

Sherry Huang
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Desire to Lose:

Sexual Arousal as Disempowering in Contemporary Japanese *Eromanga*

In the 2021 Japanese *eromanga* (エロ漫画, pornographic comics) *Sex in Confinement with an Incubus: Seductive Clitoral Torture that Brings a Holy Woman to Pleasure Depravity*, the power struggle between the female protagonist and the male succubus who abducts and rapes her manifest in a “battle” around a magical chastity belt she wears.¹ As a young nun, the girl Rose (ローゼ) in the manga has to wear a chastity belt. Despite the strong divine seal that protects the chastity belt, it breaks if (and only if) the person who wears it strongly desires to take it off. Since this special chastity belt in the manga only covers her vagina but not her clitoris, Rose and the succubus Mea’s (メア) power struggles soon develop into his constant stimulations of her clitoris which seek to drag her into the degenerate hell of desiring pleasures from vaginal sex. The first half of this manga depicts Rose’s struggle between a will to resist and feelings of sexual stimulations that she finds surprisingly arousing, which eventually leads her to secretly imagine the pleasures of an intercourse (figure 1).² After several unwanted orgasms, Rose is surprised and desperate to find that the seal on her chastity belt is broken: her body gives in and starts to desire more pleasures despite her attempts to fight it back. The succubus forces her to have intercourse with him, during which she helplessly finds the sensations to be “overly

¹ Rojione, *Inma danshi to kankin ecchi ~ saiin kuri seme de seijo kairaku ochi ~ 淫魔男子と監禁えっち ~ 催淫クリ責めで聖女快樂墮ち~ [Sex in Confinement with an Incubus: Seductive Clitoral Torture that Brings a Holy Woman to Pleasure Depravity]* (LUNACY, 2021).

² Rojione, 31.

pleasurable” (figure 2).³ In the end, Mea burns down the monastery that Rose originally belongs to (which gaslights her and forces her to seduce devils to capture them) asks Rose to be his lover, tells her that he would never let her go and promises Rose to “love you more than anyone else until the day you die.”⁴ Rose turns into a blush and accepts Mea’s kiss, while her internal monologue reads, “My body cannot not move. Oh, it’s the devil’s sweet whisper, I know.”⁵

In this manga, desiring sexual pleasure means to lose the game. Rape tears Rose apart into a body that automatically responds to sexual stimulations and a mind that cannot control how this body react sexually. According to interior logic in the manga, the fact that Rose orgasms from unwanted sexual stimulation and, more importantly, the fact that she ultimately develops a secret desire for the potential pleasures of vaginal sex translate into the body’s “submission” to sexual desire and pleasure. In addition, as the body “submits” in a way that goes against Rose’s own will, her mind also submits to her coerced relationship with her victimizer.

With the magical chastity belt that “betrays” Rose because of the desire she develops during unwanted orgasm, manga artist Rojine makes concrete a prevailing rationale in contemporary Japanese *eromanga* where a character’s sexual pleasure and sexual desire disadvantages and disempowers the character in question and position them in a more submissive role in their sexual relationship with other characters. If we follow Richard Dyer’s definition of pornography as a genre that aims at (and successfully brings) sexual arousal in the audience, then the depiction of sexual desire as disempowering is a counter-intuitive creative choice; and judging by the popularity of this technique among contemporary *eromanga*, it is also

³ Rojione, 40.

⁴ Rojione, 54.

⁵ Rojione, 55–56.

a successful one.⁶ This paper pays attention to a selection of works of *eromanga* in the genres of *chōkyō* (“training” 調教), *ryōjoku* (“humiliation” 凌辱) and *seishin hōkai* (“mental breakdown” 精神崩壊), genres where the correspondence between the portrayal of the intensity of sexual pleasure and desire on one hand and the power dynamics between characters on the other hand is most notable. I contend that these *eromanga* reveals an anxiety towards feelings of sexual arousal and sexual desire. However, rather than canceling out the sexual pleasure that *eromanga* seeks to arouse, the discomfiting anxiety, fear, shock and tension ignites more pleasure, as how Leo Bersani and Susanna Paasonen theorize.⁷

Most, if not all, *eromanga* that plays with one or a hybrid of the genres of *chōkyō*, *ryōjoku* and *seishin hōkai* depict sexual activities where there is a clear power disparity between the characters. Many of these works are fantasies about nonconsensual or barely consensual sex. The main part of the story is usually about a process of *chōkyō* (“training”) consisted of a series of unwanted sexual stimulations on the receiver of sexual “training” through which the character in question gradually transforms from resisting the sexual advances of the “trainer” to becoming submissive and even addicted to the sexual stimulations that the “trainer” provides.^{8,9} Shame and

⁶ Richard Dyer, “Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 30 (March 1985): 27–29.

⁷ Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011).

⁸ Nagayama Kaoru, *Ero manga sutadīzu: “kairaku sōchi” to shite no manga nyūmon エロマンガ・スタディーズ 「快樂装置」としての漫画入門*, Zōho (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2014), 218–19.

⁹ *Chōkyō* is originally a word for the training of animals (for instance, guide dogs or animals in the circus) and it is a derogatory term when used on humans. It has become a common term in Japanese sex culture, especially in BDSM circles. Although *chōkyō* is a recognizable tag in all kinds of pornography in Japan, the genre tropes changes from *eromanga* to video pornography to prose pornography. For a basic account of the history and features of the *chōkyō* genre in

humiliation are frequent elements in the process of *chōkyō*, and works that involve more extreme activities of sexual humiliation could be tagged as *ryōjoku*, a word that especially denotes sexual humiliation that involves violence.

In *eromanga* of the *chōkyō* or the *ryōjoku chōkyō* genre, what often marks the turning point of the victim's transformation into submission is the depiction of the victim's "mental breakdown." *Seishin hōkai* ("mental breakdown") denotes situations where a character is on the brim of seriously losing their mind because of excessive sexual stimulations that pushes them to be willing to sacrifice their dignity, moral standards and/or sanity to fulfill unsatiable sexual desire. Beyond the genre (or tag) of *seishin hōkai*, figural expressions such as "I am about to lose my mind" (*atama ga okashiku naru* 頭がおかしくなる, or *atama ga hen ni naru* 頭が変になる, literally "(my head) is becoming strange") and "I am broken" (using the word *koware* 壊れ, "broken") have a much milder tone and are widely used to depict a character's feelings of dismay, surprise and shock in their self-discovery of an unexpected desire for sexual pleasure.

Nakamura Kaoru summarizes the typical pattern of *ryōjoku chōkyō* manga with five stages in the story arc: (1) rape, (2) the victim's experience of pleasure, (3) continued rape which leads to the discovery and development of more sexual experiences for the victim, (4) the victim becomes a prisoner of the pleasures to submit, (5) the victim becomes dependent on the perpetrator.¹⁰ *Inma danshi to kankin ecchi* follows this general pattern: from rape to how the victim's body "yields" to pleasure to the victim's psychological submission to the perpetrator. The key issue behind this rationale is how and why this kind of *eromanga* equates the victim's

eromanga, see Nagayama, 203–29; Kaoru Nagayama, *Erotic Comics in Japan: An Introduction to Eromanga*, trans. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 169–86.

¹⁰ Nagayama, *Ero manga sutadīzu*, 219.

experience of sexual arousal during unwanted sex with the idea of submission. Although I have been using the expressions like “the body submits to pleasure” in this paper, how is this expression possible?

The Record of Sex with My Sister, published in 2015, is another, and perhaps more stereotypical example of how manga of the *chōkyō* genre equates the victim’s experience of sexual arousal during unwanted sex with the idea of submission.¹¹ The female protagonist Kaoru’s older brother abducts her and imprisons her in his secret “sex research lab,” where he rapes her everyday with different kinds of sex toys, sex machines, sex positions and aphrodisiac that stimulates different spots on her body with increasing intensity and variety. Throughout the manga, depictions of their sex always come with portrayals of the girl’s feelings of disgust and hatred, such as her lowering brows (figure 3) and gritted teeth (figure 4 and 5). However, after over a month of sex torture, when she finally gets a chance to escape, she finds that she can no longer feel anything from having sex with her boyfriend. In the midst of despair and resignation, she returns to her brother’s side because now he is the only person that can give her sexual pleasure.¹² The transformation that leads to her submission takes place on her body rather than her willpower. Her arousals and orgasms are distressing and surprising for her (figure 6). One of her own lines points out the phallogocentric rationale of the story: through the various sex tortures, the perpetrator “seeks to turn me into his possession.”¹³ At the end of the story, she is destined to be his “lifelong sex slave” because the continued “sex trainings” turns her body into “a body that cannot leave [him].”¹⁴ The penis forces the woman to experience sexual arousal in

¹¹ EBA, *Imouto Kansatsu Nikki 妹姦察日記 [The Record of Sex with My Sister]* (Kogiwa Manabu, 2015).

¹² EBA, 46–54.

¹³ EBA, 44.

¹⁴ EBA, 64.

nonconsensual situations, disables her physically and disempowers her mentally. As long as a woman's body meets a man's penis, the woman is destined to submit eventually, regardless of her will.

However, phallocentrism cannot explain everything in the power dynamics here. The standard *chōkyō* narrative requires a separation of a person's will and the body with sexual desire. At the same time when the woman loses to the penis, willpower loses to the body and its desire. This loss is marked by the Kaoru's repeated lines of "(I am) becoming strange," "(I am) about to be broken!" (figure 7) during orgasm, and lines like "why is it so pleasurable" (figure 8) "What is it? The orgasm just won't stop" (figure 9) which combine with her facial expressions of surprising, distressing realization.^{15,16} The way that her own body responds to sexual stimulations and feels pleasure is out of her expectation. As Nakayama Kaoru analyzes, the *chōkyō eromanga* is both a story where "the 'attacker' alter[s] the 'receiver' to their liking" and a story of the victim's "self-awakening."¹⁷ The protagonist who is often the victim of rape in these manga goes through a dramatic change with shock, fear and disgust and becomes aware of their body's ability to experience new levels of sexual pleasure in unexpected circumstances. As Paasonen argues in her chapter on extreme and shock porn, "sensations and articulations of disgust" are not only involved in the moral judgements against pornography; "they lay at the heart of pornography's imaginaries and their appeal."¹⁸ In the two *eromanga* I analyzed, the protagonists' shock, fear and disgust marks their rite of passage from the common daily life to

¹⁵ EBA, 42, 39, 62.

¹⁶ Whereas Linda Williams describes modern pornography as a "frenzy of the visible," for *eromanga*, it is important to remember that the manga is a hybrid form between visual and textual media. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁷ Nagayama, *Ero manga sutadīzu*, 220–21; Nagayama, *Erotic Comics in Japan*, 180–81.

¹⁸ Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 221.

the dark realm of unexpected sexual pleasures. In these *chōkyō* stories, it is not only the woman that submits to the man but also their common sense, reason and willpower that submits to a desire for pleasure. In this sense, the ending is victory of pornography itself, and these *eromanga* captures the reader's desire to lose to pornography.

Artists of *eromanga* elements depict how a character's body respond to sexual stimulations with blushing, moaning, squirting, shaking and *ahegao* (roughly, "climax face"). In *eromanga* with *chōkyō*, *ryōjoku* and *seishin hōkai* elements, sexual stimulations always make a character to desire more stimulations until sexual satisfaction, even though this stimulation comes with physical and mental discomfort (coerced sex and bodily torture). Importantly, a character in such an *eromanga* will never reach sexual fulfillment. Once they go through the liminal space of self-awakening, they are always desiring new kinds of sexual stimulations and more intense pleasures. The 2015 *eromanga* *VictimGirls20 THE COLLAPSE OF CAGLIOSTRO: Spare Body in the Fantasmagoria* by Asanagi offers an excellent case to illustrate this point.¹⁹ This manga is a fan art for the game *Granblue Fantasy*. It is an *eromanga* in the *ryōjoku chōkyō* genre which depicts the protagonist's process of mental breakdown (*seishin hōkai*) during gang rape that involves stomach deformation, cervix penetration, necrophilia and dissection. The protagonist, Cagliostro, is male by birth, but as an alchemist in a fantasy world, she creates artificial bodies in the form of young girls. When an old body dies, she revives in a new backup body of the same look. In *THE COLLAPSE OF CAGLIOSTRO*, she becomes the sex slave of a group of men, who also manage to take control of her numerous backup bodies. Even without Cagliostro's soul in it, a backup body can still squirt, orgasm and die like a real human body, therefore the men use these soul-less bodies as sex dolls and it becomes an orgy where many

¹⁹ Asanagi, *Victim Girls 20 THE COLLAPSE OF CAGLIOSTRO: Spare Body in the Phantasmagoria* (Fatalpulse, 2015).

bodies are killed in the process (figure 10 and 11). Cagliostro the soul also dies for multiple times during sex, and she automatically revives in one of the back-up bodies each time she dies. The process repeats until Cagliostro's mental breakdown, after which point she begins to ask for more sex and ask to be killed for more times. At the end of the manga, Cagliostro, who lost her limbs, orgasms when the main perpetrator in the gang kicks her stomach (figure 12).

The climax of *THE COLLAPSE OF CAGLIOSTRO* is not the perpetrator's triumph or their orgasm (ejaculation) but the moment of the victim's mental breakdown. In the first two-thirds of the manga, the extremity of the story builds up bit by bit from fingering to Cagliostro's stomach deformation in vaginal-penis sex to cervix penetration to choking to death and then repeated sex and death. Shock in these scenes piles up, until a critical page where Cagliostro's facial expressions changes from shock and fear in one panel to the lost of consciousness in the next one to a face of realization and then to an *ahegao* which is a way to draw facial expression during immense, overwhelming sexual pleasure in *eromanga* (figure 13).²⁰ Cagliostro falls into madness, and she "comes to a realization" and says things like "the more that a woman's body (my body) is tortured by men, the happier it gets," "the joy of death is the true meaning of life," asks for more sex and more deaths.²¹

From the beginning to the end, the scenes in this manga expect a mixture of disgust, horror, pleasure, rupture, feelings of triumph and helplessness. Shock piles up in earlier section of the manga to make it "plausible" for the victim to say humiliating and insulting lines about herself and women in general, but the story's extremity does not stop at the point of Cagliostro's mental breakdown. Continuous sexual torture and sexual stimulations forces the victim to

²⁰ For an analysis of the *ahegao*, Kimi Rito, *The History of Hentai Manga* (Portland: FAKKU, 2021), 221–45.

²¹ Asanagi, *THE COLLAPSE OF CAGLIOSTRO*, 21, 23, 24.

become a machine that can withstand and even desire sexual stimulations from more and more extreme practices. This machine will never stop because it will never find fulfillment. While the last stop in Marquis de Sade's sex hell is death, the fantasy setting of *THE COLLAPSE OF CAGLIOSTRO* allows the *eromanga* artist Asanagi to depict how even death cannot stop or fulfill a constantly accumulating desire for sexual stimulations. The final phase of this process is either the victim's severe body damage and/or their total mental breakdown and absolute submission to the perpetrator.

In this sense, this kinds of *chōkyō* *eromanga* could be considered as an exaggerated rendition of Leo Bersani's interpretation of Freudian theories of sexual desire. Bersani writes that the foundation of sexual desire is a masochist desire, because sexual stimulations come along with an unpleasant tension with leads to a simultaneous desire to discharge the tension and a desire to repeat the stimulation to accumulate of more desires.²² Sex is an "pleasurable unpleasure" and an "unpleasurable pleasure."²³ Tension and pleasure are two sides of the same thing, therefore, the moment when this tension is relieved is also the time when sexual and sexual pleasure disappear.

Bersani believes that Sade's novels parallel the structure of sexual desire itself: the sadist-masochist desire that Sade describes is the truth of sexual desire itself, and the endpoint of this desire is death, which both fulfills and kills it.²⁴ I believe that the same interpretation holds true of many *eromanga* of the *chōkyō*, *ryōjoku* and *seishin hōkai* genres; in addition, stories where sexual desire disempowers a character is an expression of people's anxiety for losing themselves in excessive pleasure. Despite the anxiety, readers of *eromanga* desires to lose. In these

²² Bersani, *The Freudian Body*, 34–35.

²³ Bersani, 34–35.

²⁴ Bersani, chap. 3.

eromanga, repeated experiences of sexual stimulations throw a character into a pre-conscious, pre-reason condition where their heart and body experiences pleasure out of their own control. The character becomes a machine that automatically responds to pleasure, and one who really controls this machine is not the other characters in the story (the perpetrator of rape) but the rules of the pornotopia itself. The penis (and the perpetrator's other techniques to torture the victim) is more like a key to turn the machine on, but this key is replaceable, just as how a male actor in contemporary online video porn is also easily replaceable.

This paper has been trying to discuss how pornography, as a "body genre" that intends to arouse pleasure, inhabits an anxiety about the very pleasure it seeks to depict and arouse. When intense sexual stimulations overwhelm characters in *eromanga*, the desire that comes from accumulated stimulation could lead to the character's transformation into a submissive role in the story: the victim submit to their victimizer, and the character's common sense and rationality submit to bodily desire. The pleasure that these *eromanga* promises their consumers is a kind of pleasure that could defeat everything, not only socially determined moral standards and law but also an individual's own rationality. This rationale corresponds to the *eromanga*'s frequent depictions of taboos including rape fantasy, family taboo and erotification of young girls. These manga are self-aware of the anxiety and horrors in the unrestrained desire they fantasize; in the stories, the character who yield to desire becomes the "loser." Yet in the end, consumers of *eromanga* read these works because want do to lose, at least temporarily, to desire itself. Therefore, *eromanga* of the *chōkyō*, *ryōjoku* and *seishin hōkai* genres captures "a desire to lose."

Figures



Figure 1. Rojione, *Inma danshi to kankin ecchi ~ saiin kuri seme de seijo kairaku ochi ~ 淫魔男子と監禁えっち ~ 催淫クリ責めで聖女快樂墮ち ~ [Sex in Confinement with an Incubus: Seductive Clitoral Torture that Brings a Holy Woman to Pleasure Depravity]* (LUNACY, 2021), 31. Manga in Japan are often read from right to left, top to bottom. The panel in the upper-right corner is a cross-section view of Rose's vulva, showing her vagina and uterus behind the magical chastity belt, and how Mea is using a cup-shaped sex toy to stimulate her clitoris. Rose's interior monologue on this page reads, "But I can feel my interior meat (vaginal flesh) shaking. It's getting ready to let a man in...No...I shouldn't be thinking about this. The pleasure inside...I wonder how good it feels..." At this moment in the manga, the magical chastity belt falls off.



Figure 2. Rojine, 40. The lines in the bottom panel around the close-up shot at the girls face reads, "I am becoming strange...It is overly pleasurable that I am becoming strange."



Figure 3. EBA, *Imouto Kansatsu Nikki* 妹姦察日記 [The Record of Sex with My Sister] (Kogiwa Manabu, 2015), 24. The lowering brows on the Kaoru's face is a common technique to depict distress in Japanese manga. The lines in the rectangular bubbles is her interior monologue, which read, "Please...if this is a dream..let me wake up..."



Figure 4. EBA, 31. Gritted teeth.



Figure 5. EBA 41. Gritted teeth in the middle panel. Kaoru's line in that panel reads, "W... Who would (like) your disgusting thing (dick)...?" The thin diagonal lines on the upper half of her face are a way of depicting shadows and often indicate a character's fear.



Figure 6. EBA, 55. Their sex after Kaoru voluntarily leaves her boyfriend and comes back to the brother who rapes her. Lowered eyebrows and gritted teeth are expressions of frustration and distress, and the diagonal lines around the nose indicates her blushing. The lines for Kaoru's internal monologue read, "It's a bummer, but this guy is indeed more..."



Figure 8. EBA, 39. "Why... Why is it so pleasurable!!!"



Figure 9. EBA, 62. "What is it? The orgasm just won't stop."



Figure 10. Asanagi, *Victim Girls 20 THE COLLAPSE OF CAGLIOSTRO: Spare Body in the Phantasmagoria* (Fatalpulse, 2015), cover. Cagliostro surrounded by multiple “backup bodies.”



Figure 11. Asanagi, 22. The orgy in the middle of Cagliostro's corpses.



Figure 12. Asanagi, 29.



Figure 13. Asanagi, 21. Cagliostro on the brim of losing her mind.

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