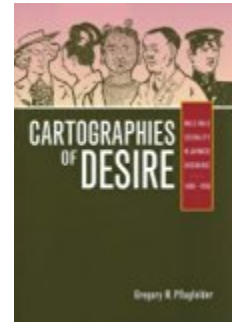


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Gregory M. Pflugfelder. *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse 1600-1950*. Berkeley, Cal: University of California Press, 2000. xi + 399 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-20909-1.

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Here, at last, is a serious, comprehensive and theoretically-informed study of male-male sexuality in Japanese history. It deserves to be widely read not only by scholars interested in Japan but by all historians and social scientists who study sexuality in its historical and contemporary manifestations. In terms of its breadth of scope and depth of insight, it would be considered truly remarkable even for a scholar more advanced in his career than Pflugfelder.

First an explanation of the title. Drawing on post-structuralist critical theory, Pflugfelder uses the word “cartographies” to emphasize that people need maps to negotiate the social world across time just as much as they need maps to navigate the physical world across space. If even geographical maps require stylization to make their meanings apparent, so much so do the conceptual maps we build of the world around us. The use of this term recognizes that what we can know about social reality is always mediated through the texts available to us. The book’s subject is not the ultimately unknowable study of sexual practices so much as it is about the way people wrote about sexual practices, the discourse embedded in texts. Although at times it seems as if we might be approaching what two or three specifically-named individuals did or said in the past, Pflugfelder is too careful a historian to accept any account uncritically. He highlights “desire” to acknowledge the fluidity of sexualities across time and space. He acknowledges specifically that he follows a “constructionist” interpretation, arguing that “desire, sexual or otherwise, is not a constant or a given, but is shaped in crucial ways by the very manner in which we think and speak about it.” (3). For that reason he eschews the term “homosexuality,” with all its contemporary connotations of sexual ori-

entation and identity, in favor of “male-male” sexuality which recognizes the gulf between Edo period practices and those that came later. He points out, for example, that Saikaku distinguished between shudou (the way of loving youth) and fornication, a distinction that makes no sense in modern terms. By beginning the book in 1600, he is able to differentiate clearly between what came before and after in terms of the discourse being produced. By ending the book after World War II, he is able to track continuities across the war years.

The book’s focus is on how the different kinds of texts, popular, legal, and medical, produced knowledge about sexuality in three different periods, Edo, Meiji and twentieth century. The first two types begin to appear in the seventeenth century; the third is a product of modern times. In the Edo period, the discourse on male-male sexuality was dominated by popular culture, that is, the texts bought and sold through the burgeoning commercial market. During this period, male-male sexuality was seen as a way (michi), a form of discipline or practice that had to be learned, mastered, and perfected. The legal discourse tried to regulate sexual practices in the interests of maintaining order and stability. During the Meiji period, legal discourse came to the fore. In the effort to make Japan into a “civilized” nation, it regulated the publishing industry and sexual practices. Disregarding the rich tradition of activities associated with the “way of loving youth,” it focused its attention narrowly on sex acts themselves. The early twentieth century was dominated by medical discourse that drew on both foreign and domestic sources to define acts and actors. Douseiai became the deviant yet necessary “other” to heterosexual normalcy.

Despite a tradition of male-male sexuality handed

down in manuscripts, only in the Edo period does a body of practices and beliefs surrounding the sex act itself come to constitute a publicly recognized and commercially successful dou. As one dimension of bodily experience, male-male sexuality required proper management in order to maintain a harmony of health and pleasure. As a way, shudou had to seek outside legitimation, and this it did through the same kinds of Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucian antecedents appropriated by the early Tokugawa shoguns to legitimize tendou, the way of heaven (see Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology*, Princeton University Press, 1985). Although Pflugfelder limits his study to what men did to boys, a great deal of his analysis applies equally well to what they did to women, at least outside of marriage. In both cases the subject of action was the nenja.

Although modern-day sexologists tend to see the Edo period as a “golden age of shudou,” in fact it was not. Not only did the focus on the inserter deny any desire or even will to the insertee, various government regulations promised severe penalties to men who raped children, who caused grave bodily injury or who disrupted the social order in the pursuit of their own pleasure. It was not the sex act itself that caused government officials concern; it was its social context. Illicit male-female couplings were seen as more of a threat and punished more severely. Bakufu hortatory directives and laws tended to focus on the relationship between kabuki and prostitution; although they differed considerably across regions, regulations issued in domains dealt more with non-commercialized relationships among the samurai, especially those that led to violence. The problem was that strong bonds between lovers might well threaten the retainer’s bond to his lord.

In contrast to the variability of Edo period legislation, that during the Meiji period did away with differences owing to status and region. It owed much to the desire to shield Japan from westerners’ contempt; it also owed much to Confucian norms of propriety. In response to male-male violence in schools, the first nationwide regulation passed in 1873 drew on Qing legal codes to prohibit anal intercourse. This provision was dropped from the 1880 penal code which relied heavily on the French Napoleonic code; so long as sodomy is practiced behind closed doors by consenting adults, it has not been and is not now a crime in Japan. The problem was rather one of obscene acts, which the code tactfully declined to define lest they “tarnish the dignity of the law.” (p. 174) Thus it was left up to the new policemen on the beat to decide what if any behavior should be suppressed. In the

1887 reformulation of the code, female-female sexuality became an issue for the first time. Here too the issue revolved around whether a minor was involved, whether consent had been given, and where the act took place. While certain acts in specific circumstances made the perpetrators liable for punishment, the acts themselves did not define the individual. Two men engaged in sex together did not thereby become homosexuals. In no case did the code prohibit persons in positions of authority from sexually harassing men or women under their control. While generally speaking sex acts in and of themselves were not punished, an exception must be made for the penal system where even sexual intercourse by consenting adults was punished as an infraction of prison discipline.

The Meiji state’s concern for “civilized behavior” found its mirror in popular culture. There the once respectable and even admirable shudou became immoral and obscene. In part this trend owed a great deal to censorship which set limits not only on what could be said but how it could be presented. Senryuu which had once poked fun at male-male sexuality dropped it as a subject by the mid-1880s once it became seen as morally outrageous. The discourse on male-male sexuality moved to the margins where it served to demarcate what constituted “civilized” behavior for the mainstream. There it was identified with groups and places increasingly anachronistic in modern Japan: the Tokugawa past of monasteries and warriors, the southwestern domains and Satsuma in particular, and adolescence. Instead of being defined as a universal way, male-male sexuality became a mere fuuzoku or folk custom. No longer a fit discipline for adult men as it had been in the Edo period, male-male sexuality became discursively refashioned to apply it to relations between adolescents (seishun). Students developed two contending styles of masculinity, the rough and the smooth. The rough eschewed contact with women; the smooth did not, but both preferred the inserter role and they might switch from one to the other at any moment. In search of fit objects for their desires, the bishounen or beautiful boy, the rough garnered considerable bad press for their predatory behavior, creating a moral panic among the citizenry. The emergence of the bishounen in popular discourse heralded a new way of thinking about sexuality, one that began to suggest that sexual orientation might be a more permanent feature of a man’s personality than had heretofore been thought to be the case. Nevertheless, whatever a man’s desires might be, for him to participate respectably in society, he had to be willing to suppress them. The separation of

desire and practice, body and spirit, love and lust (iro), sexuality and sociality marked the civilized Meiji man.

In the early twentieth century, male-male sexuality came to be seen not only as uncivilized but as biologically unnatural and medically dangerous. Not only did it ruin the health of the individual, it threatened the continuity of the family, undermined the foundations of the state and endangered the future of the species! The preferred term became *douseiai* which, as Pflugfelder points out in a footnote, “developed in interaction with, yet was more than simply a mirror image of, the Western construct of “homosexuality.” (p. 248) Under this dispensation, male-male sexuality and female-female sexuality came to be viewed as equivalent categories that distinguished their practitioners equally from what was considered to be the norm. The dichotomy between male and female became much more sharply drawn and at the same time, the assumption of age asymmetry which had characterized Edo period *shudou* disappeared. Drawing on western, particularly German sexology, Japanese scholars and media pundits who considered themselves to be professional experts developed various explanatory strategies, all of which rested on the assumption that the male-female dichotomy constituted the basis for human sexuality. For the first time attention focused on the insertee in male-male sexual relations, a subject position ignored in Edo period discourse. In the context of medical science, he became easier to understand. Being a man who thought of himself as a woman, he naturally preferred the feminine position. Why any man who thought of himself as a man would want to penetrate another man rather than a woman became difficult to conceive. This dilemma represented the opposite of the social understanding of sex roles in the Edo period. The love for youths that had characterized male-male sexuality in the Edo period became a deplorable pedophilia and honorable misogyny became pathological fear.

Thanks to the efforts of sexologists, what in the Meiji period had been seen as barbarian came to be seen as civilization’s dark side in the twentieth century. The study of sexuality and its links with consumer capitalism through the publishing industry brought male-male sexuality back from the margins and spread it all over popular culture where it became deeply entwined with the enduring hallmarks of *ero*, *guro*, and *nansensu*. In the process it lost a great deal of the fear and loathing that had characterized some extremes of official discourse in the Meiji period although it remained condemned in terms of social morality. As long as the print medium defined it as “perversion” and did not allude too directly to spe-

cific practices, it escaped government censorship. It became a source of pleasure for those who studied it, those who wrote about it, and those who read about it. For the first time, the “perverts” spoke for themselves, defining new subjectivities in the context of public discourse and contending with sexologists over who would dominate and define knowledge about sexual practices. The new idiom of sexology provided for a greater range of erotic experiences and sexual practices by a greater variety of people with more opportunities for expression than had been encompassed by the Edo period *shudou*. Nonetheless, insofar as *douseiai* remained linked to a decadent urban environment, prostitution and criminality in popular culture, it served to reinforce and indeed symbolize the link between social and sexual transgression. After World War II, *ero-guro* returned in full force, supported by scientific pronouncements and commercial opportunism. With it came the culture of *douseiai*, an object of curiosity and condescension.

The previous work with which Pflugfelder’s work will be compared is Gary P. Leupp’s *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (University of California Press, 1995). Although both books share an emphasis on the social construction of sexuality and share some documentary sources (Pflugfelder draws on a much wider range), they part company thereafter. Pflugfelder’s theoretically informed perspective allows him to make much more careful distinctions between text and reality, between different kinds of texts, and between Edo cultural practices and those of today. Unlike Leupp who sees an essential continuity between the earliest texts describing male-male sexual practices and those of the Edo period, Pflugfelder emphasizes the inherent specificity of each. He rejects Leupp’s “demographic deterministic” explanation for the prevalence of male-male sexuality in Edo society, insisting instead that it has to be explained through the lens of popular culture. He eschews meretricious illustrations and voyeuristic descriptions in favor of careful scholarship, solid analysis that draws on high-level European and American work for theory and comparison, and dispassionate observation. His book is full of insight into historical processes, social change and cross-cultural comparison, so much so that no single review, however long, can do it justice. The field of Japanese studies is indeed fortunate that it has come along. It can be readily assigned to students and proudly cited to colleagues.

In a book of this size and detail, there are bound to be matters of emphasis and interpretation that will grate on specialists in the field. I mention only three:

“night-crawling” or yobai was by no means as widely spread as Pflugfelder makes it appear. (p. 149). It was largely confined to western Japan and even there varied widely in terms of who was allowed to do what, when. The focus on Edo, particularly when speaking of Saikaku, might well have grated on a denizen of Osaka. Pflugfelder sees more differences between the three metropolises and castle towns than between Kanto and Kansai. Thirdly, the book’s dust jacket shows five young men depicted in a magazine illustration in 1909. Three of these are Japanese; the one in the center is a dark-skinned “beautiful boy” from India; the one on the left is a “disagreeable ‘beautiful boy’” from Paris. Nowhere in the book, however, is there any discussion of the history of

the relations between Japanese and foreigners that would help situate the illustration. Perhaps that will come in a later study.

Despite the intimidating title, the book is eminently readable. It is well, sometimes elegantly written with clear explanations of abstract concepts. It is to be hoped that the University of California will reissue it as quickly as possible in paperback so that it may achieve the place it deserves in course curricula and readers’ bookshelves.

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