SPRING 2011 HONORABLE MENTION

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INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

Over the course of his essay, Kima explores two related questions: Why are graphic novels that feature male homosexuality largely absent from academic accounts of Japanese art and culture, and why have these novels been explored primarily from the viewpoint of feminist studies, when male homosexuality and homoeroticism are their central subjects?

Kima addresses these questions by reminding us that before the 20th century, homosexual practices and homoerotic relationships were significant to various institutions of Japanese society, from Buddhist monasteries to the samurai tradition of bushidou. Examining current attitudes toward male homosexuality in Japanese media reveals that negative or apprehensive views of male homosexuality “believe the condoning views held during Japan’s past over half a millennium ago.” But Kima also explores the gender dynamics of yaoi’s reception, as a popular genre of Japanese graphic novels (manga) predominately created by and for young women. He proceeds to challenge the dominant critical approach to the genre which has focused on yaoi’s relationship to its mostly female creators and consumers. Kima offers an alternative critical framework that merges the perspectives of art history and media studies by reading yaoi next to nanshoku, a form of Japanese visual art popular in the 17th and 18th centuries. The differences in how both genres configure masculinity, Kima shows, can be traced (in some surprising ways) to Western influences on a longer history of male homosexual practices in Japanese society.

“Yaoi and Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Identity, Divergence, and Discourse” makes a perspicacious and timely intervention into the current—and growing—scholarly interest in yaoi. The disciplinary, historical, and linguistic breadth of Kima’s project is part of what makes his research on the subject so original and compelling.

—Rhiannon Lewis
INTRODUCTION
Notions of male homosexuality are evolving in Japan. This evolution affirms that sociocultural norms influence the institutionalization and acceptance of sexual behavior. Long ago, Japan exhibited “a cultural tradition of homosexuality comparable to that of Greece” (Watanabe and Iwata 11). In particular, male-male sexual relationships were a significant part of Japanese society before and during the Tokugawa Period, 1608-1868. Before the Tokugawa Era, Buddhist monasteries hardly discouraged homosexual practices and similarly the rich samurai tradition, bushidou, featured many homoerotic lord-vassal relationships (Leupp 37). Monks often viewed “homosexuality (the beautiful way) […] as a reasonable and forgivable compromise between heterosexual involvements and complete sexual abstinence” (Leupp 35).\(^1\) Rather than eradicating the practice, monks and samurai integrated eroticized same-sex interactions into their daily lifestyles.

Presently, the thought of such a tradition in modern society seems laughable and perplexing. Japan is no exception. The affectionate and often economically beneficial relationships between monks and their pupils or between prostitutes and their patrons have since descended into public scorn. Homosexuality no longer enjoys its once favorable standing. For example, findings from a cross-cultural study performed

\(^1\) Although certain groups (specifically Jesuit priests) denounced the prevalence of homosexual practices, it is clear that same-sex male interactions played an integral part in Japanese society during this time.
by Furnham and Saito suggest that metropolitan Japanese citizens view male homosexuality with increased ambivalence (315)\(^2\). Their negative and apprehensive responses belie the more condoning impressions held during Japan’s past over a half a millennium ago. The transformation of the status of homosexuality in Japan (following the Tokugawa Era) ostracizes same-sex male interactions. The causes of this transformation are often linked to Westernization and the effects of World War II on Japan (Watanabe and Iwata 124); however, the authors warn that this link is extremely unclear. Nonetheless, as Japan approached war, heteronormativity and the construction of different and polarized genders were on the rise (McLelland, “Queer Japan” 55). The results of this change and other stochastic social processes can be seen through how much the modern status of male homosexuality differs from that of the Tokugawa Period.

In addition, the cultural hybridization of same-sex male interactions has given rise to divergent portrayals in contemporary media. These portrayals differ widely, yet two of the most notable are those of male homosexuality in gay media and the idealization of homosexuality in gay graphic novels (specifically, *yaoi* content). While the former is directed towards a primarily gay male audience, the latter is often claimed to cater to straight female audiences (McLelland, “Beautiful Boys” 14). What I find particularly fascinating is that while there is crossover between the depiction of homosexuality in pre-modern Japan (Tokugawa Period) with modern gay media and *yaoi* media, *yaoi* and gay media themselves are rarely analyzed in regard to each other. It is puzzling that while so many of the sociocultural findings of McLelland and his contemporaries can be seen through various frames in *yaoi* graphic novels, the genre has only been analyzed as a product of Japanese feminism. While literature concerning homosexuality in Japan often regards Japanese media (both past and present) as indicators of the history of male-male interactions, Japanese gay graphic novels are largely absent from these analyses. This paper attempts to explore homosexuality in Japan and, secondarily, to examine to what extent *yaoi* warrants more exploration as an object of sociocultural analysis. I believe a fundamental understanding of the way cultural mores shape and legitimize our sexual actions is at stake. Through my paper, I ultimately explore the extent to which any portrayal of sexual or interpersonal contact adequately captures a culture’s notions of sexuality.

\(^2\) For a more details on the results of the study, please see Appendix I and II.
HOMOSEXUALITY IN TOKUGAWA JAPAN: NANSHOKU

In exploring the depiction of homosexuality in historical media, one often runs into the problem of adjusting to cultural context. As McLelland forewarns in “Is There a Japanese Gay Identity?” the Westernized notion of homosexuality is often inappropriately applied to studies on same-sex interactions in non-Western cultures:

So despite the many advantages that the development of various gay media produced and controlled by lesbian and gay individuals have brought [in traditionally Western societies], the images presented by these media are not necessarily liberating but can impose certain constructions or certain limits on what it means to be lesbian or gay. (463).

Such frameworks hinder one’s ability to understand the sociocultural context of same-sex male interactions in Japan simply because one fruitlessly attempts to fit these interactions into distinct categories that mirror those of traditional Western notions of homosexuality. Instead, one should allow room for observations to lead to organic categorizations of same-sex male interactions in Japan (Hall 72). Such a dismantling of homosexual constructions is especially helpful when exploring the complexity of same-sex male interactions during the Tokugawa Period of Japan, 1603-1868. Additionally, attempts to characterize homosexuality in Japan fail to take into account the bisexuality often contained in the practice of homosexual behavior (Harada 79). Homosexuality in Japan, especially during the Tokugawa Period, lacks the sexual exclusiveness that is key to the Western notion of homosexual behavior. In Tokugawa Japan “it was common for men to have homosexual and heterosexual relationships sequentially or sometimes simultaneously” (Harada 78). Societal conventions that governed the relationship between men and male youth helped integrate homosexual behavior into normal sexual life (Schalow 128).

Through my research, I have discovered how difficult it is to categorize same-sex male interactions during this era. Several euphemisms for “male eros” (male erotic attraction) permeated Tokugawa Japan (Leupp, “Male Colors” 1). These euphemisms, however, appear in current literature in a somewhat asynchronous manner. Nevertheless, in this paper I will focus on the practice of nanshoku. Of all the Japanese equivalents relating to homosexuality, nanshoku is the most prominent and also embodies most broadly the physical, emotional, and social aspects of same-sex male interactions during this time period. According to Leupp, nanshoku is the closest word for describing male-male sexual interactions during the Tokugawa Era (6). Nanshoku refers to a broad range of male-male sex acts and etiquette that came
to gain economic and social popularity during the early 17th century. As Leupp
writes, “one is struck by the fact that homosexuality does not appear as an equivalent
for *nanshoku* […] and pederasty is not an accurate translation either” (8). Though
words like sodomy and pederasty are often used to dismantle homosexual behavior
into physical actions, Leupp argues, “Japanese terms such as ‘nanshoku’ sometimes
connote an emotional condition, or an etiquette, and stress the refinement and
dignity of male-male sex” (8). Schalow
reiterates that “male love was a normal component of male sexuality” with its
own mores and ethical customs (27).

One should notice however, that this
is the first of many cultural clues into
how Tokugawa homosexual society
does not accommodate the same host of
modern connotations when considering
homosexual activity. In regard to the
sexual relationships among males during
the Tokugawa Period, sex with men
did not preclude males from having sex
with women or even indicate something
permanent about their sexuality
(McLelland, “Male Homosexuality” 20).
As a result, men could freely copulate
with either sex. Moreover, the surplus of
terms related to homosexuality, including
*shudo* and *nanshoku*, qualified and broke up the components and motivations of male-
male sex. This becomes especially apparent when one considers the social factors that
preempted the popularity, tolerance and idealization of homosexual activity during this
time period. For example, differentials in status sustained male homosexual behavior,
making it compliant with societal obligations (McLelland 21).

3 “Men’s same-sex sexual relationships were governed by a code of ethics described as *nanshoku*
(male eroticism) or *shudo* (the way of youths) in the context of which elite men were able to
pursue boys and young men who had not yet undergone their coming-of-age ceremonies, as well
as transgender males of all ages from the lower classes who worked as actors associated with the
kabuki theatre” (Suganuma and McLelland 330).
Up until the earlier half of the Tokugawa Period (17th century to 18th century Japan), male love permeated monastery, samurai and theatrical life (McLelland 20). Although the specifics of each of these areas are too involved for me to cover in this paper, I would like to point out a few trends I discovered. Often in these same-sex male relationships there is a passive party and an active party (Leupp 9). The younger partner is generally called chigo or wakashuu and receives the sexual advances of the older partner called nenja. In the context of Tokugawa society, monks, priests, shop masters, and craftsmen are all nenja who love their apprentices, shop assistants, and acolytes. An excerpt from Ihara Saikaku’s Great Mirror of Male Love poignantly captures how these relationships were often seen as more desirable than sexual relationships with women: “Why in the world did ‘the man who loved love’ [Yonosuke] waste such vast quantities of gold and silver on his myriad women, when the only pleasure and excitement to be found is in male love?” (17). Sentiments emphasizing the purity and desirability of male love justified male homosexual contact. Similar idealized notions of homosexuality reappear in yaoi content and some gay media, which I will discuss later.

In a relatively short time, Japan witnessed a great shift in the status of nanshoku. At first, regimented and esteemed male homosexual relations existed only among the more privileged classes. The samurai, monks, and kabuki theater actors exemplified “not so much homosexuality […] but a proliferation of ‘homosexualities’ [whose]
only common factor was the sex (not necessarily the gender) of the participants” (McLelland 24). An emotionally invested and highly committed relationship between two men, *nanshoku*, had now transformed into a “commercial transaction devoid of the commitments required by earlier traditions of male homosexuality” (Leupp 59). This commercialization, however, opened the door of access to other economic classes within Japan during this time. As Leupp writes, “*Nanshoku*, in short, arose largely to compensate for men’s lack of female companionship, but at some point its culture came to so influence the structure of male desire that its vitality no longer required the absence of women” (199). Having noted the rise and fall of *nanshoku*, we can now ask: To what extent, then, is the present Japanese male homosexual culture a departure from *nanshoku* and *shudo*?

**OBSERVATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE HOMOSEXUAL CULTURE**

One of the most salient difficulties encountered when dealing with homosexual culture in Japan is the lack of a verifiable homosexual identity. Current literature often cites this problem as rooted in the Western construct of homosexuality. This makes research concerning the history of the emergent gay identity quite difficult. In a study performed over the course of three years and published in *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, Dr. Mark McLelland interviewed over thirty gay males in metropolitan areas of Japan. Several gay men in Japan were found to not believe that their gayness was an important part of their personhood (“Gay Identity” 463-465). Further exacerbating the malleability of gay identity (or lack thereof in Japan) is the account of one of the interviewees in the study, who affirms that despite his desire for homosexual intercourse, he could not relinquish the prospect of a heteronormative family. “He says that he is afraid that ‘solely because of my sexual desire [*seiyoku no tame dake*] I must live alone without getting married’, and therefore clearly illustrates that ‘sexuality’ is not, for him, the most important aspect of his personhood” (465). For this reason, applying Western gay identity, which often stems from “over-identification” with homosexuality, is dangerous when considering Japanese gay men (463). More importantly, in very much the same way that samurai warriors partook in *nanshoku* without considering same-sex male intercourse as a marking feature of their sexuality, some men in Japan who often engage in sex with other males divorce their sexual behavior from their romantic desires.

Despite this separation, the societal landscape of modern Japan has changed drastically. Norms that once stabilized sexual relations between males as merely
another dimension of sexual enjoyment have vanished or given way to new norms that ultimately alienate homosexual practices from the greater society. Perhaps one of the most telling examples of an evolution of norms is the defining and redefining of masculinity in Japan following the Tokugawa Era. This phenomenon has particular consequences for how male homosexuality is perceived in Japan currently. Before I consider how changes in Japanese male masculinity manifest themselves in contemporary media, I will first discuss general attitudes held in Japan towards male homosexuality.

As discourse around homosexuality resurfaced during the 50s, 60s, and 70s, the attitudes towards homosexuality revealed a significant shift (McLelland, “Queer Japan” 123). Male homosexuality, now called *douseiai*[^6] (同性愛), was likened to sexual perversion, a communicable, psychological, abnormal, and ill-fated *byouki* (病気) or sickness that broke the accepted role of the male as dominant over the female (Mackintosh 30-32). Indeed, several homophobic activists encouraged the notion that male homosexuality resulted from victims being more psychologically female (Mackintosh 31). The negative impact that this association with femininity has had on male homosexuality in Japan cannot be overstated. I will cover this point in much more detail in the following section.[^7] In addition, Furnham and Saito’s study revealed that metropolitan Japanese citizens were more likely to associate the origin of homosexuality with issues during childrearing or more generally the influence of social or environmental factors (309).

Now if one considers how gender (in this case, femininity) can be expressed or performed through mannerisms, attire, and speech and that these aspects of human behavior are acquired (and not inherent), the participants in this study take no great leap in assuming that male homosexuality comes from environmental factors (Abe 2). Since gender performance is influenced by social factors and homosexuality is conflated with a desire or predisposition to be feminine, it follows that homosexuality is influenced by social factors as well. While they often feel that personal interactions with homosexuals are undesirable, Japanese citizens as a whole still support the equal treatment of the homosexual male. This paradox arises not from the empathy

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[^6]: Even the term itself, *douseiai*, has a negative medical connotation, the history of which can be traced back to the beginning of the Tokugawa Era. In effect, the appearance of this term illustrates how, in the years following the Tokugawa Period, curing sexual deviance (in this case male homosexuality), was “a task for the medical profession” (Mackintosh 34).

[^7]: See The Interplay of Homosexuality and Transgenderism in Media Portrayals.
of Japanese citizens but rather a strict obesiance to powerful societal norms that supersede or transcend the individual (Harada 81; Furnham and Saito 310). While one is free to scorn homosexuality as a lifestyle, one must not allow the scorn to get in the way of striving towards the good of greater society. To some extent then, it seems that this communal-mindedness protects homosexual males from complete persecution in Japanese society but inhibits substantial and meaningful contact with non-homosexuals. Still, the homosexual might, in his own effort to contribute to societal harmony, silence his own desire for males and not allow it to interfere with his day-to-day interactions. As Harada writes:

> The existence of the omnipresent ranking system makes clear everyone’s position and expected behavior, thereby disallowing ambiguity and creating harmony. Therefore, the internalized obesiance to rank makes the establishment, construction, and growth of a gay community difficult in Japan since for a gay community to take care of its members successfully, the members must put aside their differences in order to build on the similarities. (80).

In short, there is significant societal pressure, even for homosexual males, to behave in a manner that is congruous with behavior of the other members of society. This apprehension sharply contrasts the social acceptableness of homosexual male relationships during the Tokugawa Period. But one might ask, what exactly perpetuates or contributes to the immoral caricature of male homosexuality in Japan? While I am unable to explicate the complex combination of sociocultural obligations and gender roles that polarize male homosexuality, I will focus on the most prolific disseminator of information on homosexuals: the contemporary media.

**THE INTERPLAY OF HOMOSEXUALITY AND TRANSGENDERISM IN MEDIA PORTRAYALS**

Japanese media have taken up homosexuality and contributed to its commercialization. This commercialization strikes a precarious balance between the notions of *gei boi* or males taking on performative female roles and *homo*, in which masculinity is conserved (McLelland, “Male Homosexuality” 158-161). The balance, however, is due to the disparities in the portrayal of male homosexuality, rather than the media attempting to widen what gender norms homosexuality can accommodate. It is
possible that the media play an unnoticed role in the unwillingness of gay males to attribute significant identity to “being gay.” McLelland specifically addresses one of the striking features of this portrayal: the conflating of transgenderism and homosexuality into one new sexual phenomenon. “The idea that same-sex attraction necessarily involves some kind of transgenderism or desire to be like or even become the opposite of one’s biological sex is constantly reinforced by Japanese media, which discuss homosexuality and transgenderism in the same context,” (461). A notoriously pervasive informant, Japanese general media often damage the perception of male homosexuality. Most of the participants in Furnham’s study, for example, stated that they gained most of their information on homosexuals through Japanese media⁸; these participants were also much less likely than their British counterparts to have knowingly met a homosexual male (Furnham and Saito 303-307). Moreover, consider how the media’s depictions focus only on the performative aspects of homosexual culture, such as the cross-dressing that arose from the ancient kabuki theater tradition. Due to the plethora of words⁹ in these media conjoined to homosexuality, Japanese citizens cannot help but associate hopping genders with preferring one’s own sex.

Even contemplating McLelland’s comments on masculinity in Japan and on the portrayal of gender norms in Japanese culture makes male homosexuals’ disillusionment seem all the more plausible. “The social attitudes on structuring and limiting women’s sexuality in Japan are given graphic representation in comics directed at male audience where depictions of sex, especially violent and intrusive sex, have become common” (McLelland, “Beautiful Boys” 16). In addition to subverting the sexuality of women through violence and intrusion, these comics portray men as hyper-masculine and hyper-sexualized (16). One should take note of the little difference perceived between this characterization of the comic depiction of the heterosexual male and the characterizations of gay media’s depiction of the homosexual male. “Gay men’s pornographic comics share many of the same

⁸ See Appendix II for the full data on the opinions about male homosexuality from the participants in this study.

⁹ Among these labels are “toransusekushuaru (‘trans-sexual’, defined as persons who want to change their biological sex through an operation), toransujendaa (‘transgender’, or people who express themselves through the gender opposite to their biological sex but do not want an operation), toransubuesutaito (‘transvestite’, or persons who want to dress as the opposite sex because of a ‘fetish’), and nyuuhaafu (‘new-half’, or male-to-female transsexuals or male-to-female transgendered individuals who have ‘come out’ [kamu auto] and work in the sex industry).” (McLelland 461).
features of men’s comics [including relying upon] violence, bondage, SM and the rapid changeover in partners in order to maintain reader interest” (16). While it is not entirely important that this apply to readers’ interest, one sees the importance that gender performativity has for gay male communities in Japan. Let’s take a step back and consider how this might cause a gay homosexual male to be wary of the general media’s portrayal of homosexuals. It is clear that although homosexual men in Japan desire intercourse with other men, there is a tendency to wish to retain cultural masculinized characteristics (McLelland 462). Contrary to the depictions of homosexuality in Westernized culture where one gender norm is expected to shift to accommodate another gender norm, it appears that Japanese gay males, to some extent, do not perceive the need for a shift in gender norms. In fact, if one considers how gender norm shifting imposes feminine characteristics on males, then Japanese general media’s portrayal of homosexuality does not seem all that appealing (Mackintosh 152).

Overt and violent displays of sexuality in gay male pornography indicate a general trend in gay male media: gender polarized behavior that still conforms to societal standards of masculinity (McLelland 147). Nonetheless, while these portrayals may make gay male media align with the norms of the Japanese male, they cannot be circulated throughout Japanese society. And since the act of homosexuality is still perceived as crude, homosexual males hardly have a chance to affirm their masculinity (and thus lack of femininity) to the greater society in a context that is not blatantly sexual.

This is not to say that there are no media that cater appropriately to the interests of the gay homosexual community in Japan. Here we encounter a dichotomy between how the external (i.e., outside of the male homosexual community) and internal media depict contemporary homosexuality. In actuality, the gay media’s portrayal of homosexuality echoes the socially inflected notions of masculinity. The ideal of their material is very much the same hyper-masculine, hyper-sexualized male (McLelland, “Male Homosexuality” 126). Yet it seems that age, instead of gender, becomes the means of establishing a hierarchy of intra-gender dominance. Age is one of the most powerful means of social organization in Japanese society; stratifying gender is no exception (Levey and Silver 682). “Hence, the power differentials which disadvantage women in [certain] representations of heterosexual[s] are also apparent in [those of] gay[s], except it is the junior partner forced to submit to the senior” (159). These power differentials strengthen the sense of masculinity, and perhaps in one man submitting to another’s dominance, the submissive party affirms his
own masculinity in that he knows when to subordinate himself to a superior. One cannot deny age-differentiation “as a fundamental defining characteristic of the _nanshoku_ relationship” (Mackintosh 185). But notice how the disparities between sexual partners in the Tokugawa Era had more to do with “other historical considerations” from which a juxtaposition of concretized manliness and femininity was largely absent (185).

The article described in Figure 3 provides further evidence of the use of age to establish a gender hierarchy in homosexual relations in gay male media. One sees very clearly the masculine nature of attire and physique of the characters in this article. Bulging muscles, sports apparel, light bruises from physical activity, and an engorged penis solidify the masculine context of the depicted sex act. Likewise, the initiation (via forced sex) in the lower right panel demonstrates the use of violence and sex to affirm masculinity. The difference between the depiction of intercourse in Figure 3 and those of Figures 1 & 2 is remarkable. The protagonists in the images featured in earlier sections of this paper have relatively neutral morphological features, and attempts to affirm masculinity or indicate gender roles are absent. Even in the more graphic Tokugawa Japan art, which feature engorged penises abruptly penetrating the passive actor or insertee, the characters still do not imply a strict gender norm through their attire or physique.10

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10 Other artwork during the Tokugawa Era that depicted heterosexual intercourse had male and female characters with relatively similar physique (aside from genitalia). In addition, it appears that the attire of sexual participants was not limited to one gender. In cases of both heterosexual and homosexual intercourse, men and women occasionally wore identically styled clothing.
In summation, “[…gay] magazines represent images of homosexuality through sexual acts. Homosexuality is defined through genital acts and not through any kind of interior identity or exterior lifestyle” (158). This dissociation of the homosexual act and any notions of personhood or indications of lifestyle again supports the idea that homosexuality in Japan seems to implicate less about the identity of the persons engaging in the homosexual behavior. Presently, we see that while general media typcast male homosexuality as a bizarre attempt to leave one’s gender, gay media over-masculinize sexual acts. One might think that the hyper-masculine portrayals affirm the ability of gay men to adhere to male gender norms; however, this portrayal must compete with others available in print and online. We can ask ourselves, at this point, what is distinctive about the gender balance in portrayals of homosexuality in gay media? In other words, are there any facets of gay media that make it more complex than just a transposed version of depictions of heterosexuality?

**NAVIGATING MASCULINITY AND THE ANDROGYNOUS THREAT OF YAOI**

The gay media’s portrayal of male homosexuality draws upon distinct characteristics of homosocial interactions that are themselves products of Japanese society. “The governing paradigm of these relationships seems to be *amae* […] where the older [or senior] partner indulges or spoils the younger or junior partner […] and it seems likely that these are simply exten[sions] of erotic dimensions [to] power relations, which are operative throughout Japanese society (McLelland, “Male Homosexuality” 149). The most noticeable of these power relations form an intricate male eros that is both paternal and fraternal. In other words, the relationships evince vertical homosocial pacts between fatherly figures and son-like partners and *kyoudai'ai* (兄弟愛), or erotic brotherly love (Mackintosh 200). Looking back at Figure 3, in which the sex scene occurs at a university, it seems likely that the active participants or inserters in the panel are *sempai* (seniors) and the insertee is the *kouhai* (junior). The eroticization of the school setting, for example, permeates gay sex ads and media (McLelland 150).

The overarching sentiment, aside from the assertion of manhood through sexual acts, is a fixation on the beauty of the youthful male body (Mackintosh 205). Interestingly, the beauty of the male body, while also the preponderant motivator of the male homosexual interactions in the Tokugawa Period, has taken on a new form in the modern era. This conception of young male beauty is distinctly gendered and centralizes on morphological changes in the male body as the “manliness of
the *shounen* (boy) youth crosses over into the *seinen* (man) male youth” (Mackintosh 206). Therefore, the intrigue of the male body lies not in its androgyny (especially during pre-pubescence) but in the appearance of defined sexual characteristics that are themselves a physical testament of manhood. In the modern context, then, the amorphous splendor of the Tokugawa *chigo* or *wakashuu* is likely unappealing. *Nanshoku* required set rules about the passive and active party in sexual intercourse (Leupp 178). The passivity, to a certain extent, would undermine the masculinity of the gay male; and since the insertee was already an androgynous being, masculinity was hardly a concern. While homosocial contracts such as *amae* and paternal and fraternal eros do exist, their irrevocable basis on eroto-morphemic ideals would reject the complete de-masculinization of the beautiful youth. As discussed, the physical and sexual becoming of the youth is marked by constant instances of sexual self-awareness (Mackintosh 206). Perhaps this self-awareness, while limiting the youth to masculinized roles, does not prevent the youth from fluctuating from insertee to inserter. The youth retains his manhood since either role is an expression of his virility. In the cases of homosexual interactions in Tokugawa Japan, sex roles were essentially fixed.

When examining the depictions of male homosexuality in women’s media specifically, one sees clearly what fails to be true male beauty for male homosexuals in Japan. Among Japanese women’s media, one encounters strikingly different depictions of male homosexuality, which to some extent also undermine the operative notion of masculinity in Japanese society. *Yaoi* content is the most infamous of the depictions of male homoerotic and homosexual relationships in traditionally women’s media (Wood 396). Often deemed an “escapist” genre, filled with gratuitous sex and androgynous protagonists, the *yaoi* graphic novel diverges somewhat from shounen-ai (Boy’s Love), another class of homosexual graphic novels. “Shonen-ai manga tend to emphasize elaborate romances that contain imagery more suggestive than sexually explicit” (Wood 395). Similar to our observations in gay media, the concept of male beauty is integral to *yaoi*. But this conception of beauty could not be more

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11 “The eroto-morphemes are the terms and expressions that appear in the ads to communicate and articulate the physical affective bodily self” (Mackintosh 152).

12 Notice that in the modern conception of the idealized homosexual male, the youth’s masculinity is influenced by the potential for sexual activity.

13 *Yaoi* is an acronym for “‘Yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi,’ which roughly translates as ‘No build-up, no foreclosure, and no meaning’” (Zanghellini 160).

14 This term is used often to refer to an umbrella of male homosexual content in women’s media.
opposite of that found in gay male media. The bishounen (beautiful boys) are the central focus, yet their beauty is an intermediate of the male and female sexes. To this end, yaoi content presents virtually all male characters as Adonis whose beauty transcends the male form and outshines that of the female form (Zanghellini 169). It is somewhat paradoxical that while the boys of yaoi are portrayed as possessing an arresting beauty (one that makes them more aesthetically pleasing than women), the glory of their appearance rests in traditionally non-masculine physical traits such as fair skin and alluring angelic features. This aesthetic move makes current yaoi content similar to the depictions of male homosexuality during the Tokugawa Era, in which male beauty was praised due to the prepubescent androgyny of the young boy subjects (Zanghellini 171).

Notice the starry eyes and ambivalently feminine features of Kazuaki, male in the rightmost panel of Figure 4. Although Kira, the male in the middle panel, is the dominant or active participant in this sex scene, he does not differ artistically from Kazuaki. Relatively speaking, both characters exhibit similar levels of androgyny. Their ascetic characteristics emasculate Kira and Kazuaki and make their status as true men implausible. Here, true refers to the conception of masculinity or manliness perpetuated by gay male media. While the indefiniteness of their gender is a hallmark of yaoi content, it is obvious that their adulterated masculinity hinders connections with a readership outside of Japanese women. McLelland links this hindrance to the desire of women to overcome socially embedded obstacles that they also face:

The comparative lack of homophobia among Japanese women and the long tradition of cross-dressing and transgenderism in Japanese theatre
has enabled the development of an erotic fantasy genre which sidesteps
the pervasive political divides involved in heterosexual representations by
focusing upon the love between young beautiful men. (“Beautiful Boys” 24)

Furthermore, the sexually liberating undertones of the caricatures of male homosexuals
in yaoi content combat the restrictiveness of women’s sexuality and allow freer ebb
and flow among gender roles (23; Zanghellini 163). Yet gay male media, which
evokes sex acts and hierarchal homosocial relationships to affirm masculinity, denies
these happy mediums and hybridized states of gender roles and sexuality. Despite the
appearance of gratuitous sex, dichotomized sex roles, and even transgenerational love
motifs, yaoi is still somewhat subpar when compared to the standards of gay male
media. Consider the archetypal yaoi sex scene in Figure 5.

In terms of sex roles, there are two
distinctions, the uke or receiver and
the seme or the attacker (Zanghellini
169). In Figure 5, it is clear that Kira
is the seme and Kazuaki the uke. The
prominence of uke and seme creates a
power differential that might lead one
to give more credence to sex acts in
yaoi as performances of masculinity.
Although this power differential
may be of more importance in gay
male media, it is nonetheless ever-
present in yaoi. The graphic nature of
this frame, however, cannot mask a
subtle divergence between this staple
depiction of sex and that of gay media.
Unlike gay media, there is a reverse
power differential in the depictions of
male gay sex in yaoi. The uke normally
makes no sexual advances or attempts
to pleasure the seme; instead, the seme
initiates every sexual act in an assertive manner that one could connote with submission
to the uke (Wood 403; Zanghellini 173). This phenomenon pays homage to the priests
and samurai of the Tokugawa Era, who similarly occupied themselves with pleasing
their wakashuu and concretizing a passive/active role dichotomy (Leupp 225).

Figure 5: Another frame from カーリング。
CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary trends in male homosexuality in Japan indicate a departure from the esteemed status male homosexuality held in pre-modern Japan. This sexual exodus has left androgyny and male passivity behind and erected a societal stronghold that requires constant performative affirmations of polarized gender types. The oft-used means of this assertion are violent and hyper-masculinized sex acts. These performances deviate from both the fixed sex roles of the Tokugawa Period and the amorphously passive-active dichotomy essential to *yaoi* content. Amidst our observations were discovered the vital importance of sociocultural obligations. Societal hierarchies stabilized both the current and pre-modern forms of homosexuality. From this, we learn of the intricate interplay of social mores and the construction of sexuality. Despite the existence of frozen gay male norms in gay media, we witnessed the rise and digression of *yaoi*. We saw the transplantation of the indefinite genders of its characters to their own sexual economy.

Both in sexual practice and in homosocial etiquette, the Tokugawa Era becomes hybridized in *yaoi* content. *Yaoi* functions as medium between the passivity of lord-vassal relations and the masculinity of gay male media. But in its discourse with gay male media, *yaoi* fails to capture and hold onto its subject matter. And in this failure we see the complexity of the conception of manliness and its permanence in gay male homosexuality. While gay male homosexuality in Japan has its own gender differentials, which are heavily stratified, male eros is not formulaic. In gay male media, sexual duties and homosocial phenomena combine and effect the aesthetically beautiful for the virile and masculine. Both gay media and *yaoi* have features that resemble certain aspects of the depictions of homosexuality in the Tokugawa Period; yet the evolving constraints of gender norms sustain gay media as decidedly masculine and *yaoi* as ambiguously effeminate. Ultimately, the importance of masculinity to the Japanese gay community, in that sense, catalyzes this dichotomy, alienating *yaoi* graphic novels from the demographics they depict.

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15 See Appendix III. McLelland summarizes the bishounen and biseinen binary with a noteworthy print.
WORKS CITED


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## APPENDIX I

### TABLE 1 ANCOVA Results for Etiology of Homosexuality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>British mean (S.D.)</th>
<th>Japanese mean (S.D.)</th>
<th>ANCOVA (F level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existence of hormonal imbalances in the foetus</td>
<td>3.74 (1.26)</td>
<td>4.16 (1.42)</td>
<td>5.59*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a fear of the opposite sex</td>
<td>2.52 (1.44)</td>
<td>3.97 (1.31)</td>
<td>41.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regarding one as an outsider during childhood</td>
<td>2.68 (1.32)</td>
<td>3.57 (1.14)</td>
<td>29.30***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being sexually abused by a male during childhood</td>
<td>2.68 (1.35)</td>
<td>3.94 (1.27)</td>
<td>34.72***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessing a certain genetic make-up</td>
<td>4.05 (1.31)</td>
<td>3.76 (1.51)</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being unusually narcissistic</td>
<td>2.23 (1.28)</td>
<td>3.35 (1.19)</td>
<td>32.6***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a father who is frequently absent from home during childhood</td>
<td>2.41 (1.30)</td>
<td>3.00 (1.28)</td>
<td>10.47***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding female genitalia aversive or frightening</td>
<td>2.79 (1.49)</td>
<td>3.45 (1.40)</td>
<td>11.95***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a brain disorder</td>
<td>1.69 (0.92)</td>
<td>2.88 (1.42)</td>
<td>27.29***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having early sexual relations with (a) female(s) that proves dissatisfying</td>
<td>2.97 (1.46)</td>
<td>3.42 (1.33)</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming from a &quot;weird&quot; family</td>
<td>1.96 (1.20)</td>
<td>3.98 (1.24)</td>
<td>75.62***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing a period of almost exclusively male contact (e.g., at a boy's school)</td>
<td>3.04 (1.43)</td>
<td>3.59 (1.50)</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a traumatic relationship with one's father</td>
<td>2.46 (1.26)</td>
<td>3.46 (1.20)</td>
<td>28.53***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a hatred of woman</td>
<td>2.74 (1.50)</td>
<td>3.96 (1.27)</td>
<td>29.93***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence of hormonal imbalances after childhood</td>
<td>3.53 (1.54)</td>
<td>3.97 (1.29)</td>
<td>13.93***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having one's first sexual experience with another male</td>
<td>3.66 (1.32)</td>
<td>3.82 (1.32)</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an unusually high regard for women</td>
<td>2.31 (1.21)</td>
<td>3.60 (1.16)</td>
<td>19.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence of a sexual chromosome deficiency (XYY)</td>
<td>3.40 (1.38)</td>
<td>3.92 (1.57)</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a strong, dominant mother and a weak, ineffective father</td>
<td>2.31 (1.27)</td>
<td>2.91 (1.28)</td>
<td>5.85*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero-worshipping (a) male role model(s)</td>
<td>2.37 (1.35)</td>
<td>3.82 (1.32)</td>
<td>41.89***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regarding a gay lifestyle as more exciting than a heterosexual lifestyle</td>
<td>3.24 (1.46)</td>
<td>3.74 (1.26)</td>
<td>5.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a desire to be female</td>
<td>3.32 (1.57)</td>
<td>4.37 (1.29)</td>
<td>26.61***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being unusually self-pitying as a child</td>
<td>2.02 (1.14)</td>
<td>3.32 (1.06)</td>
<td>51.66***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being sexually abused by a male during adulthood</td>
<td>2.29 (1.38)</td>
<td>3.38 (1.24)</td>
<td>21.08***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having (a) homosexual friend(s)</td>
<td>2.67 (1.39)</td>
<td>3.28 (1.36)</td>
<td>7.38**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.
Scale: 1 = highly unlikely to 6 = highly likely.

Table from "A Cross-Cultural Study of Attitudes Toward and Beliefs About Male Homosexuality."
APPENDIX II

**TABLE 2** ANCOVA Results for Beliefs about Homosexuality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>British mean (S.D.)</th>
<th>Japanese mean (S.D.)</th>
<th>ANCOVA (F level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) On the whole I am tolerant of homosexuality.</td>
<td>5.07 (1.00)</td>
<td>3.71 (1.38)</td>
<td>39.84***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Homosexuals tend to be artistic.</td>
<td>5.70 (1.04)</td>
<td>2.95 (1.16)</td>
<td>61.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Homosexuals should be segregated from the rest of the society.</td>
<td>1.33 (0.78)</td>
<td>1.96 (1.09)</td>
<td>16.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) I would be happy to work with homosexuals.</td>
<td>5.27 (1.05)</td>
<td>4.34 (1.50)</td>
<td>14.63***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Homosexuals tend to be good at cooking.</td>
<td>3.05 (1.08)</td>
<td>5.25 (0.85)</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Homosexuality is unusual.</td>
<td>2.65 (1.31)</td>
<td>5.20 (1.43)</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Homosexuals should be tolerated but only if they do not publicly show their way of life.</td>
<td>2.52 (1.33)</td>
<td>2.75 (1.28)</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Homosexual men are more promiscuous than heterosexual men.</td>
<td>3.13 (1.35)</td>
<td>2.38 (1.14)</td>
<td>14.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) I would have a homosexual as a close friend.</td>
<td>4.54 (1.44)</td>
<td>3.56 (1.25)</td>
<td>14.85***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Homosexuals tend to have good sense of humor.</td>
<td>3.69 (1.26)</td>
<td>3.68 (0.92)</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) I can't imagine what homosexuals “do in bed” together.</td>
<td>2.87 (1.42)</td>
<td>4.36 (1.50)</td>
<td>53.54***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Homosexuals are usually more intelligent than heterosexual males.</td>
<td>2.24 (1.09)</td>
<td>3.14 (0.71)</td>
<td>35.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) Homosexuals are rarely religious.</td>
<td>3.85 (1.31)</td>
<td>3.50 (0.84)</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) Many homosexuals live publicly as heterosexuals.</td>
<td>3.65 (1.09)</td>
<td>3.62 (0.99)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) Homosexuals can be readily identified by the way they speak and act.</td>
<td>3.65 (1.20)</td>
<td>5.41 (1.36)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) I would find it easy to accept that a son of mine was homosexual.</td>
<td>3.56 (1.60)</td>
<td>2.45 (1.32)</td>
<td>19.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) Homosexuality should be made illegal.</td>
<td>1.47 (0.94)</td>
<td>1.81 (1.10)</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) Homosexuals tend to be eccentric.</td>
<td>3.15 (1.35)</td>
<td>3.56 (1.17)</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19) I would feel uncomfortable talking to a homosexual.</td>
<td>1.81 (1.20)</td>
<td>3.55 (1.00)</td>
<td>79.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20) Homosexuals are not fussy about who they have sex with.</td>
<td>2.20 (1.12)</td>
<td>2.72 (1.16)</td>
<td>8.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21) What homosexuals “do in bed” disgusts me.</td>
<td>2.77 (1.44)</td>
<td>3.68 (1.42)</td>
<td>15.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22) Homosexuals are frequently found in the creative and performing professions.</td>
<td>3.75 (1.20)</td>
<td>3.92 (0.93)</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23) I would feel flattered if a homosexual made sexual advances toward me/my partner.</td>
<td>2.98 (1.53)</td>
<td>1.85 (1.01)</td>
<td>25.83***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24) Homosexuals are found more frequently in upper classes.</td>
<td>2.49 (0.95)</td>
<td>3.07 (0.89)</td>
<td>15.70***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25) Homosexuals tend to be vain.</td>
<td>2.98 (1.26)</td>
<td>3.06 (0.94)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26) Homosexuals should be protected by law from unfair discrimination against them.</td>
<td>4.65 (1.29)</td>
<td>3.91 (1.25)</td>
<td>14.81***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27) Homosexuals should be treated like everyone else.</td>
<td>5.43 (1.03)</td>
<td>5.52 (4.71)</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28) Homosexuality is offensive to God and therefore, offensive to me.</td>
<td>1.92 (1.19)</td>
<td>2.10 (1.09)</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29) Homosexuals are only interested in themselves and other homosexuals.</td>
<td>1.81 (1.05)</td>
<td>2.64 (1.17)</td>
<td>16.57***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30) Homosexuals tend to be irresponsible.</td>
<td>1.95 (1.08)</td>
<td>2.38 (0.98)</td>
<td>5.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31) Homosexuals enjoy wearing women's clothes.</td>
<td>2.08 (0.97)</td>
<td>3.33 (1.12)</td>
<td>49.43***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- **p < .001; *p < .01; *p < .05.**
- Scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

Table from “A Cross-Cultural Study of Attitudes Toward and Beliefs About Male Homosexuality.”
APPENDIX III

An image from “Male Homosexuality.”

Plate 9. In this comic from the gay magazine _Barazoku_, the ‘beautiful boy’ image of women’s manga is rejected. The ‘ugly boy’ (on the left) is preferred by his team mates because of his superb skill at fellatio.