Through the Looking Glass:
Reflections of Differences in Samurai and Kabuki-Prostitute Male-Male Relations
in Ihara Saikaku’s The Great Mirror of Male Love

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Abstract

During the Tokugawa period, male-male homosexual relationships, known as nanshoku or shudô, enjoyed a large degree of cultural acceptability in Japanese samurai society. Like many cultural traditions of the samurai at that time, the practice of nanshoku was absorbed into the lifestyle of the new bourgeoisie class, the townsmen or chonin. But while the nanshoku of the samurai was based in strength of character and strict etiquette, in the commercial sphere of the chonin, male-male sexual relations came to mean business interactions with prostitutes. With the advent of the printing press, nanshoku became a prominent subject in the emerging body of popular literature.

Included in the works produced is Ihara Saikaku’s The Great Mirror of Male Love, a collection of 40 short stories divided into two volumes, the former focusing on samurai and the latter on kabuki prostitutes. The first half of the book expounds upon tales of samurai valor and true love, challenging the reader to live up to the high standards set by the fictional characters of the stories. However, the tone changes in the second half, in which a conversational tone and comical subject matter engage the reader in amusing anecdotes rather than didactic tales with lofty morals. Through the literary devices employed in The Great Mirror of Male Love, Saikaku illustrates the differences between the samurai and chonin styles of nanshoku, as well as the differences between the two classes themselves within the highly stratified Tokugawa society.
Introduction

While throughout the seventeenth century, homosexual behavior was condemned and persecuted throughout Europe, in premodern Japan, male-male homosexual conduct was considered neither socially unacceptable nor morally wrong. In fact, by the time of the Tokugawa period, a long-standing tradition of homosexual behavior existed in various Japanese social spheres, and was so common in Japanese culture that the Jesuits missionaries in Japan at the time were horrified at the degree of acceptance it received in society.\(^1\) Despite the fact that homosexual practices were “extremely common, at least in towns and cities”\(^2\) in seventeenth century Japan, the male-male relationships of the Tokugawa period were far removed from modern conceptions of homosexual relationships.\(^3\) Like most interpersonal relations in the highly structured Tokugawa society, distinct rules governed what was acceptable and unacceptable in homosexual relationships, the most important of which being that all male-male relationships must be between an adult male and a youth.\(^4\)

Though to a modern reader the terms “adult” and “youth” seem to be indicators of age, during the Tokugawa period, stages of life were far more of social construction than determined by natural growth and maturation. Prior to becoming a youth (or wakashu), a boy would be considered a warabe or “child” who didn’t possess the “degree of personhood” that was

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4 The Tokugawa relationship paradigm, in which an adult was required to engage with a youth rather than another adult, has often been compared to that of ancient Greece. On the topic of homosexuality in ancient Greek culture, see David M Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990)
attributed to a youth⁵. Though there was no culturally or legally defined age at which a child became a youth, somewhere around the age of eleven or twelve, the crown of the boy’s head would be shaved while his bangs or maegami (literally “forelocks”) were left in place, distinguishing him now as a youth, available as a romantic interest to an adult male. At some time during the boy’s youthhood, likely around fourteen, his hair would be shaved again, this time shaping his hairline with right angles at the sides, still leaving part of the bangs, or sumi-maegami (“cornered forelocks”) to distinguish the boy as a youth.⁶ Some years after this second step towards adulthood, often between eighteen and twenty-one, the boy’s forelocks would be shaved off completely and he would undergo a coming-of-age or ceremony known as genbuku or “capping ceremony,” after which he would be considered an adult man, no longer available for relationships with other adults, but instead taking the adult position in male-male relationships with youths.⁷

But despite the fact that genbuku was an assured point in a male’s life, the age at which he underwent the ceremony was not clearly set. Because adulthood was firstly a social condition and only secondarily a biological state, changes in a youth’s appearance as he matured, such as body and facial hair, a deepening voice, and a taller stature, did not necessarily indicate adulthood and certainly did not disqualify youths from relations with adult males.⁸ In fact, the maturity a youth developed at this phase in his life could even be considered more attractive to his adult lover, as described in the 1643 text Shin’yuki, or “Record of Heartfelt Friends.”

Shin’yuki’s narrator describes the maturity and manly honor that emerge in the later stages of

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⁷ Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 33.
⁸ Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 32.
youthhood to enhance the pleasure of a relationship with a youth rather than detract from it. The youth’s maturation and “manly conduct” are a positive attribute of the later years of a male-male relationship. Additionally, accounts exist of men to whom the effects of puberty amplified attraction, as in a 1708 story of a daimyô or regional lord who was “fond of page boys with hair on their shins. Physical maturation, while an indication that a youth was nearing manhood, was not what ended a youth’s availability in male-male relations, but rather the social transition from youth to man—while hairy shins might be acceptable in a youthful lover, a clean-shaven pate was not.

Within these boundaries, however, male-male relationships were common and acceptable in seventeenth century Japanese society. Though “literally hundreds of categories and signifiers” developed over the years to describe male-male love, during the rule of the Tokugawa bakufu, male-male homosexual relations were most commonly referred to by two main terms: nanshoku and shudô. The former, written with a combination of the Japanese characters for “male,” and “color,” signified love between two men through Buddhist terms, using the ideograph for colour to evoke “the world of visually perceptible forms toward which lower beings, including humans, experienced desire, thus hindering their progress along the path of enlightenment.” Rather than to carry religious meaning, however, this term came to refer to relations that were both emotional and sexual rather than only one or the other, as some translations, such as “male

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9 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 31.
11 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 32.
12 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 4.
13 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 25.
love” or “male sexuality,” seem to imply.\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Nanshoku} appeared as the subject of innumerable popular books, as well as songs, poems, and woodblock prints, and was much more intrinsically connected with Tokugawa popular culture than with any Buddhist philosophies.

Aside from \textit{nanshoku}, another popular term for male-male relationships during the Tokugawa period was \textit{shudô}. An abbreviated form of “\textit{wakushudô},” literally written “way of the youth,” the word \textit{shudô} placed the love of male youths in the same frame as other “ways” or pursuits, such as \textit{chadô} (“way of tea” or Japanese tea ceremony), \textit{kadô} (“way of flowers” or Japanese flower arranging), and \textit{budô} (“way of martial arts” or Japanese traditional martial arts training). Like any of these pursuits, \textit{shudô} was then seen as an art to be perfected or a pursuit that, when done well, would “bring both spiritual and physical rewards to those who chose to follow its path.”\textsuperscript{15}

From these two terms, a variety of views of the culture that utilized them become evident. Firstly, though the object of desire is specified in these terms, both (like their female equivalents, \textit{joshoku} and \textit{nyodô}) take for granted the perspective from which they are intended—that is, the perspective of an adult male. Though both \textit{nanshoku} and \textit{shudô} only explicitly mention that it is a male being loved, they referred exclusively to male-male relationships, exemplifying the male-dominated nature of the sexual terminology at the time. An encounter between a female and a male would not have been referred to in writing or conversation as \textit{nanshoku}, as it would have been seen from the woman’s point of view, but \textit{joshoku} (“female colour”), simply because romantic encounters were always represented through the male lens. The youths of \textit{shudô} fall into the same model; it was assumed that an adult man was the one who practiced the “way of

\textsuperscript{15} Pflugfelder, \textit{Cartographies}, 28.
the youth,” “an erotic path that younger males traveled only in their capacity as a sexual object.”

Another difference apparent in the Tokugawa terminology for male-male relationships is that it differs greatly from the current term “homosexuality” in that it only refers to relationships between men. Female-female homosexuality did not share the same cultural acceptability that male-male homosexual relations enjoyed during the Tokugawa period, and written depictions of female-female sexual relations from seventeenth century Japan are few. In fact, Tokugawa Japan lacked a common word for both male-male and female-female relationships synonymous to “homosexuality” or the modern Japanese equivalent, *dôseiai* (“same-sex love”). Prior to its opening to the west, Japanese culture did not tend to link male-male and female-female relations under one classification of “same-sex relations” and, as a result, to designate *nanshoku* relationships as “homosexual” ones would be creating a skewed perspective of the way in which Tokugawa era Japanese persons viewed sexual or romantic relations between men. Because of this distinct chasm between female-female and male-male relationships in the Tokugawa Japanese mentality, “male-male” seems a more apt and accurate English language description of *nanshoku* or *shudô* ties.

Like “homosexuality,” the term “sexuality” in and of itself poses problems in the understanding of Japanese sexual relations in the Tokugawa period. While since the later decades of the twentieth century, “sexuality” has come to mean a fixed sexual orientation, such as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual, and is often linked with a person’s sense of identity, no

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16 Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 27.
17 Schalow, Introduction, 18.
18 Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 5.
19 For more on the construction of contemporary fixed sexuality and sexual identity, see David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).
such designation existed in seventeenth century Japan. The sex or gender of a man’s chosen sexual object was not considered to reflect on him in Tokugawa Japan—that is to say, a man might partake in male and female prostitutes equally without any sense that his choice demonstrated anything about his sexual preferences. Tokugawa period writings tell stories of married men pining after young male kabuki actors as well as daimyō keeping both mistresses and page boys, indicating that “Tokugawa men seldom viewed nanshoku and joshoku as mutually exclusive categories.”

Because of the complete lack of a link between identity and preferred sex of one’s romantic or sexual partners in the Tokugawa mentality, “sexuality” is instead used within the bounds of this study to refer to sexual activity or the capacity for sexual feelings.

Pre-Tokugawa and Tokugawa Period Male-Male Sexual Traditions

Despite differing from the modern concept of “homosexuality,” nanshoku and shudō’s emergence in popular culture during the Tokugawa period was not the first instance of culturally accepted male-male relationships in Japanese history. Evidence of homosexual relationships as early as the Heian period appear in diaries of notable court figures, such as Fujiwara Yorinaga (1120-1156), who detailed sexual encounters with a range of male partners.

Male-male themes appear in multiple Heian period works of fiction, as well, such as Torikaebaya Monogatari and Ariake no Wakare, both of which involve men falling in love with other men who, in reality, are women in disguise. Though the relationships featured in these works are not actually between two males, one of the characters involved nonetheless believes himself to be romantically attached to another man. Additionally, the widely famous Genji Monogatari or “Tale of Genji”

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20 Leupp, Male Colors, 95.
21 Leupp, Male Colors, 25.
includes multiple occasions in which male friendships are “eroticized through competition for women”\textsuperscript{22} despite its lack of any direct mention of male-male relationships. However, comparatively few substantial or explicit texts of male-male sexual relationships were produced by the Heian court.

Rather than amongst nobility, the first well-documented male-male sexual tradition in Japan was cultivated by Buddhist monks. In fact, male-male sexuality was so intrinsically linked to Buddhism at the time that one of the foremost figures in Japanese Buddhist history and the founder of the Shingon Buddhist sect, Kobo Daishi or Kukai (774-835) was attributed with bringing male-male homosexual practice from Tang China to Japan. The religious site he founded in 816, a temple atop Mount Koya in northeastern Wakayama prefecture\textsuperscript{23} was said to have been the location of the first male-male sexual encounter in Japan,\textsuperscript{24} and despite the unlikelihood of this claim, Buddhism can be accredited with the first well-documented tradition of male-male sexuality. While Buddhist monks took a vow to abstain from any from of sexual encounter with women, sex with younger boys seemed to be a “forgivable compromise between heterosexual involvements and complete sexual abstinence.”\textsuperscript{25} Young acolytes who lived and worked in Buddhist temples served as a sort of exception to the rule for monks otherwise deprived of emotional and sexual human contact.\textsuperscript{26} These acolytes or \textit{chigo}, usually between the ages of seven and fourteen, and their love affairs are the subjects of a genre of Muromachi period literature known as \textit{chigo monogatari} or “acolyte tales” authored by Buddhist priests. Most of

\textsuperscript{23} Margaret Helen Childs, \textit{Rethinking sorrow: revelatory tales of late medieval Japan} (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1991), 5.
\textsuperscript{24} Leupp, \textit{Male Colors}, 28.
\textsuperscript{25} Leupp, \textit{Male Colors}, 35.
\textsuperscript{26} Schalow, \textit{Partings}, 14.
these stories describe a love affair between a priest and an acolyte that ends tragically, causing the priest to experience some form of religious awakening or understand the fleeting nature of life and turn his focus wholly to Buddhism.\(^{27}\) While the religious aspects of these tales cannot be discarded, it can neither be ignored that “romance plays a major role” in many of the *chigo monogatari*.\(^{28}\) Another notable literary example of male-male love in Buddhist establishment during the tenth to thirteenth centuries is the existence love poems written by priests and addressed to their acolytes, some of which were even included in court poetry anthologies.\(^{29}\)

As power transitioned to the samurai warrior class during the Kamakura, Muromachi, and Momoyama periods and all of Japan was finally unified under the Tokugawa bakufu, male-male sexual tradition became an established part of the samurai lifestyle. Though there is no clear evidence, it has been hypothesized that samurai youths, who were often educated in Buddhist monasteries, may have been influenced by *chigo* relationships and embraced the Buddhist monk traditions, including those regarding to *nanshoku*,\(^{30}\) or that the militaristic society of the samurai was conducive to male-male sexual relationships.\(^{31}\) Military values such as strong loyalty and unwavering respect of those in authority, as well as the introduction of the Tokugawa feudal system in which loyalty to one’s lord was stressed as the most important samurai value may have all encouraged the establishment of a male-male sexual tradition.\(^{32}\) Indeed, “a number of the shoguns who ruled medieval Japan” are documented as having been involved sexually with


\(^{28}\) Childs, “Chigo Monogatari,” 5.


\(^{31}\) Leupp, *Male Colors*, 47.

As the Tokugawa period came into establishment, so did the rules and etiquette dictating *nanshoku* within samurai society.

Once Japan had been unified once more under Tokugawa rule and the feudal system had been put into effect in the various domains under the control of regional lords or *daimyô*, the country fell into a period of relative peace and economic stability. Now that Japan was no longer constantly ravaged by war, sprawling markets and large urban centers emerged along with a new bourgeoisie class of wealthy merchants. These affluent commoners, or *chônin* ("townsmen"), and their economic mobility posed a threat to the samurai administration, which constituted the Tokugawa ruling class. Because they wished to easily maintain their social status as the ruling authority, a strict class system was created that placed samurai at the top and merchants at the bottom, with farmers and craftsmen as the middle two classes. Nevertheless, wealthy townsmen continued to flourish while samurai, no longer needed for military reasons in the Tokugawa period of peace, were left completing bureaucratic work and sometimes fell into poverty.34

Nevertheless, samurai culture with its code of ethics and ideals of honor continued to flourish through the Tokugawa period,35 as did the samurai tradition of male-male sexuality. The *nanshoku* of the samurai, however, became less about sexual interaction and more about an idealized relationship between the youth and the man who loved him, and sexual intercourse served as only a part in "a larger system of ethical and esthetic standards that framed and even

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35 The samurai ethical code of *bushidô* is intrinsically tied to *nanshoku* practices in the Tokugawa period. For more on *bushidô*, see Yuzan Daidoji, Thomas F. Cleary, and Oscar Ratti, *Code of the Samurai: A Modern Translation of the Bushidô Shoshinshu* (Boston: Tuttle Pub, 1999).
These relationships between adult samurai and youths learning the correct ways of samurai ethics were expected to be about emotional commitment and nurturing growth, as well as sexual gratification. The adult man was expected to “provide social backing, emotional support, and a model of manliness for the boy,” while the youth in turn would prove he was “worthy of his lover by being a good student of samurai manhood.” These relationships were often expected to continue past the point at which the samurai came of age not as sexual partnerships but as a bond of samurai brothers, who support and care for one another even outside of a romantic or sexual relationship. Additionally, according to Paul Gordon Schalow, a scholar in the field, relationships between adult samurai and their wakashu often began with an exchange of spoken and written vows of love and faithfulness, not unlike a marriage ceremony. The vows included a promise “to love in this life and the next,” and the ultimate sign of devotion for a samurai was to commit seppuku, a form of honorable ritual suicide, for his lover. The relationship between a samurai man and youth was not considered to be a passing tryst to be taken lightly, but rather a deep and meaningful bond between two honorable warriors.

Outside the samurai sphere, however, another form of nanshoku came into existence in the Tokugawa period. Because of the healthy class of merchants with money to spare, a new sphere surrounding personal pleasure began to emerge within Japan’s urban centers. Red light districts furnished with geisha and other courtesans became popular destinations for merchants to

36 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 43.
37 Schalow, Introduction, 27.
38 For more on seppuku and other aspects of samurai lifestyle, see Catharina Bloomberg, The Heart of the Warrior: Origins and Religious Background of the Samurai System in Feudal Japan (Sandgate, Folkestone, Kent: Japan Library, 1994).
spend their wealth, and alongside these establishments sprung up popular theatre, kabuki. Kabuki is said to have been started by a woman named Okuni whose wildly popular dancing was emulated by other women, forming troupes of female performers who put on shows known as onna kabuki or “women’s kabuki.” These women wore elaborate costumes and often doubled as prostitutes, and because of the decadent and sexual nature of these performances, the shogun saw fit to ban women from the stage altogether in 1629. These performances were then replaced with wakashu kabuki, or “youth kabuki,” but this change did little to reduce the sexual nature of the kabuki shows, because the boys, like the women, were prostituted to theater-going patrons instead. Since women were not permitted to appear onstage after the banning of onna kabuki, boys known as onnagata specialized in women’s roles, and were often even required to live their daily lives dressed and acting as women. Wakashu kabuki was short lived as well, however; twenty-four years later, wakashu kabuki was also proscribed, and all males appearing onstage were legally required to shave their forelocks. This form of kabuki came to be known as yarō kabuki or “men’s kabuki,” but by covering their shaved heads with headscarves, young boys remained available as prostitutes despite their adult hairstyles.

The nanshoku culture that developed around these kabuki actor-prostitutes was quite different from that of the samurai. Unlike the samurai, who were expected to make a vow of love when entering a relationship with a youth, “for the merchants and artisans of Tokugawa cities, male-male sex became largely a commercial transaction devoid of the commitments

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42 Gunji and Yoshida, Kabuki, 22.
43 For more on onnagata gender construction and eroticism, see Katherine Mezur, Beautiful Boys/outlaw Bodies: Devising Kabuki Female-Likeness (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
44 Schalow, Introduction, 36.
required by earlier traditions of male homosexuality.”45 While some kabuki prostitutes were frequented by regular patrons whose continual visits might be construed as some form of personal attachment rather than a simple purchase,46 interactions between these young actors and the adult men who enjoyed them were characterized by brevity and inevitable parting. Rather than cultivating the “brotherhood bonds” of the samurai, so defined by devotion and ethics, townsman could indulge in attractive male prostitutes “to whom [they] owed no long-term commitment.”47

**The Development of Printing Technology and Tokugawa Popular Literature**

Alongside the booming theatre and pleasure industries, other areas of the economy enjoyed commercial success during the Tokugawa era.48 Due to the invention of a printing process that allowed for both images and texts to be duplicated with relative ease, for the first time, popular literature and art came into existence. Now it became possible for those not of the elite class, which previously monopolized the only books in existence at the time, painstakingly hand-copied texts, to own or borrow pieces of literature. In turn, literacy increased, not only within the samurai class, but among commoners as well. For those who could not read the Chinese characters in the written Japanese language, publishers began to offer texts that supplied phonetic

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46 Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 40.
guides along with the kanji.\textsuperscript{49} Both the market and audience for books boomed, leading to the development and popularization of new genres of popular literature.

One such genre was the \textit{shudō} text. While in the past, hand-copied manuscripts of \textit{chigo monogatari} and illustrated handscrolls of stories with homosexual themes existed within Buddhist temples and the homes of aristocracy respectively, during the Tokugawa period, “male-male erotic texts circulated in a much broader geographic and social orbit.”\textsuperscript{50} Any townsman who wished to pick the best kabuki actor after an upcoming show or samurai who wished to impress a particular youth had the option of educating himself on the art of \textit{shudō} in one of these texts, now easily available to anyone with the purchasing power to own and the literacy to read them. Because “sexual relations between men and boys … were discussed in terms of connoisseurship,”\textsuperscript{51} \textit{shudō} texts most often took the form of instructive manuals, in which the correct method of pursuing the “way” of male love was explained or exemplified in narrative format. Similarly to other “ways” such as flower-arranging or tea ceremony, \textit{shudō} represented “a specialized body of knowledge” that, when practiced correctly, promised a rewarding outcome, and \textit{shudō} texts provided a durable, instantly available, and highly uniform way to obtain this knowledge.\textsuperscript{52} Alongside their purpose as instructive material, \textit{shudō} texts also served an entertainment value; idealized depictions of attractive youths “provided erotic stimulation”\textsuperscript{53} for the adult male reader, allowing him to vicariously enjoy \textit{shudō} without leaving the comfort of his home.

\textsuperscript{49} Pflugfelder, \textit{Cartographies}, 47. \\
\textsuperscript{50} Pflugfelder, \textit{Cartographies}, 46. \\
\textsuperscript{51} Schalow, Introduction, 6. \\
\textsuperscript{52} Pflugfelder, \textit{Cartographies}, 49. \\
\textsuperscript{53} Pflugfelder, \textit{Cartographies}, 54.
A well-known example of the *shudō* text genre is Ihara Saikaku’s\textsuperscript{54} *Nanshoku Ōkagami*, translated by Paul Gordon Schalow as *The Great Mirror of Male Love*. First published in 1687, *The Great Mirror* is Saikaku’s sixth prose publication and contains forty short stories. The first twenty stories detail *nanshoku* relationships between samurai and their *wakashu*, while the latter twenty stories focus on the realm of kabuki, often highlighting affairs between young kabuki prostitutes and their patrons. While all forty stories focus at least to some extent on relationships between men and youths, a variety of differences in tone and content are apparent between the first and second halves of the book, highlighting differences in the expectations and actualities of samurai and townsman *nanshoku* in the Tokugawa period. These stylistic and narrative dissimilarities between the two halves of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* reflect the chasm in treatment of male-male relationships in the samurai and *chonin* realms in Tokugawa Japan.

Despite the fact that various Ihara Saikaku’s works have been translated into English for over a century, the earliest complete English translation of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* was not published until 1990. Additionally, until recently, studies surrounding the history of gender and sexuality have been considered taboo, which might account for the previous lack of a translation for *The Great Mirror*, as well as the relatively narrow breadth of scholarship on Tokugawa period homosexuality. The study relies heavily on Schalow’s translation and notes, as well as works by Gary Leupp and Gregory Pflugfelder, and hopes to combine their work in order to

more thoroughly analyze *The Great Mirror of Male Love* as a work of popular fiction and a reflection on societal expectations for homosexual relationships in the Tokugawa period.

**Tone and Focus: Lessons or Gossip?**

Upon beginning *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, a reader becomes almost immediately aware of a pattern in the tone and representation of the samurai stories. The narrative presents a youth worthy of admiration and proceeds to tell the heroic and/or tragic story of his fated love with an adult male. Often, the story ends with a didactic tone, sometimes going as far as to proclaim that “there will never be another heart as true as” the youth’s or asserting that “young men would do well to follow [the youth]’s example in male love.” The trials and tribulations faced by fictional samurai youths and their lovers differ from story to story, but the reader concludes the first section of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* with a clear notion of the ideal nanshoku relationship.

When he then turns to the second half of the book, the reader may be surprised. Instead of elevated tales in which storybook samurai youths risk their lives for the sake of their male lovers, the reader finds a variety of amusing, albeit seemingly directionless, anecdotal tales recalling hearsay about real actors who performed during Saikaku’s lifetime. Many of the stories lack the main relationship so central to the samurai stories; while trysts and meetings with kabuki prostitutes are mentioned in passing, often, the stories of the latter half of *The Great Mirror* focus more on humorous tales than raising a certain youth’s love, loyalty, and romantic conduct on a pedestal. Far from idealized, these stories often include direct references to hearsay, such as

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when the narrator interrupts his story to inform his audience, “a man who happened to be included in the wild revelry that night told me all about it.”

This notable gap between Saikaku’s tone and presentation of the samurai and kabuki stories, while potentially jarring to a reader, is also significant in setting the atmosphere for stories of nanshoku in two very different realms. Both in actuality and in fiction, the expectation for samurai relationships was high; though perhaps in reality, seppuku for love was rarer, samurai relationships were expected to conform to a certain standard alongside a samurai’s code of ethics, or bushidō (“way of the warrior”). Conversely, relationships are not usually the focus of the kabuki tales. The focus for the reader during the second half of The Great Mirror is most often entertainment at the amusing anecdotes presented, or else enthrallment at gossipy tales attributed to the lives of actual kabuki actors, and likewise, the purpose of kabuki prostitutes was to provide entertainment rather than a lasting relationship. The shift in tone between the two halves of The Great Mirror of Male Love displays a shift in expectations or norms between the nanshoku of samurai and that of kabuki actors.

Within The Great Mirror of Male Love, the samurai stories fill the purpose of shudō texts as instructional guides for those travelling the “way” of male-male love. Rather than using the real names of living samurai at the time or historical figures, Saikaku invents characters to be his ideal, creating figures who can exemplify the standards and etiquette of nanshoku. By detaching his characters from any preexisting notions, Saikaku gives himself the freedom to fully use his characters as vehicles to embody lessons or epitomes of male love. Additionally, many of the stories within the first half of the book contain instructive segments in which one of these characters’ actions are described in detail as if to set an example for the reader. Out of concern

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57 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 220.
for the health of a sick wakashu, one adult samurai visits his beloved’s sickbed “three times a
day, every day for over six months,”\(^{58}\) while another youth is “prepared to fight [a rival samurai]
to the finish” so that his adult male lover can live.\(^{59}\) These characters’ actions are extreme, but
an adult male reader might glean that showing concern for a particular youth’s health is an
important step to winning his heart, while a youthful reader would be reminded that he should
show strong samurai ethics for the sake of his lover.

When not providing an example of the proper methods of nanshoku, these samurai stories
often taken on a directly didactic tone in which an unnamed authoritative narrator asserts certain
characters’ worthiness of emulation or relates important messages for a reader to take away from
the story. Often, the samurai stories within *The Great Mirror* begin with an abstract lesson only
indirectly related to favorable attributes in a wakashu; for example, one story begins by
mentioning that among young men, “those blessed with maturity and a cool head [are]
particularly high class items.”\(^{60}\) Many of the stories also end on a more directly didactic note,
with the narrator emphasizing the ideal qualities of the main characters and informing the readers
that these qualities are to be emulated. The narrator helpfully concludes one such tale by
informing the reader that “were one to walk all the provinces of the land … one would not be
likely to find another such example”\(^{61}\) as the youth in question. Like the morals at the ends of
fables, these finishing lines seem to remind the reader that, while entertaining, the stories also
intend to be informative about the ideals of nanshoku.

One clear example of the informative and educational nature of the samurai stories in *The
Great Mirror of Male Love* is provided in story 1:4, “Love Letter Sent in a Sea Bass.” The story

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\(^{60}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 166.
opens with the comparison of male youth to the cherry blossom, stating that “when [a boy] comes of age, his blossom of youth falls cruelly to the ground… loving a boy can be likened to a dream that we are not even given time to have.”\textsuperscript{62} While this kernel of wisdom does not come with an explicit explanation, certainly it is meant for the edification of the reader—the fleeting nature of all aspects of life is a common trope in Japanese romance literature, and any reader would recognize this moral as a cliched literary device based in Buddhist teachings.

The story goes on to introduce its main characters, Mashida Jinnosuke and Moriwaki Gonkuro. Gonkuro falls in love with the beautiful and talented Jinnosuke, who was handsome from birth, mastered both swordfighting and calligraphic skills by age eleven, and was apparently the item of many a samurai’s desire. Gonkuro therefore becomes friends with Jinnosuke’s attendant so that he might sent Jinnosuke a love letter. He goes to great lengths to get his letter delivered, eventually sending it to the attendant hidden in the mouth of a sea bass.\textsuperscript{63} Within the first three paragraphs of the story, the positive qualities of both the youth and his adult lover-to-be have been established; a reader would likely notice the emphasis on Jinnosuke’s precocious talents and outstanding beauty and Gonkuro’s willingness to do whatever is necessary to realize his love.

Gonkuro successfully woos Jinnosuke, and their relationship lasts for several years before another man sets his sights on Jinnosuke. When Jinnosuke fails to acknowledge his love, the man challenges Jinnosuke to a duel. Jinnosuke consults Gonkuro, but is appalled when Gonkuro advises him to “somehow satisfy [the man]”\textsuperscript{64} because he does not wish Jinnosuke to die. Horrified at the very idea of breaking his vow of love to Gonkuro and unafraid to face a fight to

\textsuperscript{62} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 69.
\textsuperscript{63} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 69.
\textsuperscript{64} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 71.
the death, Jinnosuke challenges the samurai to a duel, simultaneously continuing to set examples for the reader to emulate—both his samurai bravery and dedication to monogamy are admirable.

His duel with the other samurai set, Jinnosuke goes on write Gonkuro a lengthy list of actions of Gonkuro’s that have upset Jinnosuke, which easily doubles as a list of actions for the adult male reader to avoid in his own *nanshoku* relationships. Jinnosuke explains that he is “deeply hurt that [Gonkuro] should hesitate to die with [him]” and references his vow of love to Gonkuro in which he stated that his “body was no longer his own.” Even in the opening to his letter, Jinnosuke continues to set examples of ideal *wakashu* behavior; not only is he unafraid to die as a samurai, but he is willing to meet his death for the sake of his love, upholding his vow no matter the circumstances. The letter’s body contains a variety of stories in which Jinnosuke accuses Gonkuro of everything from infidelity to insulting Jinnosuke’s calligraphy to refusing to walk Jinnosuke home at night. He confronts Gonkuro’s “frequent insinuating remarks” about Jinnosuke and other young men as well as rebuking him for giving a gift that Jinnosuke wanted to another youth. While all of Gonkuro’s actions seem incredibly rude to the point that the reader might wonder why Jinnosuke had ever agreed to be with Gonkuro in the first place, their exaggeratedly unpleasant nature would no doubt impress upon the adult male reader that without a certain standard of etiquette, he could expect difficulties in his relationships with boys.

Jinnosuke then goes to his duel prepared to die, only to be joined at the last moment by Gonkuro, who promises to fight to the death alongside Jinnosuke. Between the pair and their two attendants, they manage to defeat sixteen men, and while some were injured or fled, “Jinnosuke cut two of them down, and four fell under Gonkuro’s sword.” Despite being

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widely outnumbered, Jinnosuke and Gonkuro only receive slight injuries. Having broken the law and killed men in a private duel, Jinnosuke and Gonkuro plan to commit *seppuku*, proving that beyond their strength in battle, they are not afraid to commit *seppuku* to maintain their samurai honor, conduct worthy of emulation. A priest convinces Jinnosuke and Gonkuro to instead plead their case to the daimyô, who, impressed as the reader is meant to be with their feat, pardons both unconditionally.

After the story itself is concluded, the narrator claims that “no young samurai had ever performed such a feat”\(^{68}\) as Jinnosuke’s defeating so many men without being seriously injured himself, and adds that Jinnosuke came to mourn his enemy’s death, which is deemed “remarkable thoughtfulness.”\(^{69}\) Continuing his praise, the narrator remarks that “the likes of this handsome boy should be a model for future generations”\(^{70}\)—not only are his samurai honor and relationship conduct admirable, but the narrator mentions his good looks, reminding the reader that along with ideal behavior, a youth should remember to maintain good looks as well. The narrator then explains that “all the sons of samurai strove to emulate Jinnosuke,” and that even boys of lower classes, “no matter how rude their appearance or menial their task, all yearned to sacrifice their lives for the sake of male love.”\(^{71}\) The reader is urged to take Jinnosuke’s ideal as an example by which to live by the assertion that many people wished to be like him, even boys of lower stations. This conclusion to the story makes the story’s moral—that Jinnosuke’s behavior is exemplary behavior for a youth in a *nanshoku* relationship—quite clear.

Unlike the samurai stories, filled to the brim with morals and ideals, the kabuki stories second half of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* are much less didactic. This half of the book

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\(^{68}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 76.

\(^{69}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 76.

\(^{70}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 76.

\(^{71}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 76.
seems much more concerned with conveying entertaining stories than teaching the correct way to behave towards a male lover, and eight of the twenty stories, though on the topic of male love, do not even develop a plot around a central relationship. Rather than telling of loving companionship, these stories end comically, with such conclusions as a popular kabuki actor spending the night in the bed of an older brother, “much to the chagrin of his younger sister.”\footnote{Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 241.} The humorous reaction of the sister is given as much attention as the fact that the boy spent the night with another man, and the relationship is never developed. Compared to the mere three stories in the first half of \textit{The Great Mirror} that lack a central relationship, the focus in the kabuki section of the book seems to have shifted. Instead of edifying the reader with nanshoku ideals, the kabuki stories fulfill the second purpose of shudô texts: entertainment of the reader.

One notable trait of the kabuki stories is that each mentions the name of at least one male kabuki actor who was well known at the time. Paul Schalow gives brief descriptions of these actors in his extensive reference section, and it is clear that Saikaku was very familiar with the names of well-known stars of the day. It is likely that Saikaku’s city-dwelling readers, whether \textit{chonin} who spent their fortunes on kabuki shows and boy prostitutes or samurai who visited the kabuki theatre as a break from their monotonous office work, would recognize these names as well, and by mentioning popular figures, Saikaku found a way to entertain his readers in a way perhaps similar to modern day tabloid newspapers. Regardless of the fact that most of Saikaku’s stories surrounding these actors seem highly exaggerated or entirely false, including the names of popular male actors was a clever way to entertain readers ranging from devoted fans of the theatre to the passing kabuki customer.
Another immediately evident stylistic trait of the second half of *The Great Mirror* is the heavy emphasis on an element of hearsay or gossip. Many of the stories contain the phrase “they say” before the beginning of a sentence or section, giving the reader the impression that segments of the tale are based on gossip the narrator heard. Additionally, the narrator interjects his own opinions and personal experiences, as if the narrator is sharing gossip with the reader. For example, one story opens with the narrator recounting, “One time I had the opportunity to see Yoshida Iori and Fujimura Handayu of Murayama Matabei’s troupe together side by side at a party at Otsuruya in Ishigaki-machi.”73 Completely unlike the samurai stories, which maintain a storybook feeling through fictional characters and few mentions of actual locations, the kabuki stories are framed by the feeling that the narrator is sharing gossip. Not only are all of the persons named in the line the names of actual theatre figures, but Ishigaki-machi was “an all-night entertainment district”74 in Kyoto, and Otsuruya was an establishment there. Whether or not the story is based in fact, the narrator’s claim that it happened “one time” gives the feeling that the following story is gossip rather than the admirable tale of two ideal male lovers.

The sixth story of the second half of *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, “A Huge Winecup Overflowing With Love,” provides an exemplary illustration of the entertaining and gossipy tone of the kabuki stories within the book. The story begins with the words, “they say,” immediately setting the tone as one of hearsay—the following statement is not attributed to any source, but not claimed as the narrator’s own, either; it has simply been said by some unnamed persons unknown. The narrator goes on to describe the parties of priests and how they enjoy parties with young actors, interjecting parenthetically, “How they can drink!”75 This insertion into the

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74 Schalow, Introduction, 341.  
narrative, seemingly based on the narrator’s personal experience, reminds the reader that the story is not told from an objective third person perspective, but through the lens of a narrator who may or may not be trustworthy. The feel of the narrative is conversational, as if the speaker is conveying gossip and opinions rather than a piece of literature to be taken seriously.

The narrator continues on his description of the revelries of Buddhist figures, mentioning that “a certain chief priest with unusual tastes amused himself by dressing Ito Kodayu in stage costume and a female wig so that the boy looked exactly like a lovely girl.”76 Though he does not give names, the narrator seems to be passing judgment on this priest and his “unusual tastes” behind his back. By putting him in a situation with a real, active stage performer at the time, the priest does not seem like a fictional character but rather an anonymous figure whose story the narrator has decided to spread in written form. The story’s sense of nonfictional basis is greatened a few lines later, when, as mentioned above, the narrator adds that “a man who happened to be involved in the revelries that night told me all about it.”77 Not only is the name of a historical actor included, but the narrator purports to have been told that this event happened by someone present at the party. The reader appears to be at the third degree of separation from the actual event, and while the anecdote may or may not have any basis whatsoever in fact, it gives the impression of gossip.

After relaying the amusing tale of the priest, the narrator digresses to wax eloquent on the topic of Ito Kodayu, the object of the priests’ desires. He praises Ito’s abilities to entertain at parties before describing his theatrical talents and beauty:

76 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 220.
77 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 220.
“Although there were many young actors like him, this Ito was by birth soft-spoken and endowed with a calm, untroubled demeanor that made him a natural actor of female roles. The way he dressed established fashions, and his grooming was impeccable. He spoke in a soft and soothing voice, excelled at dance, and could follow any rhythm perfectly … In ‘Ransom of Yoshino,’ he played the courtesan promenading to meet her patron. The audience said that his wisteria-like beauty left the real Yoshino looking like a faded cherry blossom in comparison.”

This seems to fit nicely into the entertainment role of shudô texts; while the reader of The Great Mirror may never have gotten the chance to Ito Kodayu live on stage, this passage provides an opportunity in “allowing him to relish [Ito] vicariously.” Additionally, the narrator includes the audience’s opinion of Ito’s beauty, again giving the sense that the reader is learning a rumor from the narrator; while the narrator himself may never have compared Ito to the real courtesan Yoshino, some unnamed members of an audience have claimed Ito to be the more beautiful.

“But,” the narrator continues, “to go on like this becomes tedious. Is anyone unaware of the ultimate proof of his superiority?” This transition and rhetorical question make the story more conversational and informal, almost as if the narrator is chatting with the reader. The tone is not that of a high authority teaching the correct ways of shudô but of another admirer conversing about Ito’s impressive qualities.

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78 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 221.
79 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 58.
80 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 221.
Ito’s appeal even to women is the next topic of discussion, and the narrator proclaims that women of all classes and ranks throughout Kyoto fell in love with the boy. Seemingly for emphasis, he adds, “No one knows how many of them died, lovelorn, having never told him their feelings.” The assertion that women have died for love of this boy adds to the feeling of hearsay, in which hyperbole causes rumors to grow and morph over time, and the statement that “no one knows” just how many women perished only strengthens the sense that this information stems from gossip.

The story then returns to the party in question, describing how, when the partiers moved outside to bathe, the noticed a woman with a child peering in at them. When they asked her for an explanation, she tells them that she came to find Ito, for whom her husband is wasting away with love. She fears that he will die soon, and wants to get a note from the boy to give to him so that he might be happy before he passes away. The men give the woman one of Kodayu’s robes to take to her husband, and she returns the next day to say he was able to die happily after seeing the robe. The story ends abruptly with the woman being rushed away in a palanquin so that she will not shame her parents’ reputation, without so much as a parting thought from the narrator. Unlike the samurai stories, which often conclude with a moral or lesson exemplified by the main characters’ romance, kabuki stories like “A Huge Winecup Overflowing With Love” often lack a central relationship and seem to fulfill the purpose of entertainment rather than edification.

**Idealized Youths: Internal Versus External Beauty**

A reader of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* quickly realizes that of the characters in the relationships described, one of the two parties is most often the focus on the topic of appearance,

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and often pertaining to actions, as well. Though the adult men play important roles in the stories of *The Great Mirror*, it is the youths upon whom the author spends much of his attention. Many such texts within the *shudô* genre focus similarly, likely because the majority of the readership of these books was male.\(^{82}\) One of the reasons behind the heavy male majority is the fact that books were only available and readable to those “who possessed a certain amount of literacy and economic power.”\(^{83}\) While literacy rates increased greatly amongst both men and women in the Tokugawa period, “a gender gap persisted”\(^{84}\) between men and women in reading abilities. Men, or, more specifically, *adult* men were the most likely candidates to fill both requirements—most likely, adult men would be people who were both literate and possessing the necessary economic power to purchase these books.

Another reason behind the male readership falls with the subject matter; while women might have had some interest in *shudô*, the fact that *shudô* texts dealt with male-male relations “allowed [men] to partake more fully of [the] rewards.”\(^{85}\) And while these books were not exclusively directed towards an adult male audience, the authors of the books were, in fact, adult men themselves, and would likely have the interests of the adult male in mind. Saikaku, who was in his early forties when he wrote *The Great Mirror of Male Love*\(^{86}\), would have been most likely to enjoy describing the object of his own desire: a beautiful youth. Because of this eroticization of youths rather than adult men, an older audience would have been more likely to enjoy Saikaku’s writing. In his book *Cartographies of Desire*, Gregory M. Pflugfelder thoroughly describes the portrayal of the *wakashu* from the vantage point of the adult admirer:

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\(^{82}\) Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 53.
\(^{83}\) Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 49.
\(^{84}\) Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 46.
\(^{85}\) Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 53.
\(^{86}\) Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 54.
More often than not, the youths portrayed in [the] pages [of shudô texts] were paragons of physical beauty and grace, their attributes conforming to a set of conventional tropes, some of which could be similarly employed to refer to feminine beauty, others used more or less exclusively of the wakashu. Such idealized depictions not only provided erotic stimulation for the adult male reader, but also furnished a benchmark against which to evaluate the charms of youths in real life.87

In both aspects of shudô texts, education and pleasure were primarily available to the adult male reader, while youths within the books serve as the focus of the lesson and the objects of desire.

While the main readership of shudô texts may have been adult males, youths certainly comprised some of the audience of these books. However, the lessons a youth might learn from shudô texts, such as the importance of his manners around his lover or the necessity of beauty and personal hygiene, may not have been an aid to the youth in much more than procuring an adult male lover. The objective of the authors of shudô texts in giving these tips to youths “was less to bring satisfaction to the youth himself … than to the man who beheld him.”88 While the idealization of youths in shudô texts might have given youthful male readers an example to strive towards, living up to this ideal would more greatly benefit the youth’s adult lover than it would benefit the youth himself.

*The Great Mirror of Male Love* is no exception in its idealization of youths, but throughout the course of the book, it becomes obvious that the samurai youths and kabuki youths are

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87 Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 54.
expected to live up to different standards. While in the first half of the book, youths are exemplified in their valor and bravery as samurai as well as in their stunning beauty, kabuki youths are elevated with praise of their acting, dancing, and entertaining at parties in addition to how elegant they appear in stage costume. For example, Jinnosuke of “Love Letter Sent in a Sea Bass” not only mastered his sword technique by the precocious age of eleven, but also performed a feat formerly unheard of for such a young samurai at the age of sixteen. His samurai skills, as well as his beauty so impressive that “everyone who saw him immediately fell in love” make him an ideal samurai wakashu. Additionally, delicate sensitivities are often emphasized in samurai youths in The Great Mirror—youths often fall sick and are only saved by their lovers’ prayers keeping them alive or require saving from the unwanted sexual advances of others. Through a combination of physical beauty, a delicate nature, and strong honor, the youths of the first half of The Great Mirror embody the samurai ideal.

The youths of the second half, however, are judged by a seemingly different standard. Rather than their personal natures and ethics, they ideal youths of kabuki stories are complimented on their dancing, acting and appearance onstage. One youth is described as beautiful because his “face when he appeared onstage in costume” was beautiful—his beauty is not natural, but a part of his persona as a kabuki actor. The same actor is later praised with the claim that “to theater-goers his deception was utterly convincing, and even those altogether lacking in feeling fell passionately in love with him.” It is not the boy’s personality or actions within his own identity that make people love him, but rather his acting and his “deception” on

89 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 69.
90 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 68.
91 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 132.
92 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 282.
93 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 282.
stage. Additionally, Ito Kodayu, mentioned earlier, is lauded as “unequaled” by anyone “when it came to entertaining at parties. Even practiced connoisseurs were swept away and made to suffer helplessly for love of the boy.”94 Ito’s personality, or even his personal beauty, is not what charms his patrons, but rather his ability to keep them entertained at parties. What is important in a kabuki youth is that he fulfills the role of an enchanting actor and entertainer, rather than anything about his personal nature.

The fact that, while both samurai and kabuki youths are presented as beautiful in The Great Mirror of Male Love, samurai youths are clearly judged by their natural beauty, as well as their internal strengths and personalities, whereas kabuki youths are judged by their made-up beauty and their entertaining skills both on and off the stage may reflect the book’s purpose as a guide to the adult male in the ways of shudô. For the adult samurai, a youth’s personality and ethics were important in a male-male relationship; the adult male was expected to help the boy in his path to becoming a samurai during their time together, and some shudô texts even warn that “any faux pas that [the youth] committed would bring disgrace upon his lover.”95 Alternately, because no long-term commitment was required in a night with a kabuki prostitute, their personalities did not require emphasizing. Instead, the reader was more focused on “enhancing the value of the money he dispersed on [the] procurement [of male prostitutes].”96 What was important to the adult male interested in kabuki youths was their entertainment value in the short term. As such, the depictions of ideal samurai and kabuki youths differ in The Great Mirror as a reflection of what in actuality was important about each to the connoisseur of boys.

95 Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 55.
96 Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 58.
Within *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, section 2:1, entitled “A Sword His Only Memento,” serves as an excellent example of Saikaku’s idealization of samurai youths. The story opens with a first person narrative from the perspective of Katsuya, the protagonist and a boy of 18, as he tells of his finding a letter containing his mother’s dying wish: that he complete a vendetta against the man who wrongfully murdered his father. Saikaku already sets Katsuya up for success by giving the audience a peek into his mindset; this way, Katsuya can bemoan the way he has already “wasted” six years of his life without seeking revenge, showing his conviction to avenge his father and emphasizing his honor as a samurai. However, a glimpse of the apparent contradiction in expectations for a samurai youth is also noticeable in the opening paragraphs; Katsuya opens his mother’s letter “with tears in [his] eyes”—his delicate sensitivities are moved to tears even before reading the letter’s contents. This does not seem to fit with the image of a strong, unmoving samurai ready to cut down a man he has never met for the sake of his honor, but as the story progresses, this delicate nature is continually emphasized in the ideal samurai youth.

The story continues to tell of Katsuya’s life until he found his mother’s letter, during which he became a page to a local lord. The lord was so taken with the boy that he kept Katsuya by his side at all times, and went out of his way to bestow lavish favors on him. In the narrative, Katsuya recounts that “if [he] became uncovered during the night, [the lord] would cover

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97 Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 86.
99 Warriors are often shown shedding tears in earlier works about samurai, such as the *Heike Monogatari*, or *Tale of Heike*. See Burton Watson and Haruo Shirane, *The Tales of the Heike* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). However, the behavior shown in the tale of Heike seems to more closely follow a Heian period model of masculinity, rather than the behavior expected of the samurai in *The Great Mirror*, written in the Tokugawa period.
[Katsuya] with his underrobe of white cotton lest a breeze stir and [Katsuya] catch cold.""\textsuperscript{100} This continues to emphasize Katsuya's delicate nature; though he is the son of a samurai who plans to forge out into the world to avenge his father, he might fall ill unless his lord takes care of him in bed at night.

Next, Katsuya displays yet another trait expected in the ideal samurai youth: loyalty. He recounts that, in order to “repay [his] lord’s kindness,” he planned to “follow him in death if anything should ever happen to him,”\textsuperscript{101} an honorable display of allegiance for any samurai. Katsuya even notes that to do so would have been illegal at the time, but he was willing to break the law for the lord who treated him well, an outstanding sign of devotion. However, his devotion to his lord extends past pure samurai loyalties; the two “swore [their] faithfulness to each other,”\textsuperscript{102} and Katsuya notes that “the lord himself removed a tiny mole on [Katsuya’s] temple that he said bothered him.”\textsuperscript{103} Not only does Katsuya swear his life to this lord, but he also allows the man to alter his physical appearance, a sign of loyalty and submission not as much attributed to Katsuya as a samurai but Katsuya as an ideal youthful male lover, bending to his lord’s will regardless of the request.

Katsuya continues to display admirable samurai qualities in the following passages; while at first he is bitterly angry when his lord finds a new lover, his anger turns to relief when he realizes he must carry out his vendetta. His desire to fulfill his mother’s wishes allows him to see his feelings of betrayal in a more positive light, because his lord will likely to allow him a leave of absence during which to accomplish his revenge. When a paragraph earlier, Katsuya considers

\textsuperscript{100} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 88.
\textsuperscript{101} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 88.
\textsuperscript{102} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 88.
\textsuperscript{103} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 88.
ending his life out of heartbreak, the fact that he can now see the situation as “a chance”\textsuperscript{104} shows his exemplary character as a samurai. He places his ethics before all else, eager to avenge his father and remove the “blot of shame”\textsuperscript{105} that his father’s murder would have been considered without Katsuya’s vengeance.

The lord does grant Katsuya permission to complete his vendetta, and after setting out on his journey, Katsuya meets a former compatriot, Gensuke, by chance. Upon meeting again, Katsuya weeps multiple times despite the fact that, as far as the reader knows, Katsuya has never even held a conversation with this man before.\textsuperscript{106} Additionally, at slightly past halfway through the story, Saikaku has seen it relevant to inform the reader four times that Katsuya has shed tears, a surprisingly large quantity for the short length of the story. Seemingly, quickness to tears is an important quality in Katsuya, one that is perhaps not very manly but nonetheless desirable in a samurai youth.

However, the reason for Katsuya’s tears is soon revealed: when he and Gensuke were in service together in Edo, Gensuke “sent [him] many letters expressing [Gensuke’s] love for [Katsuya].”\textsuperscript{107} Despite the fact that Katsuya never mentions any sort of friendship or even acquaintanceship with Gensuke, he explains that he appreciated them greatly and wanted to respond, but could not because he had been “sharing the lord’s bed at that time.”\textsuperscript{108} He is happy that they have met again so that they now can “spend the night together, conversing to [their] hearts’ content” the way they couldn’t have at the time.\textsuperscript{109} Through Katsuya’s response to his reunion with Gensuke, Saikaku illustrates two key aspects to Katsuya that make him an ideal

\textsuperscript{104}Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 88.
\textsuperscript{105}Schalow, Introduction, 31.
\textsuperscript{106}Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 90-92.
\textsuperscript{107}Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 92.
\textsuperscript{108}Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 92.
\textsuperscript{109}Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 92.
youthful partner and samurai male love. Firstly, he is loyal to his lord (and lover) without hesitation; despite the fact that he is flattered by another man’s love letters, Katsuya remains faithful to the man who is currently taking care of him. In a samurai male love relationship, where the “formal exchange of written and spoken vows [gave] the relationship a marriage-like status,” Katsuya’s faithfulness and loyalty to his lover are exemplary. In the second part of Katsuya’s response, however, Saikaku writes another ideal into Katsuya’s behavior: willingness to give himself over to any man who wants him. Though it is never mentioned that Katsuya as much as said hello to Gensuke in person when they worked together in Edo, because Gensuke wrote love letters to Katsuya, Katsuya is more than eager to spend the night with Gensuke now that he is free of obligation to the lord. In this short paragraph, Katsuya is a dual example of ideal youth behavior in that he is faithful when he is in a relationship but willing and giving when he is not.

Katsuya spends the night in Gensuke’s care; Gensuke gives his bed over to Katsuya and “watch[es] over his beloved through the long cold night”—again, despite the fact that he has embarked on a strenuous journey that will doubtlessly end in battle and bloodshed, when with a male lover, Katsuya becomes the ideal delicate and yielding youth who requires his lover’s care. He repays Gensuke’s kindness the next morning by exchanging swords with him and promising that they will meet again after he had completed his vendetta. Despite the fact that he has only been reunited with Gensuke for a day, like a good samurai youth, he promises to find Gensuke again.

110 Schalow, Introduction, 27.
111 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 92.
112 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 92.
Once they have parted, however, Katsuya is once again a samurai seeking vengeance; he reaches his destination and scopes out his enemy’s home, determined to fulfill his quest despite the fact that “it would be a difficult place to leave alive.”  

He stealthily ambushes his target in the night, but like a true, honorable samurai, calls the man out to fight fairly and still emerges victorious. It is even noted that Katsuya “had come with a container for [the enemy’s] head, an indication of the efficiency of their preparations.” Clearly, Katsuya is quite capable as a warrior, but somehow, he is chased down by villagers during his escape. He is about to be caught when Gensuke comes to his rescue, helping him out of sight and into a boat where Katsuya and his men make their getaway without capture.

Gensuke then proceeds to recount his story from the time he and Katsuya were separated, and reveals that he has been following Katsuya this whole time, protecting him. Despite the fact that Katsuya was capable enough to plan and successfully execute his revenge, during a point in their trip, he had been too weak to traverse heavy snowfall and had lost consciousness. Secretly, Gensuke had nursed him back to health and “held [Katsuya] against [Gensuke’s] bare skin until [Katsuya] was restored to his senses.” Somehow, Katsuya manages to be everything a samurai might want in a youthful partner; he is honorable, talented, and adheres to his samurai ethics, but at the same time, he is delicate and weak enough that he requires the care of his dominant, adult partner.

And Katsuya is rewarded for his excellent qualities; when he and Gensuke return to Edo, the lord rewards him monetarily and “relinquish[es] his claims on Katsuya and yield[s] him to

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In the end, Katsuya is rewarded for being an outstanding samurai, and presumably, the lord’s favorable response to Katsuya’s return is influenced by the loyalty Katsuya always showed him during their relationship. By exemplifying only the ideal traits for a youthful male samurai lover, Katsuya gets a happy ending in the story, followed only by a short didactic note: “young men would do well to follow Katsuya’s example in male love.” Saikaku uses the character of Katsuya as a model through which to show the ideal characteristics of a youth in male-male samurai relationships.

In contrast, the differing standards idealize in kabuki youths are expressed in section 7:1 of The Great Mirror, “Fireflies Also Work Their Asses at Night.” The story centers around a kabuki actor and prostitute named Handayu, and the narrator begins with an immediate description of the boy, claiming that he is “unequaled in the present-day world of theater.” He describes Handayu as being comparable to the “famous beauties of ancient times,” and asserts that “all who saw [him] dance in the latest style went mad with desire.” But Handayu’s beauty and stage presence are not the only praiseworthy skills he possesses; off stage, his behavior at parties does not fall beneath the narrator’s notice. In the narrator’s opinion, Handayu’s “skill in entertaining patrons [is] especially remarkable. Playful and affectionate, [he is] pliant without being weak. Even while seeming to follow the patron’s lead, [he] continued to make sure that everything was going smoothly.” His skills in bed are lauded as being equally exceptional, and the narrator claims that Handayu “could flatter and seduce even the pros.”

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118 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 247.
120 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 248.
121 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 248.
Already, at the beginning of the story, the reader is given everything he needs to know about Handayu as the ideal kabuki prostitute. Handayu is beautiful, a captivating performer, an exceptional entertainer, and talented at seduction. The reader learns nothing of Handayu’s personality in this opening section, nothing of his opinions or personal ethics, because these are unimportant in a kabuki actor. Before the narrator begins the plot of the story, he feels it is prudent to laud all of Handayu’s praiseworthy attributes and talents, but these do not include anything of a personal nature because, in someone of Handayu’s profession, those are irrelevant.

The narrator then digresses to tell the unfortunate tale of a long-suffering drum-holder before returning to Handayu. He points out that Handayu also suffers for his work, and explains that in the past, Handayu had been “forced to drink from sunset to late at night” and then work again the next day despite having been up all night. He relates, too, a tale in which Handayu was forced to work for “a repulsive old man” who had no “sense of the finer aspects of boy love.” Despite being put into these unpleasant situations, Handayu was “pliant” and pleasing to his patrons nonetheless; he shows he is an ideal kabuki youth by giving himself to his partners without complaint. Unlike Katsuya, who is wooed into loving other men with sweet letters and other signs of love, Handayu shows his ideal qualities by giving his services to anyone who pays. The narrator even comments that Handayu has a “painful occupation,” showing sympathy for Handayu, who fulfills what is required of him without complaint. Presumably, the narrator, who seems to take the ‘virile gaze’ common in shudô texts and who therefore would be in the position of a patron in relation to the boy, would have been less complementary if Handayu had been a less giving, complaining prostitute who would not behave properly for paying customers.

122 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 250.
124 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 35.
But as a long-suffering kabuki actor who works hard to please everyone, Handayu receives both pity and praise.

Despite the difficulties of Handayu’s work, the narrator explains, “what made it possible for him to forget the agony of the job were the moments when he saw the love-lorn faces of men and women gazing after him on his way home and hear their countless cries of admiration.”125 Though he suffers long days and nights of work and unpleasant experiences, “it filled him with a sense of pleasure and pride in his own beauty, and this alone made him willing to bear his bone-grinding regimen.”126 As an ideal kabuki prostitute, Handayu can bear the harsher aspects of his work because he enjoys the attention he gets through selling himself. The fact that he “derives a sense of self-worth from his popularity as a sexual object.”127 makes him exemplary in his field; he wants to please his audience and patrons through his talents regardless of some more difficult experiences, because he likes being the object of others’ sexual desire.

The story progresses to an occasion where Handayu is entertaining at a party when fireflies begin to appear inside. The partiers discover that a priest who has fallen in love with Handayu is sending fireflies to him, but when Handayu offers to share a cup of sake with him, the priest flees. Handayu is so caught up in the gesture of love that he “suffered with thoughts of the priest he had never met” and “lived each day in sorrow”128. Even once his freedom is bought by a wealthy gentleman, he “still found it impossible to forget that priest”129 and eventually takes tonsure and goes into seclusion. However, it is not until after he leaves his profession as an entertainer that he cuts himself from the world; despite the “sorrow” that he constantly felt, it is implied that

125 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 251-252.
126 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 252.
127 Leupp, Male Colors, 136.
Handayu kept working as an actor and a prostitute even after the instance with the priest, since it was a patron who bought his freedom. Despite his own emotional pain, Handayu continued to give himself up to people, further showing his remarkable qualities as an ideal kabuki actor.

While Katsuya from “A Sword His Only Memento” shows his moral worth both by completing his vendetta as a samurai and displaying admirable loyalty to his male lovers, Handayu’s moral fiber is only relevant in the sense that he has the conviction to continue to give away his excellent services in difficult situations. More important than his personal strength are his beauty, dancing technique, and entertaining skills.

**Saikaku’s Outcomes: From Happily-Ever-Afters to Heartbreaks**

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the two halves of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* is the frequency of positive outcomes in the first half of the book, starkly contrasted by the complete absence of “happily ever afters” in the second half. Many of the stories centered around samurai conclude with the main romantic pair together, either alive or in honorable death, while, oppositely, many kabuki stories end in separation for the main couple. As previously mentioned, particularly in its latter half, *The Great Mirror* contains stories that have no central relationship, but of the stories centering around particular male-male couples, almost all within the first half end on a positive note if not in a resolution where the main characters are somehow together. Likewise, almost all within the second half end in separation, either indefinite or permanent.

Though in some cases the character’s samurai ethics or extenuating circumstances interfere, the majority of the stories within the first half of *The Great Mirror* end positively for the main couple. Often, when one of the lovers is required by his samurai ethics to fight to the death or
commit seppuku, the other, as a sign of love and devotion for his dead partner, will also kill himself, such as in “The Boy Who Sacrificed His Life in the Robes of His Lover”, when the surviving lover decides “it would be pointless … to go on living”\textsuperscript{130} after his youthful partner sacrificed his life for him, or in “They Waited Three Years to Die,” where a nineteen year old youth chooses “to vanish with the dew on the dry grasses”\textsuperscript{131} after his lover is killed in a duel for his affections. Cases also exist within the samurai half, however, in which both lovers survive through the end of the tale, living on together rather than being joined only in death. Katsuya and Gensuke from “A Sword His Only Memento” are prime examples of this outcome; they are pardoned by the daimyō and able to remain together in life rather than in death. Despite the fact that a few of the samurai stories end in a situation where samurai honor keeps lovers from remaining together (which may also be considered a positive outcome, depending on the priorities of the reader), most of the tales in the first half of \textit{The Great Mirror} conclude in a way such that, living or dead, the main characters are not parted.

In contrast, the kabuki stories that focus on relationships, rather than extraneous tales surrounding kabuki or various kabuki actors, exclusively end in separation. Often the adult lover is drawn away by obligation, such as the partner in “The Man Who Resented Another’s Shouts” who must go to his sickly mother\textsuperscript{132} or religious responsibilities, as in “Visiting from Edo, Suddenly a Monk,” and the kabuki youths, tied by their contracts to their theaters, are left alone in despair. In some stories, the youths die from the heartbreak or become monks at the realization that everything in life is impermanent, but in other cases, the youths are simply left to pine for the men they loved. Unlike the samurai stories, in which cliched themes of

\textsuperscript{130} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 173.
\textsuperscript{131} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 179.
\textsuperscript{132} Saikaku, \textit{The Great Mirror}, 236.
impermanence and the suffering of life is often resolved with seppuku, in all cases, the kabuki stories end with the youth alone and the lovers separated.

The endings to these tales are yet another element in *The Great Mirror of Male Love* that reflects the nature of samurai and kabuki relationships in Tokugawa society. In samurai relationships, the “marriage-like status”\(^{133}\) of the relationship is reflected in the endings of the stories: the lovers are so devoted to one another that they are willing to die to be together, or, if they do manage to live, that they are together indefinitely at the end of the story. The “seriousness with which both partners entered into *nanshoku* relationships”\(^{134}\) is apparent in the way that the samurai stories are concluded in *The Great Mirror*, demonstrating both partners’ devotion to the relationship and to their respective lovers. The kabuki stories, on the other hand, emphasize the lack of “long-term commitment”\(^{135}\) expected in relationships with kabuki prostitutes. While a story portraying a kabuki actor falling in love with his patron only to have the patron be forced to leave him is, no doubt, a romanticized account of the experience of most actual prostitutes in Tokugawa Japan, the emphasis still remains with the lack of permanence to the romantic encounters. Even if historical kabuki prostitutes’ encounters lacked romance, they were required to see different men each day. Saikaku’s stories are likely exaggerated on both fronts—it is doubtful that all samurai lovers sacrificed their lives for one another or else ended up living the rest of their lives together, or that every kabuki actor fell in love with a patron only to be separated from him—but the representation of these two types of relationships in *The Great Mirror of Male Love* nonetheless reflects actual expectations of male-male sexuality during the Tokugawa period.

\(^{133}\) Schalow, Introduction, 27.
\(^{134}\) Leupp, *Male Colors*, 54.
“Grudge Provoked by a Sedge Hat,” the first story of the third section of the samurai half of *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, provides a clear example of the positive endings in the samurai tales. The story centers around Ranmaru, the son of an unlucky samurai who, at the deaths on Ranmaru’s brothers, hoped for Ranmaru to become a priest. At the age of twelve, Ranmaru became a *chigo*, but because he is such a “beautiful youth” and “every monk in the mountain complex [is] in love with him”\(^{136}\), the head priest keeps Ranmaru from shaving his head and taking tonsure in order to keep him sexually available. Ranmaru is to be allowed to become a monk when he turns fifteen, but while still fourteen, another man from the temple insults him by accusing him of keeping multiple lovers. Enraged, Ranmaru decides to get revenge by killing the man, despite the fact that he will be acting unfillially by breaking the law and being forced to commit *seppuku* before even becoming a priest.

Ranmaru is saddened, however, by the fact that he will be leaving behind his lover, a local hairdresser named Seihachi, whose “grief and anger will be terrible” after Ranmaru dies. Seihachi is then described as being “too good a man to be doing such menial labor,“\(^{137}\) having always paid Ranmaru special attention and gone out of his way to make the boy happy. Ranmaru resolves to see Seihachi one last time before he exacts his revenge, but even after he leaves, Seihachi follows him, curious as to what Ranmaru might be planning. He is surprised when he hears that Ranmaru has killed another man and fled.

Meanwhile, Ranmaru attempts to escape the temple, but is prevented from “manfully ending his life”\(^{138}\) by a large group of priests who are bitter after being spurned by Ranmaru in the past. Things look grim for Ranmaru as the priests force him to a local wine shop, hold him down, and

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\(^{137}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 129.  
“subject ... him to all sorts of torments”\(^{139}\)—not only has he been kept from committing suicide as would be considered right for someone with his samurai heritage, but “since they were holding him down by both arms”\(^{140}\) he is doomed to be sexually assaulted by his attackers.

Luckily for Ranmaru, Seihachi suddenly appears, “scattering the monks with his sword”\(^{141}\). He comforts Ranmaru before helping him escape both the monks and his certain execution. The two are not seen again in the area, but the reader can assume they lived happily ever after; “three years later, someone report[s], ‘I saw them at Tsurugaoka in Kamakura. They were dressed as wandering monks and playing a duet on bamboo flutes.’”\(^{142}\) Not only do Ranmaru and Seihachi escape together, but they are still together three years later—their relationship is clearly a durable and long standing one. After Seihachi rescues his ideal youth in distress, he and Ranmaru are able to live on together in an incredibly positive ending.

In the second half of the book, kabuki actor youths do not get such happy endings. This is exemplified particularly in section 5:3, entitled “Love’s Flame Kindled by a Flint Seller.” The first half of the story is entirely descriptions and anecdotes surrounding the main figure of the story, a youth named Sennojo. Naturally, Sennojo is very beautiful, hugely talented at playing women’s roles, and a perfect entertainer in the evenings. Though “he [is] in such demand that it [is] not unusual to wait ten days for an appointment”\(^{143}\), Sennojo “share[s] a deep vow of love”\(^{144}\) with a flint seller. Unfortunately, the man goes into hiding and does not contact Sennojo for a long time, and Sennojo is left “broken-hearted by the man’s disappearance”\(^{145}\) until

\(^{139}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 132.  
\(^{140}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 132.  
\(^{141}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 132.  
\(^{142}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 132.  
\(^{143}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 204.  
\(^{144}\) Saikaku, *The Great Mirror*, 206.  
someone tells him that the man, having lost all his money, is living in squalor underneath a bridge. Sennojo searches for quite some time and eventually finds him, bringing him sake and a heating pot in hopes of helping his beloved. He is so moved to be reunited and so saddened to see the unfortunate state of the man he loves that he weeps, pouring the man sake and massaging his feet. He begs the man to wait for him, but the man, “having abandoned the world, was not at all pleased by the unexpected visit.”\footnote{Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 208.} Wishing to live in simplicity, he leaves immediately and goes to another province, leaving Sennojo “distraught when he [finds] the man gone.”\footnote{Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 208.} Despite how hard Sennojo works to please the man and how much he wants to help, he and his lover are separated permanently at the end of the story. Unlike Ranmaru and Seihachi’s happy ending, the conclusion to Sennojo’s story, in which he is alone and heart-broken, is anything but positive.

**Saikaku’s Model as an Expression of Historical Expectations and Actualities**

Over the course of *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, the noticeable changes between the first and second halves of the book make for both an interesting read and a fascinating literary comparison, engrossing the reader in the Saikaku’s different renderings of his samurai and kabuki characters. However, they also provide an insight into the expectations of the time and historical experiences surrounding *nanshoku*. The differing uses of various literary and narrative devices between the two sections suggest not only a difference in the two halves of Saikaku’s book, but of these two classes in the strictly stratified Tokugawa culture.

Saikaku’s “refined tales of samurai ‘brothers’”\footnote{Leupp, Male Colors, 80} do not only provide pleasing romances, but also a glimpse into the Tokugawa paradigm for samurai male-male relationships. Because
samurai *nanshoku* contained “an elaborate code of conduct and etiquette … the production and distribution of which served as one of the chief functions of the *shudô* text,”149 the first half of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* takes on a didactic tone. Through these stories of exemplary samurai lovers, the narrator teaches the reader the high ideals of samurai male-male romance and shows the reader the correct behavior and decorum when conducting one of these relationships.

Important “characteristics of the samurai [*nanshoku*] tradition were its emphasis on loyalty between the lover and beloved and the mutual aid each, as samurai, could provide the other,”150 and as such, the example set by the samurai characters is not only in male love but in samurai *bushidô* or ethics as well; both are deemed equally important to a proper samurai *nanshoku* relationship. By ending his stories with didactic notes praising the “great love and strict adherence to honor”151 of the characters in his stories, Saikaku emphasizes the importance of admirable behavior between samurai men and youths in romantic relationships.

Like the characters’ actions, many aspects of the samurai stories are idealized, but special emphasis is often placed on the youth, the object of the adult reader’s interest and a model for the youthful male reader’s emulation. Saikaku’s samurai youths’ attractiveness is not limited to physical beauty but also their ethics and personalities, important qualities in the long-term relationships expected of samurai *nanshoku*, in which *wakashu* provided “both emotional and sexual pleasure” to their lovers.152 These youths, “filled with the most noble considerations and most undying loyalty,”153 represent an ideal that fits with the expectation for relations between samurai men and boys at the time—that within a relationship between two males of the samurai

149 Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 45.
150 Schalow, Introduction, 7.
class, behavior was important “outside the bedroom as well as within it.”

Because samurai relationships were expected to be meaningful in more aspects than just the sexual, the youths of Saikaku’s samurai stories are presented as having a strong sense of “warrior spirit” and living up to the “highest platonic ideal” as warriors of the samurai class, as well as maintaining delicate sensitivities and the striking beauty expected in any youth.

Perhaps most striking in Saikaku’s samurai stories is the emphasis on the seriousness of the relationship. While only a select few of the stories come to conclusions in which the main characters are able to continue to live together, the number of stories in which one or both of the characters dies for the sake of his beloved reflects the conviction with which the characters regard the common shudô oath promising the “sharing [of] life and death together.” The outcomes of the samurai stories within The Great Mirror of Male Love show that these relationships were not viewed as passing affairs, but rather serious commitments similar to marriage. And in the cases that Saikaku’s “chivalric romance” stories do end with both parties alive and together, they are depicted as having durable and long-lasting relationships, fitting of the expected “permanence of the bond” of nanshoku relationships between samurai. Whether in life or death, the fact that Saikaku’s samurai stories usually end with the main couple together reflects the expectation of commitment in samurai male-male relationships in the Tokugawa period.

154 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 43.
155 Saikaku, The Great Mirror, 145.
157 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 41.
158 Richie, Japanese Literature, 118.
159 Pflugfelder, Cartographies, 31.
The second half of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* sheds a very different light on the nanshoku culture of the chonin and the kabuki prostitutes they patronized. Unlike the etiquette and idealized examples stressed in the first half of the book, Saikaku’s tone in the kabuki stories emphasizes “kabuki’s titillating appeal”\(^{160}\) and gives the reader a sense of enjoyment rather than edification. Because he was a writer of popular fiction, “Saikaku’s primary purpose was to entertain his readership,”\(^{161}\) and he does so through “gossipy stories about boy actors, their patrons, and various other personnel from the social world of the contemporary kabuki theatre.”\(^{162}\) While in the realm of the samurai, Saikaku stresses the importance of the relationship between an adult man and a youth, the lack of commitment—or even relationship at all—in interactions with kabuki prostitutes is clearly expressed in the stories of the latter half of *The Great Mirror*, which sometimes fail to even contain a central romance. When not simply for a laugh or amusement, Saikaku’s constant referral to actual kabuki actors at the time gives the sense that the attentions of these youths “could be a part of anyone’s life”;\(^{163}\) rather than teaching the reader the correct etiquette to procure a wakashu of his own, the book provides a less expensive (but equally brief) substitute for a prostitute. The intent of these stories is not educational, but rather to entertain the reader with either amusing, gossipy tales or titillating descriptions of real actors, showing the lack of weight placed in the kabuki realm of nanshoku—entertainment, rather than etiquette, is important.


\(^{161}\) Schalow, Introduction, 13.


And when the kabuki stories do focus on relationships with *wakashu*, Saikaku does not elevate their moral worth or describe their delicate sensitivities, but rather describes their beauty in women’s costume or provocative dancing styles. Kabuki “served to comodify men as sex objects,”¹⁶⁴ and this is reflected in *The Great Mirror*’s kabuki stories, in which performance both on the stage as well as in the bedroom are emphasized far more than the personality or morals of any given kabuki youth. In the Tokugawa realm of the theater and prostitution, a patron was unlikely to know or care anything about a given youth past what was presented on the outside; on the stage, *onnagata* were almost completely covered in either makeup or layers of female costume, their appearances “a fiction of fabric, makeup, and decorations” rather than any sense of their real bodies, not to mention their real personalities. Fan clubs sprung up around these actors, and it was not even uncommon for a kabuki actor to be treated “as a figure of worship,”¹⁶⁵ they were seen sometimes as idols or gods, but rarely as human beings. Additionally, *onnagata* were often portrayed in prints and paintings not as men in their female roles. Their poses in artwork depicting them are often comparable to poses “common in portrayals of courtesans”¹⁶⁶ and dressed in female fashions; the actors are represented in their image as performers rather than in any relation to their personalities or personal lives.

Sometimes even the fact that a particular youth was not an actor at all was of no importance; some *wakashu*, while simply prostitutes, maintained the “fiction … that they were employees of

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the theatre”¹⁶⁷ and were certainly not left wanting for customers. Even the true nature of their professions was not important in the brief commercial transaction that made up the nanshoku culture of the chonin, and this is reflected in The Great Mirror through Saikaku’s constant praise of kabuki actors’ dancing, singing, and entertaining skills but never of their personalities or ethics.

Another issue upon which Saikaku touches in The Great Mirror of Male Love that emphasizes the lack of importance in other qualities besides entertaining skills in kabuki prostitutes is the fact that, within the realm of kabuki wakashu, “social age [could be] treated as a transparent fiction.”¹⁶⁸ Because the bakufu required all kabuki actors to shave off their forelocks, even the youngest kabuki actors, in the eyes of society, should have been seen as adults, which, in samurai society, “would have disqualified them from boy prostitution.”¹⁶⁹ But by wearing scarves or other headwear, kabuki prostitutes hid their adult hairstyles and, as Saikaku points out in story 5:5, “it was still possible at the age of 34 or 35 for youthful looking actors to get under a man’s robe.”¹⁷⁰ The actual and societal adulthood of kabuki actors could be ignored in the brief, commercial transactions between prostitutes and chonin. Accordingly, Saikaku points out that it was possible to “get under a man’s robe, not to establish a long, meaningful relationship with him, something that would have been unacceptable in the realm of the samurai. While in one of the samurai stories, “Two Old Cherry Blossoms Still in Bloom,” two men aged 63 and 66 are depicted in a male-male relationship, the acceptability of the situation hinges on the fact that one of the two men never shaved off his forelocks, making him, albeit in the eyes of society only,

¹⁶⁸ Halperin, Review, 399.
¹⁶⁹ Schalow, Introduction, 36.
still a youth. Even this behavior is labeled as “eccentric” within the story, but in when the object of desire was a kabuki prostitute, available for one night of passion rather than a long lasting relationship, the fact that a boy had technically become an adult could be ignored.

The conclusions of the stories in the second half of The Great Mirror of Male Love also reflect the historical experiences of kabuki actors during the Tokugawa period. Just as the stories of kabuki youths that do center around relationships all end in the parting of the lovers depict, the sex-for-money way of life that most kabuki prostitutes lived meant that encounters with paying patrons lasted as little as “several hours” and lacked “long term emotional commitments.”\(^{171}\) While Saikaku’s representation of the interactions between kabuki actors and chonin were likely romanticized, depicting lovers being forcibly parted rather than people who barely knew one another separating after only a few hours, the emphasis on brevity and parting remains. These short meetings between paying customers and prostitutes were “a radically different experience from the idealized relationships between … samurai and their pages,”\(^{172}\) and Saikaku demonstrates this through the emphasis on separation in his kabuki stories. Unlike in the samurai stories, where the expectation of a long and meaningful relationship is clear in Saikaku’s happier endings, these kabuki stories show, oppositely, the impossibility of a long lasting relationship in the realm of the kabuki prostitute.

The Great Mirror of Male Love and the Tokugawa Class System

Saikaku’s exact intent in writing The Great Mirror of Male Love in the way he did—creating artistic but nonetheless accurate representations of both samurai and kabuki nanshoku—is difficult to pin down. Paul Schalow suggests that the difference can be traced back to Saikaku’s

\(^{171}\) Leupp, Male Colors, 65.

\(^{172}\) Leupp, Male Colors, 74.
relative familiarity with one realm over the other; in his introduction to *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, he points out that “Saikaku’s access to information on about the samurai way of life was limited”\(^\text{173}\) while “thorough familiarity with [many kabuki actors] and their way of life freed Saikaku to produce some of his most inspired narratives.”\(^\text{174}\) The disparity in style, characterization, and plot between the two halves has also been attributed to Saikaku’s desire to sell his books—creating an idealistic image of the samurai while providing entertaining tales of townsmen “no doubt appealed to the samurai in Edo as well as the wealthy merchants in Osaka and Kyoto.”\(^\text{175}\) Others, however, cite Saikaku’s “attempt to ingratiate himself with the government”\(^\text{176}\) as a plausible reason for his elevation of the samurai in *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, fitting of the Tokugawa society in which “the regime attempted … to enforce the dictum … ‘Know your place!’”\(^\text{177}\) Whether or not Saikaku was actively attempting to please the authorities, members of the samurai government in Edo would surely have approved of a book in which samurai love was shown as ideal and the trysts of townsmen, whose economic power was a source of concern, as comical or else unpleasant in outcome.

Whatever Saikaku’s motivations, *The Great Mirror of Male Love* is reflective of its time period in the highly stratified society of Tokugawa Japan. As a book first published and made widely available in both Osaka and Kyoto and later in a second edition in Edo,\(^\text{178}\) its widespread success was made possible due to the printing press, placing it within in the emerging Tokugawa genre of popular literature. The emergence of popular media not only allowed the circulation of

\(^{177}\) Leupp, *Male Colors*, 61.
\(^{178}\) Pflugfelder, *Cartographies*, 48.
knowledge about *nanshoku*, but no doubt also furthered the propagation of the class-based norms that the Tokugawa *bakufu* tried so hard to maintain in its structured system. Whether to please both samurai and townsmen consumers or the samurai-backed government, *The Great Mirror of Male Love* is no exception. As popular media, it encapsulates accepted stereotypes and tropes of the time, and promulgated these social norms that the Tokugawa bakufu established between the monetarily powerful *chonin* and the government-backed samurai. Through the lens of *nanshoku*, Saikaku has provided readers with a widely accepted view of his time period, and through tone, narrative, characters, and plot, has emphasized the class differences that were such a major characteristic of Tokugawa life.
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