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By the early eighteenth century Edo (present-day Tokyo) was one of the largest cities in the world. Boasting over a million inhabitants, this once provincial backwater had rapidly expanded into a bustling metropolis after its establishment as the Tokugawa shogunate's capital in 1603. Peaceful stability under shogunal rule had given rise to the hallmarks of early modern Japanese society: a prosperous merchant class, a booming commercial publishing industry that harnessed the new possibilities of print, increasing literacy among the population, and a flourishing urban culture of entertainment and consumption.

Sex and erotic allure could be found in many guises in this commercialized urban setting, both in the city's streets and on the printed pages lining the shelves of Edo's numerous bookshops. Early modern readers devoured popular vernacular fiction detailing the amorous escapades of its male protagonists – which often involved various types of female sex worker as well as beautiful adolescent boys. Travellers arriving in the sprawling capital from the provinces may have already read about the illustrious pleasure quarters in Edo's Yoshiwara district in guidebooks to the city's famous sights, and some may have already stopped off at one of the post-stations on the city's outskirts, such as Shinagawa or Shinjuku, where not only food and accommodation but also the waitresses' sexual services were for sale. Many visitors in the late eighteenth century bought multi-coloured prints of courtesans in their finery as a typical Edo souvenir, while one out-of-town pleasure seeker did not hesitate to record in his diary of 1850 purchases of more explicit materials,[1] bought for a few copper coins from bookstalls in

1 Ujiie Mikito, *Edo no seifūzoku: Warai to jōshi no erosu* (Edo Sexual Mores: The Eros of Laughter and Love Suicides) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1998), 72.

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Ryōgoku – a tiny fraction of the staggering 2,000–3,000 erotic books estimated to have been published by the end of the early modern era.

Later commentators from diverse disciplinary backgrounds have noted this erotic exuberance of Japan's early modern or Edo period (1600–1868), and drawn various conclusions. In the 1880s, when Edo had already been renamed Tokyo and the shogunate had been dismantled, the writer and literary theorist Tsubouchi Shōyō was among those who dismissively characterized early nineteenth-century Edo romantic fiction (*ninjōbon*) as 'portraying debauchery'. By contrast, early twentieth-century European ethnologists such as Friedrich Krauss, in a flourish of positive Orientalism, observed Japan's 'irrepressible joy for sexual matters', often anachronistically drawing on 'traditional' early modern sexual mores to substantiate their arguments. Most famously, the French philosopher Michel Foucault somewhat indiscriminately included Japan in his realm of *ars erotica*, together with other lands where pleasure-based sexuality ruled supreme. Both views, however, fail to adequately capture the multifaceted nature of sex in the early modern period, which they implicitly set up as the sexually unfettered 'other' vis-à-vis Japanese modernity and the West.

This chapter sets out to argue that sex assumed a multiplicity of meanings at the time that ranged from pleasure and procreation to potential pathology. To this purpose, I will begin by tracing various discourses surrounding the three phenomena that have arguably received the most sustained attention in research to date and have served to nurture the image of Edo as a sexually 'liberated' place and time, namely the sex trade, male same-sex desire, and the erotically explicit materials known as spring pictures (Japanese *shunga* 春画 / *shunpon* 春本). The final section aims to move beyond the standard narrative of Edo Japan's flourishing erotic culture by focusing on the female reproductive body as well as medical and health discourses, aspiring to unsettle the paradigmatic character of this (male) pleasure-centred mode and repudiate the monolithic view of early modern Japanese sexuality as unregulated.

Pleasure Quarters and the Sex Trade

The pleasure quarters were a major motor that drove cultural production in early modern Edo, both in the visual arts and fiction. Beautiful courtesans elegantly dressed in the latest fashions adorned colourful late eighteenth-century Edo woodblock prints by popular artists, which turned their protagonists into the fashion and beauty icons of their age and the object of both

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male fantasy and female admiration.[2] Printed 'snakes and ladders' board games (*sugoroku*) invited players to partake in a virtual tour of the pleasure quarters throughout Japan, hopping from Osaka's Shinmachi to Nagasaki's Maruyama and Kyoto's Miyagawa-chō, or visiting the courtesans in Edo's famous Yoshiwara with its teahouses and various classes of brothel at the throw of a dice (Figure 12.1). Some *ukiyo-e* print series even took to depicting the everyday life of courtesans 'around the clock', showing the activities that took place in the pleasure quarters during each of the twelve hours of the early modern Japanese day.

As a romantic staple in popular fiction and theatre at the time, the high-ranking courtesans in such stories were often paragons of magnanimity, sincerity, elegance, and artistic skill. Ihara Saikaku (1642–93), for example, writing for the prosperous merchant class in Osaka, fictionally portrayed the historical courtesan Yoshino as accomplished in the arts of the tea ceremony, poetry, flower arrangement, and musical performance, as well as excelling in household accounting and the Buddhist sutras; even her proficiency at adjusting mechanical clocks – exceedingly rare luxury items in the late seventeenth century – appears in her long list of talents (*Kōshoku ichidai otoko* (Life of an Amorous Man), 1682). A contemporary observer recorded in his reminiscences of the Yoshiwara during the 1780s (*Kumo no itomaki* (The Spider's Reel of Thread), 1846) how the courtesans Hanaōgi and Takigawa, seeking to outrival each other in their artistic achievements, took calligraphy lessons from some of the finest calligraphers and scholars in Edo, while courtesans and brothel owners alike actively participated in poetry circles. More than merely a topos in the arts, the pleasure quarters were also a place where artistic networks of writers, painters, and publishers could flourish.

For prospective customers, becoming intimate with such rarefied beauties was not only expensive but also required familiarity with the elaborate etiquette and fashions of the pleasure quarters. By the eighteenth century a multitude of publications provided information for male visitors, including style guides, critiques of courtesans' physical and artistic qualities, and pleasure-quarter directories (*saiken*), updated annually and later even semi-annually, which listed the brothels and teahouses street by street, along with the price of the women (or men) they offered. At the height of their popularity in Edo between the 1770s and the early 1790s, pleasure-quarter novellas (*sharebon*) for the aspiring man about town (*tsū*) provided literary

2 On courtesans in prints of beautiful women (*bijinga*), see Julie Nelson Davis, *Partners in Print: Artistic Collaboration and the Ukiyo-e Market* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 61–107.

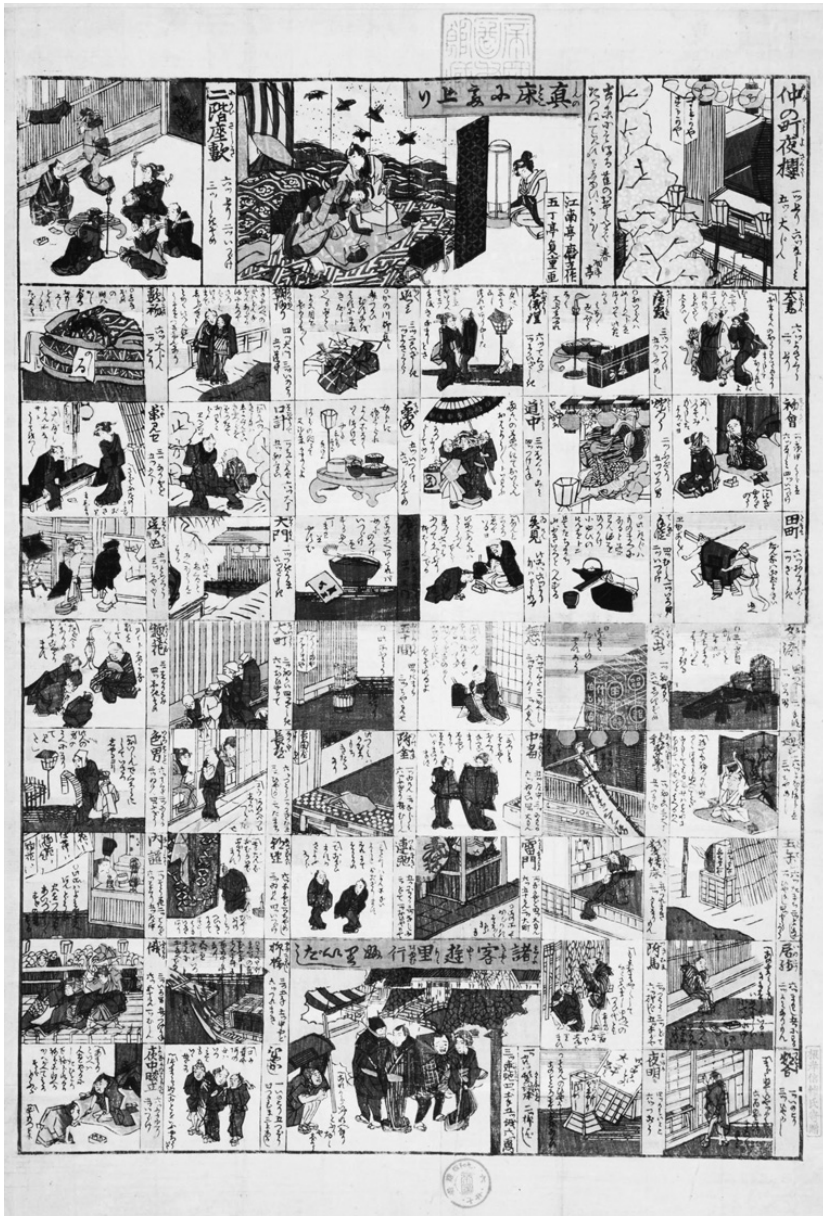

Figure 12.1 *Sugoroku* board game, *Shokyaku yūri ayumu sugoroku* (Snakes and Ladders Board Game for the Flâneur in the Pleasure Quarters), nineteenth century. The starting point of the game (*bottom centre*) depicts a group of customers departing for the pleasure quarters, while the ultimate goal (*top centre*) is the 'bed of a courtesan who harbours sincere feelings'

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role models that embodied the ideal standards of dress, hairstyle, and conduct. According to one such work (*Tsūgen sōmagaki* (Connoisseur's Words in a High-Class Brothel), 1787), stylish connoisseurs in the 1780s should sport, for example, a hood casually slung around the neck and a thin hair-knot tied to 'the width of a mouse's tail', a hairstyle allegedly most becoming on the second day after a visit to the *en vogue* hairdressers in Asakusa. This outpouring of knowledge in print fuelled the notion of an 'erotic way' or 'erotic discipline' (*shikidō*) for men centred on the pleasure quarters, which required mastery of its own set of meticulous rules and was ostensibly barely concerned with sex.

Nonetheless, such idealized images in *ukiyo-e* prints and belles-lettres that are familiar to even the most casual observer of early modern popular culture ultimately represented a carefully curated image that marketed the pleasure quarters to male consumerist fantasies. As such, they merely reflected the glittering sheen of the demimonde's highest echelons rather than the harsh underlying realities of selling sex, which involved a wide range of providers in the eighteenth century. At the heart of the business was the officially licensed sex trade, which had been established in Edo in the early days of Tokugawa rule, when the shogunal government permitted brothel owners to set up the Yoshiwara quarters in 1617, a pattern that was subsequently extended to other major metropolitan centres such as Osaka (Shinmachi, established 1630) and Kyoto (Shimabara, established 1640).

An impression of the dimensions of these licensed pleasure districts and their internal stratification at the dawn of the early eighteenth century can be gathered from *Keisei irojamisen* (The Courtesan's Shamisen of Love, 1702), a five-volume work that combines short stories of the pleasure quarters with pleasure-quarter listings for the 'three cities' of Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto. According to this directory, the Yoshiwara harboured some 1,750 women at this time, of whom only five belonged to the highest rank of courtesan (*tayū*), while the majority (some 870) were ranked in the lowest three tiers (various

Caption for Figure 12.1 (cont.)

for a client, a common romantic fantasy of the time. En route, players wend their way past the hairdresser's (*third row from bottom, second from right*), teahouses, low-class prostitutes (*fourth row, second from left*), the famed night-time cherry trees of the Yoshiwara's main boulevard (*top right*), and a banquet in a courtesan's sitting room (*top left*). Source: National Diet Library.

types of *tsubone*). At the very bottom of this hierarchy were over 400 'common prostitutes' (*nami tsubone*), priced at just 100 copper coins; despite accounting for a significant portion of sex workers in the Yoshiwara, they remain unnamed in the directory, apparently viewed as interchangeable in their anonymity, and are subsumed by the editorial note 'name listing omitted here'. As directory formats became standardized later in the century, mentions of the lowest class of sex workers were relegated to the very end of booklets and were recorded in miniscule and at times barely legible lettering that lacked the elaborate crests of higher-ranking brothels, the bold calligraphy used for the names of top-class courtesans, and even the symbols (*aijirushi*) that designated a sex worker's rank in the Yoshiwara. By the late Edo period such women were operating in small compartments (*tsubone*) barely large enough to accommodate a futon, tucked away in the Yoshiwara's back streets and moat-facing alleys where they charged their customers in cheap, short units (so-called 'cuts' or *kiri*).[3] In fact, directories from the eighteenth century suggest an overall trend towards lower-priced, low-status sex workers targeting a broader, less affluent clientele than in the seventeenth century, and a continuous decline in the number of high-ranking courtesans. By the mid-eighteenth century the celebrated *tayū* had disappeared altogether.[4]

In addition to the large variety of women working in the licensed pleasure quarters, the landscape of the sex trade extended well beyond the confines of these officially sanctioned walled-off compounds. Playful maps, reproduced in fiction or as single-sheet prints, rendered the geography of the city's erotic possibilities for pleasure seekers, which by the 1770s comprised over sixty unlicensed pleasure districts scattered across Edo, from Nezu, to the west of the city centre, to Fukagawa in the east and Shinagawa in the south.[5] These prostitution hotspots (so-called hilly places or *okabasho*), at times no more than a smattering of teahouses and brothels, were illicit businesses that sprang up in the eighteenth century in busy locations such as post stations along major thoroughfares and the precincts of popular shrines and temples. The quality and reputation of the services they offered varied significantly:

3 Angelika Koch, 'Nightless Cities: Timing the Pleasure Quarters in Early Modern Japan', *Kronoscope* 17, no. 1 (2017): 61–93.

4 Miyamoto Yukiko, 'Yūri no seiritsu to taishūka ('The Establishment and Popularisation of the Pleasure Districts'), in *Nihon no kinsei: Bunka no taishūka* (Early Modern Japan: The Popularisation of Culture), ed. Takeuchi Makoto (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1993), 169–218.

5 This figure is based on one such map, 'Yūri hōkoku no zu' ('A Compass Diagram of Pleasure Districts'), reproduced in the pleasure-quarter novella *Keikokusaku* (Policies in the Country of Love Pledges, 1776).

some were cheap 'express stops' where women in shabby clothes would aggressively solicit customers, while others, such as Fukagawa, were renowned for their geisha, who were skilled in music and dance but might also provide sexual services. These now iconic pleasure-quarter entertainers, originally comprising both male and female artists, first appeared in the eighteenth century, probably in reaction to a decline in artistic accomplishment among sex workers themselves. Female geisha, however, soon joined the rank and file of illicit sex workers who inhabited the eighteenth-century city: serving-girls in teahouses and inns, itinerant street performers dressed as Buddhist nuns (*utabikuni*) who doubled as sex workers, low-class 'night-hawks' who plied their trade at street corners, pimped out by their handlers for the price of a mere bowl of noodles, and 'boat dumplings' who approached customers on the river like 'poisonous floating weeds', as one reviewer of Edo's sex trade disparagingly described them. Unfortunate women such as these were not the stuff of romantic fiction and stylish portrayal in *ukiyo-e*.

Although the often miserable and unsavoury realities of both legal and illegal female sex workers were largely unrecorded, they have been pieced together by historians such as Sone Hiromi from documents such as court records.[6] In one instance from 1800, a man living in Edo's Fukagawa district was sentenced for having employed two illicit prostitutes, Naka and Yasu. Naka had contracted syphilis – a disease that affected some 40–60 per cent of the urban population and was a major cause of death among sex workers. She had attempted to abscond but was apprehended by her employer, who stripped her naked, tied her up, and beat her with a wooden club, which exacerbated her illness and ultimately led to her death. In another case from 1803, a Yoshiwara prostitute named Hananoi was questioned about having twice set fire to her brothel – a grave crime in an era when large swathes of the city would regularly be engulfed in flames. Having received word that her sister had been taken ill, Hananoi had hoped to make her escape during the turmoil of the fire and leave behind the 'hardships of prostitution', as the court record's dry administrative jargon describes it. Yoshiwara sex workers, who were as a rule confined to the walled compound, in fact repeatedly resorted to arson in an attempt to escape their circumstances, and the majority of the fires that occurred in early nineteenth-century Yoshiwara were perpetrated by such women. One of them, Sakuragi of the Umemoto

6 Sone Hiromi, *Shōfu to kinsei shakai* (Prostitutes and Early Modern Society) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003).

brothel, left behind an extremely rare diary of her trials and tribulations. Penned in 1842 in her own hand in simple Japanese syllabary and included in the case report, she describes how the employees received only two meagre meals a day, consisting mainly of leftover rice doused in tea (*ochazuke*) and pickles that were sometimes rotten; on occasion there was soup or scraps such as potato skins and salmon heads, and a portion of warm rice was considered a noteworthy delicacy.[7]

When mapping early modern Japanese prostitution as part of an alleged 'pleasure-based' sexuality, it is thus important to remember that this is a highly gendered conceptualization that represents the male consumer's gaze, as is the case in most literary and art works at the time. For women, prostitution was in fact typically characterized by malnutrition, violence, constant debt, physical and mental abuse, and the risk of venereal disease; treated as marketable goods, they were often sold into indentured contracts to brothels by their in-laws in exchange for an upfront payment, resold at the convenience of their employers to other establishments, and even put up as collateral for loans.[8] The early modern sex trade was therefore not merely a refined pursuit, a salient locus of popular culture and an artistic space for the liberated 'play' of men, but first and foremost a booming industry that was in the business of selling women, as more recent studies have begun to emphasize.

Amy Stanley has argued on the basis of administrative and business records that both officials and operators mainly conceived the sex trade as an economic endeavour that served the purpose of revitalizing and stimulating local economies and filling government coffers.[9] One contemporary health guide (*Yōjōben* (Advice on Nurturing Life), 1842) clearly drew on this logic to legitimize the institution, arguing that the pleasure quarters 'were in the business of bringing pleasure to people' and that 'as long as one applied oneself to one's permitted household trade, there was nothing like a bad household trade'. Prostitution per se was rarely stigmatized or questioned at

7 Yokoyama Yuriko, 'Umemotoki. Kaei 2-nen Shin-yoshiwara Umemoto-ya Sakichi kakae yūjo tsukebi ikken shiryō no shōkai' ('Umemoto Records: Introducing a Primary Source Related to an Arson Incident Instigated by Prostitutes at the Shin-Yoshiwara Brothel of Umemoto Sakichi in the Year Kaei 2'), *Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan kenkyū hōkoku* (Research Reports of the National Museum of Japanese History) 200 (2016): 145–68.

8 Loans and financing of brothels are discussed by Yokoyama Yuriko in Saga Ashita and Yoshida Nobuyuki, eds., *Shirīzu yūkaku shakai*. Vol. 1: *Santo to chihō toshi* (Society in the Licensed Pleasure Quarters Series. Vol. 1: The Three Metropolises and Regional Cities) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2013), 47–65.

9 Amy Stanley, *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets and the Household in Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

the time, as is clear not only from its mass appeal in popular mainstream media but also from existing discourses that represented indentured sex workers as filial daughters saving their families from impoverishment.

Government regulations barely concerned themselves with the moral implications of prostitution, as the licensed pleasure quarters represented a source of income for the shogunate and also a means of controlling and containing the sex trade. Illicit pleasure businesses and private purveyors of sex (so-called 'clandestine prostitutes' or *kakushi baita*) sprawling freely across the urban landscape, however, disrupted these aims and were the target of legal interventions and periodic crackdowns by the authorities. At such times, for example during the shogunate's Kansei (1789–1801) reforms, illegal sex workers were relocated en masse to the licensed Yoshiwara district, where they were auctioned off and made to ply their trade at the highest-bidding brothels. Ultimately, however, the 'hilly places' in Edo were often tacitly tolerated and never effectively suppressed, resurfacing each time that enforcement was relaxed. There were a few critical voices that portrayed the alleged self-interested independence of sex workers as a threat to the stability of the household, and such women were sometimes denounced as 'storehouses for syphilis', as one doctor working in the public government hospital in Edo put it (*Minka yōjōkun* (Precepts on Nurturing Life forHouseholds), 1827). Yet in sharp contrast with the subsequent Meiji period (1868–1912), there was no sustained public debate, medical or moral, that drew into question the institution of licensed prostitution.[10]

Male Same-Sex Desire

Male same-sex love (*nanshoku*) was another salient feature of early modern Japanese sexual culture, particularly until the second half of the eighteenth century. Anything but marginalized, several Tokugawa shoguns and many military lords were known or rumoured to engage in same-sex relationships, reportedly even vying to hire the most attractive male servants for their cortège. Some contemporary fiction went so far as to construe the 1703 incident that sparked the famous vendetta of the forty-seven *rōnin* (masterless warriors), one of the most enduring Japanese narratives to this day, as

10 On the development of a modern discourse on syphilis and public health, see Susan Burns, 'Constructing the National Body: Public Health and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Japan', in *Nation Works: Asian Elites and National Identities*, ed. Timothy Brook and Andre Schmid (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 17–50.

a disagreement between two *daimyo* (domain lords) over the favours of a beautiful boy.[11] Male–male love was thus viewed as the 'flower of the warrior estate' and encapsulated a martial ethos that emphasized and celebrated hierarchical bonds of loyalty between men. Along with political military leaders, the spiritual elite of the realm, the Buddhist clergy, had also developed a reputation for male–male ties since the medieval period; despite monastic vows of celibacy, such relationships were viewed as a somewhat lesser evil compared to those with women.

The object of adult men's affections were adolescent boys, be they page-boys and young samurai in the warrior milieu or acolytes who joined monastic communities for education and clerical training in the Buddhist realm. Relations followed an age-based hierarchy between an adult male and a youth (*wakashu*), and this unequal pattern of 'older brother' and 'younger brother' was maintained in their social interactions as well as their sexual activities, where the young male's penetrated role was commonly perceived as painful and incompatible with pleasure. Youths were eroticized as objects of desire by the adult male gaze in art and literature and commonly portrayed as unrivalled in their beauty; what differentiated their looks from adult males and boosted their allure was their adolescent hairstyle, the forelock (*maegami*) (Figure 12.2), which was not shorn until their coming-of-age ceremony around the age of fifteen, although this social boundary to adulthood was not fixed at a certain age or determined by biological markers. Some samurai lovers were allegedly furious when their 'younger brothers' underwent this ceremony without their approval, as it normally signalled the end of their availability as a sexual partner; as a retainer of the Lord of Owari noted in his diary in 1712, one such samurai even challenged his youth's father to a duel.[12]

The early modern period also witnessed the creation of a bourgeois discipline of male same-sex pursuits beyond those of the elite samurai and monastic traditions, fuelled by the commercialization and commodification of male–male love in the context of urban commoner culture in popular print, the theatre, and the pleasure districts. No fewer than 600 works on the subject were published throughout the Tokugawa period,[13] providing similar forms of knowledge and entertainment to those centred on 'female love'; these included fictional love stories that romanticized beautiful boys and kabuki actors, guides

11 Ujiie Mikito, *Bushidō to erosu* (Eros and the Way of the Warrior) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1995), 40, 205–11.

12 Ujiie, *Bushidō*, 150.

13 This figure is based on Iwata Jun'ichi's pioneering *Nanshoku bunken shoshi* (Bibliography of Male Love) (Tokyo: Koten bunko, 1956).

Figure 12.2 A beautiful samurai youth, identified by his forelocks (*bottom right*), attracts the attention and admiration of various warriors in this *nanshoku*-themed illustrated work of fiction (*Nanshoku kitsune no katakiuchi* (The Fox's Vendetta of Male Love), 1756). Source: Rikkyo University, Edogawa Ranpō Collection.

to the male prostitution quarters and etiquette manuals demystifying the 'way' of male–male love for the uninitiated. It was not unusual for 'male love' and 'female love' to share the same publications, suggesting that erotic expertise in male and female partners was commonly perceived in popular culture as complementary for an adult male rather than mutually exclusive. Fictional protagonists might visit a courtesan one night and succumb to a boy-actor's charms the next, while erotica created a pornotopia that might be inhabited by male–female sex on one page and male–male on the next – or even combined in the same image. In this sense, Edo notions of *nanshoku* diverged significantly from modern notions of 'homosexuality' as a fixed identity or, in Foucault's dictum, a separate 'species'.

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The primary locus for this comparably new commoner culture of male–male eroticism in eighteenth-century Edo was the world of kabuki theatres, teahouses, and male prostitution, which were often inextricably linked with each other. Kabuki had developed into an all-male popular theatre following its inception in the early seventeenth century: the authorities banned women (1629) and then also boys (1654) from appearing on stage in order to curtail the erotic appeal of performances that had given rise to violent incidents among spectators. Regulations required all stage actors from the mid-seventeenth century to shave their hair in the fashion of adult males, thus in theory removing the performers from the eroticized 'youth' status; subsequent orders made repeated attempts at diminishing the popular appeal of actors, for example by requiring them to conceal their faces under straw hats when walking in the street. In response, actors covered their shaved pates with a purple kerchief, which soon became an eroticized symbol in its own right. The existence of *shunga* depicting actors wearing such a kerchief while sexually engaging male (and female) patrons suggests that such tonsorial interventions were unsuccessful in detracting from actors' seductive charms.

Many of Edo's establishments specializing in the male sex trade were clustered in the vicinity of the theatre districts and recruited sex workers from the ranks of both bona fide actors and actors-in-training; others were located in convenient proximity to temples and shrines, where they could also tap into the pool of performers appearing in regular stage events held on the precincts. Unlike the licensed female quarters, none of these ventures was granted official status by the government. By the 1760s Hiraga Gennai (1728–80), a famed scholar of Western learning and a self-avowed lover of beautiful youths, was able to list ten locations which offered the services of in total over 200 young men in his guide to male prostitution in Edo, *Kiku no sono* (The Chrysanthemum Garden, 1765); he notes, however, a decline in their numbers, which was symptomatic of the tradition's overall decreased vitality by the second half of the Edo period. Stylizing himself in the preface as a seasoned boy-aficionado taking up his brush to compile this work in the blissful embrace of his personal favourite, Gennai methodically maps out the geography and opportunities provided by the male sex trade in Edo at the time, marking the lodging houses used by actors and male prostitutes (*kodomoya*, literally, 'children's shops'), the teahouses where they received customers, and the various types of youth on offer.

At the top of this unspoken hierarchy were the kabuki actors who trod the boards of the three 'great theatres' in Edo; these institutions fed into the infrastructure of male prostitution, with teahouses for assignations

conveniently dotted around the theatres' front and rear exits and lodging houses for actors located just a few houses further down the street, as illustrated in Gennai's sketches (Figure 12.3). Even the names of stars such as Nakamura Matsue and Arashi Hinaji, immortalized for their beauty and grace as female-role impersonators in numerous kabuki-themed woodblock prints from the 1760s and early 1770s, can be found on the guide's list of men for sale – although belonging to an altogether 'different category from your average youth', they could command double or three times the basic fee. Other male sex workers in Edo, particularly in prostitution hotspots outside the main theatre districts, were shrine performers or simply young men sold into employment contracts, not unlike their female counterparts. The services offered included full-day and half-day assignations as well as shorter 'cuts'. Prices varied substantially between the various locations, but were exorbitant in the main theatre districts, where a day's entertainment with a male companion was roughly three times as expensive as a top-ranking Yoshiwara courtesan's daily fee; the 'common youths from the back alleys', by contrast, were once again omitted from the guide.

Despite the general acceptance of male same-sex culture and its visibility in popular print culture, this should not be taken to signify that it remained unregulated. As already pointed out, urban authorities attempted to suppress the sexual attraction of theatre performers with various legal measures. Non-commercial forms of *nanshoku* were also targeted and numerous domains throughout Japan issued regulations banning certain groups among their

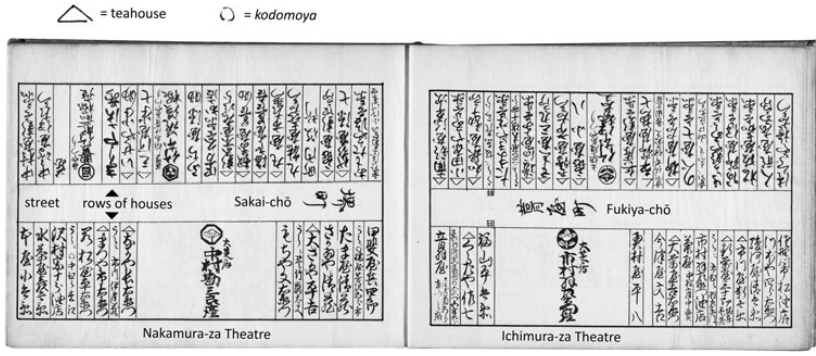

Figure 12.3 Maps by Hiraga Gennai of the immediate vicinity of the Nakamura-za and Ichimura-za theatres located in Edo's theatre districts of Sakai-chō and Fukiya-chō (*Kiku no sono* (The Chrysanthemum Garden, 1765). Teahouses for assignations with male actors and sex workers are marked with a triangle, and their lodging houses (*kodomoya*) with small circles. Source: National Diet Library.

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retainers, particularly pageboys, from engaging in relations with men. Some private academies – largely male homosocial environments – also explicitly forbade bonds between male students. Nakae Tōjū (1608–48), a prominent seventeenth-century Confucian scholar, appears to have taken a strict stance on this matter – and was promptly criticized by his famous pupil Kumazawa Banzan (1619–91), who felt that excluding men engaging in male love from the school would entail a deplorable haemorrhaging of intellectual talent.[14] Similarly, the scholar-physician Miura Baien (1723–89) threatened in his school regulations (*Jukusei*, 1766) to expel everyone over the age of fourteen from his academy should he hear reports of sexual misconduct, adding that 'the same applies for male love'. It is notable, however, that male love is not singled out here for suppression but included in the range of sexual acts covered by a general prohibition of sexual desires for students living at the academy.

In circumscribing the realm of permissible behaviour, legislators and other regulating authorities were in fact typically concerned with what Gregory Pflugfelder terms the 'perisexual', that is, the contexts in which male same-sex acts occurred and the consequences they entailed, rather than condemning the behaviour as such.[15] The authorities were particularly troubled by the strong horizontal bonds between samurai that same-sex love could forge, viewing them as potential sources of disorder, disloyalty, and violence that could lead to murder, suicide, and vendettas. A rare early eighteenth-century manuscript (working title *Shūdō tsuya monogatari* (A Tale of Boys' Love All Night Long), 1714) held at Yale's Beinecke Library graphically illustrates a conflict that was allegedly sparked in this way.[16] Set in north-western Japan, it recounts the events and rumours surrounding a fatal clash between two samurai, which official annals merely describe as a 'private fight'. At the centre of the case is a promising youth named Takenomata Genta, who becomes the object of several men's attentions. Lauded in the narrative for being 'responsive to the affections of others' – a quality highly esteemed in a male youth at the time – his all too dutiful response to their advances inevitably leads to malicious gossip, rivalries, intrigue, and ultimately his murder. Warrior allegiances shift as Genta's love relationships are reshuffled, vividly illustrating the socially disruptive potential of such intense male same-sex bonds that attracted the concern of the Tokugawa authorities.

14 Ujiie, *Bushidō*, 115–20.

15 Gregory Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male–Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 97–145.

16 Angelika Koch et al., eds., *Blood, Tears and Samurai Love: A Tragic Tale from Eighteenth-Century Japan*, 2023, www.japanpastandpresent.org/en/projects/blood-tears-and-samurai-love/.

Erotic 'Spring Pictures'

Perhaps most closely linked to the sexualized image of early modern Japan, erotica has long exerted a fascination and embodied the lure of the Oriental 'other' for the Western mind. While nineteenth-century European and American visitors to the recently reopened country commented disparagingly on the abundance and availability of such 'lewd' images, Japanese commentators pointedly noted the eagerness of these same foreigners to purchase such prints. Sustained scholarly engagement with Japanese erotica, now widely termed *shunga*, has only taken place during the past two to three decades. Despite this, Japanese public institutions have often remained hesitant to embrace these pictures as objects of serious study, and it was not until 2015 that the first major exhibition of *shunga* was held in Tokyo.

In Edo, *shunga* were ubiquitous, at least if we are to believe one disgruntled early nineteenth-century samurai, who lamented that 'year in, year out new books with images . . . depicting male–female intercourse are published . . . Townspeople display them at their shopfronts and parents, children and siblings have no qualms about enjoying such books together as playthings' (*Seji kenbunroku* (Records of Worldly Matters), 1816). Although his claims may contain an element of hyperbole, his impression that printed erotica was a flourishing genre was not mistaken. The Union Database of Japanese Early Modern Erotic Books (Kinsei Ehon Shunga Sōgō Deetabeesu) hosted by Ritsumeikan University,[17] probably the most comprehensive bibliography of extant erotica from the period, currently lists over 2,000 titles. Even taking into account the fact that erotic books were sometimes reprinted under different titles or were simply an amalgamation of previous works, this still constitutes an impressive output by early modern standards.

These works were not the creation of separate underground ventures operating at the underbelly of the bona fide publishing industry but were produced by the same publishers, artists, and artisans involved in the publication of non-erotic books. These included leading artists such as Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806), Nishikawa Sukenobu (1671–1750), and Torii Kiyonaga (1752–1815), all of whom created *shunga* as part of their *oeuvre*. The format, quality, and price of erotica varied significantly and ranged from cheaply produced black-and-white prints to luxury hand-painted scrolls. As Ellis Tinios has previously pointed out, *shunga* were overall some of the most lavishly produced illustrated printed books of the Edo period, particularly

17 Ishigami Aki and Ritsumeikan Art Research Centre, Kinsei ehon shunga sōgō deetabeesu, 2015, www.dh-jac.net/db1/ehoncatalogue/index.php.

following the introduction of multi-colour printing in the 1760s.[18] 'Elaborately coloured in silver and gold', as the above-mentioned disgruntled samurai noted disapprovingly, such unbridled extravagance can partly be explained by the fact that erotica were officially banned from 1722 and were thereafter published without identifying their publisher and author, thus enabling them to evade the official sumptuary regulations for printed books.

Repeated government prohibitions that condemned erotica as 'injurious to public morals' were only sporadically enforced and *shunga* continued to circulate via various channels, including bookstalls, second-hand bookshops, and ambulant book lenders (*kashihon'ya*) (Figure 12.4). Shouldering a pack of books, the latter made regular rounds of their clientele in towns and their hinterlands, providing access to reading matter at a mere fraction of the sales price. Unlike publishers, lenders were not subject to strict censorship controls and hence often handled illicit works, including *shunga*; some evidence even suggests that erotica might have commanded higher rental fees than regular publications.[19]

Consumers of such books were by no means limited to the common classes. Sakai Hanshirō (1834–?), a low-ranking samurai in the service of the Kishū domain, makes repeated mention in his diary of borrowing 'pillow books' from book lenders while on duty at his lord's Edo mansion (*Sakai Hanshirō nikki* (The Diary of Sakai Hanshirō), 1860). Similarly, comic poems often poked fun at erotica being rented out furtively by elite residences. At the highest echelons of samurai society it was not unheard of for *daimyo* to hold exclusive hand-painted erotica in their collections, as witnessed by the fact that a painting manual of the Kanō style, which was patronized by the warrior elite, saw it fit to include instructions on how to draw semen and the best colour palette for genitalia (*Gasen* (A Fish Trap of Painting), 1721). The recently discovered erotica collection belonging to the lords of the Mito domain, for example, contains one such opulent Kanō school scroll, along with an imported Chinese erotic album, a French lithograph, rare anamorphic *shunga* and a box set of sex toys with handwritten instructions for their use, all carefully catalogued by the *daimyo* Tokugawa Nariaki (1800–60).[20]

18 Ellis Tinios, 'Japanese Illustrated Erotic Books in the Context of Commercial Publishing, 1660–1868', *Japan Review* 26 (2013): 83–96.

19 Shirakura Yoshihiko et al., *Ukiyoe shunga o yomu (jō)* (Reading Woodblock-Print Erotic Images) (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2000), 1: 77.

20 Ricard Bru, 'The Shunga Collection of the Mito Tokugawa,' *Japan Review* 29 (2016): 121–43.

Figure 12.4 A book lender's pack of books (*Kashihon'ya no toshi-dama* or *A Book Lender's New Year's Gift*), from the erotic book *Enseki zasshi* (A Miscellany of Sensual Pleasures, 1833). One of the erotic prints scattered in the foreground depicts a calendar (*daishō-goyomi*) with an erotic motif, which was a common New Year's present. The red cartouche on the calendar identifies the 'large', thirty-day lunisolar months (second, fourth, seventh, ninth, eleventh, and twelfth month), which correspond to the year 1833. Source: Shagan Collection.

The fictional world of erotica itself was inhabited by a myriad of figures past and present, old and young, married and single, male and female, human, animal, and supernatural, from the highest court nobility and the deities in the heavens to the humblest peasant in the field, all revelling in the diverse pleasures of sex – solo, in couples, same-sex, mixed-sex, in larger groups, as direct participants and as voyeurs. Produced primarily in book form, erotica drew inspiration from the various printed genres that circulated in early modern Japan and included erotic short fiction, explicit versions of the great classics of Japanese literature such as *The Tales of Ise* and *The Tale of Genji*, frank depictions of sex scandals involving real-life kabuki actors, irreverent parodies of Confucian-style educational texts, and quasi-encyclopaedic manuals for a fulfilling sex life. Contrary to the common perception of *shunga* as a mainly pictorial format, these books usually contained a significant portion of text – not merely snippets of pillow talk wrapped around the figures in the illustrations.

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Recent scholarship has therefore placed increasing emphasis on the textual level of erotic books, which has raised new questions concerning their readership and usage.[21] The possible purposes of erotica have long been the subject of animated debate among scholars, with interpretations ranging from masturbatory tools, sex education for young brides, sexual stimulants for couples, and even as talismans against fire, all these uses having been documented in early modern sources. To these, the renewed focus on *shunga* as texts has added aspects of erotica as humorous entertainment, parody, and a form of intertextual divertissement in close interplay with non-erotic print genres. One example of such a textual cross-current can be found in a series of erotic parodies of Confucian-style educational texts for women and children produced in the 1760s and 1770s, which often closely mimics the moral guides in format, style, imagery, and text (Figure 12.5).[22] Where the one exhorts women to be gentle with their words, look after their household, and practice virtue from a young age, the other instructs them to be gentle with their husband's penis, look after their pubic hygiene, and learn from a young age how to be attractive for their future spouse, thus effectively extending women's education to the bedroom. Notably, such works have highlighted the possibility of a female target audience for erotica.

Women's Sexuality, Marriage, and Family

It is appropriate at this point to consider the question of women's sexuality in its own right, rather than merely as the object of male consumption, both in print and in the flesh, that has appeared so far in this chapter. Discourses on this subject, produced by a male-dominated publishing industry and legislators, are almost inevitably filtered by a male gaze, and women's own voices and sexual experiences have been largely lost to us.[23] For example, whereas early modern Japan developed a tradition of male same-sex desire with its own pedigree, icons, and literary output, no corresponding discourse – or even term, for that matter – existed for female same-sex desire. Female–female pairings appear in popular fiction and erotica, but these arguably reflect the fantasies of their male creators and tend to relegate such

21 See Ishigami Aki, *Nihon no shunga, ehon kenkyū* (Research on Japanese Erotic Books and Prints) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2015); Andrew Gerstle and Timothy Clark, eds., 'Shunga: Sex and Humour in Japanese Art and Literature', *Japan Review* special issue 26 (2013).

22 Andrew Gerstle, *Edo onna no shungabon* (Edo Women's Erotic Books) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2013); also contributions by Gerstle and Moretti in Gerstle and Clark, 'Shunga', 169–212.

23 Anne Walthall, 'Masturbation and Discourse on Female Sexual Practices in Early Modern Japan', *Gender & History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 1–18.

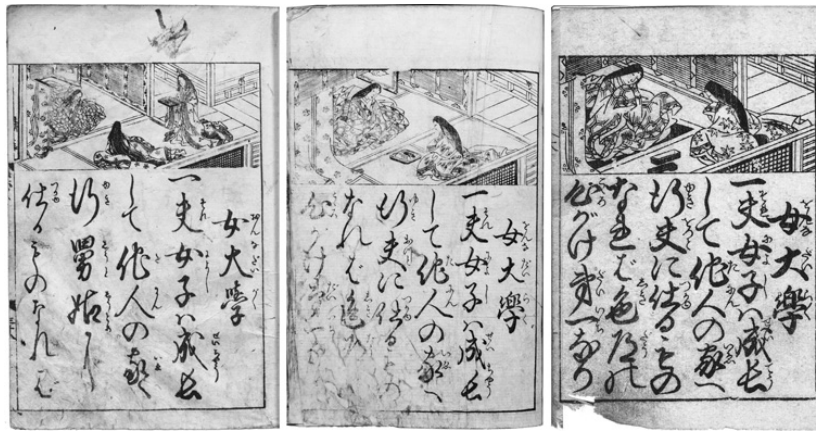

Figure 12.5 Women's educational text *Onna daigaku* (Greater Learning for Women, 1772) (*left*) and two versions of its erotic parody *Onna dairaku* (Greater Pleasure for Women, *c.* 1770) (*centre and right*). The original image depicts a noblewoman with her attendants; in the erotic versions she is offered two dildos on a tray (*centre*) and is shown masturbating with a dildo (*right*). The page layout and calligraphy closely replicate the original. Source: Tōsho Bunko, Honolulu Museum of Art Collection and Koizumi Yoshinaga Collection.

encounters to exclusively female contexts, such as the fabled women's quarters in the shogunal and daimyo households; in this way, they are couched in the androcentric notion that female–female sex represented a poor substitute for the 'real' (male) act that was not available to these women. Rare hints of intimate female friendships can be found in contemporary letters and reports,[24] but a dearth of sources leaves us largely in the dark on this matter.

Some scholars have hailed the dildo (*harigata*) as a symbol of early modern women's sexual agency and claim to sexual satisfaction.[25] Made from water buffalo horn or tortoise shell in varying sizes, these implements were routinely advertised in handbills from Edo's famous sex shop, Yotsumeya. In standard shopping guides to Edo they innocuously appear in the publication's 'sundries' section, euphemistically marketed as 'sundries for women' (*onna komamono*) that could be ordered by mail from anywhere in the provinces (*Edo kaimono hitori annai* (Personal Guide to Shopping in Edo), 1824). Objects from the period survive as material testament to the practice, not least a set

24 Walthall, 'Masturbation', 10; Ujiie Mikito, *Edo no joshiryoku: Ōoku mōjo retsuden* (Girl Power in Edo: Bibliographies of Exemplary Strong Women of the Inner Quarters) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2010), 14.

25 Tanaka Yūko, *Harigata to Edo-onna* (Edo Women and Dildos) (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō, 1999).

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preserved in the above-mentioned Mito collection. Erotic discourses commonly depicted dildos as masturbatory devices for women (see Figure 12.5) and women as sexual agents who actively enjoyed masturbation and whose sexual pleasure was important to their mental and physical well-being. Although this ultimately formed part of early modern pornotopian fantasies, it is nevertheless significant that some discursive space existed in which women could be imagined as sexual beings and their sexual needs and feelings acknowledged.

Women also participated in the early modern libidinous economy as consumers – of kabuki plays, actor prints, and, by all accounts, male prostitution.[26] Legal documents from the 1830s reveal that by that point officials were in fact concerned about *female* customers ('female moneylenders and the like') of male commercial sex.[27] Popularly, such women were imagined to be mainly widows and ladies-in-waiting from the women's quarters – a rather circumscribed group with disposable income and no access to men, rather than 'regular' wives and daughters, who were subject to the control of their husbands and fathers. Late seventeenth-century actor evaluation books occasionally remark upon certain actors being particular favourites with the court ladies, and one late eighteenth-century Edo joke tells of a scheme devised by an actor to ward off his fan club of ardent ladies-in-waiting by holding a raffle with his own hand in marriage as the coveted prize; his plan backfires when the winning ticket is found to be shared by ten such ladies.[28] Such claims were not entirely early modern urban legend, as evidenced by a notorious scandal that swept Edo in 1714, in which the high-ranking court lady Ejima, during a rare outing from the palace, indulged in a visit to the theatre and the company of the actor Ikushima Shingorō. Yet much of this discourse is limited to sensationalized gossip and literary stereotypes about specific groups of unmarried women.

Antithetical to this image of women as sexual beings in erotica and popular discourses were the prescriptive norms of femininity propagated by the educational texts for women that were produced in great numbers and widely read in the eighteenth century, such as the renowned *Greater Learning for Women* (*Onna daigaku*, 1729). Inspired by Confucian notions of

26 Tanaka Yūko, *Edo-onna no iro to koi: Wakashū-gonomi* (Edo Women's Love and Eros: The Craze for Young Men) (Tokyo: Gakshū Kenkyūsha, 2002). Tanaka's research is limited to literary and visual representations of women.

27 Saga and Yoshida, eds., *Shirīzu yūkaku*, 79.

28 Angelika Koch, 'Between the Back and the Front: Male Love in Humorous Tales of the Edo Period', *Vienna Journal of East Asian Studies* 1 (2011): 21.

gendered propriety, which restricted contact with the other sex from an early age, such texts instructed women on how to become virtuous wives and obedient daughters-in-law. Sexuality remains shrouded in the background in such texts, appearing only as an underlying imperative to procreate for the sake of the household. Pre- and post-partum handbooks for women extended such notions of propriety and procreative sexuality to the female reproductive body, claiming on medical authority that a woman's morally upright behaviour (or, conversely, the lack of it) during pregnancy would ultimately determine the health, character, and future fortunes of the foetus.[29] While women's historians have amply demonstrated that the realities for women were far more complex than those posited by such restrictive educational discourses,[30] marriage and fertility nevertheless played a central role in the sexual life of both women and men, particularly as ideological notions of the 'household' (*ie*) and its continuity over generations permeated all social strata during the course of the eighteenth century.

Marriage was monogamous for the vast majority of the commoner population, but institutionalized concubinage was widespread at the top tier of society, including for the emperor, shogun, and domain lords. The imperial Bureau of Palace Attendants assigned female staff in rotation to serve as the emperor's bed companions (*osoba-san)*, and the shogun's 'Great Interior' (*ōoku*), the women's quarters at Edo Castle, was home to a specific category of women (*chūrō*) who were sexually available to their lord.[31] The eleventh shogun, Ienari (r. 1787–1834), was particularly prolific, fathering over fifty children with his principal wife and some twenty to forty concubines. A number of eighteenth-century rulers, including Tokugawa Yoshimune (r. 1716–45) and Emperor Nakamikado (r. 1709–35), were themselves born to concubines. Further down the social ladder, heads of samurai households also commonly entertained sexual and reproductive relationships with female servants, typically daughters of low-ranking samurai or higher-class commoners. Children from such unions were usually fully integrated into their fathers' aristocratic or warrior

29 Susan Burns, 'The Body as Text: Confucianism, Reproduction, and Gender in Early Modern Japan', in *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan and Vietnam*, ed. Benjamin Elman, Herman Ooms, and John Duncan, Asia Pacific Monograph Series (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 178–219.

30 See, e.g., Marcia Yonemoto, *The Problem of Women in Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

31 On these elite female environments and sexuality, see Cecilia Segawa Seigle and Linda H. Chance, *Ōoku: The Secret World of the Shogun's Women* (Amherst, MA: Cambria, 2013), chs. 5 and 6; G. G. Rowley, *An Imperial Concubine's Tale: Scandal, Shipwreck, and Salvation in Seventeenth-Century Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

households.[32] Wives, meanwhile, were routinely exhorted in educational texts to avoid jealousy and maintain harmony in the household, but it appears that not all women obliged their husbands on this count.[33] On the kabuki stage and in popular fiction, scorned wives sometimes engage in murderous vendettas against their rivals or even appear as vengeful ghosts to torment their unfaithful husband and female interlopers.

Chastity and lifelong commitment in marriage was, by contrast, a prototypically feminine virtue touted in educational literature for women and praised in government collections of exemplary behaviour such as the *Kōgiroku* (Records of Filiality, 1801). When a samurai wife stabbed a former lover in a criminal case of 1824, the authorities were ostensibly more concerned with punishing the lapse of wifely chastity represented by her meeting a man alone in the private 'inner' part of the house than with the actual murder.[34] Yet despite such normative ideas, divorce and remarriage were in practice common across all status groups and were rarely stigmatized for either sex, with divorce rates ranging from approximately 10 per cent for samurai to between 10 and 40 per cent for commoners. Tsuneno, the strong-willed daughter of a Buddhist priest and the protagonist of Amy Stanley's *Stranger in the Shogun's City*, was married no fewer than four times.[35] Among the urban and rural lower classes, marriage was often a fairly ad hoc and informal arrangement and could involve substantial periods of pre-marital cohabitation. In farming village communities, in particular, the practice of 'night crawling' (*yobai*) permitted young, unmarried men to pay nightly visits to girls and widows.[36]

32 See, e.g., Luke Roberts, 'Women's Roles in Men's Narrative of Samurai Life,' in *Women and Networks in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, ed. Bettina Gramlich-Oka et al. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 21–41; Anne Walthall 'Social Norms versus Individual Desire: Conventions and Unconventionality in the History of Hirata Atsutane's Family', in *What Is a Family? Answers from Early Modern Japan*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Berry and Marcia Yonemoto (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 195–216.

33 Luke Roberts, 'Governing the Samurai Family in the Late Edo Period', in *What Is a Family?*, ed. Berry and Yonemoto, 156.

34 Roberts, 'Governing the Samurai Family', 163.

35 Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun's City: A Japanese Woman and Her World* (New York: Scribner's, 2020).

36 On 'night-crawling' and male village youth groups, see Anne Walthall, 'The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan', in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 50–1; and Nagano Hiroko, 'Collective Maturation: The Construction of Masculinity in Early Modern Villages', in *Recreating Japanese Men*, ed. Sabine Frühstück and Anne Walthall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 212–15.

Within the context of marriage, it was a commonly held belief that women's sexuality was the responsibility of fathers and husbands and subject to their control. Laws for adultery promulgated in the shogunate's *One Hundred Articles* (*O-sadamegaki hyakkajō*, 1748), for example, criminalized a wife's extra-marital affair (but not a husband's) and meted out the death penalty as punishment to perpetrators, demonstrating that such behaviour was a severe infraction of the patriarchal order of the household. In line with this, cuckolded husbands, particularly those of samurai status, were commonly rebuked or even punished by officials for having failed to properly manage their wives. Although in reality most cases of adultery were settled privately in a less drastic fashion,[37] such settlements still involved the intervention of male village officials, relatives, and letters of apology from fathers to male heads of households.

Women's fertility increasingly became a concern for the shogunate and domain rulers in the late eighteenth century following population stagnation and falling tax revenues.[38] This was particularly an issue in parts of north-eastern Japan, where families customarily 'thinned out' the size of their dependent family through abortion and infanticide, with perhaps as many as four in every ten pregnancies being subject to such practices.[39] In response, regional authorities took an increasingly active role in the reproductive lives of women by introducing measures such as the registration and surveillance of pregnancies by village officials and doctors, subsidies for child-rearing, and moral campaigns against infanticide that demonized perpetrators as hideous beasts and monsters in pamphlets, posters, and votive tablets (Figure 12.6). In a bid by the Yonezawa domain to boost fertility, local officials in 1792 were even instructed to broker marriages for single men over the age of twenty and women over the age of seventeen.[40]

37 Amy Stanley, 'Adultery, Punishment, and Reconciliation in Tokugawa Japan', *Journal of Japanese Studies* 33, no. 2 (2007): 309–35.

38 Sawayama Mikako, *Sei to seishoku no kinsei* (Sex and Reproduction in Early Modern Japan) (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 2005); Ochiai Emiko, 'The Reproductive Revolution at the End of the Tokugawa Period', in *Women and Class in Japanese History*, ed. Hitomi Tonomura, Anne Walthall, and Wakita Haruko (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 187–215.

39 Fabian Drixler, *Mabiki: Infanticide and Population Growth in Eastern Japan, 1660–1950* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 21.

40 Sawayama Mikako, *Sei kara yomu Edo jidai: Seikatsu no genba kara* (Reading the Edo Period through Sex: Views from Real Life) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2020), 51–5.

Figure 12.6 Midwife smothering a newborn baby, untitled print, late Edo period. Both the midwife and the mother of the child are shown as demonic, horned figures, representing their inhumane nature. Source: Kyūshū University Medical Library.

Sex and Health

Early modern Japan thus developed a lively erotic culture as well as a concern for reproductive sex in the service of household continuity; yet notions of sex vary across time and societies, and may extend beyond the familiar associations with pleasure and procreation. The notion that certain kinds of sexual behaviour have consequences for health has a long, now well-documented history across a range of cultures, including early modern Japan. In eighteenth-century Japan the (male) body's well-being was in fact an important arena for articulating sexual standards across a variety of media that included expert medical treatises, popular medical advertisements, household regulations (*kakun*), autobiographical writings – and, first and foremost, health cultivation manuals.

These so-called books on 'Nurturing Life' (*yōjō*), penned by doctors, scholars, and other (pseudo-)experts in accessible language for the layman, provided guidelines for healthy living, including advice on eating, drinking,

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sleeping, and 'sexual matters'. Arguably the best known of these texts, *Yōjōkun* (Precepts for Nurturing Life, 1713), written by the renowned Neo-Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekiken, emphatically warns against sexual excess and champions restraint for men wishing to improve their health. A common feature in texts such as Ekiken's is the recommended frequency of ejaculation based on age, for example 'leaking one's essence [semen]' once every four days in one's twenties, once every eight days in one's thirties, and not at all after the age of sixty. Such calls for moderation and restraint in health manuals reflected the theoretical trappings of Sino-Japanese medicine, which conceived of sexual fluids as a type of finite life force that warranted preservation and was lost through ejaculation. Failure to moderate one's sexual desires could allegedly result in men suffering from exhaustion, ringing ears, loose teeth, bad eyesight, greying hair – and of course death for the unrelentingly excessive. In this sense, it was the quantity of sexual activity that represented the main concern in such discourses, whereas any evaluation of specific acts, such as masturbation, homosexuality, and the consumption of erotica, is noticeably absent.[41]

Judging from eighteenth-century publishers' catalogues, health manuals were perceived primarily as a medical genre, but they were also suffused with Confucian-style ethics and the ideology of the household. The latter has traditionally been viewed as subordinating female bodies to the goals of family continuity and prosperity, but in health discourses the same also arguably held true for male bodies. Physical health was in fact inseparable from moral virtue in these early modern formulations, and desire was viewed not merely as a matter of ethics but also as a medical pathogen that could have tangible, somatic consequences if mismanaged. In this context, a paragon of 'health' was at the same time an exemplar of masculinity and the ideal head of the household. It is telling that an early nineteenth-century guidebook for prospective bridegrooms (*Kon'in danshikun* (A Young Man's Precepts for Marriage), 1805) recommends Ekiken's health manual as suitable reading for the husband-to-be and declares familiarity with sexual health guidelines indispensable for married men.

In their outlook, such health discourses often reflected the sexual values of their scholarly authors; yet the audience for such works remained by no means limited to the warrior strata, as extant evidence about book ownership among early eighteenth-century commoner elites, for example, reveals.

41 Angelika Koch, 'Sexual Healing: Regulating Male Sexuality in Edo-Period Books on "Nurturing Life"', *International Journal of Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 143–70.

The prominent Edo merchant house Echigoya even created their own in-house *Rules for Nurturing Life* (*Yōjōshiki*, 1726), which was distributed to branch offices for the edification of employees; included was a warning against the health risks of 'the way of sexual desire' – rather untypically defined as 'solitary sex' and 'losing one's head over actors and courtesans'. For those who did not have the willpower or the willingness to exercise restraint, late eighteenth-century promotional pamphlets for the patent medication Tenju hogentan promised the same benefits as Ekiken's sexual health regimen in instant pill form. Popular fiction frequently poked fun at men who had 'depleted their kidneys', the putative seat of semen in Sino-Japanese medicine, while gossip surfaced in letters and records that excessive venery was the root cause of a certain person's illness or demise. Such instances document the widely shared cultural assumption at the time that sex was linked with health, even though different conclusions were drawn from it.

Claims concerning the actual practice of sexual regimens and first-hand experience of their efficacy meanwhile appeared in autobiographical writings of warrior-class men. The shogunal reformer and politician Matsudaira Sadanobu (1759–1829), for example, reports in his memoir that for health reasons he refrained from all sexual activity for a year and a half in his younger years and adhered to a strict age-based scheme of limiting ejaculation not unlike Ekiken's. Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1659–1719) in the now famed samurai treatise *Hidden by Leaves* (*Hagakure*, 1716) recounts forsaking sex for a full seven years in his youth when told that he would not live beyond the age of twenty. He also recommends a half-year or even a one- to two-year course of abstinence as the best cure for 'people nowadays', who according to him die young due to lack of sexual restraint and weak constitutions. These men were convinced of the efficacy of controlling their sex life and apparently experienced the relationship between their body and sexual activity as a precarious and fragile one that required careful attention and self-care. Even if we doubt the veracity of their declarations, the authors' interest in presenting themselves as models for others to emulate in their writings is nevertheless evidence that such notions formed part of an ideal masculinity at the time.

Conclusion

As has become clear in the present discussion, the image of early modern Japanese sexuality as 'pleasure-based' occludes the experiences of various social groups and masks the varied landscape of sexual discourses inflected by gender and class that existed at the time.

Commercialized sexual 'pleasure', whether sold in print or in the flesh, was primarily aimed at and produced by men; the realities for the thousands of young women (and men) who sustained the sex trade were far less pleasurable and palatable. Pleasure for women was not unimaginable, particularly in erotic discourses, which depicted a '*shunga*topia' where everyone, irrespective of gender or class, could equally (and single-mindedly) partake in carnal delights. Yet this notion of sex as unfettered pleasure for all was ultimately a fantasy created in early modern popular literature, erotica, and art, and one that cannot be facilely accepted as reflecting actual behaviour – a proviso that also applies to the educational ideals of female chastity and male moderation presented in lifestyle and instructional literature at the time. Such normative notions had the greatest impact on the early modern samurai elite and to an extent the upper reaches of the commoner population, who sought to emulate their social betters in mores and marriage customs. Enshrined in government pronouncements and regulations, these sexual values could in practice be circumvented and evade enforcement, as long as this served the greater interests of the household. For the lower ranks of the urban and rural population, such norms were probably of little consequence and a 'trial marriage system' of pre-marital sexual liaisons and cohabitation appears to have been accepted as a matter of course.

Most importantly, 'pleasure' was not the only meaning early modern discourses ascribed to sexuality at the time, but represented merely one among a range of diverse and often conflicting forms of knowledge. Sex was also a health issue, a matter addressed in legislation for its potential social disruptiveness, a problem for authorities in view of the population's fertility, and a major concern for the household founded upon the 'harmonious union' of the marital couple. Neither was sexuality unregulated, as is clear from a range of health guidelines, school and household rules, governmental campaigns against infanticide and abortion, and legal measures (although largely ineffective) against erotica, unlicensed prostitution, and the 'perisexual' contexts of same-sex liaisons.

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