developed earlier than the written work. This would mean that episodes focused on female characters may have already existed in the narrative pre-1240.

### 5. Female Images in *The Tale of the Heike*

This section considers the various representations of female characters, analyzing their appearances via the episodes in *The Tale of the Heike* in which they have a central and visible role. Specifically, this section will focus on the female characters represented in the following episodes' title in the Kakuichi-bon edition: Giō 祇王 and Nidai no Kisaki 二代の后 (empress of two sovereigns) in Book One; Aoi-no-mae 葵の前 (hereinafter Aoi), Kogō 小督, and Gion'nonnyōgo 祇園女御 (the Gion consort) in Book Six; Kozaishō 小宰相 in Book Nine; Dairinyōbō 内裏女房 (the gentlewoman at the palace), Senju-no-mae 千手前, and Yokobue 横笛 in Book Ten; Kenreimon-in 建礼門院 (Taira no-Tokuko hereinafter Tokuko), in the Initiates' Book. This section will shed light on the female characters highlighted by giving them central roles after classifying them under the following categories: ① Kokubo(国母) (the mother of the realm), ② Concubine, ③ *Shirabyōshi* (白拍子), ④ Women who prayed that the next life bring Taira no-Shigehira 平重衡 (1158-1185) rebirth in paradise, ⑤ Women with a broken heart due to losing their love with the aim of evaluating female characters according to the function that they fulfill within their society.

#### ① Kokubo(国母) (the mother of the realm)

Nidai no Kisaki 二代の后 (the empress of two sovereigns)

Kenreimon-in 建礼門院(Taira no-Tokuko hereinafter Tokuko)

Aoi 葵

Kogō 小督

#### ② Concubine

Gion'nonnyōgo 祇園女御 (the Gion consort)

#### ③ *Shirabyōshi* (白拍子)

Giō 祇王

#### ④ Women who prayed that the next life bring Taira no-Shigehira 平重衡 (1158-1185) (Note 12) rebirth in paradise

Dairinyōbō (内裏女房) (the gentlewoman at the palace) (Note 13)

Senju-no-mae(千手前)

#### ⑤ Women with a broken heart due to losing their love

Kozaishō 小宰相

Yokobue 横笛

### ① Kokubo (the mother of the realm)

#### Nidai no Kisaki 二代の後 (the empress of two sovereigns)

Nidai no Kisaki or Fujiwara no-Tashi (hereinafter, Tashi) is the daughter of the lord of Kin'yoshi, and Tokuko the daughter of Kiyomori, are two female characters expected to become kokubo. Tashi was married to Emperor Konoe 近衛天皇 (1139-1155) (Note 14); after his demise, at Emperor Nijō's (Note 15) demand, Tashi served the palace again as an empress of Emperor Nijō (Figure 2). Hence, she is called "the empress of two sovereigns." She is the only case of an empress being united with two emperors in the entirety of Japanese history. For the realm, being empress twice was a grave matter. Consequently, Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa and the senior nobles in the council stated their views and refused this marriage, which was against Tashi's wishes in any case (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 28-30). Represented as a woman who has lost her independence, Tashi's father, who wished her to become kokubo, said:

I have learned that those who refuse to bend to the world are mad. The edict has been issued.... You must go at once to the palace. You have no other choice. Perhaps this is a happy sign that you would be called the mother of the realm, if you bear him a prince, and then I, the old and foolish man, may still be revered as an emperor's grandfather. (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 28-30).

Hence, Tashi had no choice: she could not be released from that marriage, whether or not she wanted it.

It is worth mentioning that the episode of "The Empress of Two Sovereigns" begins by emphasizing the Heike's wrongdoing and criticizing the manner of Emperor Nijō, who was considered the antithesis to Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa. Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa's displeasure with the emperor's behavior was elucidated in the following passage Tyler et al. (2014):

From ancient times to this day, the Heike and Genji have jointly chastised in His Majesty's service anyone who flouted his will. Thus, the realm long remained undisturbed. But after Tameyoshi was slain during the Hōgen years (1156-59) and during Heiji (1159-60). Yoshitomo, too, came to grief, their Genji successors were all exiled or killed. The Heike alone flourished. No one stood against them. Their triumph seemed assured for all time. However, a succession of armed skirmishes followed Retired Emperor Toba's passing. There were repeated executions, banishments, and dismissals from office. The world within the seas was not at peace. Insecurity still reigned. During the Eiryaku and Ōhō years (1160-63) especially, imperial reprimands began reaching the circle around Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa, while those around the reigning emperor Nijō began receiving expressions of Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa's displeasure. (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 28-29)

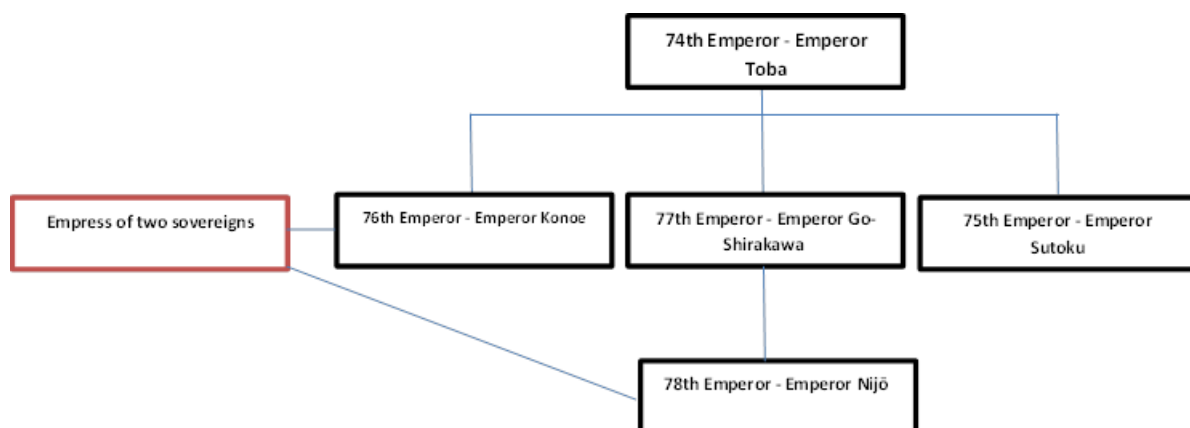


Figure 1. Relation diagram of the empress of two sovereigns and Emperors

#### Kenreimon-in 建礼門院 (Tokuko)

The other character who was expected to become kokubo was Tokuko, who actually did become the mother of the realm after she gave birth to Emperor Antoku 安徳天皇 (1178-1185) (Note 16), who became one of Kiyomori's most important sources of power. When Tokuko was sixteen, she married Emperor Takakura 高倉天皇 (1161-1181) (Note 17), who was six years younger (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 678-710). It is not clear whether Tokuko hoped to become the mother of the realm or not, but it is clear that her father, Kiyomori, gained power

by becoming the future emperor's grandfather. She was honored greatly after giving birth to a boy who would become the emperor despite his young age. However, she later lost the rest of her family, including her son, in the Battle of Dan-no-ura. In the Initiates' Book, Tokuko is depicted as praying for the rebirth of the Heike and the rebirth of Emperor Antoku in paradise.

### **Aoi (葵)**

Elsewhere, *The Tale of the Heike* presented episodes featuring female characters who were damaged for approaching the strategic role of the mother of the realm, including Aoi (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 312-314) and Kogō (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 314-321). Aoi was a girl who served as a maid of a gentlewoman in the empress's service. She became unusually intimate with Emperor Takakura, who was married to Kiyomori's daughter. At court, there were rumours that she may have been due to become mother of the realm, as captured in the following song lyric: "Do not lament the birth of a daughter; do not applaud the birth of a son. A son may never gain a fief; a daughter may rise to be empress." (Tyler et al., 2014, p. 313). Emperor Takakura broke off relations with Aoi because of this rumor.

### **Kogō (小督)**

Although Kiyomori's oppression is not clearly portrayed in the episode featuring Aoi, it is clearly apparent in the Kogō episode, which depicts the broken hearts of both Emperor Takakura and Kogō. After breaking with Aoi, Emperor Takakura was so grieved that the empress (Tokuko), pitying him, sent him Kogō, a gentlewoman of hers, to console him. Kogō was famous for her beauty and highly skilled on the koto (Note 18). The emperor loved Kogō, who had previously had a relationship with Lord Takafusa Fujiwara. The relationship between the emperor and Kogō saddened Takafusa deeply. However, because the empress was one of Kiyomori's daughters and another was married to Takafusa, when Kiyomori heard what was going on, he felt that he had lost two sons-in-law to Kogō: "No, no!" he cried. "Nothing will go right as long as that Kogō is around.... Get rid of her!" (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 315).

According to the episode, soon after, Kogō, who heard what Kiyomori had said, left the palace at night. When the emperor became extremely sad again, Kiyomori forbade the emperor's personal gentlewomen approaching him, and the courtiers who frequented the palace, knowing he was displeased with them, no longer dared to go there. The emperor searched for Kogō; upon finally finding her, he lodged her well out of sight. He had her come to him every night; in time, she bore him the princess later known as Bōmon-in. However, Kiyomori again learned what was going on. He seized Kogō, made her a nun, and banished her from the capital at the age of 22. This, it was rumored, destroyed the emperor's health, leading at last to his death. Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa had suffered a succession of blows, having lost Emperor Nijō, his eldest son, in the Eiman years (1165-66) and Emperor Rokujō (Note 19), his grandson (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 316-321). The historical fact that Kogō gave birth and entered the priesthood was confirmed by Hosokawa (1998, p. 118).

In this episode, the portrayal of the empress serves to contrast with the character or position of her father Kiyomori, and Kiyomori's wrongdoing is emphasized. When the empress pitied the emperor's sadness, she sent him Kogō to console him. However, Kiyomori is represented as a man who wished to become the grandfather of the emperor and did not want anyone to stop his plan. In addition to the above representation of female characters and Kiyomori, the gentle personality of the emperor is also used to emphasize Kiyomori's wrongdoing: the emperor, who was 21 years old, is represented as suffering from Kiyomori's oppression, eventually dying as a result.

## **② Concubine**

### **Gion'nonnyōgo 祇園女御 (the Gion consort)**

In the episode Gion'nonnyōgo, a concubine is given the title of the episode. However, Gion'nonnyōgo is not the main character in the episode. Portrayed as a beautiful gentlewoman who lived in the Gion district, below the Eastern Hills, Gion'nonnyōgo was favored by Cloistered Emperor Shirakawa 白河天皇 (1053-1129) (Note 20), who used to visit her frequently. Once, when he was on his way to her home, escorted by one or two privy gentlemen and a few of his guards, night had fallen, it was too dark to see anything, and it was raining. There was a chapel near this gentlewoman's house, and there appeared next to this chapel some sort of creature. It was shining: the creature's head glittered and gleamed as though it had sprouted silver needles. It had its two hands lifted high, one seeming to hold a mallet and the other something that gave off light. The sovereign and escort together cried out in fear and surprise. From among the escorts, the emperor summoned Taira no-Tadamori (hereinafter, Tadamori) (Note 21), who was still a junior member of his guard at that time; he asked Tadamori to shoot the creature. Although Tadamori dutifully started toward it, he began thinking that he did not want to shoot

it and would kill it using his sword, reasoning that it did not look so powerful and was probably just a fox or a badger. So he kept going. The light flared and dimmed two or three times. Tadamori grasped the creature strongly. “What’s going on?” an agitated voice cried. It was no monster, but a man. He was a monk of about 60 years old, and he was in charge of the chapel. He had been on his way to replenish the lamps on the altar, with a jug of oil in one hand and, in the other, a lamp in an earthen dish. It was raining, so to avoid getting wet he had tied wheat straw into a bundle to wear on his head as a hat. The straw stalks gleamed like silver needles in the light of the flame. Now they understood everything. “Why, it would have been just awful if he had shot or stabbed the fellow,” the emperor proclaimed. Tadamori had shown superb judgment, and he was granted Gion’nonyoōgo. However, at that time, she was already pregnant, and she later gave birth to a son (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 335-345).

The text portrays neither the attitude nor the character of Gion’nonyoōgo and nor her opinion of being given to Tadamori, meaning neither her self-representation nor her autonomy is apparent. Accordingly, it could be argued that demonstrating Tadamori’s pedigree was more important than the portrayal of Gion’nonyoōgo, especially as a sign that Kiyomori’s success was the result not only of his ability but also of the blood he shared with Cloistered Emperor Shirakawa.

### ③ Shirabyōshi 白拍子

**Giō** 祇王

**Ginyo** 祇女

**Toji** 刀自

**Hotoke Gozen** 仏御前

In the episode “Giō,” four female *shirabyōshi* dancers are portrayed: Giō, Ginyo (According to some books, this name was pronounced Gijo; see, for example, Ozaki vol.1, 2015, p. 10; Wakita, 2001, p. 135), Toji, and Hotoke Gozen. The story begins with the description of the position that Giō and her sister Ginyo, daughters of the dancer Toji, gained because of Kiyomori’s relation with Giō. Giō, the elder, was Kiyomori’s favorite, so people prized Ginyo as well. Although many envied Giō for this position, about three years later, a 16-year-old *shirabyōshi* called Hotoke Gozen (hereinafter, Hotoke) came to the capital and became famous. But because she had not been called even once by the Lord Kiyomori, she decided to visit Kiyomori’s residence. When Kiyomori was told about Hotoke’s sudden visit, he decided to banish her. From his viewpoint, Hotoke had no business appearing in Giō’s presence. However, Giō sympathized with Hotoke and begged Kiyomori to let her return. Kiyomori allowed Hotoke back and allowed her to sing and dance. Hotoke was a true beauty, and as soon as she had finished her dance, Kiyomori decided to keep her nearby, banishing Giō instead. This shocked Giō, who thereafter stayed home and did not respond to anybody’s messages. The following spring, Kiyomori amplified her pain by sending after her to come and play for Hotoke’s amusement. His intention in asking her was to cheer Hotoke up by singing her some songs and dancing for her. Giō did not even reply. When he later repeated his request, Toji, Giō’s mother, afraid of what might come next, begged her daughter to go. Although Giō wanted never to see Kiyomori again, her mother told her,

You simply cannot live in this land and safely ignore Kiyomori’s wishes. The troubles that crop up between men and women are nothing new ... Ignoring his summons could possibly cost you your life. Or, he will only expel you from the capital. You are young; you and your sister, and you will get on well enough out there among the rocks and trees. Your poor old mother will be expelled, too, though, and for her it is misery just to imagine life out in the wilds. Oh, please allow my life to end in the city! Then I will know you are filial in this life and the next! (Tyler et al., 2014, p. 21).

Giō could not bring herself to disappoint her mother, and she set out with tears of pathetic distress. Because going alone would have been too painful, Ginyo went with her. Their party of four, including two other dancers, reached Nishi-Hachijō in one carriage. She was led not to her usual seat but to a seat far from the place of honor, and she said to herself, “I have done nothing wrong, yet I find myself not merely rejected but seated ignominiously low” (Tyler et al., 2014, p. 21). She pressed a sleeve to her eyes to hide her tears, but they still trickled through. Hotoke noticed, and pitied her. Finally, Toji and her two daughters decided to become nuns. They moved to live in a brushwood hut in a distant village. One night, they heard a knock and thought that a demon had come to them. But it was Hotoke, who sympathized with Giō and remembered that she had once been generous to her. She decided to reject Kiyomori’s oppression and escape from him, joining Giō and her family to also become a nun (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 24-25).

This episode indicated that Giō faced three constraints: the need to obey Kiyomori as a resident in the country,

restrictions on gender relations as a woman, and her filial obligation to her mother. It is also important to note that this story begins with the following criticism of Kiyomori: “Lord Kiyomori, who held in his hands the world within the four seas, dismissed censure, ignored mockery, and indulged every odd whim.” (Tyler et al., 2014, p. 15) It is worth noting the decision of the Kakuichi-bon edition to allocate so much space to talking about the Giō family’s tragedy at the hands of Kiyomori, an extremely reckless and unjust person who caused great ordeal, preventing Giō’s family from escaping his oppression until they took refuge in the temple.

#### ④ Women who prayed that the next life bring Shigehira rebirth in paradise

##### **Dairinyōbō (内裏女房) (The Gentlewoman at the Palace)**

In *The Tale of the Heike*, there are many episodes related to Shigehira in which his character unfolds through his encounters with different female characters. This section will focus on two episodes corresponding to two female characters: Dairinyōbō (The Gentlewoman at the Palace) and Senju-no-mae. “The Gentlewoman at the Palace” begins with a depiction of the shameful and miserable state of Taira no-Kiyomori’s fifth son Taira no-Shigehira, who was captured alive in retribution for his sins of destroying and burning the temples of Nara. The episode’s second half depicts the pitiful farewell scene between Shigehira and his mistress Dairinyōbō, Taira no-Chikanori’s daughter and a dazzling beauty. The story depicts a sad encounter between her and Shigehira before his execution. Later, when she learns that Shigehira has been executed, she cuts her hair and becomes a nun, praying for Shigehira in the afterlife (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 524-529). However, it would be difficult to conclude that Dairinyōbō is this episode’s main character.

##### **Senju-no-mae (千手前)**

Again, despite the title, the character of Senju-no-mae is not the main character of the episode. Shigehira, who was caught alive, wished to become a priest, but he was not allowed to because he had burned down the temples of Nara. However, before his execution, Shigehira was made comfortable by the care of Senju-no-mae, who was sent to him by Yoritomo (Note 22) one evening to hold a party to console him. Senju-no-mae served Shigehira in his bath, played the biwa (Japanese lute) and sang for him. When Shigehira was executed, Senju-no-mae also clothed herself in black and prayed for him in the afterlife (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 541-547). Thus, it could be argued that Senju-no-mae represented a woman who played a role in calming the heart of Shigehira before his execution and prayed only that the next life bring him rebirth in paradise after the execution, rather than being portrayed as an individual as in the case of Dairinyōbō.

Notably, this episode presents Yoritomo differently to Heike members, portraying him as a gentleman keen to comfort his enemy to the utmost degree before his execution.

#### ⑤ Women with a broken heart due to losing their love

##### **Kozaishō 小宰相**

In the episode “Kozaishō Drowns,” the warrior Michimori dies in the Battle of Ichinotani (1184), sending his wife Kozaishō into shock. She was pregnant, and she was advised to become a nun and pray for the departed to reach enlightenment. However, she could not bear the grief, and she drowned herself instead (Tyler et al., 2014, p. 513).

Kozaishō was the daughter of Lord Norikata and the gentlewoman in the service of Princess Shōseimon-in (Tyler et al., 2014, p. 515). Kozaishō was the beauty of the palace. She met Michimori when she was sixteen when she went to view the blossoms at Hosshōji Temple. Michimori fell in love with her and passed her waka poems and love letters, but she accepted none of them, not replying to him for three years. Then, Michimori sent her what he meant to be the last letter. Kozaishō thrust the letter into her waistband and continued to the palace. There, the letter slipped out in front of the court lady, who picked it up and hid it in her sleeve. The court lady already knew that Michimori had been courting Kozaishō. After the court lady opened and read the letter, she told Kozaishō, “My dear, take care. Those excessively hard of heart only bring suffering on themselves.... He must have an answer” (Tyler et al., 2014, p. 516). Princess Shōseimon-in called for ink stone and wrote a reply for Kozaishō herself. Michimori was overjoyed to receive an answer. He made Kozaishō his wife, and they loved each other deeply. In 1184, Yoshitsune and Noriyori, Minamoto no-Yoritomo’s younger brothers, led a large army and approached Fukuhara. Before the battle, Michimori summoned his wife from the offshore fleet and said, “I feel like I’m going to die in tomorrow’s battle. What would you do if I died?” (Tyler et al., 2014, p. 511). She did not think this would happen because war was so commonplace, and she told him that she was pregnant. However, the battle ended in a resounding defeat of the Heike clan, and many people from the Heike, including Michimori, were killed. When she heard that Michimori had been killed, Kozaishō decided to drown herself. Her nanny tried to convince her, “You should give birth and raise a baby and live as a nun.” Instead, Kozaishō ended her own life.

Her nanny subsequently became a nun to pray for Michimori and Kozaishō's afterlives. People were impressed when wives became nuns after their husbands' death. However, it was even more unusual that wives followed their husbands in the manner of Kozaishō (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 511-517).

### Yokobue 横笛

The episode "Yokobue" contrasts with the tragedy of the broken heart of Kozaishō. Yokobue is a female character who represents the issue of religious salvation along with the sadness of a young woman whose love has been quashed because of her social status. Yokobue was in the service of Tokuko. Saitō Takiguchi Tokiyori, the son of Saitō Mochimori, once served in Koremori's household. When he was thirteen, he moved to the palace to join the corps of Takiguchi guards, and there he met Yokobue. When he saw her, they fell in love. However, Tokiyori's father became angry when he learned that his son was in love with a girl from a low social class like Yokobue. His father advised him that he should become the son-in-law of a gentleman who would set him up well in life. As for Tokiyori, he suffered between his love and obedience to his father. When he was nineteen, he decided to become a monk. When Yokobue learned that he had decided to become a monk without telling her, she was shocked and decided to find him to inform him just what she thought of him. She left the city and wandered off toward Saga (Note 23). At last, from a tumbledown monk's lodge, she heard Tokiyori's voice. She delivered him a message telling him that she had come to see him one last time. However, he decided not to meet her, and she had to leave without meeting him, leading her into a deep sorrow that would require her to follow him to Hokkeiji Temple in Nara (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 547-553).

## 6. Gender Representation in *The Tale of the Heike*

This section builds on the previous section's function-based classification system to focus on some of the most important female characters in *The Tale of the Heike*. Of the thirteen female characters discussed in the episodes named after them, nine directly relate to the character of Kiyomori. Although Yokobue's episode is a story of a woman who lost her love, it also describes the shameful scene of Shigehira's capture, and the story of Kozaishō, who lost her love due to the conflict between the Genji and the Heike. There is a repetition, either apparent or implied, to emphasize the image of the evil Kiyomori, the crime of burning temples, and the atrocity of war, a course of events that takes listeners back to the introduction of the biography that criticizes the arrogance of the Heike. As such, gender representation is analyzed by focusing on some of the female characters most associated with Kiyomori, the head of the Heike clan, given their pivotal position in terms of the space that they occupy.

Tokuko is represented as a chess piece without independence because of the strategic role as kokubo assigned to her by her father. Therefore, it could be argued that the tragedy represented in Book One of *The Empress of Two Sovereigns*, who lost her independence because of her father, may present a reflection to Tokuko's story to emphasize her father Kiyomori's wrongdoing.

This has led some scholars (e.g., Nagai, 1979) to criticize Tokuko as a negative character who acted on her father's orders. Nonetheless, when the people of her clan jump in the water and commit suicide after Heike's defeat, she does not jump in. Despite having many chances to die, she never does. Thus, Tokuko played an important role for her clan (Hosokawa, 1998, p. 142) and actively participated in political judgments before and after the fall of the Heike (Fukutō, 2013, pp. 74-88). However, *The Tale of the Heike* is a literary work, meaning that, although it includes many facts, there are many cases where fiction is used to develop the plot.

As for Gion'nonnyōgo, although there is no apparent role for her in *The Tale of the Heike*, highlighting her character and positioning her as Kiyomori's mother is significant. Regarding Kiyomori's mother, there are no reliable historical materials available. However, "Imakagami" attributes the success of the Taira family to this relationship with Gion'nonnyōgo (Gomi, 1999; p. 8). There is also a strong theory that this is true based on Kiyomori's unusual promotion (Fukutō, 2013, p. 173). There is also a theory that Kiyomori is the son of Tadamori and the younger sister of Gion'nonnyōgo, and that Kiyomori grew up under the protection of Gion'nonnyōgo after the death of his mother (Gomi, 1999; p. 10). Although Kiyomori's promotion is a mystery considering the circumstances at that time, some scholars have suggested that his promotion was due to being an illegitimate child of the Cloistered Emperor Shirakawa (Takahashi, 2007). Although the truth of this is unclear, there is no doubt that this discourse was used to stereotype Kiyomori. According to Gomi, being an illegitimate child often had negative effects during this time (1999; p. 7).

Meanwhile, it is evident that the *shirabyōshi* presented in the episode "Giō" represented the most distinguished characters in terms of providing female models who rejected Kiyomori's domination. Thus, the gender representation of the *shirabyōshi* dancers will be analyzed through the characters of Giō, Ginyo, and Hotoke (1998) points out that role of the *shirabyōshi* was not only limited to entertainment, but also Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa collected information about the society through *shirabyōshi*. In addition, Giō and Hotoke, who



left Kiyomori's possession, were finally honored by being recorded in the Chokodo Temple death register book of the Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa after their death. It is pointed out that the superiority of Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa as a prince of the heavens against Kiyomori's character is also shown by the guaranteeing of their Ōjō (Note 24) by Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa-in (Hosokawa, 1998, p. 63). However *The Tale of the Heike* did not mention the relationship of the four *shirabyōshi* dancers with the Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa.

According to Jien, performers such as *shirabyōshi*, Miko (shrine maidens), and sarugaku (monkey music) (Note 25) performed at Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa's palace, and Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa collected information about the popular world through these performers (Brown et al., 1979, p. 177). According to Hosokawa, it could be said that Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa was a patron of the *shirabyōshi* included in the Giō episode (Hosokawa, 1998, p. 63). Moreover, as mentioned after their death, the four *shirabyōshi* were recorded in the Chokodo Temple registry that belongs to Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa. It could be assumed that some of the *shirabyōshi*, including Giō and Hotoke, performed an intelligence-gathering role. Thus, as previously discussed, the presentation of Giō and Hotoke might have been intended for a purpose other than their gender representation, namely, to indicate the atrocities of Kiyomori, who was in conflict with Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa. Thus, it could be argued that the portrayal of *shirabyōshi* in *The Tale of the Heike* demonstrated their usefulness for stirring public sentiment against Kiyomori.

Hence, it is confirmed that this relationship between the four *shirabyōshi* and the Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa that *The Tale of the Heike* kept silent about is important for re-evaluating Kiyomori's relationship with the four *shirabyōshi* portrayed in *The Tale of the Heike*, which cannot be isolated from Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa's relationship with Kiyomori on the one hand and the relationship between the four *shirabyōshi* and Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa on the other hand. Although, this triangular relationship disappears in the episode of Giō 祇王, it is clear in the episode of Kogō 小督, which portrays how Kiyomori's cruelty caused the death of the young Emperor Takakura, whose death causes the grief of Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa. The next section considers the development of the relationship between the Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa and Kiyomori that influenced the gender representation of *The Tale of the Heike* in terms of the actual historical context.

### 7. Comparing the Character of Kiyomori in *The Tale of the Heike* with Historical Records

It has been established that, among the story's various characters, those persons most involved in the development of *The Tale of the Heike* are Taira no-Kiyomori, Taira no shigehira, Yoshinaka Kiso, and Minamoto no-Yoshitsune (Yamada, 1933). However, female characters also played a pivotal role, shaping and presenting every male figure to the audience (e.g., Kiyomori and Shigehira). Kiyomori holds the most important position in *The Tale of the Heike*; without him, the story could not have been established. If we consider the division of *The Tale of the Heike* into three parts in accordance with Sugimoto Keizaburō (Sugimoto, 1985, p. 34), it is apparent that Kiyomori is the main character in the episodes included in the first half of the tale, that is, the first six of the twelve volumes of the Kakuichi-bon edition.

Notably, the story begins with the following:

The arrogant do not long endure...spurned the governance established by their lords of old, by sovereigns past, sought pleasure and ignored all warnings, blind to ruin threatening the realm, deaf to the suffering peoples cries. So it was annihilation...each stood out in pride that man among us in the recent past: the novice monk of Rokuhara, former chancellor, his lordship Taira no-Kiyomori, tales of whose deeds and ways surpass the imagination, exceed all that the tongue can tell. (Tyler et al., 2014, pp. 3-4).

Thus, the audience is already prepared to see how bad Kiyomori is, a person who is deceived by his own strength and is ruthless towards the weak. This is reiterated in every episode of *The Tale of the Heike* that Kiyomori appears in, including the women's episodes addressed in this research.

Kiyomori is also portrayed in *The Tale of the Heike* as a person who burnt down the Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji temples, oppressed women, and ultimately suffered from a fever as retribution, for a long time, has formed the image of Kiyomori as *The Tale of the Heike* has been disseminated. However, the image of Kiyomori has been reconsidered, with studies seeking to clarify Kiyomori's political and social background, leading to the accumulation of knowledge about his real identity.

The reality of Kiyomori's character has been of interest to many scholars (e.g., Gomi, 1999; Takahashi, 2007; Higuchi, 2011; Motoki, 2012; Fukutō, 2013). Building on these studies and from historical records, this section considers the development of Kiyomori's image.

Higuchi Daisuke analyzed the representation of Kiyomori and its transition from various angles assumed that there were exaggerations in the portrayal of Kiyomori's character such that the development of Kiyomori's power and the development of the relationship between Kiyomori and the emperor, on the one hand, and the relationship between the Genji and the Heike, on the other hand, were not thoroughly covered in *The Tale of the Heike* (Higuchi, 2011).

Kiyomori belonged to Ise Heishi, which was established by Sadamori and his son Korehira, who established a base in Ise (Motoki, 2007, p. 22). Later, Masamori had made the Ise-Heishi military name known to the world. In 1097, Masamori donated his territories in Iga Province to Rokujo in mourning for Cloistered Emperor Shirakawa's beloved daughter, Ikuhomonin 郁芳門院, who had died the previous year. He subsequently grew close to the Cloistered Emperor Shirakawa. Masamori had repeated successes as a samurai and rapidly achieved promotion. His son, Tadamori, built on the foundation laid by his father and became closely linked to the Imperial Court. Tadamori was just one step away from becoming a court noble, completely breaking away from the samurai class (Fukutō, 2013, pp. 11-12).

Taira no Sadamori	Korehira	Masanori	Masahira	Masamori	Tadamori	Kiyomori
→	→	→	→	→	→	→

Figure 2. Kiyomori and his ancestors (Fukutō, 2013, 11)

Meanwhile, Kiyomori was born on January 18, 1118 (Gomi, 1999, p. 2) and achieved unprecedentedly rapid promotion. As mentioned, this has been linked to his being the illegitimate son of Cloistered Emperor Shirakawa. Although Motoki has argued that there are cases in which the sons of In no Kinshin 院近臣 families (the retired Emperor's courtier) have been promoted faster than Kiyomori, his argument assumes that to become a minister, it was necessary to have a close relationship with the emperor; in the case of Kiyomori, he was appointed to the Naidaijin (i.e., inner ministry) and Daijo-daijin (Chancellor of the Realm) before becoming a maternal relative of the emperor, he suggested that the theory that he was an illegitimate child holds true (Motoki, 2007, pp. 21-22; Fukutō, 2013, p. 14).

However, In 1129, at the age of 12, Kiyomori was conferred a peerage and became Sa hyō no suke 佐兵衛之 (official under the Ritsuryō (Note 26) system). Sa hyō no suke was a government post usually given to children of high-ranking aristocrats, and it was considered an honor for the children of Taifu 大夫 (Note 27) to be appointed. At that time, his father, Tadamori, was still a modest governor of Bizen Province (Junior Fourth Rank), meaning there is no doubt that this appointment was an exceptional honor for Kiyomori (Motoki, 2007, p. 24; Fukutō, 2013, pp. 15-18). Notably, Kiyomori's repeated military successes helped him rise to many high positions.

In 1174, Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa and Kenshunmon-in visited Itsukushima Shrine together with Kiyomori and other members of the Taira clan. Until this time, the relationship between Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa and Kiyomori was good, albeit with some ups and downs. However, after the death of Kenshunmonin, who connected Kiyomori and Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa in 1176, the relationship between them began to deteriorate rapidly. The following year, there was an incident that became the basis for the "Shishigatani Incident," which is the most famous of several conspiracies and uprisings against Kiyomori and which affected the relationship between Kiyomori and Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa, such that Kiyomori punished Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa's vassals all at once. However, after 1179, the relationship between the Emperor and Kiyomori worsened until, in the third year of the Jisho coup, Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa was confined in Toba-dono (Fukutō, 2013, p. 18).

The following year, Kiyomori's daughter Tokuko, who was married to Emperor Takakura, gave birth to Emperor Antoku, and the Takakura cloistered government began. However, when Prince Mochihito's Rebellion broke out in May of the same year, Minamoto no-Yoritomo raised an army in Izu in August. This was followed by a succession of armies raised in various places that engaged in a nationwide civil war. During this time, Kiyomori moved the capital to Fukuhara with Antoku, Emperor Takakura, and Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa, but dissatisfaction continued, not only among the aristocrats but also within the Taira clan because of the insufficient preparations. The capital was returned to Kyoto at the end of November due to the deterioration of Takakura's illness, the crushing defeat of the pursuit army in the Battle of Fujikawa, and the spread of the rebellion to Mino and Omi in the suburbs of Kyoto (Fukutō, 2013, p. 19). Subsequently, the Taira clan became busy addressing the civil war, dispatching a hunting force to Omi to suppress the rebellion at the beginning of December, with the

hunting army led by Shigemori headed to suppress Nanto at the end of the year. Kofuku-ji Temple and most of Todai-ji Temple were burned down by burning arrows, which decisively damaged the reputation of the Taira clan and was followed by Kiyomori's death the following year (Fukutō, 2013, pp. 18-19).

Notably, the development of Kiyomori according to the diaries of aristocrats who lived in the same era as Kiyomori and non-war tales suggest that the evaluation of Kiyomori by the nobility changed greatly in the last two years of his life due to the 1179 coup and the transfer of the capital to Fukuhara. Regarding his standing as a powerful politician, the real image of him is completely different, indicating a considerable gap from the image in *The Tale of the Heike* (Higuchi, 2011, p. 17; Fukutō, 2013, pp. 19-31).

Meanwhile, a collection of tales compiled in the middle of the thirteenth century, the *Jikkunshō* 十訓抄, describes many situations in his later life that portray him as a kind and tolerant person. For example, during one cold winter, he let the young attendants who served him sleep under the hem of his clothes. Even the lowest classes were treated by him like a normal person in front of his family and acquaintances. For example, in 1168, Fujiwara Kanezane wrote about Kiyomori, then suffering pinwheel, as follows: "Kiyomori's illness is a big deal in the world. If this man dies, [this country] will lose momentum and decline." He shows no ill feelings towards Kiyomori and is concerned only about the political situation becoming unstable after his death, demonstrating just how much these upper-class aristocrats relied on Kiyomori (Fukutō, 2013, p. 21).

Other writings praised his wisdom, sensibility, and firmness (Higuchi, 2011, pp. 19-22). However, Kanezane also wrote that Kiyomori completely lost his popularity due to transferring of the capital, ultimately leading to his abandonment by the public (Fukutō, 2013, p. 21).

Nonetheless, artistic exaggerations portraying the atrocities of Kiyomori in *The Tale of the Heike* have led to the concealment of a large proportion of the historical facts, affecting the image of women in the tale, as discussed in the previous section. The prologue and epilogue for every female character related to Kiyomori gave evidence of his evil deeds, with even the female character episodes with no direct relationship with Kiyomori emphasizing the vilification of the rule of the Heike clan and their disrespect for people's feelings, suggesting that the female characters were assigned an important role in explicitly or implicitly portraying the ugliness of Kiyomori and evoking feelings of sympathy from the audience of listeners. For example, it is clear that *shirabyōshi*, in particular, had a great deal of space in this informational mission. Thus, the reality of gender representation cannot be separated from the reality of Kiyomori and the Heike.

Moreover, one characteristic of the medieval era of Japan was that it formed its own beauty via an emphasis on binary oppositions (Sugimoto, 1985, p. 69) a characteristic that also influenced the image of female characters in *The Tale of the Heike*. It subsequently becomes clear that although *The Tale of the Heike* is based on historical events, the content of the narrative does not necessarily match the historical events in every detail.

## 7. Results and Discussion

Many think that literature is just fiction. However, others consider literature a mirror of life that has the power to express social problems. Writers create stories to reflect human life and circumstances with creativity and imagination through story settings and words and actions that reflect the values and deficiencies of a given society. Literature is also a means of moving the reader from real life to thoughtful reflection. In reading historical stories such as those in *The Tale of the Heike*, the question of what life was like in the past comes to the reader's mind. For Ichiko, "Literature cannot be born in isolation from the society of the time" (1955, p. 25). By examining the historical background of the work, the content of the literary work becomes even deeper, and various facets and events in society can be better understood. George Lukács (1885-1971), one of the developers of Marxist sociology, recognized that analysis of literary devices such as symbols and images absolutely depicts class struggle in a given environment, meaning that literary texts reflect and reveal social consciousness. Introduced as the "reflection theory," this idea presupposes that sociologists also collect small pieces of the whole picture that reflect society based on literature, with the corpus of literature considered a reflection of the economics, family relationships, attitudes, religions, and social classes that constitute society's components (Albrecht, 1954).

As mentioned, *The Tale of the Heike* is a representative work of Japanese medieval literature and a cultural phenomenon of the era, having an impact that has extended into Japanese society to this day. However, after analyzing the highlighted female characters as well as the social and historical background context, it was found that each female character highlighted in *The Tale of the Heike* is bound up in relationships that the author or narrator does not explicitly reveal. Therefore, it could be argued that, when analyzing the gender representations or social problems embedded in literature, it is necessary to analyze not only the text but also the silent symbols of behavior, the role of representation, human relations in the era when the work was written, the historical

background and transition of era to enable readers to see the events of the era through the lens of that era rather than through the lens of the current era. According to Omar, “By examining the historical background of the work, in fact, the content of the literary work becomes even deeper, and various facets and events in society can be better understood” (2022, pp. 184-185). In other words, it is not possible to understand a cultural phenomenon such as *The Tale of the Heike* in isolation from its social and historical context surroundings. It is important to recognize what this text produced in audiences of its time, that is, what the text or the author tried to theorize and tried to introduce into discourse, what the text ultimately theorized and introduced into discourse, and how human relations shaped the apparent heroes and the hidden heroes. These matters constitute the “text environment.”

Moreover, understanding *The Tale of the Heike* requires understanding the political situations during last years of the Heian era 平安時代 (794-1185) and the early Kamakura era. 鎌倉時代 (1185-1333). It is impossible to understand gender representation in *The Tale of the Heike*, which mainly relates to the Kiyomori character, without deeply understanding the development of Kiyomori’s power in the context of the relationship between the Genji Clan and the Heike Clan or in the context of the relationship between Kiyomori and the emperor. Thus, this study applied both semiotic analysis and socio-historical analysis to analyze patterns of relationships in a more conscious manner.

*The Tale of the Heike* addresses a very important turning point in Japanese history that impacted not only political history but also social history, with society moving from the so-called ancient era with its aristocratic culture to the so-called medieval era with its samurai culture. Women had a prominent role in this, playing a significant role in political and social life in medieval Japan. The historical book *Gukanshō*, which was completed around 1220, portrayed medieval women as lively and active (Jien, 2021). For example, depictions of the brave nuns with long swords reflected the new medieval woman, as also portrayed in the *Ryōjin Hishō* (梁塵秘抄) (Note 28), an anthology of *imayō* 今様 (Note 29) songs (Ueki, 2014, p. 184-187). Moreover, 12th-century aristocratic women did more than just marry and become wives. Beyond the Heike clan, the women of this period were active as court ladies and often displayed political power (Fukutō, 2013, p. 3). However, such female characters, and more generally the spirit of the new medieval woman, are not captured by *The Tale of the Heike*. Thus, the unique strong female knight character of Tomoe is embedded in the episode “The Death of Kiso”; she is not given her own separate episode. Nonetheless, she is described in *The Tale of the Heike* as an archer of rare strength and a powerful warrior on foot or on horseback who could ride the wildest horse down the steepest slope and could stand alone in a battle against a thousand people. In battle, Lord Kiso clad her in the finest armor, equipped her with a great sword and a mighty bow, and ordered her to charge the opposing army (Tyler et al., 2014, p. 463).

As for Kiyomori, his source of power was not only the strength of the Heike clan: Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa was fond of Taira no-Shigeko (Kiyomori’s sister-in-law and the mother of Emperor Takakura Kiyomori’s son-in-law) and Kiyomori’s daughter Taira no-Tokuko, who was the wife of Emperor Takakura and later the father of Emperor Antoku, who were among the greatest sources of support for Kiyomori (Jien, 2021, p. 270).

Gender representation in *The Tale of the Heike* cannot be separated from the representation of Kiyomori by powerful political actors at that time, which was designed to purposefully and strategically shape mass opinion. These political actors had a vested interest in fabricating consent around representations that would support their cause and provide legitimacy for it. These groups attempted to impose representations via the content and form of public communication, including the gender representation used in that communication (e.g., discrimination against shirabyoshi and discrimination against any woman who impeded the strategic role of mother of the realm). Upon examination of the historical period, it becomes evident that the narrative processes of *The Tale of the Heike* correspond to the role of the media in modern times. The influence of power shapes the process of telling *The Tale of the Heike*, and the representation of women, who appear weak and without independence, cannot be asserted as an accurate expression of gender reality. On the contrary, it seems that representations of these female characters were designed to win sympathy from the audience, suggesting women were used as weapons, even in medieval times. Moreover, the relationship between these female characters and the power of Kiyomori was portrayed to be inverse. Thus, the closer a female character’s position to the ruler, the more they lost their autonomy to represent themselves. This explains why there is no separate episode title for Tomoe Jozen in *The Tale of the Heike*, despite her uniqueness. Furthermore, her female heroism is not addressed in detail. Nor are there stories for women who had prominent political roles, such as Kiyomori’s stepmother Ike no-Zenni 池禅尼 (Fujiwara no-Muneko), who preserved Minamoto no-Yoritomo’s life after the death of his father, the head of the Genji clan, and also supported Kiyomori or Kiyomori’s wife Taira no Tokiko 平時子 (Note 30), who

supported Kiyomori through her relationship with Taira no-Shigeko 平滋子 (Note 31), the Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa's wife and Emperor Takakura's mother. Nor was Hōjō Masako (1156-1225) included. Hōjō Masako was a unique character who, as a strong young woman, decided to marry Yoritomo despite her father's opposition and later had a significant political role in supporting the Kamakura shogunate, becoming a "nun shogun." However, the diversity of these female figures is not reflected in *The Tale of the Heike*, confirming the perspective of Kunio Yanagita that the "narrative" was produced before the work was recorded in writing (Sugimoto; 1985, p. 20).

Therefore, it could be said that despite highlighting certain social problems for women, including class discrimination in the case of the Yokobue love story, *The Tale of the Heike* used power and gender in binary opposition between the center and the periphery to conduct political discourse rather than reflect the actual gender situation. More concretely, the story portrayed a stereotyped Kiyomori character, incorporated criticism of the disadvantages of the Heike clan regime to emphasize the need to get rid of this political regime, focused on the disadvantages of war, and depicted cruel scenes of separation through the episodes featuring Kozaishō and Tokuko that appear in the Initiates' Book. Thus, it could not be said that these highlighted female figures reflect a complete or objective picture of gender representation at that time. Furthermore, it seems that *The Tale of the Heike* was developed between not only the narrators and the listeners but also via a trigonometric relationship between (1) the narrator (through their lens and motivation), (2) power dynamics (Emperor vs. Heike; Heike vs. Genji; Heike vs. Buddhism), and (3) the audience of listeners.

## 8. Conclusion

Applying semiotic analysis and socio-historical analysis, this study has discussed the societal positions in Japan depicted in *The Tale of the Heike* and analyzed the gender representation of highlighted female characters. Subsequently, the paper has analyzed the historical and social background responsible for the gender representations of *The Tale of the Heike's* female characters.

This led to the conclusion that, when analyzing gender representations or social problems embedded in literary texts, it is necessary to analyze not only the text but also the silent symbols of behavior, the role of representation, human relations in the era when the work was written, and the historical background and transition of era to enable us to see the events of the era through the lens of that era rather than through the lens of our current era.

The gender representation of female characters, especially the *shirabyōshi* characters, had a deep political role. It also was found that Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa used many women in his strategy for fighting the Heike.

Furthermore, binary opposition and gender representation in *The Tale of the Heike* may have been used to promote the Heike clan stereotypes, suggesting mechanisms similar to those observed in present-day media. Accordingly, *The Tale of the Heike* should be considered to have been formed and developed not only between the narrators and the listeners but also in terms of a trigonometric relationship between (1) the narrator (through their lens and with his motivation), (2) power dynamics (Emperor vs. Heike, Heike vs. Genji, and Heike vs. Buddhism), and (3) the audience of listeners.

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## Notes

Note 1. *The Tale of the Heike* 平家物語 is an epic account of the struggle between the Taira (Heike) clan and the Minamoto (Genji) clan for control of Japan at the end of the 12th century.

Note 2. *Shirabyōshi* were Japanese female entertainers that appeared at the end of the Heian period and disappeared in the first half of the Kamakura period, who sang songs and performed dances. The word *shirabyōshi* can also refer to these songs and dances. Notably, *Shirabyōshi* danced dressed as men (Wakita, 2001, p. 153; Hosokawa, 1998, p. 56).

Note 3. A Japanese form of short poetry similar to haiku in construction.

Note 4. A type of short-form traditional Japanese poetry.

Note 5. A series of Japanese prose narratives written between the Muromachi period (1336-1573) and the

beginning of the Edo period (1603-1867).

Note 6. There is a statue of Kiso Yoshinaka and Tomoe Gozen in Kiso Town, Nagano Prefecture, and a pine tree (or Kiso Throw) that was once called “Koma Kake no Matsu” in Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture. It is said that Tomoe Gozen threw Kiso Yoshinaka, and the horse on which Yoshinaka was riding was caught in this pine tree. Kiso no-Yoshinaka 木曾 義仲(1154-1184) was a member of the Minamoto clan (i.e., Genji), and Minamoto no-Yoritomo was his cousin and rival during the Genpei War between the Minamoto and the Taira clans (Watson, et al., H., 2006, p. 72; Tyler et al., 2014, p. xlv ).

Note 7. The military leader in Japan’s late Heian period who established the first samurai-dominated administrative government in the country’s history.

Note 8. Also known as “lute priests,” these individuals appeared in the Nara and Heian period. They were traveling performers who earned their income by reciting vocal literature to the accompaniment of *biwa* music. *Biwa hōshi* were mostly blind (Hiromi, 2009).

Note 9. A collection of essays written by the Japanese monk Kinko between 1330 and 1332. It is considered one of the most outstanding works of medieval Japanese literature and one of the three most notable representative works of the *zuihitsu* genre, along with The Pillow Book and Hōjōki (Carter, 2014).

Note 10. The 82nd Japanese emperor.

Note 11. A member of the Fujiwara clan of powerful aristocrats. He was poet, historian and Buddhist monk.

Note 12. One of the sons of Kiyomori and one of the Taira Clan’s chief commanders during the Heian period. He fought in various places and killed the monks of the Tōdai-ji monastery and Kofukuji Temple by burning the southern capital.

Note 13. The translation of the name is quoted from Tyler et al. (2014).

Note 14. The 76th emperor of Japan.

Note 15. The 78th emperor of Japan.

Note 16. The 81st emperor of Japan, who died during the climactic sea Battle of Dan-no-ura in April 1185. Antoku’s grandmother Taira no-Tokiko took him and plunged with him into the water of the Shimonoseki Straits, drowning the emperor rather than allowing him to be captured by the Genji clan.

Note 17. The 80th emperor of Japan.

Note 18. A traditional Japanese musical instrument.

Note 19. It is said that he was pressured by the Taira clan to abdicate in favor of his uncle, who became Emperor Takakura. In 1168, Takakura succeeded Rokujō on the Chrysanthemum Throne. Because Rokujō died at the age of eleven, he had neither consorts nor children (Kitagawa et al., 1975).

Note 20. 72nd emperor of Japan.

Note 21. The head of the Taira clan, and the father of Taira no-Kiyomori.

Note 22. Minamoto no-Yoritomo 源 頼朝 (1147-1199) was the founder and the first shogun of the Kamakura shogunate of Japan, ruling from 1192 until 1199 at Kamakura, beginning the feudal age in Japan, which lasted until the mid-19th century. Yoritomo was the son of Minamoto no-Yoshitomo of the Genji clan. After establishing himself as the rightful heir of the Minamoto clan, he led his clan against the Taira clan (Heike), beginning the Genpei War in 1180. After five years of war, he finally defeated the Taira clan in the Battle of Dan-no-ura in 1185.

Note 23. A located on the island of Kyūshū.

Note 24. A term in Japanese Buddhism for rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha.

Note 25. A form of theatre that was popular in Japan between the 11th and 14th centuries.

Note 26. *Ritsuryō* is the historical law system based on the philosophies of Confucianism and Chinese Legalism in Japan.

Note 27. Under the original *Ritsuryō* system, this was a term used to refer to government officials who had a status second only to *kugyo*, that is, nobles of the fourth and fifth ranks (however, those who were appointed as councilors even at the fourth rank were excluded because they were *kugyo*).

Note 28. Collections of the Songs by Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127-1192).

Note 29. A form of Japanese songs meaning “modern style,” the term meant “modern popular song” at that time. Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa was fond of this kind of song. These songs were very popular at the end of the Heian period, but fell into disuse during the Kamakura period (Ueki, 2014, p. 10).

Note 30. Her Buddhist name is Nii no Ama 二位尼, which means “Nun of the Second Rank.”

Note 31. Her Buddhist name is Kenshunmonin.

## Appendix A

### Binary opposition and gender representation in *The Tale of the Heike*

Table A1. Analysis Matrix of Gender representation in *The Tale of the Heike*

<i>The Tale of the Heike</i> Classification of women		
Women given story titles	Function-based classification for female characters in <i>The Tale of the Heike</i>	Self-representation Independence of action
Giō		The empress of two sovereigns
<b>Book One</b> Nidai no Kisaki (the empress of two sovereigns)	① <b>Kokubo</b> (i.e., “the mother of the realm”)	Kenreimon-in
Aoi no mae		Aoi no mae
<b>Book Six</b> Kogō Gion’nonyōgo (the Gion consort)		Kogō
<b>Book nine</b> Kozaishō Drowns The Gentlewoman at the Palace (Dairinyōbō)	② <b>Concubine</b>	Gion’nonyōgo
		Giō
<b>Book Ten</b> Senju-no-mae	③ <b>Shirabyōshi</b>	Ginyo Toji Hotoke Gozen
Yokobue	④ <b>Women who prayed that the next life bring Shigehira rebirth in paradise</b>	Senju-no-mae Dairinyōbō
<b>Initiates’ Book</b> Kenreimon-in	⑤ <b>A woman with a broken heart due to losing their love</b>	Kozaishō Yokobue

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