Japan Past & Present

Male-Male Love in Early Modern Japan

This reading list was developed as a supplement for viewers of the Blood, Tears, and Samurai Love project who are interested in learning more about male-male sexuality in early modern Japan. While we do not claim this to be a comprehensive list of English-language materials on the subject, we hope that it will provide sufficient research background. We also anticipate that a number of these resources are well-suited for use as assigned readings for course syllabuses.

The list has been divided into three sections:

(1) secondary readings
(2) primary readings translated into English
(3) general resources on gender and sexuality beyond Japan

[□] indicates a resource particularly recommended for students and non-specialists.

Secondary Sources

Gerstle, Andrew. "Shunga in Tokugawa Society and Culture." In *The Tokugawa World*, edited by Gary P. Leupp, James McClain, and Tao Demin, 627–646. Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2022.

Gundry, David. *Parody, Irony and Ideology in the Fiction of Ihara Saikaku*. Boston: Brill, 2017.

———. "Samurai Lovers, 'Samurai Beasts': Warriors and Commoners in Ihara Saikaku's *Way of the Warrior* Tales." *Japanese Studies* 35, no. 2 (2015): 151–168.

———."The Two Paths of Love in the Fiction of Ihara Saikaku." In *The Tokugawa World,* edited by Gary P. Leupp, James McClain, and Tao Demin, 668–684. Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2022.

n.b. Readers interested in the society and culture of early modern Japan are encouraged to explore the rest of *The Tokugawa World*, a recent monumental publication containing over 60 contributions.

Koch, Angelika. "Between the Back and the Front: Male Love in Humorous Tales of the Edo Period." *Vienna Graduate Journal of East Asian Studies* 1 (2011): 1–32.

———."Sexual Healing: Regulating Male Sexuality in Edo-Period Books on 'Nurturing Life.'" *International Journal of Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 143–170.

Leupp, Gary P. *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

———."Capitalism and Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century Japan." Special Issue: *Eighteenth-Century Homosexuality in Global Perspective, Historical Reflections / Reflexions Historiques* 33, no. 1 (2007): 135–152.

Matsuba Ryōko. "Kabuki Actors in Erotic Books (Shunpon)." Special Issue: *Shunga: Sex and Humor in Japanese Literature*, *Japan Review* 26 (2013): 215–237.

Mezur, Katherine. *Beautiful Boys/Outlaw Bodies: Devising Kabuki Female-Likeness.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Morinaga, Maki Isaka. "The Gender of Onnagata as the Imitating Imitated: Its Historicity, Performativity, and Involvement in the Circulation of Femininity." *positions* 10, no. 2 (2002): 254–284.

 Mostow, Joshua S. "The Gender of Wakashu and the Grammar of Desire." In *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, edited by Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Marybeth Graybill, 49–70. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003.

Mostow, Joshua S., and Asato Ikeda. *A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Edo-Period Prints and Paintings (1600–1868)*. Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum Press, 2016.

n.b. *Museum catalog of 2016 Royal Ontario Museum exhibition. For a reflection essay of the exhibition by the curator, see*

Ikeda, Asato. "Curating *A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Prints*." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 638–647.

 Pflugfelder, Gregory M. *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

———."The Nation-State, the Age/Gender System, and the Reconstitution of Erotic Desire in Nineteenth-Century Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 4 (2012): 963–974.

Schalow, Paul. "Kukai and the Tradition of Male Love in Japanese Buddhism." In *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón, 215–230. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992.

———."Theorizing Sex/Gender in Early Modern Japan: Kitamura Kigin's *Maidenflowers* and *Wild Azaleas*." *Japanese Studies* 18, no. 3 (1998):

246–263.

Screech, Timon. "The Shogun's Lover's Would-be Swedish Boyfriend: Inoue Masashige, Tokugawa Iemitsu and Olof Eriksson Willman." In *Sexual Diversity in Asia, c. 600–1950*, edited by Raquel Reyes and William Clarence-Smith, 105–124. London: Routledge, 2012.

Primary Literature in English Translation

(listed in approximate chronological order)

1619 | ***Mongrel Essays in Idleness*** **犬徒然** ***Inutsurezure*** by Konoe Nobuhiro 近衛信尋

The title of this collection of musings on samurai 'love of youths' gestures firstly to Essays in Idleness, *the canonical 14th century work in the* zuihitsu *genre written by Yoshida Kenkō, and secondly to the matured tradition of comic linked verse* (haikai no renga) *through its canine reference* (*inu* 'dog' or 'mongrel'). *Printed in 1653, this proudly irreverent series of essays predates the body of literature on male same-sex love that would be produced in the latter half of the century.*

Translation (partial, ~12 pgs) and introduction

Schalow, Paul G., trans. "Mongrel Essays in Idleness." In *A Kamigata Anthology: Literature from Japan's Metropolitan Centers, 1600–1750*, edited by Sumie Jones, Adam L. Kern, and Kenji Watanabe, 374–384. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020.

1624? | Selections from ***Today's Tales of Yesterday*** **昨日は今日の物語** ***Kinō wa kyō no monogatari*** **(**anonymous author)

This collection of humorous anecdotes was printed in numerous editions throughout the early Edo period and marked an intentional departure from

*the medieval tradition of recorded anecdotes (*setsuwa). *The translator Schalow has selected anecdotes dealing with male-male sexuality from this large collection.*

Translation (excerpts, ~12 pgs) and introduction

Schalow, Paul G., trans. "Today's Tales of Yesterday." In *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature,* edited by Stephen D. Miller, 55–66. San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1996.

n.b. Readers are encouraged to explore the rest of the anthology for other works of literature on male-male sexuality in Japan.

1636–1643? | ***A Boor's Tale*** 田夫物語 ***Denbu monogatari*** **(**anonymous author)

A short tale in which two men debate the relative merits of "male love" (nanshoku; i.e. male same-sex love) and *"female love"* (*joshoku*; i.e. male heterosexual love), *the recurring dialectic of the Edo period through which literary discourse on male sexuality occurred. The two sides of the debate offer literary precedents as well as personal experience in presenting their arguments.*

Translation (complete, ~13 pgs)

Leupp, Gary P., trans. "Appendix: *A Boor's Tale*." In *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan*, by Gary Leupp, 205–218. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

1682 | Section from ***Life of a Sensuous Man*** 好色一代男 ***Kōshoku ichidai otoko*** by Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴

Saikaku's first work of prose fiction, Life of a Sensuous Man *marked the beginning of a literary period of "books of the floating world" (*ukiyo zōshi*)*

and tells of the romantic adventures of Yonosuke (*literally, "man of the world"), whom readers follow from age six to his twilight years. While the erotic exploits of the work's protagonist are not exclusively episodes of male-male eroticism, the translator Danly has selected an episode from chapter two in which the fourteen year-old hero encounters an itinerant male prostitute* (tobiko).

Translation (excerpt, ~3 pgs) and introduction

Danly, Robert Lyons, trans. "Flyboys." In *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature,* edited by Stephen D. Miller, 92–95. San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1996.

n.b. Additional excerpts of *Life of a Sensuous Man* can be found in the various anthologies cited in this reading list.

1687 | *The Great Mirror of Male Love* 男色大鏡 *Nanshoku ōkagami* by Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴

Saikaku's longest prose work, The Great Mirror of Male Love *is the author's most famous work on the subject of male homosexuality and consists of twenty stories of samurai and twenty stories of young kabuki actors depicting what was at the time called* wakashudō or shudō, the *"way of loving youths."*

Translation (complete, ~250 pgs) and introduction

Ihara Saikaku. *The Great Mirror of Male Love*. Translated by Paul G. Schalow. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

n.b. An excerpt of *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, also translated by Paul Schalow, can be found in *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600–1900,* edited by Haruo Shirane, 120–130. New York: Columbia

University Press, 2002.

1702 | *Male Colors Pickled with Pepperleaf Shoots* 男色木芽漬 *Nanshoku kinomezuke* by Urushiya Ensai 漆屋園斎

As stated by the translator Pflugfelder in his introduction, Male Colors Pickled with Pepperleaf Shoots *offers a vision of "male passion" in which members of all social classes participated, valorizing the virtues of young men while misogynistically decrying the qualities of women, the competitors for men's affections. It is probably more appropriate to take the normative tone of works such as this as tongue-in-cheek, not least because of this work and related works' sarcastic choice of titles.*

Translation (excerpt, ~7 pgs) and introduction

Pflugfelder, Gregory trans. "How a Pledge of Undying Love was Reborn." In *A Kamigata Anthology: Literature from Japan's Metropolitan Centers, 1600–1750*, edited by Sumie Jones, Adam L. Kern, and Kenji Watanabe, 385–391. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020.

1706–7 | *Bad Boy Morihisa* and ***The Male Players' "Takasago"* (**anonymous authors)

Taken from the parodic librettos Virtuoso Vocal Pieces: Beating Rhythm with a Fan *and* Virtuoso Vocal Pieces: A Stacked Pair of Sake Cups *respectively, these two libretto chant (*utai) *scripts—a popular alternative to full-scale Noh productions—reimagine with comedic delight a revered warrior in the former and the time-honored Noh topos of Takasago in the latter.*

Translation (excerpts, ~5 pgs) and introduction

Quinn, Shelley Fenno, trans. "The Back Side of Nō Chant." In *A Kamigata Anthology: Literature from Japan's Metropolitan Centers, 1600–1750*,

edited by Sumie Jones, Adam L. Kern, and Kenji Watanabe, 392–397. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020.

1713 | ***Mountain Azaleas*** **岩津々志** ***Iwastsutsuji*** by Kitamura Kigin 北村季吟

An illustrated anthology of 34 passages of male homoerotic poetry and prose extracted from works of classical literature. Compiled in 1676 by poet and scholar Kitamura Kigin and later published in 1713 by Sawada Kichizaemon.

Translation (complete, ~20 pgs) and introduction

Schalow, Paul G. "The Invention of a Literary Tradition of Male Love: Kitamura Kigin's Iwatsutsuji." *Monumenta Nipponica* 48, no. 1 (1993): 1–31.

1763–1769 | ***Rootless Grass*** **根無草** ***Nenashigusa*** by Hiraga Gennai 平賀源内

*A satirical novel (*gesaku*), proclaimed by its author Hiraga Gennai to be the first best-seller of its kind, that brings levity and biting allegorical critique to its depiction of hell as ruled by Enma, who falls for the real-life kabuki actor Kikunojō II. Part I was published in 1763 in five volumes; Part II was published in 1769 in five volumes.*

Translation (Chapter 3, ~10 pgs) and introduction

Sitkin, David, trans. "Rootless Grass" In *An Edo Anthology: Literature from Japan's Mega-City, 1750–1850*, edited by Sumie Jones and Kenji Watanabe, 114–124. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013.

Translation (excerpts, ~20 pgs) and introduction

Drake, Chris, trans. "Rootless Weeds." In *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600–1900*, edited by Haruo Shirane, 461–486. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

1776 | *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* 雨月物語 *Ugetsu monogatari* by Ueda Akinari 上田秋成

This volume from Akinari's collection of supernatural tales Ugetsu monogatari *(which inspired the famous Mizoguchi Kenji 1953 film of the same name) presents a ghost story of an abbot's cannibalistic devotion to his young lover. While "The Blue Cowl" bears the traces of Noh theatre's narrative structure in which a priest must pacify a vengeful apparition, it is important to note the characters' attitudes towards eros in this tale.*

Translation (excerpt, ~10 pgs) and introduction

Sibley, William F., trans. "The Blue Cowl." In *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature,* edited by Stephen D. Miller, 125–133. San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1996.

[before 1868] *The Thread from the Spool* 賤のおだまき *Shizu no odamaki* (anonymous author)

A fictionalized account of two historical warriors from Satsuma province in Kyushu who lived during the Warring States period (1467–1600). Written sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century and circulated in the first decades of the Meiji era, reaching the readership of well-known writers like Mori Ōgai, this relatively understudied text stood at the center of what the translator Durante calls a "cultural war" between Meiji reformists interested in the Westernization of Japan and conservatives looking back to the warrior ethos that the text thematized.

Translation (complete, ~30 pgs) and introduction

Durante, Daniele. "*Shizu no odamaki* or 'The Thread from the Spool': Male Same-Sex Love and Warrior Ethos in a Nineteenth-Century Historical Tale." *Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Japanese* 56, no. 2 (2022): 411–472.

Visual Sources

Shagan, Ofer. "Male male, female female Shunga images 'Shagan collection.'"

n.b. Many of these have been printed in Shagan, Ofer. *Japanese Erotic Art. The Hidden World of Shunga*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013. (also published in French as *L'art érotique japonais: Le monde secret des shunga*)

(in Japanese only) Hayakawa Monta 早川聞多. *Ukiyoe shunga to nanshoku* 浮世絵春画と男色. Tokyo: Kawade Shobo̅ Shinsha, 1998.

Gender and Sexuality Theory Readings & non-Japan

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.

Chiang, Howard, and Alvin K. Wong. "Asia is Burning: Queer Asia as Critique." *Culture, Theory and Critique* 58, no. 2 (2017): 121–126.

Eng, David L., Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz. "Introduction: What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* 23, no. 3–4 (2005): 1–17.

Jackson, Reginald. "Preface. Benefits of the Doubt: Questioning Discipline and the Risks of Queer Reading." In *A Proximate Remove: Queering Intimacy and Loss in* The Tale of Genji, xiii-xxi. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021.

Lo, Vivienne, and Penelope Barrett. "Other Pleasures? Anal Sex and Medical Discourse in Pre-Modern China." In *Sexual Diversity in Asia, c. 600–1950*, edited by Raquel Reyes and William Clarence-Smith, 25–46. London: Routledge, 2012.

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. "Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories for Historical Analysis?" *Journal of Women's History* 18, no. 1 (2006): 11–21.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Queer and Now." In *Tendencies*, 1–22. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993.

Helpful Readers

Coates, Jennifer, Lucy Fraser, and Mark Pendleton, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture.* New York: Routledge, 2020.

Kimura Saeko. *A Brief History of Sexuality in Premodern Japan*. Tallinn: TLU Press, 2010.

McLelland, Mark, and Vera Mackie, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Reyes, Raquel, and William Clarence-Smith, eds. *Sexual Diversity in Asia, c. 600–1950*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Wiesner-Hanks, Merry, and Mathew Kuefler, eds. *Cambridge World History of Sexualities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.

Notes

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