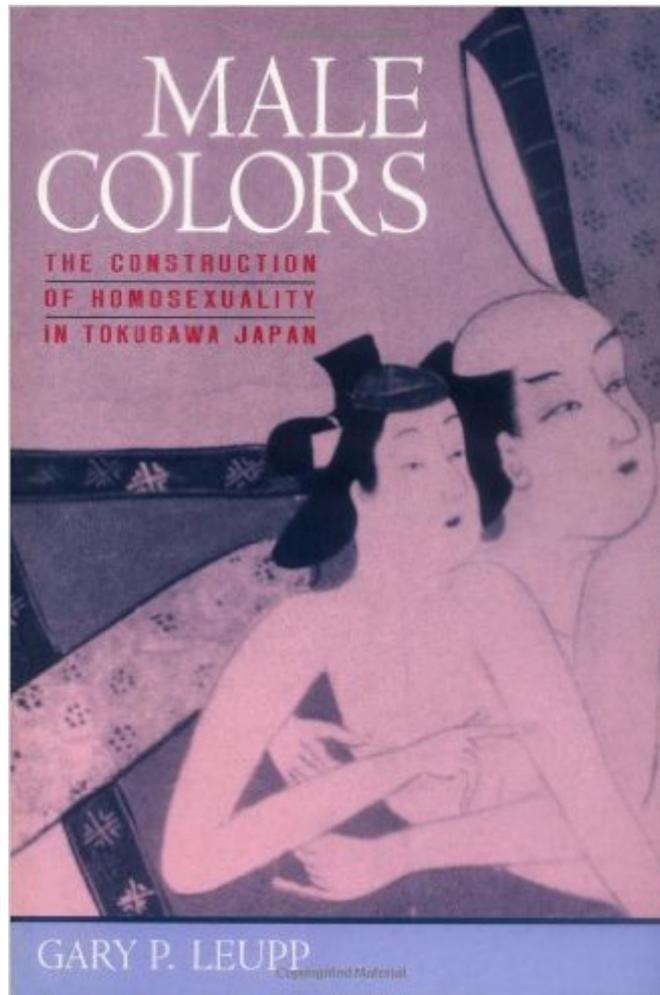


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Male Colors: The Construction Of Homosexuality In Tokugawa Japan



Synopsis

Tokugawa Japan ranks with ancient Athens as a society that not only tolerated, but celebrated, male homosexual behavior. Few scholars have seriously studied the subject, and until now none have satisfactorily explained the origins of the tradition or elucidated how its conventions reflected class structure and gender roles. Gary P. Leupp fills the gap with a dynamic examination of the origins and nature of the tradition. Based on a wealth of literary and historical documentation, this study places Tokugawa homosexuality in a global context, exploring its implications for contemporary debates on the historical construction of sexual desire. Combing through popular fiction, law codes, religious works, medical treatises, biographical material, and artistic treatments, Leupp traces the origins of pre-Tokugawa homosexual traditions among monks and samurai, then describes the emergence of homosexual practices among commoners in Tokugawa cities. He argues that it was "nurture" rather than "nature" that accounted for such conspicuous male/male sexuality and that bisexuality was more prevalent than homosexuality. Detailed, thorough, and very readable, this study is the first in English or Japanese to address so comprehensively one of the most complex and intriguing aspects of Japanese history.

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Customer Reviews

It is very interesting for us Japanese to read a this kind of book written by a foreign author. But there is one thing to be disappointed that Mr. Leupp didn't treat before Edo period so minutely, because male homosexuality in Japan was much more popular and prosper in pre-Edo period both in samurai society and in the aristocracy, the priesthood also than in Edo period, as many Japanese

recognize. From Insei period on, especially in late-Kamakura, Muromachi to Momoyama period, male-male love was highly estimated and enthusiastically celebrated, and almost of all Shogun i.e. supreme commanders, Daimyo i.e. war lords et Tenno i.e. emperors had their male lovers. Some of famous Daimyo and Tenno never married nor had any heterosexual relationship, for they thought to abstain from sex with women is a brave, manly and pious behavior. There're so many documents & literal texts e. g. Anthology of pederastia just like the Greek *Musa paidike* by Straton. Even quasi-marriage ceremony between men NENKEI was usually performed, and several famous Shogun & Daimyo were assassinated out of male-love jealousy or homoerotic troubles. On the other hand, Edo period was nothing but a slow and long decline process of male homosexuality which was vulgarized & commercialized. Yet, even in Meiji period, pederasty was more popular than heterosexuality among students. And Ko-ha i.e. manly students engaged in pederasty, on the contrary Nan-pa i.e. soft students loved women, but the latter was despised as effeminate. Anyhow some readers may misunderstand as if in Japan male homosexuality became most vigorous in Tokugawa period. However I would like to point out that such a conception is not correct. I want to comment more, but night's candles are burnt out, so I must go to bed now.

Not many scholarly works read well, but this one does. Even if you are not a student of Japanese history and culture, "Male Colors" is a pleasure. Yes, there are sections with a lot of Japanese names (particularly when the author cites a string of sources), but by and large, this work is very accessible to us mere mortals who are interested in the history of same-sex love. Initially, as the author describes, same-sex love in Japan was something practiced by elite groups: first the Zen Buddhist monks who are believed to have imported the practice from China (a curious notion because this also carries the connotation that homosexuality came from "some place else") and then the samurai elite. While factors such as the lack of eligible women may have contributed to the general acceptance of bisexuality, many, if not most, of the practitioners of nanshoku had deep emotional ties to their partners. But as urban life began to grow, nanshoku was popularized through a combination of the kabuki theater and the commercial sex enterprises that cropped up. Also interesting were all the examples of art depicting nanshoku, some of it quite ribald and most of it graphic. But that just lends more weight to the notion that there was no stigma attached to boy love during this period in Japan, at least not a universal stigma; it was quite nearly universally tolerated and any effort to control nanshoku usually was to control violent fights over popular boy prostitutes rather than a governmental decree against homosexual sex. The book is heavy on male sexuality with little mention of lesbianism, but that's hardly a surprise considering most cultures tend to be

strongly patriarchal and it is the men who record history.

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