A WORLD LIKE OURS:
GAY MEN IN JAPANESE NOVELS AND FILMS, 1989-2007

by
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Abstract

This dissertation examines representations of gay men in contemporary Japanese novels and films produced from around the beginning of the 1990s so-called gay boom era to the present day. Although these were produced in Japanese and for the Japanese market, and reflect contemporary Japan’s social, cultural and political milieu, I argue that they not only articulate the concerns and desires of gay men and (other queer people) in Japan, but also that they reflect a transnational global gay culture and identity.

The study focuses on the work of current Japanese writers and directors while taking into account a broad, historical view of male-male eroticism in Japan from the Edo era to the present. It addresses such issues as whether there can be said to be a Japanese gay identity; the circulation of gay culture across international borders in the modern period; and issues of representation of gay men in mainstream popular culture products.

As has been pointed out by various scholars, many mainstream Japanese representations of LGBT people are troubling, whether because they represent “tourism”—they are made for straight audiences whose pleasure comes from being titillated by watching the exotic Others portrayed in them—or because they are made by and for a female audience and have little connection with the lives and experiences of real gay men, or because they circulate outside Japan and are taken as realistic representations by non-Japanese audiences. In this dissertation I argue that positive, supportive, indeed overtly political messages can be found, even in texts with problematical representations. I show that, over the nearly twenty year period covered by the
novels and films I study, it is possible to discern a tendency towards less stereotyped, and more overtly political, portrayals.

The novels and films I discuss in this dissertation represent a disparate range of genres, producers, and representations, and characters who are straight, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual. Yet all have in common the universal themes of overcoming or becoming, ranging from journeys to coming out, growing up, and finding the self to stories of triumphing over homophobia and prevailing over discrimination.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, N.J. Hall.
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In memory of my grandmother

Marguerite Belle Hall

1916-1987
Chapter 1: Introduction

In modernity, identities inevitably become global.

— Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (663)

On November 24, 2011, Australian political action group GetUp! released a short video titled “Love Story,” which quickly became better known as “It’s Time.” Shot almost entirely from the point of view of an unseen character who meets and falls in love with a young man named Paul (played by New Zealand-born actor, journalist, author and filmmaker Julian Shaw), the video follows the couple as they meet, get to know each other, and experience the various milestones of a relationship such as meeting friends and parents, moving in together, and dealing with the death of a loved one. The story is told in less than two minutes through gorgeously filmed scenes of housework, sunny days at the beach, arguments in the car, and moments of tenderness, and the point of view technique means that we are kept from the realization that we are watching a gay couple until the final seconds of the video, when Paul proposes and the camera pulls back to reveal that his lover—now fiancé—is also a man. The video ends as the couple embrace, their friends and family surround them joyfully, and the slogan “It’s time. End marriage discrimination” appears.

“It’s Time” was a major success for GetUp! Described in The Advocate as “possibly the most beautiful ad for marriage equality we’ve seen” (Grindley), it garnered well over one million views on YouTube in less than forty-eight hours, becoming the site’s most-watched video internationally, and prompted admiring comments from celebrities like Stephen Fry, Sandra Bernhardt, and Marlee Matlin.
An Australian production which is presented and was promoted only in English, the “It’s Time” video is remarkable not only for the large number of views it amassed in a short period of time, but also for its global reach and transcultural impact and appeal. YouTube allows viewers to access statistics about the videos it hosts, including maps showing where in the world a given video is most popular.¹ Unsurprisingly, shortly after it debuted, most viewers of “It’s Time” were in English-speaking countries such as Australia and New Zealand, the United States and Canada. But the video also attracted significant viewership in non-English speaking and non-Western countries—some of them notoriously homophobic—including Brazil, Thailand, The People’s Republic of China, and Nigeria, and also in Japan. One of Japan’s most popular gay manga artists, Tagame Gengoroh (whose Twitter handle is @tagagen), posted a series of tweets about the video, beginning with a link and the message “‘It’s time.’ Same-sex marriage (marriage equality) campaign ad from GetUp! Australia”² (11:07pm). He followed with a number of tweets musing about same-sex marriage, including:

I’m always troubled now about how to translate [the term] marriage equality. . . I think dōseikon (same sex marriage [sic]) is shorthand for ‘equality in the rights and privileges of matrimony,’ but it’s not easy for me to convey that nuance in Japanese. (11:17pm)

Marriage equality をどう日本語にしたものか、いつも悩むな。同性婚（same sex marriage）とは《婚姻の権利を平等にする》ことなのだという、戦略的な

¹ I accessed these statistics, which can be seen on the video’s YouTube page at bit.ly/tjr2vo, on November 27, 2011, when “It’s Time” had been available for three days.

² 「It's time.」オーストラリア、Get Up! による同性婚（marriage equality）キャンペーンCM。Translations throughout the dissertation are mine except where noted.
The popularity of “It’s Time” spawned movements both in Australia and in the U.S. to screen the video, or one based upon it, on television. In Taiwan, it inspired Taiwan Pride’s Tenth Anniversary Pride Campaign video, which debuted on YouTube on September 21, 2012. Titled in English “Love All the Same, Same Kind of Love” (Taiwanese: 愛一様、一様愛), it begins with young residents of Taipei speaking about their partners, and plays on the fact that the third person pronouns “he” and “she” are the same in Taiwanese (in the English subtitles, these are rendered “my partner”). The interviews are followed by a short video, also shot using the point of view technique so that it seems to be about one young opposite sex couple but is eventually revealed to actually be about two same-sex couples, and concludes with the English message “Hope [sic] one day we can all proudly say ‘I do’ to our partners, as we embrace and hold each other’s hands. We have a right to love, equally.”

In an interview with MTV Newsroom on November 30, 2011 (by which time the “It’s Time” video had had nearly 2.7 million views), GetUp! Marriage Equality Campaigner Paul Mackay said,

To say we’re surprised is an understatement . . . What has been most surprising has been the overwhelmingly positive international attention we have received for the video . . . we never thought it would receive the attention it has. (Vaca. Emphasis added.)

What makes a product designed for a particular cultural and political context so globally appealing?

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3 “Love All the Same, Same Kind of Love” can be viewed at youtube.com.
In this dissertation, I focus on contemporary Japanese novels and feature films, published or released between 1989 and 2007, which feature gay male characters. Although these have been produced in Japanese and for the Japanese market, and reflect contemporary Japan’s social, cultural and political milieu, I argue that they not only articulate the concerns and desires of gay men and other queer people in Japan, but also that they reflect a transnational global gay culture and identity despite linguistic, cultural and other differences, and notwithstanding the lived realities of many gay people in Japan.

As I will discuss, it has been pointed out by various scholars that many mainstream Japanese representations of LGBT (particularly gay male) people are troubling, whether because they represent “tourism”—in other words, they are made for straight audiences whose pleasure comes from being titillated by watching the exotic Others portrayed in them—or because they are frequently made by and for a female audience and have little connection with the lives and experiences of real gay men, or because such products circulate outside Japan and are taken as realistic representations by non-Japanese audiences.

It is undeniable that depictions of gay men in many mainstream Japanese productions, including those examined in this study, are far from unproblematic. There remains, for example, a marked tendency in Japan to conflate male homosexuality with feminization, cross-dressing, and trans identities, and this is reflected in several of the fictional texts and films I examine. Nevertheless, I argue that positive, supportive, indeed overtly political messages can be found, even in texts with problematical representations. And as I will show, over the nearly twenty year period covered by the novels and films I study, it is possible to discern a tendency towards slightly less stereotyped, and notably more overtly political, portrayals. The novels and films I discuss in this dissertation represent a disparate range of genres, producers, and representations,
and characters who are straight, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual. Yet all have in common the universal themes of overcoming or becoming, ranging from journeys to coming out, growing up, and finding the self to stories of triumphing over homophobia and prevailing over discrimination.

In this chapter, I begin by examining transnational cultural flows and considering whether such things as a global or Japanese gay identity can be said to exist.

### 1.1 Japanese Culture/Global Culture

Darrel William Davis argues that the nation is culturally constructed, like sexuality, gender, and race. Nationalism, he suggests, incorporates a “xenophobic intolerance of difference” which encourages the view that the nation, the family, even the self can be subject to “invasion” by the Other (11-13). Yet in the modern world contemporary ideas, identities and popular culture products travel out into the marketplace influencing and being influenced by foreign cultures in an increasingly transnational, hybridized global culture. Similarly, there is a common—though curious, given its reputation for absorbing and assimilating the foreign—perception, both within the country and elsewhere, that Japan’s is a particularly inward-looking, closed and homogenous culture; yet modern Japanese history has been continuously marked by interaction with the global.

Since the arrival in 1853 of Commodore Perry’s black ships in Edo Bay, foreign goods and ideas have poured into Japan and Japanese products have increasingly flowed back out. Furthermore, it is often overlooked that Japanese exchanges with the larger world far predate Perry: the earliest records of Japan occur in Chinese texts from the first century, and by the fifth century Japan was sending envoys abroad and receiving immigrants, cultural products, religious
and political ideas in return. The first Westerners (Portuguese sailors, who were known in Japan as *nanban*, or southern barbarians) arrived in Japan in the sixteenth century, leading to significant changes and developments in science, philosophy, religion, art, and daily life. Although the country was *officially* closed for more than two hundred years and communication with outsiders was severely restricted for most Japanese, contact with the outside world (especially Asia, but also the West) never really ceased, and Japanese *rangaku* scholars produced thousands of books on the West which were widely circulated within Japan.⁴

I would argue that major upheavals in Japanese culture and society—such as an abrupt shift from feudalism to rapid modernization and Westernization; war and colonialism; atomic bombings, defeat, and occupation; economic success and recession; and an ongoing tension between tradition and progress—have played out on two scales: the national and the personal. For example, on the national scale the Meiji Restoration (1868 CE), usually considered as the beginning of the Japanese modern period, meant among other things the opening of the country to international trade and communication; the rapid modernization and industrialization of what had hitherto been a feudal agrarian economy; and the putative restoration of power to the emperor, for which the event is named. On the personal scale, the feudal class system was officially abolished and all citizens, ostensibly equal under the emperor, could now access

⁴ *Rangaku*, literally “Dutch learning,” refers to a body of knowledge on the West, particularly Western medicine, sciences, and technologies, which was developed in Japan during the period of national isolation (*sakoku*, literally “chained country”) from 1641 to 1853, when the country was closed to most foreigners and Japanese were forbidden to leave. *Rangaku* was so named because the knowledge was acquired primarily through contact with Dutch traders who were permitted to reside in the enclave of Dejima, a fan-shaped artificial island in the bay of Nagasaki. For a detailed discussion of *rangaku* see Goodman, *Japan: The Dutch Experience*. 
education and choose their occupations. But both of these also interacted with the global: as the country sought its place among the powerful nations, individual Japanese struggled to find a new identity and subjectivity that blended the foreign ideas rapidly entering the country from the West with traditional Japanese ways of being. These reciprocal flows continued post-WWII, first with the Allied Occupation, then with the rise and eventual burst of the bubble economy, recession, and continuing social changes, as the Japanese people again and again had to negotiate national and personal identities vis-à-vis the constantly changing world.

Many scholars have written about modern Japan’s interactions with global culture. For example, Asato Ikeda examines the worldwide flows of arts and politics in the 1930s and 1940s in “Mobilizing Every Body: Japanese Art, Fascism, and War (1931-1945),” her 2012 study of Japanese war art. The study challenges the assertion that fascism was an exclusively European phenomenon by employing the concept of cultural translation: rather than trying to identify which of its characteristics Japan lacked, Ikeda shows instead how the ideology was “translated” into the Japanese context, where it became both fascist and Japanese.

In Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination (2006), Anne Allison explores the international impact of Japanese toys and entertainment products, examining how such items are influenced and shaped by different cultures as they flow into the “globalized market of the United States” (7-8). Allison shows that nearly as soon as the Second World War was over the Japanese began using American products and ideas to create toys for export, starting by producing small playthings from items discarded by the U.S. military and the

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5 While this was the official stance, in reality much of the population was still bound by the old strictures. Higuchi Ichiyō’s short story “Takekurabe” (Child’s Play, 1895-1896), for example, follows a group of children who gradually realize that, despite the official policy of personal advancement through effort, they have no choice but to enter their family professions including, in the case of one character, prostitution. I return to the Meiji Restoration in Chapter Two.
Occupation forces, which were made to appeal to American children (38-39). Japanese toys—now globally popular—thus not only played a major part in the reconstruction of the country following the war, but have always both had international appeal and been influenced by international culture: *Millennial Monsters* underscores the difficulty of stating definitively whether any product is really “Japanese” or “global,” even those that are exported from Japan to the worldwide market.

As Iwabuchi Kōichi explains in “Taking ‘Japanization’ Seriously: Cultural Globalization Reconsidered” (2002), it was in the late 1980s, when Japanese companies began buying out American film studios and Japanese animation and other products began to make inroads into the U.S. market, that Japan’s “substantial role in global cultural flows” began to attract attention (23-24). While Iwabuchi admits that it can be argued that consumers “may be aware of the Japanese origin” of the commodities exported by the country, he claims that they are barely recognizable as Japanese, which points to “how a Western-dominated cultural hierarchy governs transnational cultural flows in the world” (28-29). Although Iwabuchi concedes that Japanese products have become increasingly conspicuous as the country becomes a major player in globalization, he calls the global reach of U.S. powers unprecedented, “all-inclusive, a complex of political, economic, military, and cultural hegemony” (32). American popular culture, he argues, has universal appeal supported by this hegemony and the prevalence of the English language, and it is difficult and fallacious to compare the popularity of Japanese anime or games to the global process of “Americanization” because Japanese popular culture is *mukokuseki*, not perceptibly Japanese: even when such products do evoke a positive perception of Japan, Iwabuchi claims, it

6 One robot figure, Allison notes, disturbingly featured a mushroom cloud on its package (39).
is not a “tangible, realistic appreciation of ‘Japanese’ lifestyles or ideas” (33-34).

The theory of cultural imperialism supposes that culture flows from the dominant to the dominated, instilling its consumerist values and ideologies. This is not always the case, however, because these flows of ideas and goods also produce new cultural diversity, or transculturation, wherein foreign cultural products are “creatively misused, recontextualized in local sites, [and] differently interpreted according to local cultural meaning,” creating something new (Iwabuchi 39-40). As Iwabuchi notes, although distribution is still occurring unevenly, from a few major centres, the origins of images and commodities are becoming harder to trace and “increasingly insignificant and irrelevant,” so that the “absolute symbolic center no longer belongs to a particular country or region” (45-46)—as Sharalyn Orbaugh points out, it is “virtually impossible to disentangle the culturally ‘pure’ or ‘authentic’ elements in pop culture products of the 1990s; these products circulated and continue to circulate widely across national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. They are culturally hybrid” (“Busty Battlin’ Babes” 203).

This notion of cultural hybridity is one of the themes in Azuma Hiroki’s 2001 *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals* (original title *Dōbutsuka suru Posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon Shakai, Animalizing Postmodernity: Seeing Japanese Society through Otaku*), in which he

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7 I would question how often it is ever the case that the average person bases his or her choices to consume foreign cultural items on “tangible, realistic appreciation” of those cultures or how “realistic” an image of the “American lifestyle” is presented by a man in a white suit and a string tie selling fried chicken.

8 Iwabuchi notes, however, that Japanese cultural products are widely exported to other parts of Asia where, because of the legacy of Japanese imperialism, they cannot be considered “odorless” despite the “seemingly power-free perception of cultural similarity and local intimacy” amongst Asian countries as opposed to between Asia and the West (47-49). In other words, although the process is different from that of Americanization, Japanese cultural power in Asia is demonstrated in the popularity of its cultural products in the region, which reflects other Asian countries’ new sense of cultural closeness with Japan as the developmental “time lag” between them diminishes.
examines the history and characteristics of the otaku subculture, and the production and consumption habits of its members. The translated edition begins with a short preface by Azuma and a long introduction by the translators in which they offer the following definition:

[Otaku are] those Japanese, usually males and generally between the ages of 18 and 40, who fanatically consume, produce, and collect comic books (manga), animated films (anime), and other products related to these forms of popular visual culture and who participate in the production and sales of derivative fan merchandise. (xv)

Azuma examines the “pseudo-Japan” of the otaku, arguing that the otaku phenomenon and its products are paradoxically marked by both a yearning for a lost Japan and by the influence of the United States. He also distinguishes between postmodern and postmodernism: according to Azuma, the former refers broadly to the period since the 1960s or 1970s, or since the Osaka International Expo in 1970. Postmodernism, however, refers to particular theories which emerged in France in the 1960s, spread to the U.S. in the 1970s, and entered Japan in the 1980s. Since, Azuma argues, Japan never became fully modernized, it was easy for it to become postmodernized: “Whereas modernity equals the West, postmodernity equals Japan. To be Japanese is thus to be standing at the forefront of history.” Azuma claims that this is what enabled Japan to superficially overcome its complex towards America, which also enabled the

9 In light of Azuma’s claims about otaku cultural products being global and of his insistence that otaku is a worldwide phenomenon, it is strange that neither he nor his translators offer information on or speculate about the differences between otaku inside and outside Japan. For instance, many non-Japanese speaking North Americans identify as otaku, but if the term has any pejorative connotations in this context they may be associated with issues of racism—you’re not Japanese so why are you into all this Japanese stuff—rather than the image of dangerous anti-socialism the term sometimes carries in Japan.
Azuma observes that there is a frequently pointed out connection between otaku culture/products and traditional Japanese culture, and that the “affection” for such images remains even in items that are exported; indeed, he goes so far as to argue that “this very affection is now considered a necessary condition for being an otaku” (9). Iwabuchi, Napier, Allison and others have argued that this is not always the case; Iwabuchi claims, as I explained above, that anime and manga (the quintessential otaku products, according to Azuma) are purposely rendered “mukokuseki” by their creators and travel out into the global marketplace with no trace of what he calls Japanese “cultural odor.” Napier, meanwhile, agrees that anime builds on Japanese traditions like kabuki and woodblock prints, cinema and photography, and argues that much of its content is culturally specific, but she also says that the Japanese identity depicted in anime is increasingly a global one because of the very amorphousness of the medium (292).

Azuma, in contrast, insists that otaku products are directly and explicitly linked with Japanese problems and subject material, even as he acknowledges that those products have a global reach and that otaku culture is absolutely not “a uniquely Japanese phenomenon,” but rather is “part of a worldwide . . . trend” which can be understood in the Japanese context as part of the country’s project of postmodernization that began in the middle of the twentieth century (10). However, Azuma also says that otaku culture in fact represents an adaptation or domestication of U.S. culture of the 1950s-1970s, pointing out that early Japanese producers

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10 Many have argued, however, that Japan has never overcome this complex, pointing out for instance that the Japanese term for the period after World War II (sengo) refers to the entire period between 1945 and the present, and that the Japanese “postwar” period has consequently never ended. See for example Tanaka, “Apocalypticism in Postwar Japanese Fiction.”
used American technologies and ideas in creating early anime, resulting in the paradoxical situation that “most of the characteristics of anime since the 1980s that are seen as ‘otaku-like’ or ‘Japanese’ were in fact produced through the mutation of techniques imported from the United States and a positive reappraisal of the results” (13).

Global patterns of consumption are examined by Laura Miller in the context of the beauty industry and standards of and fashions in bodily practices in Japan. In *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (2006), Miller examines the industry from the 1990s to the early 2000s, arguing that that even directly imported beauty practices do not necessarily reflect a desire to become or appear Western or Euro-American, and that the interpretation of such practices in this way is ethnocentric: when influence from Western fashions first began to be introduced to Japan, they were promoted as elements of a modern, rather than a Western, appearance, not a mere imitation of Euro-American style. She points out that “a process of cultural blending has been going on for more than a century” in Japan, arguing that the Japanese beauty industry “participates in an arena of transnational body aesthetics and practices” (4-5).

Resistance to male beauty practices among men in Japan (specifically the removal of body hair), Miller argues, is often linked to sexism rather than to homophobia: rather than rendering the male body “more feminine and thereby suspect,” it is a signal that the man “has no pride and has given in to women’s demands and desires” (137). While Miller does not make this link, this is an interesting contrast to the English-speaking Euro-American world, where male beauty practices are often explicitly coded “gay”: consider, for instance, the invention and global spread of the metrosexual, an explicitly straight (*metropolitan + heterosexual*) man who displays stereotypically gay attributes, such as a concern for bodily appearance and attractiveness and an
Important for both male and female beauty practices in Japan is Miller’s argument that—in part—they are specifically undertaken as a form of resistance against imposed and proscribed norms, and both men and women are using technology and bodily aesthetics to make their bodies look different from those of their parents (7).

“Japan,” then, has always been marked by intersections with (and sometimes resistance against) the non-Japanese. In the modern period in particular (that is, since the Meiji Restoration) these intersections have become increasingly reciprocal, as global culture has flowed in and Japanese products and cultural goods have flowed out into the international marketplace and influenced global culture in turn. Images of “Japaneseness”—including national identity, gendered and sexual identities—are reflected in and influenced by literature and popular culture products such as live-action films and television, anime and manga. Such products are also influenced by and in turn influence international culture as they travel out into the world marketplace and the global imagination.

### 1.2 Is There a Transnational Gay Identity?

Australian sexualities scholar and historian Peter A. Jackson points out that large numbers of men and women . . . are reacting against what they see as the historical constraints on homoeroticism in their respective societies and . . . are

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11 Miller does not specifically discuss Japanese gay male beauty practices, although she does note that the male ideal presented in gay manga often differs radically from that presented in manga aimed at heterosexual women. Given the importance placed on “types” in Japanese gay culture primarily based on bodily appearance, such as taiku-kei (athletic), Janīzu-kei (cute, boyish), and kuma-kei (hairy, bearish), it may be more difficult to make generalizations about gay men’s beauty practices, whereas Miller asserts that Japanese women’s alleged preference for nonhairy males is a primary reason for the growing popularity of hair removal among young heterosexual men. For a discussion of “types” in Japanese gay culture, see McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan* (124-127).
actively engaging in relocating homoeroticism from the shadows and the periphery to the center stage of their lives. (5)

According to Denis Provencher, who studies intercultural communication and issues of sex and gender, “The emergence of North Atlantic constructions of gay culture has resulted in the circulation of a ‘universal gay identity’ across various national boundaries,” among them, as he observes, Japan’s. This identity is transmitted, among other ways, via both print and electronic media which, “aided by advertising from multinational corporations,” informs gay people about: where to travel as well as how to talk, dress, shop, define relationships, have (safer) sex, exercise, and sculpt their bodies. In particular, the rise of the gay and lesbian press in the United States and Western Europe has contributed significantly to the invention of a transnational gay culture, a gay ‘way of being’ determined by Western-style consumerism. (23)

Both Jackson and Provencher are unambiguous: they are writing about what they regard as a worldwide phenomenon. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that Western terms and concepts still do not or cannot apply in non-Western contexts, and challenge the notion of a transnational gay identity, asserting that “gay” represents a culture, politics and set of practices born of and rooted in a few English-speaking Western cultures, primarily the United States. It has also been argued that attempts to impose this identity onto non-Western sexualities represents a kind of cultural imperialism in the guise of globalization that impedes understanding and even erases traditional cultures, ways of being and identities. For example, Dennis Altman writes of “the paradox of the apparent globalization of postmodern gay identities,” arguing that the development of a social and cultural identity based upon homosexuality (what he calls “the global gay”) is a mainly male image conceptualized in ways derived from recent American
fashion, and represents the globalization of lifestyle and identity politics and the erasure of old concepts (77).

There are thus two closely-related objections to the possibility of a transcultural gay identity: the first is that the notion represents the denial (or ignorance, or repudiation) of traditional/indigenous non-Western ways of being and understanding the self and sexual behaviour, and the second is that (i) gay identity is necessarily Western (or specifically American) and (ii) that its spread represents cultural imperialism.

An increasing number of scholars are writing about modern Asian sexualities from a wide range of perspectives, and many have shown that the categories of “gay male” and “lesbian” are not always sufficient or accurate to describe identities and behaviours. For example, Megan Sinnott has examined Thai identities of “tom” (“masculine beings who express their masculinity in their personality, dress, and sexual attraction to females”), “dee” (normative women who are “normatively attracted to a masculine partner who could either be male or female”) and “kathoey” (people who are intersex, transgender or transsexual) (134-135). Michael L. Tan has written about bakla, a traditional identity in the Philippines which encompasses transgender and transsexual people, cross dressers, and masculine, male-bodied, male-identified persons who are attracted to other males. And Shivananda Khan discusses the difficulty of naming various same-sex erotic behaviours in India, where, he writes:

notions of sexuality are considerably less significant than the often clear distinctions between concepts of ‘active’ and ‘passive,’ concepts of ‘discharge,’ ‘pleasure,’ and ‘desire,’ or even concepts of ‘real sex’ (in marriage between husband and wife, where sex is defined by procreation and duty), and maasti [literally, mischief]. (106)
As I mentioned above, the cultural imperialism theory proposes that culture flows from the dominant (typically conceived as the United States) to the subaltern (often conceived as the presently or formerly colonized or the “third world”), imposing foreign consumerist values and ideologies that subsume or eradicate local, traditional ways of being and doing. The gay version of this model follows Foucault in attributing the development of a modern gay identity to the coming into being of the homosexual as a category of person in certain parts of the West in the nineteenth century, and the subsequent development of a community of politically active, physically fit, fashionable young white men with its symbols of Stonewall and the rainbow flag. “Gay,” in other words, is synonymous with “privileged,” “Western/American,” “English-speaking,” often “white” and “wealthy,” and usually “male.” This identity, the theory goes, is imposed wholesale upon subjects who engage in certain often disparate behaviours, such as sexual activities with members of their own sex; cross-dressing; or in other ways transgressing gender boundaries, in the process eradicating “traditional” or “(ab)original” ways of being, behaving, and identifying. This may be done linguistically, by referring to people as gay who might have other or no referents for their behaviours, or by simply assuming a stable identity where none exists—for instance, taking any example of same-sex behaviour as evidence of a gay identity.

Cultural imperialism may indeed be a defensible explanation for certain aspects of globalization. However, to assume that cultural imperialism explains the transnational expression of gay identity is to be immediately confronted with an inescapable and vexing theoretical conundrum. First, most LGBT people, in the United States or elsewhere, do not embody the young, fashionable, fit, white, male, moneyed stereotype, although certainly many aspire to at least some parts of the formula. Second, to have a gay identity is usually understood
to mean believing in an immanent, stable, unchanging orientation towards members of one’s own sex coupled with believing in an inherent right to equality on the basis of that orientation.

It is the second issue that is most difficult to fit into the theory. The United States is the presumed source of modern gay identity, yet in that country leading figures (politicians, religious leaders, media pundits) regularly insist that (homo)sexual orientation can be changed or advocate attempts to make such a change. The country has no federal laws forbidding discrimination against LGBT people, but it has a federal law prohibiting the recognition of same-sex marriages (the Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA\textsuperscript{12}). While fifteen U.S. states and the District of Columbia,\textsuperscript{13} along with several local counties and Native American tribal jurisdictions, have legalized same-sex marriages, constitutional amendments or initiatives banning same-sex marriage are in force in thirty-five others; and as recently as 2012 all but one of the Republican presidential hopefuls signed a pledge against same-sex marriage created by an anti-gay group.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} DOMA was enacted in 1996; in a landmark decision in \textit{United States v Windsor} in July of 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that one part of the Act, Section 3, which barred same-sex couples from being recognized as married for purposes of federal law and from receiving federal marriage benefits, was unconstitutional. For a summary of the case and a PDF of the ruling, see “United States v Windsor.”

\textsuperscript{13} Those states are California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington. Same-sex marriage legislation has also been passed in Illinois. For up to date information on the rapidly changing situation in the U.S., see freedomtomarry.org, the official website of the Freedom To Marry Campaign begun by civil rights attorney and gay activist Evan Wilson in 2003.

\textsuperscript{14} The National Organization for Marriage (NOM) created the pledge, which had “five critical goals”: (1) support sending a federal marriage amendment defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the states for ratification, (2) nominate US Supreme Court and federal judges who are “committed to restraint and to applying the original meaning of the Constitution,” and “thus reject the idea our Founding Fathers inserted a right to gay marriage into our Constitution,” (3) defend DOMA in court, (4) establish a presidential commission to investigate and document reports of “Americans who have been harassed or threatened for
The law forbidding gays and lesbians from serving openly in the U.S. military was repealed only in 2011 (in contrast Taiwan lifted its ban nearly a decade earlier, in 2002, while Japan has never had one), and a prohibition on transsexual service members remains in effect (“Transgender Vets”). And homophobic rhetoric issues daily in the form of speeches by both local and federal politicians, press releases from religious and other organizations, and news and media commentary.

The conundrum, then, is how to explain the apparent contradiction presented by a theory of cultural imperialism in which the group engaging in the imperialist project is itself an oppressed minority with a political identity that does not reflect the reality of its own dominant culture. While it is true that in the last five years in particular the situation has been changing rapidly in the United States, the Stonewall Riots, widely considered the start of the U.S. gay liberation movement, took place in 1969, and it was after this that some of the most damaging anti-gay legislation, such as DOMA, was put in place.

John D’Emilio argues that gay and lesbian identity and subculture emerged along with the realization of relative individual autonomy under capitalism. This process, he explains, unfolded as follows: by working for wages people were able to become independent from their families. With this new freedom came the ability to “uncouple” sex and sexuality from procreation, and people were able to begin to “organize their personal [lives] around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex.” Finally, the emergence of gay social spaces allowed people to translate a desire for partners of the same sex into a “way of life” (470). It is perhaps inevitable, exercising their civil rights to organize, to speak, to donate or to vote for marriage and to propose new protections, if needed,” and (5) advance legislation to allow a vote on marriage equality in the District of Columbia. The pledge, which can be viewed at nomblog.com, was signed by every Republican candidate except Ron Paul. The Southern Poverty Law Center, a non-profit civil rights organization, has listed NOM as an anti-gay group since 2010. See slpc.org.
then, that those who can publicly claim this identity are more likely to enjoy other forms of social privilege, such as relative power and wealth, which are often associated with being white, male, and Western. But Altman does not explain why being linked to U.S. culture and fashion would preclude gay identity from being globalized; indeed, given the vast international reach and influence of American popular culture and entertainment, politics, fashion and business, I would suggest that, on the contrary, it could be argued that this actually strengthens the association.

Yet as Altman himself points out, the promotion of this image does not originate only in the West: gay groups in non-Western countries often make references to “global society” and seek to emulate or align themselves with gays in other places and cultures (and, I would add, Western gay groups often seek to ally themselves with non-Western ones too). Nevertheless, Altman questions whether such developments are comparable to the creation of economically and politically powerful gay communities in the United States and Canada, Australasia, and northern Europe, and whether a universal identity based on homosexuality and linked to modernity results from economic and cultural forces of globalization.

As a region, Asia has a long history of transnational sexuality. Tamara Loos introduces her study “Transnational Histories of Sexualities in Asia” by relating the case of the execution of a Siamese prince ordered by King Rama III in 1848, exactly twenty years before Japan underwent

15 For example, in a feature called “Popular Gay Resort and Event News,” the October 2003 edition of Japanese gay monthly magazine Bádi lists a variety of political and entertainment events, including Europride (in Manchester, England), the Santa Barbara Gay Pride Festival (in California), Leather Pride Nederland (in Amsterdam), the White Party (an annual LGBT circuit party held in Miami, Florida), as well as the Sapporo Rainbow March, the Tokyo Gay Festival, and other happenings in Japan (“Ninki Gei Rizōto & Ibento Jōhō” 34). In a much more overtly political (and much more dangerous) action, in August of 2013, participants in the second ever pride march in Uganda, where homosexuality is illegal, carried signs expressing solidarity with LGBTs in Russia, a country that became the focus of condemnation and boycott efforts by supporters of sexual minority rights worldwide after it enacted, in 2013, a vaguely-worded law against the “propaganda of homosexualism” (Elder).
the Meiji Restoration and its transition to modernity. The legal indictment in this case, Loos argues, “located his sexual transgressions within a specific transnational moral framework.” By comparing Prince Rakronnaret to the Qing Emperor Daoguang (1782-1850, who was alleged to enjoy sex with male prostitutes), she explains, the king “gestured toward the relevant comparative field of transnational sexual exemplars, good and bad” (1309). Loos contends that “arguably the first self-consciously transnational histories of sexuality” in Asia were written about the period of Western imperialism (which began in the 1500s) and examine the meanings and practices of sexuality, particularly with regard to relationships of inequality, such as between colonizer and colonized, European and indigenous. As Loos points out, “major swaths of the region” (including Thailand and Japan) were never directly colonized. Nevertheless, she argues, “colonization of the region by Europe and the United States affected the economies, polities, and cultures of non-colonized Asia as intensely as it did those of directly colonized areas” (1312). According to her study, these histories often say more about Euro-American sexuality than about Asian sexualities, revealing how colonizers imposed their beliefs about the body, gender, and sex onto cultures which often had very different understandings.

Echoing this claim, Altman writes that using modern Western terminology can mean failing to understand the various ways in which non-Western people experience their sexualities, and that modern forms of homosexuality can and do exist simultaneously with traditional ones. As Jackson has written, for example, many Asian men and women continue to live within the ‘traditional’ spaces for gender/sex difference and to understand themselves and their lives in ‘pre-gay’ terms that often relate more to the pre-industrial rural pasts of their societies than to the postmodernizing urban present. (5)
I would argue that this is not the case in Japan.

First, the indigenous shudō tradition faded away more than two hundred years ago, before the end of the Edo period (1603-1868) and before the advent of modernity with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and was based on social traditions, expectations, privileges, and practices that no longer exist in the same forms. Harada Masashi points out that current gay relationships in Japan are different from those in the shudō tradition because they are based on equality (or “mutuality”) and also because the sexual roles of top and bottom are no longer dependent upon the ages of the people involved, but rather are based on their individual tastes (78). Second, shudō involved sexualized relationships between adults and non-adults, which for legal reasons alone, let alone issues of ethics, culture, and morality, would be impossible in modern Japan. Finally, shudō relationships were by their nature temporary—males could enter into them as the youth partner, and then transition to the role of the adult partner, but ultimately were expected to mature out of them—and significantly were not considered a form of sexual orientation or identity but were rather one among a spectrum of options for sexual pleasure available to males. I would therefore argue that it is no more likely that this indigenous form of Japanese same-sex relationships still exists or could be revived than it is to imagine the revival of ancient

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16 Shudō refers to a paederastic tradition of sexual and romantic relationships between adult men and male youths. Although it continued to influence later conceptions of male-male sexuality, Pflugfelder argues that as early as the second half of the Edo period shudō was already being commonly viewed as “on the decline,” and by the end of the period, “many authorities had come to view male-male sexual practices as more typical of an earlier era in their country’s history than their own” (92-95). I discuss this tradition and its decline further in Chapters Two and Four.

17 In “The Gender of the Wakashu and the Grammar of Desire” Joshua S. Mostow proposes that the “seventeenth-century Japanese gender/sexuality system” (52) should be considered in terms of a “grammar,” arguing that “we must think of at least four genders”: wives, prostitutes, male youths, and adult men (65). Men, Mostow explains, could have sex with any of the other genders. See also note 18.
Greek or Roman same-sex traditions, which followed similar patterns and could not exist in the contemporary world for similar reasons.

On the other hand, Altman’s argument about the notion of a gay community as reflective of the ideology of individual rights and fulfilment and the recognition of pluralism and cultural diversity does seem hard to fit into the cultural realities of Japanese life, and Harada has written about the difficulties gay people can face in balancing the potentially conflicting needs to fit in to Japanese society, which emphasises collectivity and harmony, while simultaneously trying to forge a gay identity. Nevertheless, as Harada, Mark McLelland and others have shown, Japanese people who identify as gay are finding ways to do just that, and a gay rights movement has emerged in Japan along with critical examinations of non-heterosexual identities (such as in the journal *Queer Japan*), and an increasing trend for non-heterosexual Japanese to reveal and revel in their sexual identities by publicly coming out. As Altman writes, “it seems clear that *some form* of gay and lesbian identity is becoming more common across the world” (85).

### 1.3 Is There a Japanese Gay Identity?

Scholars of Japanese sexualities often face difficulties selecting appropriate terminology to describe erotic behaviours and relationships between people of the same sex in various eras in Japanese history. For example, Gary Leupp has been criticized for employing the word “homosexual” in his *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (1995), which focuses on the period between 1603 and 1868 (also called the Edo era). Reviewers have pointed out that this usage is anachronistic, since no concept of “homosexuality” existed at that time and because the *shudō* tradition was not associated with an exclusive *orientation* to persons of the same sex, but was open to all males as one among a range of sexual
Similarly, the title of *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature* (1996, whose front and back cover illustrations are the paintings *Blue Narcissus*, and *Kabuki III*, respectively, by contemporary gay artist Hasegawa Sadao) implicitly and potentially problematically reads back a modern (gay) identity onto writings from as early as the twelfth century. According to translator Robert Omar Khan, for instance, the story “Ariake no Wakare” from which the collection’s title is taken is one in which

several relationships are perceived as same-sex by one partner but not the other, and then develop in an unusual way once one partner’s unexpected sex is revealed. In short, they defy our modern classification of relationships and orientations. (21, emphasis added)

While the collection’s editor Stephen D. Miller refers to the early eighteenth-century anthology *Iwatsuji* as the only previous Japanese “anthology of literature by or about gay or homosexual men” (8), in the book’s introduction Paul Gordon Schalow questions the “very notion of a Japanese ‘gay and lesbian literary tradition’” (11).

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18 As Pflugfelder explains in *Cartographies of Desire*:

Although the status of nenja [the adult partner in a nanshoku or shudō-type relationship] ostensibly precluded the individual from serving as an insertee to other males, neither the wakashu [youth] nor nenja role was irreconcilable with sexual interaction with females . . . Yet, though nanshoku [male-male] and joshoku [male-female sexuality] were not mutually exclusive, Edo-period authors frequently portrayed the former as preceding the latter in the male life cycle, with male-female interactions tending to eclipse male-male over time . . . Upon marriage, if not sooner, a man was expected to fully embark upon a career of joshoku, although nanshoku liaisons in the role of nenja were still permissible, and the sanctioned range of female partners included not only wives but concubines and prostitutes. (38)

19 Tagame Gengoroh calls Hasegawa “without a doubt one of the most representative of Japan’s gay artists” (紛れなく日本の代表的なゲイ・アーティストの一人である) (193).
Gregory Pflugfelder confronts the issue in his 1999 *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950*. In the opening pages he writes:

[I]f a twentieth-century American text on ‘homosexuality’ were to find its way by some miraculous means to seventeenth-century Japan, a perplexing task would face the translator who wished to transpose it into the vernacular. To begin with, how to render the term ‘homosexuality’? Although the period’s sexual vocabulary offered various expressions that could be used to refer to erotic activities between males or between females, there was no single word that signified both, so that even finding an appropriate name for the work would pose a considerable challenge. (23-24)

For much of the period he studies, Pflugfelder points out, there was no concept, either in Japan or in the West, that “each individual possesses a deeply rooted personal identity based on the biological sex of the preferred sexual object or objects.” Indeed, he observes, even after Japanese words were created in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to translate Western concepts of homosexuality, “the precise connotations and nuances of the . . . vocabulary continued to differ in significant respects from their Euro-American analogues” (5-6). This is illustrated by the changing meaning of the word “gay”: rather than simply being an antonym for straight, *gei* was initially associated with transgender practices and prostitution—a gay boy (*gei bōi*), for instance, was a young, effeminate, semi-cross-dressed male who served drinks at gay bars and often sexually serviced male clients as well—and was not widely used by male-desiring males themselves (McLelland, *Queer Japan* 77-79).

If the terms “homosexual” and “gay” are problematic in the non-Western context, as Altman and others suggest, then “queer” is potentially even more so: although five editions of a
Japanese journal with the English title *Queer Japan* were published between 1999 and 2001, this term has not been widely taken up in Japan— and, as Marjorie Garber says, even in the English-speaking West, “despite its value as a political slogan, ‘queer’ is not, finally and fundamentally, an easy political term” (64). Nevertheless, both Mark McLelland and Barbara Summerhawk chose to use the word “queer” in their respective studies of modern Japanese homosexuality.

*Queer Japan: Personal Stories of Japanese Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transsexuals* (1998) is a collection of personal stories of eighteen Japanese lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transsexual-identified men and women gathered via interviews and short autobiographies. The book was intended by its editor Summerhawk as a forum for LGBT Japanese people to tell their own stories. Meanwhile, in *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (2005), McLelland examines the evolution of “nonheterosexual ‘queer’ or ‘perverse’ desires” in the modern period. To talk even of “sexual minorities” in the immediate post-war period, he writes, “is already to invoke an anachronism” (8). Echoing Pflugfelder, he explains that there are many difficulties in translating terms. Along with “gay,” the 1950s had a rich vocabulary of partially borrowed terminology for same-sex behaviour, some of it still in use today.

In his 2010 book *Homosexuality and Manliness in Postwar Japan*, Jonathan D. Mackintosh studies the first Japanese *homo* magazines which emerged in the postwar era, focusing particularly on the early 1970s. Via textual analyses of fiction, essays and personal ads

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20 By way of comparison, a Google search for ゲイ (gei) returned 6,710,000 results, while a search for クィア and クイア (variant transliterations of queer) returned only 48,500 and 25,400 results respectively. Interestingly, a search for the English word “gay” returned 10,700,000 Japanese-language results.

21 Throughout his book Mackintosh uses *homo*, an abbreviation of the Japanese transliteration of “homosexual,” because that was the term most commonly used in the magazines during the period on which he focuses. I discuss Japanese terms for gay men in the following chapters.
from magazines like Barazoku, The Adonis Boy/Adon, and Sabu, he examines the “narratives of men” that were produced within them, an “aesthetic and ethical dialogue” on homosexuality, race, manliness, autonomy, and culture in the postwar era (213-214). Although smaller, often privately circulated homo magazines had existed before, Mackintosh argues that it was the 1971 inauguration and “instant success” of Barazoku, Japan’s first commercial magazine for gay men, which was founded and edited by a heterosexual named Itō Bungaku, that eventually led to the development of a “homo publishing industry” with magazines catering to a “viable homo market,” including gay activist Minami Teishirō’s Adon, which was “revolutionized by ideas emanating from the burgeoning Movement for Gay Liberation in the Anglo-American West” (3-5).

While Mackintosh argues that the new-found community created by the homo magazines did not quite succeed in creating an Anglo-American-style “integrated public-sphere presence” in 1970s Japan, “much to the disappointment of men like Minami [Teishirō] and [Barazoku founder] Itō [Bungaku],” he does believe that a sexual revolution occurred, one that was part of a change in understandings and a reassertion of Japanese masculinity along with a decline in American influence (213-216).

Whilst activists hoping for gay liberation/equality and American-style identity politics in Japan in the 1970s may have been disappointed, Mark McLelland writes that by the mid-1980s a new generation of ‘gay’ men emerged and began to employ modes of organization and activism similar to those that had been pioneered by gay and lesbian organizations in the west, and . . . the mainstream media began to deal with lesbian and gay issues outside of the entertainment paradigm that had dominated the discussion in the postwar period. (Queer Japan 161)
Although some (including McLelland) argue that it is still difficult to speak of a “Japanese gay identity” or identity politics, like same-sex-desiring people in the English-speaking West and all over the world contemporary Japanese homosexuals prefer to refer to themselves as gay (gei), a word that has also become part of the mainstream Japanese vocabulary and is commonly understood to refer to a sexual orientation (which is to say an enduring pattern of sexual and emotional/romantic attachments) primarily to members of one’s own sex. Japan also has an open and thriving gay scene and no anti-gay laws. It has had an openly lesbian

22 Tom Boellstorff and William L. Leap point out that “ways of talking about same-sex desires, practices, and subjectivities . . . and the everyday experiences of same-sex desire have been caught up in the transnational interchange of material and intellectual commodities associated with the condition of late modernity” (1-2). They explain that gay linguistic practices are not merely part of the speaker’s own sense of selfhood, but can also “affect the broader social context, and thereby have impact on the subjectivities of other individuals—gay, straight, or otherwise,” influencing reactions to a speaker as a gay person (8). I discuss Japanese gay argot terms and forms of speech further in the following chapters.

23 There are no legal proscriptions of homosexuality and no sodomy laws. Mark D. West, author of Lovesick Japan: Sex, Marriage, Romance, Law (2011), which analyses a database of 200,000 Japanese court cases and 2700 publicly available court opinions, remarks that although Japanese courts “have much to say about sex,” they have almost nothing to say about homosexuality (217), and there are “virtually no gays and lesbians in Japanese law” (11). However, as Stephen D. Pinkerton and Paul R. Abramson point out, this does not mean that homosexuality and homosexual behaviours are “void of statutory regulation” in Japan, because there are laws relating to things like obscenity, prostitution, and the family which may “exert constraints” on gay people. Additionally, they observe that “societal rather than statutory regulations are preeminent in Japan,” particularly with regard to the family, and that regulation of public behaviour and sociocultural norms, in particular the system of hierarchy, obligation, deference, respect, duty, and conformity, is very much a cultural imperative (67). Therefore, although engaging in homosexual behaviour is “neither forbidden nor heavily stigmatized” providing people meet their social and familial obligations, it is the “socially inescapable duty of every Japanese to marry and reproduce” (70). I return to this issue both below and in the subsequent chapters. Also, it is important to note that while there is no specifically anti-gay legislation, there are also few laws protecting people from discrimination in housing, employment or other areas based on their sexual orientation or gender expression; the few that do exist have been passed recently with the work of LGBT activists including the politicians discussed in this section.
assemblywoman (Otsuji Kanako\textsuperscript{24}), an openly transsexual elected official (Kamikawa Aya\textsuperscript{25}), and two openly gay assemblymen (Ishikawa Taiga and Ishizaka Wataru\textsuperscript{26}). Gay celebrities (mostly men, some of whom usually appear in drag) are fixtures on television, and homosexuality, primarily male, is a common theme of mainstream Japanese cultural productions.

\textsuperscript{24} Otsuji Kanako is an LGBT rights activist and former politician from Osaka who was Japan’s first openly gay politician (but not the first openly gay person to be elected to office; see note 26). She revealed that she is a lesbian in a 2005 autobiography titled \textit{Coming Out: A Journey to Find Myself} (カミングアウト～自分らしさを見つける旅), and held a public—though not legally recognized—wedding ceremony with her partner in 2007, probably the country’s first such event. In addition to being the first openly gay politician, Otsuji was also the first openly gay person to run for election to the National Diet of Japan; had she succeeded, she would have become the country’s first openly LGBT lawmaker. Her campaign (which used the rainbow flag as one of its symbols) is the subject of the documentary film \textit{Kanako: Challenging The System}, which debuted at the Vancouver Queer Film Festival in 2009. Her official website is at otsuji-k.com.

\textsuperscript{25} Kamikawa Aya was elected as an independent in Tokyo’s Setagaya ward in 2003, becoming the first openly transsexual person to be elected to public office in Japan. She was re-elected in 2007. Kamikawa is the author of three books on transsexual issues. Her official website can be viewed at ah-yeah.com.

\textsuperscript{26} In the same election, in April of 2011, Ishikawa Taiga and Ishizaka Wataru became the first two openly gay individuals to be elected to public office in Japan, the former in Tokyo’s Toshima Ward and the latter in Tokyo’s Nakano Ward.

A graduate of Meiji Gakuin University’s School of Law, LGBT activist Ishikawa Taiga came out in 2002 at the age of twenty-eight in an autobiography titled \textit{Where’s My Boyfriend?} (ボクの彼氏はどこにいる?) and is the author or co-author of three additional books on gay issues and on sexual minorities and education. Ishikawa was instrumental in lobbying the government to issue Certificates of No Impediment to Japanese citizens wishing to marry foreign nationals of the same sex in countries where same-sex marriage is legal (discussed later in this chapter), and he is also campaigning for the creation of a municipal domestic partnership registry for Toshima, Japan’s first, which would grant same-sex couples housing and hospital visitation rights. His official website is available at taigaweb.jp.

Ishizaka Wataru is a former social worker and school teacher, and an LGBT and human rights activist. He is the co-author of a book on mental health and welfare who has done HIV-prevention education work with Tokyo’s Community Center AKTA, which I discuss in Chapter Three. His website can be viewed at ishizakawataru.net.
including film and literature, and especially in popular culture products like manga and anime.\textsuperscript{27}

On the other hand, the gay scene is mostly restricted to large cosmopolitan centres like Tokyo and Osaka.\textsuperscript{28} And while there is some acceptance of gay male celebrities and gay fictional characters and themes (particularly in manga and film), in their daily lives many people must still conceal their sexuality outside of gay contexts, some even to the extent of marrying partners of the opposite sex, and there are currently few legal protections for LGBT individuals or for same-sex couples, and no anti-discrimination laws.\textsuperscript{29}

There are also Japanese scholars and activists who work on Japanese gay and lesbian studies and queer studies. A 2003 book edited by activist Fushimi Noriaki titled \textit{Dōseiai Nyūmon: Welcome to the Gay Community}\textsuperscript{30} includes articles on gay history, culture, and politics

\textsuperscript{27} Lesbians also feature in some mainstream productions, but less commonly than gay men, and there are far fewer historical records of female-female sexuality. According to James Welker, “The [relatively] few written histories of the Japanese lesbian community published to date have tended to be fragmented, often tentative, and seldom offer even a semblance of comprehensiveness” (362). Welker adds that there are few academic surveys of the history of the Japanese lesbian community. In marked contrast to the gay male community, until the 1990s gay boom (discussed in Chapters Two and Three) and the growth of the Internet, “most [Japanese] women found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find information on lesbian desire” (366). Same-sex-desiring women (such as Otsuji) have become more visible in Japan, but since my aim is to study representations of gay men, in this dissertation I will focus primarily on gay male identities.

\textsuperscript{28} It should be noted, however, that individual gay establishments can be found in many areas, a fact that forms the basis of a manga story by one of Japan’s most popular gay manga writers Hirosegawa Susumu called “Love Love Ren’ai Kōza [Love Course],” published in the October 2003 edition of the monthly gay magazine \textit{Badi}, which is about a thirty-one year-old gay man named Kotobuki who runs a gay bar in the countryside.

\textsuperscript{29} One of Otsuji’s accomplishments as an assemblywoman was securing the right in 2005 for same-sex couples to share public rental housing in Osaka, an option they had previously been denied. For more on Otsuji’s work as a politician, see Tsubuku.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Dōseiai} is the Japanese translation of “homosexuality,” while \textit{nyūmon} means “primer, manual, entering an institution/institute, or introduction.”
both in Japan and globally. It ends with an essay by Noguchi Katsuzō\(^{31}\) titled “Lesbian/Gay Studies” (Rezubian/Gei Sutādīzu), in which he discusses work by Fushimi, Hirano Hiroki, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and others. Gay and lesbian studies in Japan, Noguchi states, is primarily “shouldered by” (ninawareteiru) lesbians and gays, and aims to eliminate what he refers to as anti-homosexuality discrimination (dōseiai sabetsu) (147). He identifies Fushimi Noriaki’s Puraibēto Gei Raifu: Posuto Ren’ai Ron (Private Gay Life: Post Love Theory, 1991) as the beginning of gay and lesbian studies in Japan. The argument put forth in Fushimi’s book, Noguchi explains, is held in common by Japanese gay and lesbian studies and in Western queer theory (imported to Japan in the mid 1990s); that is, that the basis of anti-gay discrimination is the misogyny linked with the equation of “homosexual” with “feminine man,” and that sexual activity which is uncoupled from reproduction is seen as deviating from the norm (148).\(^{32}\)

Harada Masushi’s 2001 study of Japanese gay and bisexual men seems to support this claim. Harada argues that living in an environment in which homosexuality is suppressed, as it is in Japan, and dealing with homophobia and heterosexism, creates in gay men an attitude of

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\(^{31}\) Noguchi is an associate professor in philosophy at Kyoto’s Seika University who works on queer theory, poststructuralism, and anti-patriarchy studies. Seika is home to Japan’s first manga studies department (the Faculty of Manga), the current dean of which is Takemiya Keiko, one of the pioneers of the Boys’ Love genre, which I discuss in Chapter Two. Sharalyn Orbaugh discusses Takemiya’s role in the genre’s creation in “Creativity and Constraint in Amateur Manga Production.”

\(^{32}\) While Noguchi himself seems to advocate the queer theory stance of deconstructing gay identity and the rules of gender and sex, he also acknowledges that people derive both meaning and pleasure from living by these rules, and that dismantling the “male-female gender” system (i.e.: masculinity and femininity) would also mean the loss of desire itself (男女のジェンダーをめぐる性愛のゲームから欲望の享受と性の意味を得ており、その解体は、欲望自体が失われることを意味します) (153).
opposition to society which acts as a “catalyst in the creation of gay identity.” Although Japan has unique cultural aspects that differ from those in the West, Harada asserts that Western concepts and models of identity are “applicable to a considerable extent to Japanese gay and bisexual men” (77). People in Japan are increasingly building lives and identities around their same-sex desires. For instance, most of Harada’s gay respondents thought that gay men should come out and try to make a space for themselves in society. The rate was lower for those who identified as bisexual, possibly because, unlike their gay counterparts, their attraction to women means that they can find sexual and emotional fulfilment in marriages to opposite-sex partners, but most of the gay respondents accepted a gay identity and sought to develop it while forging a “middle social position between being closeted and being political gay activists.” They do this, Harada explains, by coming out and participating in networks of gay men (89-94).

In contrast, although as discussed above he has elsewhere noted the emergence of Western-style gay activism in Japan in the 1980s, in “Is There a Japanese Gay Identity?” Mark McLelland makes the argument that “there is little in [Japanese] popular culture to support the notion of a gay or lesbian identity in the politicized Anglo-American sense” (462). He contends that even in the West “gay” and “lesbian” identities can be hard to pin down, so that it is also “problematic” to hold up an unambiguous gay/lesbian identity as an example in Japan. In addition, he points out that although representations of male homosexuality have been widespread in modern Japan since the early 1970s, they have been associated primarily with entertainment rather than political activism, even in the gay media (“Gay Identity” 460). He argues that such representations of homosexuality (which are frequently conflated with transsexuality and transgenderism) work against the development of a sense of a Japanese gay identity.

 Whilst as I explained above the conflation of homosexuality with trans identities continues
to obtain, including in the most recent examples of fictional narratives I examine in this dissertation, I will show that on the contrary Japanese popular culture does support the notion of a modern gay identity. In fact, Japan’s popular culture products deal with various types of non-heterosexual, non-heteronormative identities, often under the rubric of “gay and/or lesbian,” including transsexual and transgender identities (I discuss one particularly clear example, the 2005 film Mezon do Himiko, in Chapter Three). As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, these are sometimes dealt with in a problematic way; in particular, gay male and transgender/transsexual identities are frequently conflated in mainstream products such as on television and in popular films.

Although it is unclear whether McLelland believes that Western popular culture products dealing with gay themes are (necessarily or intrinsically) political, or are more so than Japanese ones, I will show that contemporary gay-themed works of Japanese fiction and film—although they are primarily entertainment products—do explore political issues surrounding gay identity, such as equality, discrimination, and the fundamental human right to make a life with a partner of one’s choosing, and that their cardinal messages are often what would surely be considered pointedly activist in a Western film. It is important to note also, as Boellstorff and Leap argue in their discussion of gay language and linguistic practices, that “groups articulate claims to recognition and belonging that may not be recognizable as political from a post-Stonewall, U.S. perspective yet are deeply engaged with conceptions of the public and visions of social justice” (18). Thus, while it may be difficult to see at first glance how a violent rapist and murderer can constitute a positive image of a gay man, or how a story that makes no mention of marriage, equality, human rights or the law can be a powerful statement about exactly those issues, I argue that this is precisely the situation in some examples of contemporary Japanese novels and films I
discuss in the following chapters.

Returning to the issue of Japanese gay identity, McLelland recounts interviews with Japanese “same-sex-desiring men”\(^{33}\) in which he observed that many had “flexible and ambivalent feelings about sex and relationships with men and women,” and that several did not “rule out” marriage to a woman (“Japanese Gay Identity” 464). But while Harada finds that people in Japan are increasingly building lives and identities around their same-sex desires, McLelland reports that some of his informants actually resisted adopting a gay identity, and as further evidence of this points out that not all gay men understand marriage with women to be “fake” since the reason for getting married in Japan is often to establish a “household” (katei) rather than for love (465).

As Harada explains, however, marriage is very much a cultural imperative in Japan, with most Japanese people feeling societal and familial pressure to marry and a common view that unmarried people are in some way incomplete—this is an issue that is dealt with explicitly in the 2007 film *Hatsukoi*, which I discuss in Chapter Three. I would add that, if establishing a household means, at least in part, having children, and if having children necessitates marriage to a woman, for men who are both gay and wish to raise children this is yet another strong imperative to marry; these issues are dealt with in the 2001 film *Hasshu!*, also discussed in Chapter Three.

McLelland points out that not all gay men in Japan “feel the need” to be completely open

\(^{33}\) “Is There a Japanese Gay Identity” is based on research conducted between 1996 and 1999 and included interviews with over thirty Japanese gay men conducted both in person and online. McLelland also analyzed representations of homosexual characters in television shows, films, plays, magazine and newspaper articles, videos, websites, manga, and books. It also includes information from his 2000 book *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan* which, according to the “Research Approach” section of its Introduction, is based on research conducted in Japan in 1988-1994 and 1997-1999 and interviews with sixteen men (12-15).
about what many see as something private, \(^{34}\) and that by coming out many men feel that they become “associated with the effeminate stereotypes about gay men which exist in the wider community” (467); here again he seems to selectively interpret his informants’ responses. For example, he sees one respondent’s remark that he “simply wants his same-sex attraction to be acknowledged by the wider society [and] sees his orientation as a personal issue which should not have consequences for how he is treated by others” as rejection of gay identity; I would argue that the opposite actually appears to be true: wanting to have one’s sexuality acknowledged and accepted, I would suggest, is a marker of embracing one’s gay identity, not of rejecting it. And as Chou Wah-Shan puts it, for white people living the West “sexuality may be the site of greatest oppression,” but for other people different factors, such as culture, class or family, may exert more pressure (28). This seems particularly relevant in the Japanese context where, as I have pointed out, cultural imperatives to marry and produce children may be stronger than disapproval of non-heterosexuality.

I would also suggest that a reluctance to come out (even when framed in terms of “not seeing a need to be completely open about something private”) should not be taken as evidence of a rejection of gay identity—on the contrary, I regard it as a consequence of living in an environment that is hostile to homosexuality. Although as discussed above Japan has no anti-gay laws or religious prohibitions against homosexuality, Harada and others have noted that

\(^{34}\) Again, this is not a phenomenon unique to Japan or even to gay males. In her famous “coming out interview” with Oprah Winfrey in 1997, for instance, American television star Ellen DeGeneres also said that she had not come out before this because she had previously viewed her lesbianism as something private. DeGeneres had actually come out—in character, as Ellen Morgan—on an episode of her sitcom Ellen shortly before the interview; the episode won several awards. However, both her “fictional” coming out (on her sitcom) and her “real” coming out (in the media) generated a massive backlash that negatively affected DeGeneres’ career for several years (Foley).
homosexuality is suppressed in Japan and that gay Japanese people must contend with homophobia and heterosexism in their daily lives. Indeed, James Keith Vincent wrote his PhD dissertation on the topic. Titled “Writing Sexuality: Heteronormativity, Homophobia and the Homosocial Subject in Modern Japan,” the dissertation argues, in part, that male-male eroticism shifted from being merely an accepted male prerogative (as “shudō”) to being “a threat to masculinity itself” (as “homosexuality”) (13). It is also worth noting that homosexuality was officially considered pathological in Japan until 1995, while the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its diagnostic manual in 1973 (Kazama & Kawaguchi, 180).

McLelland himself points out that there are same-sex desiring Japanese people who do embrace “gay” and “lesbian” as identity categories, mentioning gay activist couple Ito Satoru and Yanase Ryūta, and the gay rights group OCCUR; McLelland even cites OCCUR as a “clear example of globalization at work” (“Is There a Japanese Gay Identity?” 467; I briefly return to OCCUR below). However, he argues that images of same-sex desiring men and women in Japan are being “refracted through . . . imported terminology,” giving the impression to outsiders that Japan is somehow “‘behind’ some supposed Euro-American ideal with regard to gay rights,” and asserting that “same-sex desiring men and women who identify with Western models [are] a minority within a minority in Japan” (468).

I would counter that some of the terminology has been in use for a century, as we will see in subsequent chapters, and that, as discussed above, traditional forms of Japanese homosexuality had all but vanished long before the modern era and were anyway not understood

35 Homosexuality was de-medicalized by the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology, having previously been listed as a sociopathic personality disorder. Information on the American decision is available at the American Psychiatric Association’s website psych.org.
as a form of identity. I would also note that McLelland’s conclusions in the “Japanese Gay Identity” study come from discussions he had with informants in the late 1980s and mid 1990s, and that the desires and culture and political awareness of young Japanese people and Japanese society at large are rapidly changing. While some of the texts I study are from that period, many are more recent, and the changing representations and political approaches I identify in these novels and films may reflect a popular culture shift in understandings of non-heterosexual identities, at least on the part of their creators, not all of whom are gay.

Indeed, while more work needs to be done on this topic, at least some of both McLelland’s and Harada’s respondents do suggest that they aspire to gay rights similar to those available in other parts of the world. Indeed, if one considers that gay rights are human rights—as then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton famously said in Geneva in her December 6, 2011 speech on the occasion of International Human Rights Day (Clinton)—it is difficult to say that Japan is not lagging. While Japan is one of the sixty-eight signatories to the 2008 United Nations Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, which condemns, among other things, discrimination, exclusion, stigmatization, and prejudice based on sexual orientation and gender identity, the Executive Summary of a 2008 shadow report on Japan to the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, an international organisation accredited by and holding consultative status with the United Nations, concludes:

Overall, Japan is not accepting of LGBT [people] . . . Transgender persons . . . are still labeled as suffering from “gender identity disorder” (GID), and lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons in Japan continue to experience the legacy of pathologization. (3) Global health and HIV/AIDS researcher Anthony DiStefano adds that sexual minorities in Japan are subject to discrimination and violence, and to physical, psychological, sexual and verbal
abuse motivated by their sexual orientation, as well as being at increased risk of suicidality and self-harm driven by the homophobic/transphobic environment and the negative consequences of either coming out or remaining closeted (1429).

Joshua Gamson writes that gays and lesbians in America have politically empowered themselves by creating a collective identity or what he calls a “‘quasiethnicity’, complete with its own political and cultural institutions, festivals, neighborhoods, even its own flag,”36 centred on the notion of a shared, fixed identity based on same-sex desire, and on shared oppression/denial of the freedom to express this identity (391). As I have shown, same-sex desiring Japanese people also suffer from oppression based on their sexual identity and the lack of freedom to express this identity openly; from discriminatory laws and polices; from lack of protection in employment and housing; and from various forms of violence motivated by their sexual orientation. The types of political and cultural institutions, festivals, neighbourhoods and symbols to which Gamson refers have all been adopted, adapted, and created in Japanese gay communities, albeit on a smaller scale than in some Western countries.37 In addition, as Chris Berry points out, the circulation of cultural products like films enables gay Asian people to participate in the constitution of an increasingly globalized gay culture (213)—at least three of the four films I discuss circulate on the global queer film festival circuit, where they have won various awards and recognition. And as Paul Gordon Schalow argues, “a distinctly ‘gay male

36 Such symbols, including the rainbow flag to which Gamson alludes, have been adopted by gay Japanese people and are becoming known even in the mainstream in Japan.

37 This may be in part because, as discussed, relatively fewer people in Japan are able to adopt a public gay identity in all parts of their lives. However, in Tokyo’s Shinjuku ni-chôme, for example, rainbow flags can be seen flying outside bars and businesses, there are several bookshops selling a variety of rainbow paraphernalia and other items aimed at a gay clientele, and the neighbourhood hosts various festivals throughout the year. Japan also holds several pride parades, the largest of which takes place in Tokyo.
literature’ has come into being in recent years” in Japan, which echoes that of modern Western gay writers: “confident, proud, exploring what it means to be gay in a sometimes unfriendly world” (18). Furthermore, as cases like the 1994 OCCUR lawsuit,38 the 2005 change in Osaka housing eligibility rules discussed above, and the 2009 change in marriage certificate regulations (to which I return below) show, the situation is changing thanks to the political work of Japanese LGBT activists.

In short, it is my assertion that same-sex desiring Japanese people identify as gay and understand and express that identity in terms that are based on and circulate in a global gay culture in which they also participate. And although they may face restrictions and discrimination, they also employ Western-style gay organization and activism to change both those realities and the image of gay people portrayed in the media. I would also argue that the creation and consumption of narrative products is also a form of activism, and the circulation of such products across Japan’s boundaries represents one way in which Japanese LGBTs participate in and contribute to a transnational gay culture.

Despite the fact that gay Japanese citizens currently have few legal protections, it is significant that their government is a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. A strong indication that the Japanese government sees gay people as having an identifiable identity based on an immutable sexual orientation which deserves legal protection came in 2009 in a legal change viewed by many as a first step towards legalizing same-sex marriage in the country. To marry a non-Japanese person abroad, Japanese

38 The lawsuit was brought by the Japanese gay rights group against the Tokyo Board of Education when OCCUR was denied access to a publicly funded facility, and was the first in Japan to be litigated over sexual orientation discrimination (after a protracted fight, OCCUR eventually won). For a more detailed discussion, see McLelland, Male Homosexuality 40.
nationals must obtain a certificate from the Ministry of Justice by submitting documents for both partners that include their names, sexes, nationalities, and similar personal information. The certificates verify that the person has reached the legal age of marriage and is unmarried. It was announced in 2009 that the Ministry would begin issuing these certificates to Japanese citizens wishing to marry same-sex partners who are citizens of countries where such unions are legal. Such certificates were not previously issued on the grounds that same-sex marriages are not legal in Japan; as a consequence, even in countries which have marriage equality, Japanese citizens had not been legally able to marry their same-sex partners, in some cases preventing them from obtaining legal residence in those countries. Ishikawa Taiga, the aforementioned Tokyo-based LGBT activist and politician, who represents the gay support group Peer Friends, said that while they were unable to convince the ministry to forgo the classification of sex, this was a major “step forward” for gays in Japan (“Ministry Clears Path”).

It is also significant that major cultural institutions in Japan have slowly begun to express their support for LGBTs. In 2011, Rev. Kawakami Takafumi of Shunkō-in, a Kyoto temple which belongs to the largest Rinzai Zen Buddhist school, who refers to himself as “an LGBT rights supporter,” announced that the temple would perform same-sex wedding ceremonies (Kawakami). The following year, in an article titled “Mickey Mouse Supports Same-Sex Marriage Too,” *AFPBB News* reported that the popular Tokyo Disney Resort would begin permitting same-sex weddings in its Cinderella Castle attraction (“Dōsei Kekkon”). The first same-sex couple to hold their wedding there were Higashi Koyuki, a former *otokoyaku* (specialist in playing male roles in the all-female Takarazuka revue) and her partner (identified

39 This is a standard requirement for foreigners marrying in many countries; the certificate is often known as a Certificate of No Impediment, or CNI (“Getting Married”).
only as Hiroko); the ceremony was on March 3, 2013 (“Moto Takarajiennu”).

Perhaps even more significantly, Osaka’s Yodogawa Ward has become the first government body in Japan to announce its support for LGBT people and an intention to train its municipal staff in LGBT issues. Having hosted a round table discussion in June of 2013 with Higashi, her partner Hiroko, and U.S. Consul-General for Osaka-Kobe Patrick Linehan, who is also gay, on September 1, 2013 the Ward posted a “Declaration of Support for LGBTs” on its website which reads:

In Yodogawa, in order to make this a city where diverse people can live in a lively way, we respect the human rights of LGBT (sexual minority) people! To that end…

We will undertake to give our staff human rights training in regards to LGBTs!

We will transmit accurate information about LGBTs!

We will provide assistance and so on for the activities of LGBTs!

We will listen to the voices (discussions) of LGBT people! (Yodogawa Ward Office)

淀川区では、多様な方々がいきいきと暮らせるまちの実現のため、

LGBT（性的マイノリティ）の方々の人権を尊重します！そのためには・・・

LGBTに関する職員人権研修を行います！

LGBTに関する正しい情報を発信します！

Linehan, whose partner is Brazilian-Japanese, has been working to increase understanding and acceptance of LGBT people in Japan and elsewhere. He has recorded a video for the It Gets Better Project which can be seen on YouTube.
1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to weave together several strands of discussion on globalization and identity. I began in the first section by examining Japan’s history of interactions with the global, which are first recorded in Chinese sources in the first century, and the importation of political and cultural systems; these interactions continued throughout Japan’s period of national isolation (during which Western knowledge continued to pour into the country in the form of so-called Dutch studies), and intensified with the coming of modernity following the Meiji Restoration. As I show, major upheavals in Japanese culture and society from the Meiji period on have been encountered both individually and nationally, but always in interaction with the global, as the Japanese people and the state have negotiated changing identities in relation to the country’s position in the world. Drawing on the work of Iwabuchi, Orbaugh, Napier and others, I also showed how systems and ideas imported to Japan have been reinterpreted, becoming both Japanese and international; and how Japanese products, particularly cultural and pop-culture items, are marked both “Japanese” and “global” as they travel out into the world marketplace.

In the second section, I addressed the question of whether there can be said to be a transnational gay identity. I presented two main issues: the continuing existence of indigenous forms of behaviour, ways of being, and notions of identity in non-Western cultures; and the question of whether gay identity is necessarily linked to white male Anglophone American culture. While as I show it is true that there are still cultures in which “traditional” ways of being and doing continue to exist (in the Asian context I cited scholars writing about the Philippines,
Thailand and India), I argue that this is not the case in Japan, where the indigenous practice of *shudō* had faded long before the advent of the modern period almost 150 years ago.

Finally, I addressed the question of whether there is such a thing as a Japanese gay identity. Drawing on work by Gregory Pflugfelder, Mark McLelland, Harada Masashi and others, I show how understandings of same-sex eroticism have changed since the pre-modern period, culminating in the emergence of gay-identified, politically aware and active people in contemporary Japan.

In the following chapters I examine how gay identity is represented in examples of contemporary Japanese novels and films, drawn from around the beginning of the 1990s “gay boom” period to the present day. I argue that although they were produced in and for the Japanese market, and they reflect Japan’s social, cultural and political milieu, they nevertheless reflect a transnational global gay culture and identity, along with universal themes of love and loss, overcoming and becoming. Although the representations are not always unproblematic, I argue that positive, supportive, and overtly political messages can be found in them, and furthermore, over the nearly twenty year period covered by the novels and films I study, that it is possible to discern a tendency towards slightly less stereotyped, and notably more overtly political, portrayals.

1.5 Background and Approach

In my Masters thesis I examined representations of male-desiring men in postwar Japanese short stories and contemporary manga. While I wanted to continue to study representations of same-sex-desiring men, many scholars have examined such representations in manga. Also, while the manga I studied at in my thesis were published in gay monthly magazines and were
created by gay men for an explicitly gay male audience, the short stories were not: rather, they are by canonical authors such as Ōe Kenzaburō, Mishima Yukio and Shiba Ryōtarō, writers who did not publicly identify as gay, and whose works were not primarily aimed at a gay readership. My initial plan for this follow-up study, therefore, was to look at representations of gay men in contemporary novels by gay authors.

The anthology *Partings at Dawn*, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, contains translated excerpts of the 1989 novel *YES YES YES* by Hiruma Hisao (discussed in Chapter Two). In his introduction to the collection, Schalow says that Hiruma writes “contemporary gay novels” with “scenes between men that are both sexually and emotionally explicit” and which seem to reflect “the world of modern Western gay writers: confident, proud, exploring what it means to be gay in a sometimes unfriendly world” (18), and so this seemed like the perfect novel with which to begin this dissertation, as it was contemporary and by a gay author. I soon realized, however, that things would not be so straightforward: according to Paul McCarthy, who translated the excerpts of *YES YES YES*, Hiruma has a wife. Of course, having a wife does not mean that Hiruma is not gay, but I wondered why an openly gay author of explicitly gay novels would be married to a woman; research online, however, proved unhelpful.

Indeed, whilst there are some Japanese authors who have acknowledged their homosexuality, such as poet Takahashi Mutsuo and novelist Nishino Kōji, as the uncertainty surrounding Hiruma’s public identity shows, there are many others who write on gay themes but who may or may not be gay themselves. Also, authors are sometimes included in lists and collections of gay literature for reasons of expedience or politics. For example, besides Hiruma Hisao, *Partings at Dawn* contains work by Edo period authors Ihara Saikaku and Kitamura Kigin, who were probably not primarily male-desiring, as well as by openly gay modern authors.
Takahashi Mutsuo and Tate Shirō. In its section on gay literature in Japan, the “Gay Literature” article in the Japanese edition of *Wikipedia* also includes Edo-era writers, along with authors from the modern period like Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki, and Kawabata Yasunari (all of whom I discuss in the following chapter, and all of whom were presumptively heterosexual), as well as Mishima Yukio, Takahashi Mutsuo, and also Hiruma Hisao (“Gei Bungaku”). And *Aesthetic Stories: Gay Literature Book Guide* (1993) also begins in the Edo period, and also includes Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki, Kawabata Yasunari and Hiruma Hisao, among many other authors, both openly gay and not (*Tanbi Shōsetsu*).

It became apparent, therefore, that short of directly asking each person how they identify—a difficult task in itself—determining which authors fit my original criterion would not be easy and might not even be possible. However, as I read and watched the texts I discuss in the following chapters I also realized that whether their creators were gay or not was actually less important than the fact that they were depicting explicitly gay characters. In other words, gay people were still being represented in the works, they were being represented in ways that were interesting and seemed significant, and the fact that these were mainstream productions not specifically aimed at a gay market also meant that they were probably being more widely consumed and their messages were reaching a larger audience than they would have otherwise.

I decided, therefore, to focus on works that portrayed gay characters and had won recognition or awards. As I discuss in detail in the following chapters, the works I selected are by creators who have won various important literary or film awards for their other works, and in the case of the films, they feature actors who are well-known, and who are often multi-award winning in their own right. Each of these works seemed to reflect the kind of globally recognizable gay culture and identity that I see in Japan and among my Japanese friends, but that
is often repudiated in the academic literature, and so I determined that I would approach them via
close readings of the primary texts, situated in the context of the larger question of gay identity.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

In the following chapters I discuss specific examples of novels and films featuring gay
male characters. In Chapter Two I begin by examining literary and historical representations of
male-male sexuality in Japan, starting with the pre-modern period and ending with Boys’ Love
manga and contemporary literature. I also discuss the country’s two “gay booms,” the first in the
1950s and the second in the 1990s, before turning to specific examples of contemporary novels
featuring gay men: Hiruma Hisao’s YES YES YES, Yoshida Shūichi’s Saigo no Musuko, and
Hanamura Mangetsu’s Burūsu.

In Chapter Three I turn to film. First, I provide a brief overview of the development of
Japanese film with a focus on gay themes and transnational culture, and discuss representations
of gay men in movies by internationally famous Japanese directors like Ōshima Nagisa, Takashi
Miike, and Nakajima Takehiro. I then examine in detail three contemporary gay-themed films:
Hashiguchi Ryōsuke’s Hasshu!, Inudō Isshin’s Mezon do Himiko, and Imaizumi Kōichi’s
Hatsukoi.

As I explain in Chapter Three, with rare exceptions movies with stories of unambiguous
male-male eroticism are to be found only in live-action films set in the contemporary era. I
therefore devote Chapter Four to a discussion of one recent mainstream example that centres on
explicitly gay characters in a premodern setting: Kudō Kankurō’s Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-
san. I argue that unlike mainstream films from the 1990s gay boom period discussed in Chapter
Three, *Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san* is unique among Japanese films in that it directly links a positive modern gay identity with premodern same-sex eroticism.

In Chapter Five, I present an overall analysis of the research and conclusions, and of my readings of the texts, and return to the issues raised in the present chapter: whether a modern gay identity can be said to exist in Japan, and the circulation of representations of male-male eroticism within and across Japan’s borders. Finally I address possible future research directions.
Chapter 2: Images of Gay Men in Contemporary Literature

Eroticism between males is a frequent theme in a variety of Japanese literary genres with a range of producers and consumers; the best-known internationally is probably the category of known by various names such as yaoi or Boys’ Love. These manga are aimed at a female audience and feature male same-sex romantic and sexual relationships. I shall return to this genre shortly, but first I briefly outline the history of literary representations of male-male sexuality in Japan, along with the changing interpretations of male same-sex desire, and then discuss examples of pre-war representations of male-male eroticism in mainstream fiction before turning to an in-depth analysis of three contemporary novels with gay male characters. I will argue that the characters in these novels, with their universal themes of overcoming and becoming, love and loss, represent a gay identity that is both Japanese and global.

2.1 Prior to the Meiji Period

Although not all scholars agree, there may be allusions to eroticism between males in the very oldest Japanese texts, including the Nihongi or Nihonshoki (Chronicles of Japan), which dates to about 720 CE, and the Man’yōshū, a collection of poetry dating to circa 750.41 That allusions can be found in courtly writing of the Heian period (794-1185), however, is less controversial. The most notable example is the eleventh-century epic Tale of Genji, popularly conceived of as the world’s first novel, which includes both a scene in which the hero Genji has

41 Gary Leupp, for example, calls the evidence for the former “unconvincing,” and for the latter not “explicit.” He notes, however, that “some of [the Man’yōshū’s] poems may have stemmed from homosexual feelings” (22-24).
sex with the younger brother of a woman who has rejected him, and a lengthy and “complex exploration of a same-sex relationship” between Kaoru, ostensibly the son of Genji, and a man known as the Eighth Prince. Elements of this storyline “explicitly inspired” the twelfth-century Torikaebaya Monogatari (The Changelings), a tale in which a man has two children, a boy and a girl, each of whom has the characteristics of the opposite sex (Schalow 12-13). There also exist diaries from the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries purporting to contain accounts of real sexual encounters between their authors and other males. Examples include court noble Fujiwara Sukefusa (1007-1057), Confucian scholar and poet Ōe Tadafusa (1041-1111), chief councillor of state Fujiwara Yorinaga (1109-1180) and regent and chief minister Fujiwara no Kanezane (also known as Kujō Kanezane, 1149-1207) (Leupp 25).

By the Edo period (1603-1868), explicit male-male eroticism could be found in mainstream literary productions by popular and respected authors and poets, and had become a “staple theme” on the stages of both the kabuki and noh theatres (Pflugfelder 26, 113). Sex between males was understood and expressed within the rubric of shudō (衆道), literally “the way of youths.” The metaphysical nature of this tradition is revealed in the use of the character dō (道, tao or dao in Chinese), meaning road or journey and indicating a discipline with “a certain spiritual or ethical nuance” (Pflugfelder 28). Such disciplines are often art forms that require long and arduous study, the pursuit of which is thought to bring spiritual rewards, for example tea ceremony (茶道 sadō or chadō, “the way of tea”), karate (空手道 karatedō, “the way of the empty hand”), and calligraphy (書道 shodō, “the way of writing”).

As the name suggests, the shudō tradition was paederastic, sharing certain characteristics

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42 Also 男色 nanshoku, male eroticism. Hereafter I will use the term shudō.
with similar customs that existed at various times in many parts of the world: vertically arranged age- and status-based relationships between adult and non-adult males, in which the older partner had the prerogative of penetrating the younger partner. For example, in ancient Greece “the erastês-erômenos relationship played a role in the . . . social and educational system, had its own complex social-sexual etiquette and was an important social institution among the upper classes,” and this tradition informed the later Roman tradition as well (Pollini 27). 43 Shudō, too, had its own complex etiquette and inspired both literary and visual artists; indeed, it was so celebrated in the Edo period that, as Gregory Pflugfelder puts it, in popular discourse “the intricacy of the ‘way of youths’ was virtually axiomatic” (27). However, despite its respected position as a quasi-spiritual pursuit, even before the Edo period ended the shudō tradition had declined.

2.2 The Modern Period

As discussed in Chapter One, Japan’s modern period is usually considered to have begun in 1868 with the Meiji Restoration. 44 Rather than a single event, as the name implies, the Meiji Restoration was a series of incidents leading to the returning of power to the emperor and to radical changes to Japan’s social and political structures. In the forty-four years between 1868 and the end of Emperor Meiji’s reign in 1912, Japan transformed from an isolated, feudal society

43 There is some scholarly debate on the subject of whether anal penetration (as opposed to intercrural intercourse) was a defining practice of ancient Greek erastês-erômenos relationships, as it was in Japanese shudō relationships, but it is widely agreed that it was a part of the tradition in ancient Rome.

44 However, as it had elements of modernity such as urbanization, high literacy rates, and communication and transportation networks, the era prior to this, the Edo era, is sometimes referred to as the early modern period.
into a fully industrialized Western-style power with its own colonial possessions and a new social system in which class distinctions had been discarded and the idea of *risshin shusse*, success through effort and self-sacrifice, was promoted as a new “enlightened philosophy” (Maeda 110). This period was a time of quick and thoroughgoing social change; ideas, sciences, arts, and systems of politics were imported from the West, and traditional Japanese culture “came to be despised as obsolete and useless” (Kato 58).

Along with efforts to modernize the nation, literature, too, was subjected to attempts at modernization: Japanese writers were sent abroad to study Western literatures, philosophies and religions, which they introduced, in turn, to Japan (Orbaugh, “Historical Overview” 22). With the opening of the country also came increasing encounters within Japan between Japanese people and people and cultures hitherto unknown, creating new experiences of self and other for the Japanese. These and other experiences with the outside world, including the necessity of translating into Japanese literary works collected abroad and brought back to Japan, created the

45 The history of this period is extremely complex, and to fully explore it would require more space than can be devoted to it here. It is important, however, to remark briefly on some of these sweeping changes. It is undeniable that the Meiji Restoration resulted in the breaking down of old class systems and the reformation of the political structure but, like the largely symbolic “restoration” of power to the emperor (who had almost always been under the control of members of the non-imperial warrior class), such official advancements were often on paper only, while in fact things continued much as they had before, changing much more slowly than is suggested by the academic convenience of marking the year 1868 as a bright line dividing feudal and modern.

For instance, while the old social hierarchy was officially abolished, in reality the class system did not simply disappear: the hereditary aristocracy was retained, the emperor was elevated to a new, even higher status, and there was no real change in the lives of the lower classes. Similarly, although a parliament was formed and the emperor given executive powers, real power remained in the hands of the members of the former warrior class who had led the Restoration. In addition, despite the official promotion of self-improvement by personal effort, improving their social status remained elusive or impossible for most ordinary people, and gendered labour and social divisions continued much as before. Writers in the Meiji and Taishō periods frequently addressed the anxieties created by these contradictions.
need to define both Japoneseness—or what Susan Napier has called “a sense of an iconic ‘Japan’ in contrast to the rest of the world” (“Other Side” 41)—and the personal identity of Japanese individuals. I return to this issue in the context of film in the following chapter.

The death of a monarch always paradoxically represents both an ending and a beginning. The death of the Meiji Emperor in 1912 marked both the end of the first modern Japanese era and the start of the Taishō period (1912-1926). Over the course of his reign, the country had abandoned its feudal society and its isolationist policy and taken its place among the modern industrialized nations. As a consequence of its efforts at modernization, issues of Japanese individual and national identity and male versus female identity had become central to literature, art and intellectual debate (Orbaugh, “General Nogi’s Wife” 8-13).

With the Taishō period came new changes in notions of gender roles. In the Meiji era, the ise seido (family/household system), a modern system loosely based on the premodern family structure of the samurai, had been promulgated as Japan’s “traditional” family system. The competing notion of the katei had also been introduced, but as an explicitly modern system envisioned as “the Japanese version of the modern nuclear family” (Orbaugh, “Gender” 43-46). In the ise seido, the husband/father had all the power and inheritance was strictly patrilineal, while in the katei the family was centred around a loving married couple and their children, with the husband taking a public role and the wife creating the home.

Along with literature and philosophies, the new fields of psychology and sexology were also imported during Meiji and Taishō. Whilst it was an “uphill battle to spearhead a psychoanalytic movement in Japan” (Cornyetz & Vincent 1), Japanese popular sexologists drew
enthusiastically from the work of Europeans like Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs\(^46\) (1825-1895); Carl Friedrich Otto Westphal\(^47\) (1833-1890); and Richard von Krafft-Ebing\(^48\) (1840-1902). Despite

\(^46\) The German-born Ulrichs is now seen as one of the fathers of the modern gay rights movement. According to Simon LeVay, “if, as some people assert, the word ‘gay’ should be reserved for people who are self-conscious, open members of the homosexual community, then Ulrichs was the first gay man of modern times. Certainly he was the first gay activist . . . Ulrichs argued tirelessly for the rights of homosexuals” (12). He published numerous works on homosexuality, and argued that homosexuals were “a distinct class of individuals, innately different from heterosexual people.” He also argued that sexuality was a result of foetal development, in other words inborn. He theorized a range or “spectrum” of what he called urnings, or descendants of Uranus (named for the Greek goddess Aphrodite Urania, who was born from the testicles of the sky god Uranus), from very feminine to very masculine, and with a similar range of sexual preferences, from top to bottom (12-14). LeVay points out that this conception matches almost entirely our current ideas about gay men and their sexual relationships, except that Ulrichs discounted the possibility of “companionate relationships between conventionally masculine men” (15). For a discussion of the lives and works of Ulrichs, Westphal, and Krafft-Ebing, see Norton.

\(^47\) Westphal was a psychiatrist and neurologist from Berlin. In perhaps the best-known passage from The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault credits Westphal with creating the modern category of the homosexual with his article on “contrary sexual feeling” (Die Konträre Sexualempfindung: Symptom eines neuropathologischen (psychopathischen) Zustandes):

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal’s famous article of 1870 . . . can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (43)

\(^48\) Krafft-Ebing, a psychiatrist, was also born in Germany. He is known for the seminal 1886 work on human sexual behaviour Psychopathia Sexualis: eine Klinisch-Forensische Studie (Sexual Psychopathy: A Clinical-Forensic Study). Krafft-Ebing’s view was that homosexuality was a perversion.
its links to ancient customs, shudō “virtually disappeared . . . under the influence of Western legal and medical discourse” (Schalow, “Introduction” 16).

Although in the mid-Meiji period anal sex between adult men was officially legalized, it was also designated “obscene,” and male-male sexuality became “barbarous, immoral . . . unspeakable” (Pflugfelder 168-193). Same-sex behaviour—not just between males, but now for the first time between females too—began to be understood as dōseiai (同性愛, literally same sex love: a translation of “homosexuality”), as what would now be called a sexual orientation or sexuality, that is, an enduring pattern of romantic and sexual attractions and behaviours and an identity based upon them. However, as in the West, (male) homosexuality also became conflated with femininity, feminine gender identity, and transvestism (Pflugfelder 252-261).

These new ways of understanding love and sex between males were dramatically, even radically different to the way in which shudō had been conceived. Shudō had been a quasi-spiritual pursuit available to any male: although not all participated, those who did were neither considered in any essential way different from other males nor precluded from sex with females; in contrast, homosexuals (dōseiaisha) were sharply distinguished from other males in that that they were assumed to be exclusively attracted to members of their own sex. Whilst in shudō both adult and youth participants were understood as masculine, it was now believed that homosexuals who took a receptive role in anal sex were “feminine” and (therefore?) desired to be penetrated by “masculine” men—a trope that continues to obtain both in popular discourse and even among some gay people in the West and elsewhere today. Finally, unlike those males who took the role of “youth”/insertee in shudō relationships, for whom desire was not considered a primary motivation in their sexual activities with other males, homosexuals who desired to be penetrated were imagined as actively luring their male sex partners (Pflugfelder 263-267).
Journals dedicated to discussion of sexualities began to appear by the end of the Taishō period (1912-1926). They provided a forum for sexologists, the new experts in sexuality, but as readers were encouraged to write in for advice from these experts they also provided, for the first time, a forum for the “perverse” themselves (McLelland, *Queer Japan* 23). During the Second World War publications of a “sexual and frivolous nature” were banned, “[o]pen discussion of sexuality . . . largely ceased,” and sexuality became “increasingly heteronormative” for both men and women (McLelland, *Queer Japan* 31-37). After the war, however, attitudes towards “traditional sex and gender ideologies” and “nonprocreative acts” became less rejective, and by 1950s the word *gei* (gay) had come into circulation in Japan (McLelland, *Queer Japan* 65-78).

The 1990s “gay boom” (*gei būmu*) in Japan has been widely discussed, but McLelland has shown that the original gay boom occurred much earlier, in 1958, when the mainstream media started using the term in reports on the many gay bars that had begun moving into Tokyo’s Shinjuku ni-chōme—now Japan’s largest gay neighbourhood—following the crackdown on (heterosexual) red light businesses in the area in the mid 1950s, and the increasing popularity of such bars among what he terms “a more mainstream clientele” (*Queer Japan* 106-107). As McLelland explains, there was increasing interest, particularly in the tabloids, in gay people and gay culture in this period, making figures like drag queen Miwa Akihiro and transsexual singer Carousel Maki household names. As McLelland points out, this first gay boom saw a degree of “discussion and representation [of gay men] in the popular media unparalleled . . . in any anglophone society until the early 1970s” (Ibid. 123). I return to the 1990s gay boom shortly.
2.3 Modern Literature

Shudō is an important part of both the history of male-male eroticism and of literary history in Japan. As Pflugfelder explains, although the term shudō had grown “increasingly obsolete” by the end of the Edo era, “no equally powerful paradigm of male-male sexuality would inherit its place . . . until the emergence of a new discursive regime in the latter part of the nineteenth century,” and fictional accounts of male-male sexuality, some of them best sellers, continued to appear for decades (95). In Writing the Love of Boys: The Origins of Bishōnen Culture in Modernist Japanese Literature (2011), Angles argues that the new discourse (of “same-sex love”) that emerged in the late Meiji period “downplayed the importance of . . . elements that had been important in structuring earlier formulations of desire,” such as the ages and social and sexual roles of the partners (7). He also points out that besides shudō and same-sex love, from the Edo period through the pre-WWII years male-male sexuality was conceptualized in various ways in Japan, and that representations varied considerably between those intended for mass consumption; those in the legal realm; those in medical discourse; and those in sexology, politics, and education, among others, and that different images can sometimes be found even within single texts, becoming what he refers to as “hybrid representations” (9-10).

The shudō paradigm having declined by the end of the Edo era, in the Meiji and Taishō periods many acclaimed mainstream authors, including Mori Ōgai (1862-1922) and Kawabata Yasunari49 (1899-1972), reinterpreted male-male sexuality in their stories about love between schoolboys. Mori Ōgai is perhaps best known for the novel Gan (Wild Geese), which is set

49 Kawabata was the first Japanese author to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1968. He is also credited with discovering and mentoring several other successful authors, including Ōkamoto Kanoko, Ibuse Masuji and Mishima Yukio. His 1948 novel Shōnen (Boy) concerns the love of a schoolboy for his classmate.
against the change from the pre-modern Edo period to the modern Meiji period, but in 1909 he published a remarkable novel called *Wita Sekusuarisu (Vita Sexualis)*; as there are parallels between Ōgai’s life and that of the protagonist and narrator Kanai Shizuka, the novel is usually understood as at least semiautobiographical (Nakai 227). It discusses various aspects of Meiji-era sexuality, including sexual attraction between men and women (who are depicted as experiencing sexual attraction for and initiating relationships with men), and male-male sexual attraction—Stephen Dodd writes that *Vita Sexualis* “resists the Naturalist tendency to ignore other previously acceptable forms of human sexuality” (477), and as Jim Reichert points out, it is one of the few texts of its era to even acknowledge the existence of male-male sexuality (199). I would also add that an often overlooked and remarkable aspect of the novel is that the main character appears to be asexual.

*Vita Sexualis* is a parody of naturalist writing which focuses on social problems including bullying and sexual victimization at schools; the unfair and unequal treatment of women, especially in marriage; and the social pressures experienced by people, particularly in relation to their superiors. Although it contains almost no depictions of sex at all, the novel was banned and Ōgai was reprimanded (Marcus 76). Kuroiwa Yūichi points out that Ōgai, a medical doctor, was influenced by the scientific approach to homosexuality of psychiatrist Krafft-Ebing and other European psychiatrists/sexologists, and he not only incorporated such views into his portrayals of homosexuality (3), but also frequently quoted Krafft-Ebing in both his medical and literary

50 Sexual attraction between young men is also the theme of Ōgai’s 1910 novel *Seinen* (Youth).

51 Asexuality, defined as having no sexual attraction to either sex, is only just beginning to be recognized as a sexual orientation (see Anthony F. Bogaert, “Asexuality: Prevalence and Associated Factors in a National Probability Sample”).

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writing (11). This link is evident in the title *Vita Sexualis*, which directly parallels Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis.*

In the novel, narrator-protagonist Kanai first learns about sodomy in his school dormitory from a classmate, a handsome boy who was the object of erotic attention by other students who had no access to girls, and Kanai himself is the victim of an attempted rape by some of the older boys. Later, he describes the “soft” and “hard” styles: the elegant, effeminate *nanpa* are interested in erotic picture books, while the rough and manly *kōha* are obsessed by a story about a boy named Hirata Sangoro, a handsome youth with unshaved forelocks who has an affair with an older man.

The relationships depicted in *Vita Sexualis* and other examples of Meiji fiction, although they are between schoolboys rather than between adults and non-adults, resemble *shudō* in that they remain both age-differentiated and hierarchical. As Angles explains, three important authors whose careers began in the Taishō era, Edogawa Ranpo (1894-1965), Murayama Kaita (1896-1919), and Inagaki Taruho (1900-1977), were part of a new generation of authors whose works, while they are also about “amorous and erotic desire between schoolboys,” present a “stark contrast” to the work of Ōgai and other earlier writers, focusing on mutual interests and the appreciation of “bishōnen [beautiful boy] beauty” (*Writing the Love of Boys* 17-18). Angles links the works of these authors to the later development of Boys’ Love manga, a genre to which I return briefly in the next section.

In 1914, two years after the start of the Taishō period, Natsume Sōseki, “the most esteemed

52 Published in 1886, the book’s full title is *Psychopathia Sexualis: eine Klinisch-Forensische Studie* (Sexual Psychopathy: A Clinical-Forensic Study).

53 I return to the significance of forelocks in *shudō* in Chapter Four.
author in modern Japan,” published one of the most canonical modern Japanese novels (Orbaugh, “Natsume Sōseki” 87). Inspired by the real-life suicides of General Nogi Maresuke and his wife Nogi Shizuko in 1912, Kokoro is usually read as dealing with the modernization of Japan and Japanese society and the transition from Meiji to Taishō. As Dodd argues, in contrast to Vita Sexualis, in which “heterosexual bonding emerges as at least a narrative possibility, marriage in [Kokoro] has significance only as part of a larger narrative concern, namely, the unfolding relationship between Sensei and the student” (478; emphasis added).

In the form of first-person narratives by these two characters, Kokoro develops as a series of betrayals, crises and suicides in which women play a central role yet are markedly absent. As Orbaugh argues in “General Nogi’s Wife,” the exclusion of Sensei’s wife Shizu and the relationship between Sensei and the student in Kokoro is one example of the trope of homosociality between men in modern cultural production, with Shizu functioning as “little more than an item of exchange” between the three main male characters (17).

In one important passage in the novel, Sensei writes to the student: “I will now tear open my own heart and try to pour that blood on your face. If, when my throbbing halts, a new life is able to lodge in your breast, I shall be satisfied” (173; my translation). Orbaugh sees the spurting of blood in this passage as symbolizing a type of asexual reproduction between Sensei and the student which preserves a male genealogy that excludes females. Hosea Hirata points out that the fluid, passed from Sensei to the student, no longer flows “in the consecrated direction of blood lineage” (199), which is to say from father through mother to son. The blood, he argues, represents a search for meaning on the part of Sensei, who has no father/teacher, that will transform the student into a “receptacle of history,” while the student is a blank slate seeking an archetype to establish his own identity (204).
Although he does not discuss the imagery in this context, it is interesting that in Hirata’s analysis the student, whose own father has died (along with the emperor, the “father” of the nation), both becomes the “receptacle”—typically conceived as the female role—and also takes on the identity of Sensei/the donor, who becomes the surrogate father. Far from the lineage ending as Hirata suggests, the blood, then, is metaphorically passed directly from Sensei/the father to the student/the son who, as both the “receptacle” and the new creation, will then incorporate Sensei’s archetypal characteristics in bringing into existence his own identity, just as in sexual reproduction a child inherits the characteristics of both its parents.

The sexual imagery of the passage is obvious, and both Orbaugh and Hirata agree that its ultimate result is a kind of transfiguration. The imagery strongly suggests the feminization of the student, who becomes a “receptacle” for the “new life” (new culture and/or history) that is being transferred to and given life through him, a direct reflection of the new culture, history and identity that were being born in the late Meiji and early Taishō periods. Orbaugh discusses this feminization in “General Nogi’s Wife,” in which she points out that Sensei “pass[es] the phallus” to the student as a “male ‘gives’ the phallus to the female in the form of a child” (16). The feminization of the student reflects both Japanese men’s sense of feminization in the late Meiji period and the erasure of women discussed by Orbaugh.

On the other hand, Vincent points out that critics have recently interpreted Kokoro as a metaphor for the changing conceptions of male-male eroticism in Japan: Sensei is an older man who still remembers the erotic possibilities of male homosociality, while the student is part of a new generation for whom different understandings of homosexuality have replaced the old traditions. Vincent, however, analyses the novel as an “uncannily Freudian narrative of sexual development” (“Sexuality and Narrative” 227). Kokoro, he writes, is
a text that puts into dialogue two conceptions of sexuality: one that produces the category of homosexuality and heterosexuality at the opposite ends of a developmental narrative and one that recognizes the performative role of narrative itself in the way sexuality is experienced and understood. (“Sexuality and Narrative” 223)

According to Vincent, for Sōseki this kind of narrativization “was inseparable from the narratives of the global Imperial order of which he remained critical throughout his career” (“Sexuality and Narrative” 231).

Vincent argues that “it is crucial to recognize” that both Sōseki and Ōgai were “aware of and even,” as Dodd puts it, “open to a wider range of erotic possibilities than has generally been acknowledged” (Vincent, Two-Timing Modernity 89; Dodd 496). For Vincent, Kokoro represents “a way of thinking about sexuality and subjectivity that was new” at a time in Japan—the early twentieth-century—when the word “gay” did not exist and “homosexuality” was a new term which lacked the “ontological heft it has today,” but when “both the understanding and lived experience of sexual and gender identity were undergoing major transformations” (Two-Timing Modernity 90-91).

2.4 Gay Men in Contemporary Literature

Like their pre-war counterparts, post-war authors who write about male-male eroticism do not generally take shudō as a theme.54 The most frequent depictions of gay males in Japanese popular culture today are to be found in yaoi, a category that includes a “large number of comic

54 I discuss one exception, Shiba Ryōtarō’s 1962 short story “Maegami no Sōzaburō” (Sōzaburo with the Forelocks), in the next chapter.
books, novels, and monthly (and weekly) magazines [occupying] a large sector of the Japanese book market, with many . . . consistently attaining the bestseller list” (Nagaike 77). *Yaoi*, also known as Boys’ Love or BL,⁵⁵ is a term for fictional products with male homoerotic themes often written by women and usually aimed at a female audience. As mentioned in the previous section, Angles has argued that there is a “concrete line of connection” between early twentieth century homoerotic works by authors like Edogawa Ranpo, Inagaki Taruho, and Murayama Kaita and the work of contemporary female manga artists working in the *yaoi* genre (*Writing the Love of Boys* 245). However, although some gay men do read *yaoi*, manga aimed at a gay male audience are usually considered a separate genre.⁵⁶ Along with all types of manga, *yaoi* has spread outside Japan and is consumed by non-Japanese people both in (often unofficial) translation and in the original Japanese.

Kazumi Nagaike writes that *yaoi* narratives represent “female fantasies about idealized male homosexual relationships” which reflect none of the “practical realities of male homosexuality.” She argues that these narratives are a site for the exploration and expression of heterosexual female sexuality that provides a psychologically safe way for straight women to consume pornography (85-92). Fujimoto Yukari makes a similar argument in “Transgender: ______________________

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⁵⁵ Despite the name, characters in Boys’ Love products are usually pubescents or young adults rather than children. A genre called *shota* or *shotakon* (ショタ, ショタコン, short for Shōtarō complex, 正太郎コンプレックス, cf. *rorikon*/Lolita complex) “feature[s] sexual depictions of prepubescent boys and has a complicated mix of male and female producers and consumers” (Saitō 236).

⁵⁶ Among English speakers this genre is known as Men’s Love or Bara, the latter name having been inspired by the title of the gay monthly magazine *Barazoku* as well as by Hosoe Eikō’s 1985 collection of photographs featuring Mishima Yukio titled *Barakei* (*Ordeal by Roses: Photographs of Yukio Mishima*). According to Wim Lunsing, both Tagame Gengoroh and Hirosegawa Susumu, two of Japan’s most popular gay manga artists, got their start in manga aimed at a female audience. They both told him that BL manga “belong to a world [they do] not understand” and that they “lack reality” (“*Yaoi Ronsō*”).
Female Hermaphrodites and Male Androgynes.” According to Lunsing in his article about the *yaoi ronsō* (the *yaoi* dispute, a discussion among Japanese manga artists and gay activists surrounding the politics of depictions of male homosexuality in manga aimed at females), however, there are often similar themes in gay manga and pornography. He asks:

If *yaoi manga* are criticised for giving false presentations of gay men, how come gay *manga* are not? Obviously, gay *manga* made by gay men for gay men may lack the aspect of voyeurism by a group outside the gay scene, in this context, women. However, women who enjoy *yaoi manga* often also read gay magazines and thus are also familiar with gay *manga* and pornography. It rather seems that gay men like [gay activist and drag queen] Satō [Masaki] have difficulty with the idea that women may look at them as sex objects. Gay *manga* are not essentially different from [BL] *manga*. (“Yaoi Ronsō”)

Manga featuring erotic and romantic relationships between males had been growing in popularity since the 1970s, but when the second gay boom began in the early 1990s, gay issues began to be widely covered in mainstream Japanese media from newspapers and magazines to photo books, and were taken up in genres as diverse as novels; anime; television documentaries, talk shows and dramas; and big screen movies. Like *yaoi* manga, much of this output was aimed at a female audience: it was a forty-six-page special entitled “Gay Renaissance” in women’s fashion magazine *Crea* that is usually agreed to have “inaugurated” this boom (Hall 41). I return to the 1990s gay boom in the context of film in the following chapter.

Besides popular culture products like manga, gay males continue to be depicted in mainstream Japanese literature. Indeed, according to Schalow “a distinctly ‘gay male literature’ has come into being in recent years” in Japan, one which echoes that of modern Western gay
writers: “confident, proud, exploring what it means to be gay in a sometimes unfriendly world.”
Writers of this new genre include Takahashi Mutsuo57 (b. 1937), whose award-winning works
with their unapologetic themes of gay desire are read internationally, and Hiruma Hisao (see
below), whose “gay novels” are widely read in Japan (18).

I devote the rest of this chapter, therefore, to three contemporary gay-themed novels:
Hiruma Hisao’s YES YES YES, Yoshida Shūichi’s Saigo no Musuko, and Hanamura Mangetsu’s
Burūsu. Although each of the novels is problematic in some way—for conflating homosexuality
and femininity or trans identities, or for making the main gay character psychopathic—I argue
that the stories nevertheless articulate the needs and desires of modern Japanese gay men, and
that they deal with universal themes like overcoming and becoming, love and loss. Although the
representations are stereotyped, I argue that we can nevertheless read them as positive, an issue
to which I return in Chapter Five.

2.5 Hiruma Hisao’s YES YES YES

Hiruma Hisao was born in Tokyo in 1960. He has written several novels including Happī
Bāsudei (Happy Birthday, 1990), Besuto Furenzu (Best Friends, 1992), 100% Pyua (100% Pure,
1994), Urutorapoppu (Ultrapop, 1996), Fushigi na Taiken (A Strange Experience, 1997), and
Nihon: JAP no Akarui Mirai (Japan: JAP’s Bright Future, 1997). His themes include young
people and their lives and problems, gender and sexuality, and social issues.

57 Takahashi, a friend of Mishima Yukio, is “one of the most prominent poets of contemporary
Japan,” and has written dozens of poetry collections, novels, prose works and essays. He has
won several important literary prizes, including the Yomiuri Literary Prize, the Takami Jun Prize,
and the Shika Bungakukan Prize (Angles, “Penisism”).
YES YES YES won the Bungei Shunjū Prize\(^{58}\) in 1989, the year in which it was published, and was considered for the prestigious Mishima Yukio Prize\(^{59}\) the following year. Apart from short excerpts translated by Paul McCarthy and published in the 1996 collection *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature*, the novel remains unavailable in English. Following the prologue, the book proceeds through fourteen chapters, each a short sketch describing narrator-protagonist Jun’s life as a prostitute at a gay host bar, the other employees of the club, and the men who hire them for sex. As Paul McCarthy puts it, the novel is “a portrait, not only of aspects of the gay world in Japan, but of a confused, sensitive adolescent seeking to find himself within that particular milieu” (330).

It is interesting, therefore, that according to Kakinuma Eiko, when it was first published *YES YES YES* was “explosively popular” among young (implicitly heterosexual) women, who were “wildly enthusiastic” about it (243). As such, it would appear to fit with the products of the 1990s gay boom period—such as the films Okoge (Fag Hag) and Kira Kira Hikaru (Twinkle), which I discuss in Chapter Three—which, as McLellan and others have argued, seem to be aimed at a female audience. One notable difference between *YES YES YES* and these films, however, is that the novel does not focus on a gay male couple whose relationship is threatened by a woman—indeed, the novel lacks even a single female character—and, importantly, it does not end with the main character’s assimilation into some form of ostensible heterosexuality. On

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\(^{58}\) The publishing company Bungei Shunjū Ltd. was established in 1923, and is known for its monthly literary magazine *Bungei Shunjū* (“Kaisha Gaiyō”). It also administers the annual Akutagawa Prize (see below).

\(^{59}\) The Mishima Yukio Prize was established in 1988 in memory of the author, playwright, poet and director who was born Hiraoka Kimitake (1925-1970). One of the most important twentieth century Japanese writers, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature three times. The Mishima Yukio Prize is awarded annually to an outstanding work of fiction, criticism, poetry, or drama, and comes with a cash award of one million yen (*Mishima Yukio Cyber Museum*).
the contrary, while the protagonist is ostensibly heterosexual, I argue that the novel actually represents Jun’s progression towards acknowledging his own homosexuality: a journey towards coming out to himself.

Set in a gay host club called Bar Adolescence, probably in Japan’s largest gay neighbourhood, Tokyo’s Shinjuku ni-chôme, the book begins a year after Jun, for unusual and mysterious reasons, decided to take a job at the club. As he explains in the Prologue, Jun did not come to this part of town because he needed money or had nowhere else to go. Neither did he have what he refers to as “interests like that” (sō iū shumi, that is, a desire for sex with other males):

Before I came to this town, naturally I’d never experienced [awful] stuff like holding a man’s thing in my mouth, or having a man’s thing put in my arse. And of course, I didn’t have those tastes either. And I still don’t. No, I don’t think I do.⁶¹ (10)

僕はこの町に来るまで、当然のことながら、男のあれを口に含んだり、
男のあれを尻に入れられたりなんて経験はなかった。そしてもちろん、
そんな趣味もなかった。そしてそれは今もない。いや、ないと思う。

By his own account, until the previous year Jun had lived a “blessed” life: a singer in a band, he had “understanding parents” and a “totally peaceful” experience at his high school. But he suddenly realized that his life was empty: if he sang about sorrow he realized it felt like a lie,

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⁶⁰ Most Japanese reviews of the book, and also the introduction by McCarthy to the excerpts in Partings at Dawn, reference Shinjuku ni-chôme, but the novel itself makes no mention of Shinjuku or indeed of Tokyo at all. The descriptions and atmosphere, however, are certainly suggestive of the area. Yoshida Shūichi’s Saigo no Musuko (The Last Son), which I discuss below, is explicitly set in Shinjuku ni-chôme.

⁶¹ As in the rest of the dissertation, translations in this chapter are mine except where noted.
because within him was not the slightest bit of sadness, of grief, desire, or anger. So he quit his band, dropped out of high school, and went wild for a month, “drowning [himself] in vodka and riding around on [his] motorbike, going to rape women, drinking [his] own piss, and doing all kinds of crazy things” until he remembered what he had heard about this place (9):

In exchange for a bit of cash I’d be used, like a bit of rag, like a doll, and surely that would break something within me, and some small bit of sorrow might be etched onto my soul; in my hazy state of despair at that time that’s how I thought. (9-10)

わずかの金引き換えに、自分がボロ雑巾のように、人形のように扱われること、それは確実に僕の中の何かを壊すだろう、そして小さな悲しみの一つでも僕の心に刻みつけるだろう、僕はあの時、朦朧とした絶望感の中で、そんなふうに思ったのだった。

Mark McLelland describes YES YES YES as “gay erotic fiction” (Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan 35), yet while the novel does contain scenes of explicit sex between males, there is very little about it that is erotic: instead, the narrative focuses on the humiliation heaped upon Jun and his fellow hosts by most of their clients, and on the “boys” amusement with the clients’ sexual peculiarities. But Jun discovers that in spite of the humiliation he experiences, having freely chosen this life those experiences do not break him, and he soon becomes more concerned with making money than with searching for meaning.

Although Jun is presented as heterosexual—he claims not to have “those interests,” and he fantasizes about women in one scene when he masturbates and in another when he has to
penetrate a client\textsuperscript{62}—he also increasingly compares himself with women and sees and describes himself as feminine, and even as explicitly female. The first example occurs early in the novel, when Jun recalls his very first john, an ugly man who treated Jun roughly and thoroughly humiliated him:

Surely a girl might perhaps understand my feelings at that time? That trembling of the heart, that somehow sweet shiver… But, of course I was afraid. Not very [afraid], but I couldn’t even begin to imagine a great big thing like that entering my body. (15)

As the client repeats how beautiful Jun’s pain-filled face is, Jun reflects that he feels like a woman,\textsuperscript{63} and as the man orders him to dance, Jun sees himself, in the client’s eyes, as looking like a tragic heroine (hiroin); even now, he says, he feels “like a pathetic girl who patiently endures humiliation” (20).

\textsuperscript{62} In this scene, Jun must penetrate Tsubaki, a man whom he finds particularly unattractive, and he realizes he must turn to fantasy in order to perform (I return to Tsubaki shortly). First, he imagines a “cute, beautiful, angel-like girl,” but he cannot forget that what he is touching is not a vagina, so he imagines first the arse of a woman, then (due to the rough texture of the man’s skin) that of a foreign woman. Finally, because the sounds the client is making are not even human, Jun settles on a “cannibal woman from New Guinea” (92). I would argue that what is arousing for Jun in this scene is not that his fantasies are of women, but—ironically, given the novel’s heterosexual female audience and various scholars’ assertion that products of the 1990s gay boom period represent what Dobbins calls “cultural tourism” (41)—instead the pleasure and titillation of gazing upon an exotic Other.

\textsuperscript{63} The phrase onna no yō ni (like a woman) occurs repeatedly in the novel.
Not only does Jun describe himself as *feeling* like a woman, often one who has been sexually assaulted—for example, in one section he says “I really felt like a woman . . . like a woman who is being . . . raped” (22)—but he also describes his physical body in female terms. Jun refers to his anus idiosyncratically as his “Eden” (エデン), which is interesting for several reasons. The term is synonymous with the notion of paradise as well as being associated with human (hetero)sexuality and love, which in turn suggests a type of physical pleasure that seems, at first, incongruous with the discomfort and indeed pain Jun often describes suffering during sex with his clients; this is also seemingly at odds with the image of the Garden of Eden as a *locus amoenus* signifying safety and comfort. And of course Eden is associated with Eve, the first woman according to the Abrahamic creation myth, a complicated figure who represents both sexual temptation and motherhood. In a scene in which he has been hired by the elderly president of a company, who reminds him of a corpse, Jun says:

[The thought of being treated as a plaything by this dirty old man] made my Eden expand and contract like a woman’s vagina and my narcissus stick out in front of the old man’s protruding belly and incessantly ooze clear tears. (27)

As the encounter ends, Jun laments the fact that his body has betrayed him: being penetrated has “naturally” made him into a woman, which is something to be resisted; yet even as the pain is so severe it distorts his face, his body wants more.

64 This unusual term for penis, we learn later, comes from the aforementioned Tsubaki, a daily visitor to the club and the object of much derision among the hosts for his habit of acting like a little boy during sex.
Although these comparisons to women continue, and despite increasingly frequent suggestions, like the one above, that he is enjoying sex with his clients, Jun still sees himself as “not gay,” and his group of friends among the hosts are “antipathetic” towards “homos.” The Master of the bar, however, sees things differently. When Jun and Shiki are talking together on the stairs outside the club, the Master says:

You guys! *Amour* between ‘boys’ is prohibited! My goodness, what would we do if such a thing was seen by the customers! The club might become known as a bar full of queens. (45)

あんたたち！ボーイ同士のアムールは禁止ですよ。マアー、そんなとこお客さんに見られたらどうするの！この店はオネエさんばっかのお店だって思われちゃうでしょう。

While not every client admits to being gay or even bisexual, daily visitor Tsubaki (whose name means camellia) is not only proudly gay, but has his own highly developed theory of homosexuality. He is known for his “flower speech”; when he gets drunk he holds forth in a lisping soliloquy in which he says that “we are the chosen ones, flowers, so to speak”:

But please imagine it, a world in which not even a single flower blooms; it’s totally dark, right? *That’s* why Heaven made us, it created us to ensure that flowers aren’t eradicated from this world; most varieties, right, they make children or they make families, they fulfil their meagre lives, but you know, these are the varieties that have been on the ground and have flourished from the beginning, varieties that were created to produce offspring in an endless cycle of death and rebirth, but you know, we’re different, we’re a variety that was chosen and sown by Heaven, we were chosen and sent to supply the flowers and beauty in this world, you know... (73-74)
だって想像してごらんなさい、一輪の花も咲かない世界を、真っ暗闇でしよう？ だから天は私たちを創ったの、この世の中に花を絶やさないように私たちを創造したの、多くの種はね、子供を作るなり家庭を作るなりして、ささやかなその人生をまっとうするわ、でもね、それは最初から地上にあって地上で繁栄する種なの、子孫を残すべく創られた輪廻の種なの、けどね、私たちは違う、私たちは天によって蒔かれた選ばれた種なの、この世の中に美と花を供給すべく遣わされた選ばれた天の種のよね……。

Tsubaki goes on to explain that Heaven has designated gays as people who can never experience the happiness of family and children,\(^6^5\) as people who must be like strangers without a single relative, that is to say, lonely. The reward, he believes, is that loneliness is the source of all creation, because loneliness leads to beauty and gays are messengers of Heaven’s love. To prove his point, he adduces Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Tchaikovsky, and Plato, all of whom have been cited by modern-day observers arguing for links between contemporary gay identity and figures in the historical past.\(^6^6\)

\(^6^5\) This is a theme that recurs in several of the films I discuss in the following chapter: in Hasshu! the two gay protagonists must overcome precisely this prejudice about their place in the world, while in Mezon do Himiko and Hatsukoi we see the toll that societal prejudice takes on the families and children of gay people.

\(^6^6\) Other Western historical figures mentioned in the novel include Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975), a gay Italian film director who may have been murdered by a seventeen year-old hustler; French poet Paul Verlaine (1844-1896); and Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), with whom Verlaine had a lengthy affair. Indeed, in one scene Jun is reminded of Rimbaud’s “Lettre du voyant” (The Letter of the Seer), which he wrote to his friend, poet Paul Demeny (1844-1918), in 1871. The letter explains Rimbaud’s thoughts on the future of poetry, and bears a striking similarity to Jun’s own experience:
In the final scene in the novel, in the Epilogue, Jun has been hired by a man who wants to dress him as a woman. Here, Jun’s transformation becomes complete. First the man removes the few stray hairs growing around the naturally hairless Jun’s “Eden,” then dresses him in a mini-skirt, a blouse and stockings, and expertly makes up his face. In the mirrors that cover every surface in the room Jun sees not himself, but an “idiot girl . . . a pathetic, dim-witted girl” (236). As the man—a yakuza with a dragon tattooed on his back—raises Jun’s legs and his white undergarments droop “like a white flag of surrender,” he begins to see the image as erotic. Random thoughts run through Jun’s mind: “His outrageous acts stripped her naked and left her in a pitiful state—or was it what she desired?” (237). Then the man injects them both with shabu (methamphetamine) and as Jun is overtaken by desire, his “heart is chipped away gradually, and [his] mind and body gradually become one” (239). In the novel’s final lines, the man asks Jun if it feels good: “I just, just cried out, ‘Yeah, really, really good! . . . there was no lie in this feeling’” (240).  

\textit{YES YES YES} is thus a journey of self-discovery: although Jun sets out to destroy himself, he paradoxically becomes whole, when in the last lines of the story his body and mind finally become one. The way in which Jun attempts to break himself down is to be degraded by being

\begin{quote}
The Poet makes himself a seer by a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses. All forms of love, suffering, and madness. He searches himself. He exhausts all poisons in himself and keeps only their quintessences. Unspeakable torture where he needs all his faith, all his superhuman strength, where he becomes among all men the great patient, the great criminal, the one accursed—and the supreme Scholar!—Because he reaches the unknown! Since he cultivated his soul, rich already, more than any man! He reaches the unknown, and when, bewildered, he ends by losing the intelligence of his visions, he has seen them. Let him die as he leaps through unheard of and unnamable [sic] things: other horrible workers will come; they will begin from the horizons where the other one collapsed! (Fowlie 377).
\end{quote}

\footnote{Paul McCarthy’s translation of this line skilfully brings in the novel’s title: “All I can do is cry out, ‘Yes. Yes. Yes. It feels so good!’ For once, it was no lie” (349).}
feminized, and throughout the story he is constantly linked with women, often abused, wretched, or debased women. In the end, however, he has accepted his femininity: it is not until he overcomes the prejudice that links femininity and abjection, and fully embraces the “feminine” role of being penetrated by a man, that he can feel sexual pleasure and even a sense of being complete.

Furthermore, although he initially does not seem to be gay, and he disavows any enthusiasm for “those interests,” Jun unequivocally links himself with the gay world by referring to his own body in terms of flowers and gardens, an explicit reference to the “flower speech” of Tsubaki. Similarly, in the final scene Jun has finally overcome the barriers in what on the surface appeared to be his perfect life and has finally found pleasure, desire, and transformation, and harmony between his body and mind, symbolizing both gay identity and coming out.

2.6 Yoshida Shūichi’s Saigo no Musuko

Yoshida Shūichi (born in Nagasaki in 1968) has won multiple literary awards for both “pure literature” (junbungaku) and “popular literature” (taishū bungaku). His themes include unconventional lives and lifestyles, the city (often Tokyo), and complex relationships between people. He won his first award, the Bungakukai Prize for New Writers,\(^{68}\) for Saigo no Musuko in 1997; the novel was also considered for Japan’s most prestigious and coveted literary award, the Akutagawa Prize,\(^{69}\) which he went on to win in 2002 for Pāku Raifu (Park Life). In the same

\(^{68}\) The Bungakukai Prize for New Writers was established in 1955 by Bungei Shunjū. Previously unpublished manuscripts are considered twice yearly, with the winning entry appearing in Bungakukai magazine and a cash award of 500,000 yen (“Bungakukai Shinjinshō”).

\(^{69}\) The Akutagawa Prize is the most prestigious Japanese literary award in terms of both social recognition and commercial value (Abe El-Khoury 53). It was established in 1935 by Kikuchi
year he also won the Yamamoto Prize\textsuperscript{70} for the novel \textit{Parëdo} (Parade), which was released as a feature film by director Yukisada Isao starring Hayashi Kento, Fujiwara Tatsuya, Kanjiya Shihori, and Karina in 2010. In 2007, Yoshida won both the Mainichi Shuppan Culture Prize\textsuperscript{71} and the Osaragi Jirō Prize\textsuperscript{72} for \textit{Akunin}, which was subsequently published in English as \textit{Villain}, his only work currently available in English translation. \textit{Akunin} also became Yoshida’s seventh work to be released as a film, directed by Lee Sang-il and starring award-winning actor and Basking Lite lead singer Tsumabuki Satoshi (who also has a small role in Kudō Kankurō’s \textit{Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san}, which I discuss in Chapter Four), Fukatsu Eri (Fukatchan), Emoto Akira, Okada Masaki, and Kiki Kirin. Most recently, in 2010, Yoshida won the Shibata Kan, editor of \textit{Bungei Shunjū} magazine, in memory of novelist Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927), who is known in Japan as the “father of the short story.” The Prize is awarded twice yearly to the best purely literary (\textit{junbungaku}) short story by a new author, and the winner receives a pocket watch and a cash award of one million yen, along with virtually guaranteed media stardom. According to Abe El-Khoury, winning the Akutagawa Prize is “like hitting the jackpot,” and even “being merely nominated results in instantaneous credibility and recognition” (4-5). It is difficult to overstate the significance of this prize: it is “so important and so potentially transformative for an author’s career that not winning is often devastating,” and judges have received death threats from writers whose entries were not selected (59).

\textsuperscript{70} The Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize was established in 1987 on the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Shinchō Society for the Promotion of Literary Arts (Shinchō Bungei Shinkō Kai). It is awarded annually to a new work of fiction, and comes with a cash award of one million yen. It is named for the writer born Shimizu Satomu (1903-1967), a prolific novelist and short story writer (“Yamamoto Shūgorō Shō”).

\textsuperscript{71} The Mainichi Shuppan Culture Prize or Award is offered by Mainichi Publishing for outstanding literary and cultural products. It was established in 1947 (“Mainichi Shuppan Bunka Shō”).

\textsuperscript{72} The Osaragi Jirō Prize is named for the author born Nojiri Haruhiko (1897-1973), who was known primarily for historical fiction. Established by the \textit{Asahi Newspaper}, it includes a cash prize of two million yen (“Osaragi Jirō Shō”).
Renzaburō Prize for Yokomichi Yonosuke (Side Street Yonosuke).

Saigo no Musuko (given in English below the Japanese title on the cover of the book as The Last Son) is a first-person account by the unnamed protagonist, who refers to himself as “boku,” a masculine form of the personal pronoun “I.” Although we discover at the end that the entire story has taken place over only a single day, it describes his past, his life, and his relationship with his boyfriend Enma-chan (Little Devil). As in the novel YES YES YES, and in most of the other texts I examine in this dissertation, in Saigo no Musuko homosexuality is conflated with femininity.

The plot is straightforward. The protagonist lives in Tokyo with his boyfriend Enma-chan, the mama-san of a famous and successful okama bar in Shinjuku ni-chōme. Enma-chan talks and behaves in a “womanish” (onnappoku) way, is renowned for his cooking skills, loves to get

73 The Shibata Renzaburō Prize was named for the author born Saitō Renzaburō (1917-1978). It was established in 1988 by Shūeisha, a major publishing company which produces Weekly Shōnen Jump, one of the most popular shōnen (young male) manga (“Shibata Renzaburō Shō”).

74 Yama or Yamarāja is the Hindu god of death, who entered Japanese mythology via Buddhism as Enma (閻魔). Enma is the ruler of Hell (Jigoku) who judges the sins of the dead and is known to pull out the tongues of liars. He is also considered an incarnation of Ksitigarbha (Japanese: Jizō-bosatsu, Ojizō-sama, or Jizō), a bodhisattva of souls suffering in the underworld and, in Japan, a guardian of children, the patron deity of dead babies and aborted foetuses, and one of the most beloved Japanese divinities (“Enma”). Chan is a diminutive form of the suffix –san, usually attached to the names of women and children.

75 While the term mama-san usually denotes the female manager of a mizu shōbai (night time entertainment) establishment—men are usually known as “master” (masutā), as we saw in YES YES YES—it is also used by some male managers of gay establishments, as I discuss in my analysis of the film Mezon do Himiko in Chapter Three.

76 The word okama, which derives from a slang term for buttocks and is therefore a reference to anal sex, usually refers to a gay man who is effeminate and/or cross-dressed (I discuss the term further in Chapter Three). An okama bar could be either a gay bar run or staffed by drag queens, or an establishment staffed by drag queens and transsexual women catering mainly to a straight clientele; Enma-chan’s bar is the former.
drunk and be dramatic, and abhors violence. The narrator, who is onnappokunai (not womanish), comes from a very old Nagasaki family who think he has a successful job in the capital. In fact, his relaxed, elegant life is entirely supported by his boyfriend: he spends his days reading, going for strolls, and having baths while Enma-chan cooks for him, and his evenings drinking at the bar while Enma-chan works. While he likes Enma-chan, however, “boku” does not love him. In order to maintain his lifestyle, therefore, the narrator is constantly trying to come up with new schemes to ensure that Enma-chan remains in love with him.

Meanwhile, the narrator’s parents assume that he is living with a woman, and one day his mother shows up unannounced and wants to meet her. In a panic, “boku” convinces his friend, a woman named Sawako, to pose as his girlfriend. All is going well until the mother confesses that since she has come all the way to Tokyo she would like to visit one of those okama bars she has heard about. “Boku,” who is feeling guilty about not introducing Enma-chan to his mother, decides to ask him to come to the hotel to meet her. However, he has no intention of telling his mother the truth, but rather plans to introduce Enma-chan as a sort of representative okama. Enma-chan, believing that he is to be introduced as his boyfriend, suddenly realizes that he no longer wants to be with “boku” and disappears. As the story ends the protagonist, certain that Enma-chan will return, has decided to pass the time by viewing his diaries while he waits.

Despite this simple plot, Saigo no Musuko has an extremely complicated narrative structure. Although it is not laid out as such—there are no dated entries, titled or numbered sections, chapters, or other structural elements in the physical text that suggest a journal—everything that happens in the novel comes from the protagonist’s diaries, some of which he is reading as the story progresses. We discover, however, that the protagonist has actually been watching his video diary throughout the story, and in this video diary he is reading his written
diaries both through the lens of the video camera—and, at other times, on the camera’s screen—as well as watching scenes of his life which were filmed as they happened.

In addition to this the action does not progress chronologically but rather mirrors the protagonist’s flipping backwards and forwards in his diaries. As readers, therefore, everything we learn is interposed through writing (in the narrator’s written diaries), the camera lens (as he reads the diaries through the camera’s eye), and the video screen (as he watches his recorded written and videotaped diaries), and ultimately through the narrator himself. As a consequence, the protagonist-narrator is at times oddly removed from his own life, and although we do occasionally get to see other characters (albeit mediated through the screen and the narrator’s reportage) everything we learn about him is filtered through several layers of his own interpretation.

All of these mediating, reflecting, and reduplicating images suggest mirrors, and I would argue that the central device used in the novel is mirroring: written diaries read through a camera lens or screen; reflections of people in looking-glasses and other surfaces captured on video; the protagonist watching himself on tape (and even writing about watching himself on tape)—these techniques are reflected in the story, in which various characters and relationships mirror one another, some more and some less clearly or manifestly, suggesting possibilities and consequences that the narrator himself does not, cannot, or is unwilling to see.

As the novel begins, “boku” is reading his written diaries through the lens of his video camera; he is going back several months in the documents carefully erasing with correction fluid somebody’s real name, replacing every instance with the nickname The President, and admiring his own handwriting as he reads. We soon learn that The President, a friend of Enma-chan and the narrator and a regular at Enma-chan’s bar, was beaten to death when he was discovered
performing oral sex on another man at K Park, which is known as a gay cruising area. But, because whenever he went there he purposely carried no identification (in order to avoid the possibility of blackmail), it took twenty days for his body to be identified. We will learn later that The President’s murder mirrors an earlier attack on another young man who was blinded as a result of a gay bashing at the same park.77

Boku rewinds the tape a little. He watches himself on the tape as he flips through his written diary; his noticeably worsening handwriting indicates the pages where he wrote about The President’s death and about the people who murdered him. On the tape, Boku tears the pages out and buries them in the kitchen rubbish; as the scene ends Boku thinks:

My diary no longer contains what I wrote about the kind of human beings who under the name homogari [gay bashing]78 beat The President to death, the kind of people who I feel disgusted [by] and waste my time just thinking about; the morning after this, those pages were taken out with the trash. (12)

「ホモ狩り」とやらで、大統領を殴り殺した奴らの、相手にするだけ無駄な、考えただけで虫酸が走るような、そんな人間たちのことを書いたページは、この翌朝、生ゴミと一緒に捨てられたのだ。

In other words, the protagonist is attempting to literally rewrite history: by blotting out the victim’s real name and replacing it with a nickname, and by tearing out the pages that contain the

77 In an extraordinary coincidence, the fictional murder of The President in this novel mirrors the later real-life murder, in February 2000, of a young man named Suzuki Shin’ichi in a cruising park in Tokyo known as Yume no Shima. Suzuki was beaten so badly that he was “beyond recognition” and he was ultimately identified using footage from a security camera at a nearby train station (Vincent, “Writing Sexuality” 2-6).

78 Homogari (ホモ狩り) literally means “homo-hunting.” For a discussion of the use of the term homo in Japanese, see Chapter Four.
information about his death, “boku” is not only restoring The President’s anonymity but is erasing his death: he is modifying reality.

In fact, “boku” has long been attempting to modify reality by hiding who he is and manipulating others. When he was in junior high school he had a friend named Ukon who was cool, Western-like, and fashionable, and had a “mountain” of knowledge about music and films that the narrator had never heard of. Ukon was particularly interested in Austrian actor Helmut Berger, a “youth” (seinen) who, according to Ukon, “was favoured by” (chōai sareta) the director Luchino Visconti (26). The uncool (dasai) narrator desperately wanted the other boy to like him and so he tried to copy Ukon’s mannerisms and style of dress, but he was not successful:

At that time, whether it was clothes or entertainment, no matter how desperately I tried to imitate Ukon it was as though I had the words “Made in Japan” attached to me. For example, if Ukon was the real Elvis, I was the “Made in Japan” Elvis. It seems I was raised to see the term “Made in Japan” as an insult. (25)

The image of Japan as uncool/undesirable and the West as cool/desirable is repeated in several important passages and is linked with the narrator’s struggle to reconcile his views on gender and sexuality with the real people who populate his life. For example, he meets many different people at Enma-chan’s bar, but they all strike him, he says, as “very Japanese”:
I think they’re really Japanese. Their worries, their opinions, their worldviews: in one way or another they can [all] be thought of as a symbol of this country. For example, the way being told ‘you’re really not okama-like are you’ has become the highest compliment. (54)

本当に日本人だなぁと思う。彼らの悩みだとか、主張だとか、処世術だとか、何から何までこの国を象徴しているように思えるのだ。たとえば「オカマっぽくないね」と言われるのが最高の褒め言葉になってしまうようなものだ。

In other words, the protagonist is saying that gay people should be more open and free from Japanese norms, and he links this openness and freedom with the West, positioning Japan as a backward Other.

Indeed, the narrator understands this view as both natural and Western. For example, in Enma-chan’s favourite American gay novel there is a passage that stands out for “boku”:

‘When I was dumped by David I just felt like acting blindly! Just about every night I went to that kind of sauna. It didn’t matter who I was blowing: anyone would do. I even did Japanese [guys]. Anyway, it was the worst broken heart of my life.’ When I [“boku”] read that part I was astonished. In the end, in the same way as the man who was saying he hated [Shinjuku] ni-chôme, we are the ones who are making the biggest fools of ourselves. (54-55)

『デビッドにフラれた僕は、もうどうにでもなれ！って感じだった。毎晩のようにその手のサウナに通った。フェラチオする相手なんて誰でもよかった。僕は日本人サとさえヤッた。とにかく、人生最悪の失恋だった』[。] この章を読んで、ぼくは愕然とした。結局、ニ丁目が嫌いだと言っていたあの男
と同じように、自分たちを一番馬鹿にしているのが自分たちなのだ。

Here, our protagonist is referring to a customer who one night tells “boku” and Enma-chan that he really hates Shinjuku ni-chōme because it is filled with men who are “womanish.” The irony, of course, is that “boku” is unable to see that he himself is exactly like this customer. Even as he takes pains to try to present himself as someone who rejects such views, the reader can see that the narrator is actually no different. Just as when he went home in junior high school wearing a red bandanna he purchased at Ukon’s behest and his father kicked him and asked if he was becoming an okama, just as even making instant noodles would result in a scolding from his father, who would say that men do not belong in the kitchen, “boku” sees Enma-chan as woman-like, and therefore treats him as he imagines men (should) treat women.

Yet the reader can also see that even the narrator himself suffers because of such views. In a short passage he suddenly addresses the reader directly: “I want you to try to imagine for a moment the young boy, forced by his father to wear a kendo uniform, yearning for the films of Visconti” (27). In other words, the narrator is completely different on the inside than he is on the outside, different from the way his father wanted him to be. One pictures an almost photographic image: a grainy snapshot of a boy in a martial arts uniform, posing as something he is not while secretly yearning for films he has never seen by a foreign director about whom he knows nothing, except for the hint that his relationship with one of his actors was somehow unusual—all this strongly suggests a teenager’s growing self-awareness of being gay and of the

79 The character uses the term onna no kusatta yō na yatsu, literally “guys who are like rotten women,” which is to say men who behave more like women than like proper men. Amusingly, it seems to have escaped his notice that he is sharing this view with the drag queen mama-san of an okama bar. For his part, Enma-chan largely ignores him, murmuring in exaggeratedly feminine language, “I wonder if you might be right” (sō kashira nē); later, he tells the narrator that the man is one of his best customers, coming to the bar at least once a week (54).
need to be closeted.

In fact, although his friend Ukon *is* gay, the narrator himself is not: about halfway through the novel we learn that he is bisexual, as is revealed in a pair of mirrored triangular relationships: in school, “boku” was attracted to a girl named Tomoko who was in love with Ukon, and before “boku” was with Enma-chan he was with Sawako; although he is now with Enma-chan, Sawako and the narrator begin having sex again near the end of the book.

Along with mirrored relationships, every character mirrors at least one other. Ukon shares characteristics with Sawako (they are both ambitious and independent) and Enma-chan (they are both feminine, and both support “boku,” buy him clothes, and introduce him to gay life). Enma-chan shares similarities with both Sawako and with the narrator’s mother: like Sawako, he is ambitious and successful and has a sexual relationship with the narrator, and both abandon “boku” in the end; like “boku’s” mother, he is a good cook and leaves the man who depends on him. For his part, the narrator tries to mirror Ukon and arguably Helmet Berger as well in an effort to be cool and mysterious in order to be loved by Enma-chan—but the one he most closely resembles is his own father: an essentially useless man who has rigid notions of gender roles and tries to act “like a man,” but needs a woman because he is unable take care of himself.

Besides mirroring, a consequence of foregrounding the video camera in this novel is that the idea of performance is emphasized, particularly when we are viewing characters through the camera lens. The narrator’s mother and father perform an ideal traditional Japanese couple: he is “just strong” (*tada tsuyoi dake*), she is “just beautiful” (*tada utsukushii dake*) (46). Enma-chan performs as an *okama* by being woman-like and by sounding strange when he uses masculine speech patterns, but also by embodying the traits of both modern men (enjoying cooking) and modern women (being independent or self-reliant), as reported in a magazine special he is
reading in one scene (58). Sawako performs traditional femininity by “obtaining” “a marriage that will make her college friends jealous” (66), but simultaneously performs modern femininity by proclaiming her dislike of cooking (much to the dismay of the narrator’s mother, who declares pitiful a man who has a wife who hates to cook). And Ukon is literally a performer (he grows up to be an actor), but he also performs gayness by being knowledgeable about fashion, music, the arts, and Tokyo’s gay scene.

However, while the other characters perform traditional (the mother and father) or modern (Sawako) identities, or perform their true natures (Enma-chan and Ukon are both unabashed in their respective gay personas), the narrator performs in order to hide who he really is and/or to manipulate others. As a teenager he copied Ukon to try to ingratiate himself with the other boy, and as an adult he attempts to perform in ways that he thinks will be seen as brave (for example, after The President is murdered he spends several nights at K Park ostensibly looking for gay-bashers, although he never goes to any area that might actually be dangerous); and manly (he never helps Enma-chan with the cooking); and mysterious (he often refuses to say what he is thinking); and that he thinks will make Enma-chan love him.

While Enma-chan initially seems to accept this treatment—that is, he seems to accept that because he is an okama it is natural for a non-womanish man to treat him like a woman—we see hints that his view is changing. In a brief but important scene, when the narrator is on his way to see his mother at the hotel, Enma-chan tells him that he “mustn’t be cold-hearted to a woman who’s feeling down” (72). Although “boku” thinks that Enma-chan is talking about the mother, it becomes clear that he is actually talking about himself. We realize that Enma-chan has seen parts of the narrator’s video diary where his mother is saying that “boku” is just like his father, and has probably been struck by a particular scene in which the family is watching a television
programme on “women’s independence” (onna no jiritsu) during which a female scholar shouts “Women are not housemaids!” (42).

In the final scene, “boku” has decided to read his diary. He turns to the page where Enma-chan’s name first appears and carefully erases it, replacing it with his real name. By the time he finishes erasing every “Enma-chan,” his boyfriend will surely have returned.

Like Jun in YES YES YES, Enma-chan has also transformed, and he has also overcome the barriers that were preventing him from seeing “boku’s” true nature. Yoshida holds up traditional gender roles for scrutiny in this novel. “Boku” is masculine, and he treats his partner like his old-fashioned father treats his mother: as little better than a housemaid. The womanish Enma-chan, meanwhile, initially accepts this treatment. However, when the protagonist’s mother comes to town, Enma-chan finally realizes that “boku” does not treat him well and does not love him, he overcomes his own prejudices about what it means to be a feminine gay man, and he makes the decision to leave.

“Boku,” on the other hand, does not overcome his prejudices, even as we see that they have been a source of distress in his own life. Because he is unable to overcome his old-fashioned views, and because he fails to treat the man who supports him as an equal, in the end the protagonist is unable to become a fully-fledged adult: he is left in an infantile state, alone, and wailing with hunger. While Enma-chan has seen the reality of his situation in the mirrors “boku” has relentlessly held up, has successfully overcome the preconceptions that were holding him back, and has become stronger and freer as a result, the protagonist has failed to understand what he has seen, and has instead reverted to his childish habit of trying to modify reality to protect his own distorted views.
2.7 Hanamura Mangetsu’s *Burūsu*

Hanamura Mangetsu (born Yoshikawa Ichirō in Tokyo in 1955) won the Shōsetsu Subaru Award for New Writers\(^{80}\) for his debut novel *Goddo Bureisu Monogatari* (God Bless) in 1989. Almost a decade later, in 1998, he won the Akutagawa Prize for *Gerumaniamu no Yoru* (Germanium Nights), a first-person account of a Japanese orphan brought up in a Jesuit monastery who in his early twenties returns to the cloister to escape punishment for murder. Also in 1998, he won the Yoshikawa Eiji Award\(^{81}\) for *Minadzuki*,\(^{82}\) which was adapted the following year as a film directed by Nakamura Masaya starring Okuda Eiji, Yoshimoto Takami, and Kitamura Kazuki. Hanamura’s themes include religion, sex, and sexual violence, and several of his novels feature gay male characters.

At 566 pages *Burūsu* (Blues) is by far the longest novel I discuss in this dissertation. Although the protagonist is straight, homosexuality is central to the plot of this story, and the gay antagonist functions as an essential catalyst in the main character’s development. Unlike Hiruma’s *YES YES YES* and Yoshida’s *Saigo no Musuko*, in both of which homosexuality is presented as explicitly feminizing, the main gay character in *Burūsu* is not only a yakuza—a gangster, one of most masculine stereotypes in the Japanese popular imagination—but functions

\(^{80}\) The Shōsetsu Subaru Award for New Writers was also established by Shūeisha in 1988. It is awarded for novels (“Shōsetsu Subaru Shinjinshō”).

\(^{81}\) The Yoshikawa Eiji Award was established by Kōdansha in 1967, along with the Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for Culture, to commemorate the work of novelist Yoshikawa Eiji (1892-1962). It includes a cash prize of three million yen (“Yoshikawa Eiji Shō”).

\(^{82}\) *Minadzuki*, written with the characters water, none, and month (水無月), is the traditional name for the month of June, but for the title of this novel the author uses the homophonous characters all/everything and month (皆月) instead.
as a symbolic father figure whom the protagonist must overcome in order to transition into maturity.

Set in a flophouse area (doyagai) in Yokohama’s Kotobuki-chō, Burūsu has an involute plot featuring various complicated triangular relationships and, as befits a story concerning a yakuza, rather a lot of violence and revenge murders. As the story opens the scene is the East China Sea in November; aboard the oil tanker Kōei-maru, fearsome yakuza Tokuyama, who is supervising a rebellious sludge-cleaning crew, has cut off the finger of one of their number, Ken, using the Japanese sword he habitually carries, a blade with the grand moniker Tsuda Echizen no Kami Sukehiro. We soon learn that Tokuyama is responsible for the death of another crewman, a left-wing radical Korean-Japanese named Sai, and that he is in love with a third, protagonist Murakami, a failed guitarist.

As the narrative flashes forwards and backwards in time, a complex web of relationships emerges. Whilst Tokuyama is in love with Murakami, his friend Aya, a half Japanese blues singer at a bar called Mojo, loves Tokuyama. Tokuyama, however, views her as the only woman he likes and one of the only people with whom he is at all close (following a failed attempt at sex in one scene, Tokuyama muses that he wishes she were a man). He tells Aya that he is in love with Murakami, and admits that he caused Sai’s death because Sai and Murakami had started to socialize “as intimately as homos” (45). Unbeknownst to Tokuyama, however, Aya is herself

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83 Tsuda Echizen no Kami Sukehiro (津田越前守助広) was one of the professional names used by the adopted son of famed swordsmith Soboro Sukehiro; he resided in Settsu Province, modern-day Osaka. A famous sword maker in his own right, he lived from 1637-1682, and surviving examples of his work have been designated Important Cultural Properties. For a detailed discussion of Tsuda Echizen no Kami Sukehiro’s life and works see Iida.

84 それこそホモのように親密に付き合っていた。
in love with Murakami; she does not reveal this to the gangster, but as the story progresses he becomes increasingly jealous of their closeness.

It quickly becomes evident that Tokuyama makes no effort to hide his love for Murakami. In a flashback, aboard the Kōei-maru shortly before he murders Sai, we see him confessing his love and, in consternation when Murakami does not respond and simply looks away, threatening the other man with his sword. It seems that both Tokuyama’s crew aboard the tanker and his fellow gangsters are well aware of his desire for Murakami: when Murakami gets into a fight in Kotobuki-chō, low-ranking yakuza Yagi, knowing that his boss is in love with Murakami and hoping to prevent him from getting into trouble, intervenes and delivers the fatal blow. Yagi pays for this loyalty to Tokuyama with his life: as he later has sex with his sometime girlfriend Miyako, a man bursts in, attacks Yagi, and cuts off his penis, leading to his death.85

Against this backdrop of violence and murder, little by little we learn the details of Murakami’s life. As his father was frequently away he was raised almost entirely by his mother, an incredibly beautiful blind shamisen expert who made her living teaching the instrument. After playing her shamisen, Murakami’s mother would masturbate, and she would make him suck her breasts and would use other parts of his body to enhance her sexual pleasure as she did so. In junior high school, he began having sex with a woman who was supposed to be teaching him guitar; when she fell pregnant, she quit teaching and got married. He dropped out of school and began living with a young medical student; Murakami’s mother, jealous of the relationship,

85 Although not explicitly stated it is implied that this man (who is Miyako’s current boyfriend) is also a gangster, and has attacked Yagi both in revenge for killing his associate in the street fight and over the love triangle with Miyako. The man is evidently new to town and is not aware of Tokuyama’s reputation for viciousness, and the danger he is therefore putting himself in by causing the death of Yagi, a member of Tokuyama’s gang and the man who protected Murakami. Tokuyama subsequently takes revenge by calmly slitting both Miyako’s and the man’s throats.
forced him to break up with the woman. At eighteen he began working at Misawa Air Base, a U.S. Military facility in northern Japan, where he learned English and fell in love with jazz and blues. He became famous around the base for his guitar-playing, even as he was treated by the white inhabitants as a “yellow monkey.” Soon, he went to the U.S. to pursue the blues, travelling around the ghettos from New Orleans to Chicago, where he began living with a black woman and playing in a famous band. Before long, however, he began drinking heavily, and although skilled at playing guitar, was no longer able to perform. At the age of twenty-seven he was deported back to Japan and spent a year in a rehabilitation centre.

Murakami’s life history is interesting for a number of reasons. The figure of the blind shamisen player is a traditional character in Japanese literature and art ranging from Edo-era woodblock prints to contemporary anime. Here, though, instead of learning the shamisen at her knee Murakami learned about sex, and instead of himself becoming a shamisen virtuoso, implicitly rejected his mother by taking up an instrument and a style of music associated with American rather than Japanese culture. However, Murakami does credit his technical ability on the guitar to the shamisen expert’s blood which flows through his veins, and he says that he did learn that he could discover people’s true character by observing the reactions they had when they first realized that his mother was blind: he saw her as a “mirror that reflected people’s hearts” (357).

86 Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s 1933 short story “Shunkinshō” (translated as “A Portrait of Shunkin”) is an extremely well-known and still popular example which has been adapted for both stage and screen; it concerns a very beautiful but very cruel blind female shamisen player. Nishizawa Akio’s award-winning anime NITABOH the Shamisen Master (Nitabō: Tsugaru-Jamisen Shiso Gaibun, 2004), which tells the (probably apocryphal) story of the blind male founder of the Tsugaru-jamisen style—the same style practiced by Murakami’s mother—is a more recent example.
Murakami reports that his father was “awful” (hidoi). Had his mother not been blind, he says, she would never have chosen him. He was a sly and shameful character, but he was “good at sex,” taking a long time and leaving his wife “in ecstasy” every night (358). However, he was also an absent father, and it was his absence that led Murakami’s mother, who would become aroused after playing her shamisen, to turn to the young Murakami for her sexual needs.

In classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the Oedipus complex is a stage of psychosexual development that occurs during the Phallic stage of childhood. Named for the mythical Greek king and tragic hero who was destined to marry his mother and murder his father, the Oedipus complex describes a male child’s unconscious desire to sexually possess his mother. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) theorized that successfully resolving the Oedipus complex and moving through the Latency and Genital stages were necessary steps in developing a mature and gender-appropriate heterosexual identity. According to Freud’s schema, the son becomes an adult by (symbolically) killing his father. The son desires to possess his mother/his mother’s body, but this desire is frustrated by the presence and authority of the father, who has the power to deny the son access to his woman. In a successful resolution of the Oedipus complex the son rebels against the father, acquires his own woman, and thus proceeds to proper heterosexual adulthood.

In *Burūsu*, the Oedipal schema is distorted. His father’s absence meant that Murakami did

87 The word can also mean “cruel,” “terrible,” or “violent.”

88 For a discussion of Freud’s theories of the Oedipus complex and childhood sexuality, see Heller, *Freud A to Z*. The Electra complex was proposed by Carl Jung (1875-1961) as a female analogue to the Oedipus complex, although the myth for which it is named is not precisely cognate to that of Oedipus Rex. Electra is the princess of Argos, daughter of King Agamemnon, who helps her brother Orestes to kill their mother Clytemnestra and stepfather Aegisthus in revenge for their murder of Agamemnon. See Scott, *Electra After Freud: Myth and Culture.*
in fact sexually possess his mother, albeit incompletely and temporarily: incompletely because of his very young age, and temporarily because, as the mother’s sexual desire became more intense, she abandoned the son who could not fully satisfy her needs and turned instead to an adult, a strange man, and “Murakami and his mother’s honeymoon [mitsugetsu] came to an end” (367). By preventing Murakami’s access to the mother the other man usurped the father’s proper Oedipal role, but rather than becoming a substitute father against whom Murakami could rebel he simply disappeared when the real father returned, leaving Murakami without a father figure to overcome and therefore without a path via which to proceed to heterosexual maturity.

We see Murakami’s frustrated development in his subsequent relationships. First, as a junior high school student, he began having sex with a woman. Although this could be understood as a move to adulthood, their music teacher/student relationship mirrors the relationship with his mother. And just as his mother rejected him by taking an adult male lover, when the teacher conceived Murakami’s child she stopped seeing Murakami, stopped teaching, and married another (adult) man. When Murakami dropped out of school and started living with a different woman, another seemingly adult arrangement, his mother intervened and forced him to end the relationship. He was treated as an inferior—symbolically, as a child—by the white Americans on the base where he worked, and his sexual relationship with Aya seems to revolve mostly around mutual masturbation rather than penetrative vaginal intercourse, the *sine qua non* of adult heterosexual male sexuality. Indeed, masturbation, an “immature” form of sexual behaviour associated with Freud’s Phallic stage, is the most commonly described form of sex in the novel.

Freud associated fear of emasculation with anxiety about castration (loss of the *physical* phallus), which he located in the Phallic stage and linked with the Oedipus complex. In the
interpretation of Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), the phallus serves a variety of purposes; among them, it is both the possession of the father and, the child learns, the object of the desire of the mother. Although Murakami’s father may have possessed the phallus before he went away (we recall that he brought the mother to ecstasy every night), I would suggest that in Murakami’s subconscious this was usurped by the strange man who took the father’s place in his mother’s bed, and who subsequently disappeared, taking the phallus with him.89

Indeed, it becomes increasingly clear that in this story it is Tokuyama who possesses the “phallus,” both metaphorically, in terms of his power, and symbolically, in the form of his sword. Tokuyama resembles a father in several ways: he is older than Murakami, and he is balding; he has authority and exerts control over Murakami (along with a large number of other men) as his boss; he is respected and feared about town; he and his underlings try to protect Murakami, including by preventing him from getting into trouble, by attacking those who hurt him, and by trying to get him out of jail; and—although in their own ways both men’s attempts are unsuccessful—it is Tokuyama who first has “sex” with Aya, mirroring Murakami’s relationships with both his mother and his father.90

Furthermore, aside from the sword’s actual power as weapon, it is clear that for Tokuyama violence and murder are linked with sex. We learn partway through the novel that Ken, whose finger Tokuyama has severed in a symbolic castration in the opening scene, not only strongly resembles Murakami but is living with Tokuyama in an implied sexual relationship. After

89 Although we are told that Murakami’s real father returned, he is never mentioned again, and both he and the mother are only referred to in the past tense, suggesting either that they are dead, or that Murakami and they are no longer in contact.

90 This association becomes even clearer near the end of the novel, when it emerges that Tokuyama’s mother resembled Aya.
avenging Yagi’s death by murdering Miyako and her boyfriend, a distraught Tokuyama, heartbroken at seeing the man he loves and the only woman he trusts arm in arm, tells them that he would have killed Murakami and Aya then and there had he not already despatched two other people that night, suggesting both a psychological and a sexual refractory period. In an even more explicit example, when he later learns that Sachio, the guitarist in Aya’s band who is in love with Aya and jealous of Murakami, has participated in having Murakami falsely arrested for drug possession, Tokuyama, his sword in his hand, spontaneously ejaculates as he vows revenge; like the sword, however, this time his erection does not subside until Tokuyama has committed the symbolic sexual act of murder and the physical sexual violence of rape: first he kills Sagara, the man who forced the drugs on Murakami, with a single gash. Next he ties up and first rapes Sachio, telling him this is the penalty for selling out Murakami, and then he murders him.

The turning point in the story comes soon after these killings, when Murakami is released from jail. Aya tells him that both Sagara and Sachio are missing, and explains that this is how Tokuyama shows his love. She says that Tokuyama really loves Murakami—the one he most wants to kill is probably Aya herself. Murakami suddenly realizes that the result of Tokuyama’s love has been death: “the love of one man for another has been sublimated into murder” (500). Murakami makes a decision: he tells Tokuyama that he will join him on his next job the following morning aboard another tanker, the Kōfuku-maru. He buys a gun.

We have seen how the protagonist has been unable to transition to proper adulthood, and as he stands on the deck of the Kōfuku-maru the next evening, in the novel’s penultimate scene, he thinks back on his life: he finds he cannot picture Aya, the woman with whom he has come close

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91 男が男を愛して、それを殺人という形で昇華したのだ。
to having an adult relationship. He recalls the mother who used his “immature” body; the older girl with whom he clumsily attempted sex in junior high school, the “small protuberance” (chīsai tokki) he tried to push inside her only to ejaculate on her sweatshirt. He remembers the first time he stepped on stage, in front of an audience of black American soldiers: his immature technique; the way the soldiers responded to his guitar-playing, driven by the blood of his blind mother. He believed he had found himself in performing, and the guitar became his only way to express his emotions. But the more he played, the more his playing became automatic and the less he could find meaning in it. He convinced himself that a Japanese was unable to play “black people’s music,” and began to drink in an effort to ease his frustration at being unable to overcome his immaturity. He saw this immaturity reflected in Sai; unlike Murakami, though, Sai was not self-conscious about his inexperience. Murakami was jealous of Sai, but came to love him too. Yet while Sachio was also a lot like Murakami, Murakami hated him for it. Murakami thinks about Tokuyama, “the homosexual who murdered Sai and Sachio, who were like offshoots of Murakami himself” (529). He thinks, “A teenager’s immaturity [aokusasa] is charming and valuable. But someone over thirty [clinging to immaturity] is dangerous. [I] was unable to become an adult. [I] completely missed the chance” (527).

Tokuyama and Murakami both go out on deck. Murakami feels that he has finally reached the test that will bring him to adulthood: he must attack the barrier called “Tokuyama.” Throughout the dramatic, sexually suggestive scene, Tokuyama refers to him as Murakami-chan,

92 Osanai or itokenai (幼い) can mean “very young,” “childish” or “immature.” This word and the term aokusai (青臭い), meaning “immature,” or “inexperienced,” are used frequently in the novel, and occur repeatedly in this scene.

93 自分の分身のような崔とサチオを殺した同性愛者。
using the diminutive suffix often appended to children’s names. Murakami has come prepared
with his own phallic symbol, but once again he is inadequate: Tokuyama puts his sword to his
beloved’s throat, and Murakami raises his gun and pulls the trigger—but has forgotten to
deactivate the safety lock. He flees clumsily with Tokuyama in pursuit and impotently throws
the gun at Tokuyama who tosses it overboard, laughs at him and calls him stupid. Tokuyama
slashes at Murakami, his sword strikes a pipe and breaks, and the two men begin fighting with
their bare hands. Tokuyama is winning. He straddles Murakami, punching him in the face and
whispering “finally, little Murakami will become mine” (543).

Tokuyama’s hands are around Murakami’s neck, but suddenly the pressure is gone: one of
the crew has broken a bottle over Tokuyama’s head. The others are lifting him, dragging him to
the rail, throwing him overboard. Murakami tries to stop them; he shouts Tokuyama’s name.
Murakami sees Tokuyama’s eyes: they are just like his own. Tokuyama murmurs “Murakami-
chan”; he tumbles overboard and sinks beneath the waves. The workers carry Murakami to
Tokuyama’s cabin, where he passes out. In the final scene, Murakami opens the front door of
Mojo. Aya is on stage, singing “Love in Vain.” He closes the door and walks away.

While both Jun in YES YES YES and Enma-chan in Saigo no Musuko are feminized,
Tokuyama is one of the most masculine characters in all of the texts I examine. Yet, perhaps
even more than Jun, whose representation remains somewhat ambiguous even at the end of YES
YES YES, Tokuyama’s is difficult to read as a positive depiction of a gay man. Although he is
not stereotyped as feminine or as non-threatening, fashionable and funny, he is certainly mad,

94 Chan would also be used for a female lover, but whilst it might be appended by a father to his
young son’s name, the masculine suffix kun is more likely to be used in the case of an adult male.

95 やっと村上ちゃん……俺のものになるね。
bad and dangerous to know—a cold-blooded and ruthless murderer and rapist whose love for Murakami might better be described as an obsession.

Yet in spite of his extreme flaws, Tokuyama is paradoxically honourable: he is true to himself and to his love throughout the novel, he does his best to protect Murakami, and he heroically takes on the Oedipal father role and sacrifices himself so that Murakami can become a man. While it is not clear that this attempt has been successful—Murakami does not get the girl in the end, and we do not see him overcoming his inability to play and moving on to a flourishing music career—Tokuyama has nevertheless fulfilled his role.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced literary representations of and historical approaches to male-male sexuality, starting with the pre-modern period and ending with Boys’ Love manga and contemporary literature, before turning to specific examples of contemporary novels featuring gay male characters.

Whilst there is some disagreement about where the very first Japanese literary allusions to male-male eroticism may be found, by the Edo period such representations were explicit and common, spanning the gamut from mainstream art and literature to productions for kabuki and noh theatre, and male-male sexuality was understood and expressed within the concept of shudō, “the way of youths,” a paederastic tradition of spiritual, romantic, sexual relationships between adult men and non-adult males. Much of the writing on shudō in the Edo period concerned the complicated etiquette surrounding the practice.

This tradition had already declined by the advent of the modern period in 1868, however. With modernity came changing understandings of gender roles, family, and sexuality.
Sexologists drew with enthusiasm on the works of European psychiatrists and sexologists; Western legal and medical discourses were also imported to Japan. Although homosexuality began to be understood as a sexual orientation, and one not limited to male sexuality, it was also reimagined as pathological, and conflated with femininity and trans identities. Although the “perverse” began to find a voice in pre-war sexological journals, with the ramping up to war came the enforcement of an increasingly heteronormative sexuality for all Japanese; after the war, however, there was a loosening of such attitudes, and the word “gay” (gei) entered the lexicon by the 1950s, a decade in which increasing interest in homosexuality and gay culture led to a gay boom in the mainstream media.

Even as the shudō tradition had declined or disappeared by the end of the Edo era, through the subsequent Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa periods mainstream authors including Mori Ōgai, Kawabata Yasunari, Natsume Sōseki, Edogawa Rampo, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Mishima Yukio and Ōe Kenzaburō continued to write about love and sex between males, in some cases using gay male characters to embody themes like grotesquerie or national abjection.

A second gay boom occurred in the 1990s, and this time media interest was combined with increasing output in a variety of fictional genres including novels and films. While in contemporary Japan images of male-male eroticism are found most frequently in yaoi (or Boys’ Love) manga, as I explain such manga are usually considered to be aimed at a straight female, rather than a gay male, audience. However, gay male characters continue to be found in mainstream literary productions, and, as Schalow points out, “a distinctly ‘gay male [Japanese] literature,’” including works by authors such as Takahashi Mutsuo and Nishino Kōji, has evolved.

In this chapter I focused on three recent novels featuring gay male characters: Hiruma
Hisao’s *YES YES YES*; Yoshida Shūichi’s *Saigo no Musuko*; and Hanamura Mangetsu’s *Burūsu*. Each deals with some kind of transition on the part of one or more characters, and each features a protagonist who is in some way immature. In *YES YES YES*, protagonist Jun—arguably the least explicitly gay character in the three novels—is on a journey to find himself which culminates in his embracing his homosexuality; in order to do so, he must acknowledge and embrace his femininity, and he does this by spending a year trying to destroy himself by selling his body to the male patrons of a host club. For Jun, who is genuinely immature (he has only recently dropped out of high school), the final release comes when he literally surrenders to a client, a yakuza who has dressed him as a girl, injected him with shabu, and made his “mind and body . . . become one” (239).

The significance of the terms narcissus (penis) and Eden (anus) become clear at the very end of the novel: Jun has taken to heart the “flower speech” of client Tsubaki (whose name, we recall, means camellia), and has discovered his commonality with Michelangelo, Rimbaud, and all the other (all Western) figures that Tsubaki links with gay identity. By referring to his penis as a flower, and his anus—the source of the pleasure he finally experiences in the final scene—as a garden, Jun explicitly links himself with Tsubaki, with the wider gay community, and with Tsubaki’s theory of homosexuality, which despite its rather depressing understanding of gay men’s role in life (i.e.: that they are born to suffer) also represents an assertion that gay people are a special, vital, useful part of society: they are “chosen by Heaven,” and they bring beauty to the world.

While Jun is literally immature, the protagonists of both *Saigo no Musuko* and *Burūsu* are in states of figurative immaturity. In *Musuko* it is the unnamed narrator “boku,” a bisexual, who
has not successfully transitioned to adulthood. A lazy, shiftless, and cowardly schemer, he is supported by his successful gay boyfriend Enma-chan, whom he views almost like a mother. This is made explicit in the text in several times, the first a few pages into novel:

Enma-chan holding the video camera looked just like my own wife holding a baby, and I remembered unconsciously turning towards the camera and nearly saying “I’m your papa!” (15)

ビデオを抱えた間魔ちゃんが、どうも赤ちゃんを抱いた自分の奥さんのような気がして、ついそのビデオに向かって「パパでちゅよぉ」と言いそうになったことを思い出した。

Later, the resemblance is made even more explicit when the narrator muses that Enma-chan looks “entirely like a mother” (33). The way that he films Enma-chan is mirrored in the way that the narrator films his own mother when he visits her over the new year holidays; this resemblance is reduplicated and mirrored again, when the mother remarks to her husband that their son is just like him: he used to chase her around with his own video camera when they were young.

Here, as in YES YES YES, homosexuality is again conflated with femininity: both of the main gay characters in the novel, Enma-chan and Ukon, are explicitly described as feminine, while the more masculine narrator is bisexual. I would argue, however, that the depiction of Enma-chan is not negative; on the contrary, he is successful, self-reliant and self-confident, and although it is true that he loses his boyfriend in the end, we are clearly meant to understand this as a positive thing: he has rid himself of a man who did not treat him as he deserves, and we are left to imagine that his next relationship will be much more successful—indeed, one is forcefully reminded of Gloria Gaynor’s 1978 disco hit and gay anthem “I Will Survive.”
*Burūsu* is unique among the texts I study in this dissertation in that it is the only one in which homosexuality is never explicitly linked with femininity; on the contrary, the main gay character Tokuyama is a yakuza, a figure of extreme masculinity. As in *Saigo no Musuko*, the protagonist in this novel, Murakami, has not successfully transitioned to maturity, and Tokuyama functions in the story as a substitute father figure.

As discussed above, in Freud’s theory of psychosexual development a boy cannot progress to adulthood if he does not successfully resolve his Oedipal stage. In *Burūsu*, Murakami has been unable to reach maturity because his father was not a proper Oedipal father figure: he flaunted his own sexual prowess and access to Murakami’s mother, but in his subsequent absence she turned to her son for sexual release. As her needs intensified, however, she rejected Murakami in favour of a man who was able to satisfy her as the immature Murakami could not. By effectively disallowing Murakami’s access to his mother’s body, this man took the role of the Oedipal father; yet he, too, disappeared, once again leaving Murakami unable to overcome the same-sex parent and find maturity.

Years later, Murakami finds himself the object of Tokuyama’s passion: like an overprotective parent, this gay man will do anything to safeguard Murakami—including murdering at least five people—and Murakami realizes that in order to be free he must kill him. While Tokuyama is one of only two gay characters I examine in this study who die (or, more accurately, he is one of only two who remain dead, as we will see in Chapter Four), I argue that like Enma-chan’s loss of his boyfriend, for this character death is actually positive: Tokuyama’s only wish was to either be loved or to be killed by Murakami, and despite the violence of the scene, his ending is paradoxically peaceful.

While the end of *YES YES YES* seems to represent a successful resolution for Jun, the
endings of *Saigo no Musuko* and *Burūsu* are far more ambiguous. In the last pages of *Musuko*, the protagonist is erasing Enma-chan’s nickname in his diary and replacing it with his real name, the mirror image of what he was doing in the first pages of the novel; in the last scene the protagonist’s Enma—the child-protecting deity—is gone, and “boku” is reduced to an even more immature and vulnerable state, crying out wretchedly like an infant that he is hungry. Although the mirroring of the narrator’s parents’ marriage and his own relationship means that we might be tempted to think that that Enma-chan will return (as “boku’s” mother returns to his father after being gone just long enough to teach him a lesson), the letter Enma-chan has left, in which he says that he has no desire to look after “boku” for the rest of his life, strongly suggests otherwise. In *Musuko*, therefore, Enma-chan appears to have had a successful resolution (he has rid himself of an unworthy boyfriend), but the protagonist does not.

Similarly, at the end of *Burūsu* it could be argued that Murakami has finally successfully reached maturity: he has overcome the symbolical father in the form of Tokuyama, and he is setting out literally with a song in his heart. On the other hand, Murakami has not fully overcome Tokuyama: on the contrary, he has to be rescued by his crewmates from near-certain death. Furthermore, it is the crewmates, not Murakami, who kill the gangster, and the novel neither ends with Murakami getting the girl—that is to say, building a successful adult relationship—nor with a triumphant return to the stage as a successful guitarist who is skilled enough to play “black people’s music.”

In the following two chapters I turn to images of gay men in film. In Chapter Three I begin with the development of Japanese film and then examine three examples of contemporary

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96 [歌を]心のなかで呟くように繰り返した (553).
gay-themed movies: Hashiguchi Ryōsuke’s Hasshu! (Hush!); Inudō Isshin’s Mezon do Himiko (The House of Himiko); and Imaizumi Kōichi’s Hatsukoi (First Love). Chapter Four is devoted to a discussion of Kudō Kankurō’s 2005 film Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san (Yaji and Kita: The Midnight Pilgrims).
Chapter 3: Images of Gay Men in Contemporary Film

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of Japanese film with a focus on gay themes and transnational culture, and discuss representations of gay men in Japanese movies by internationally famous directors like Ōshima Nagisa, Takahashi Miike, and Nakajima Takehiro. I then examine in detail three contemporary gay-themed films: Hashiguchi Ryōsuke’s Hasshu!, Inudō Isshin’s Mezon do Himiko, and Imaizumi Kōichi’s Hatsukoi, which I attempt to place in the context of current Japanese social attitudes towards homosexuality. Although these films were made for a Japanese audience, they all travel beyond Japan’s borders and participate, through the queer film festival circuit and international viewership, in a global gay culture. Furthermore, these films represent an increasingly political awareness and intentionality on the part of the producers, drawing attention to the discrimination faced by LGBT people in Japan, and offering clear calls for the end of inequality.

3.1 Development of Japanese Film

Film was born transculturally and transnationally; it arose simultaneously in various parts of the world and was freely shared. The history of film in Japan begins with the importation of technologies and pictures from abroad: the first movies screened in the country, in the late nineteenth century, were recordings of foreign city scenes which were shown to curious and enthusiastic audiences for whom these images of “non-Japan” helped to create an awareness of “that new thing called the modern Japanese nation” (Cazdyn 16).
The earliest Japanese films were of famous sites in Tokyo, allowing a populace a little over twenty years into a project of self-conscious modernization to view itself and its world reflected in and by the same thoroughly modern technology through which the average Japanese person had for the first time seen the Western world the country was working so hard to emulate. This entirely new way of seeing and understanding the self, beyond imagination prior to the Meiji Restoration only thirty years earlier, was exciting but also unsettling; kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjūrō IX (1838-1903), for example, famously proclaimed it “terribly strange” to see himself on film. Cazdyn argues that this strangeness was a symptom of Danjurō’s new awareness, realized through film, of “what it meant to be himself in the modern world” (15-16).

It is fitting that Danjūrō was a kabuki actor, since until 1910 most Japanese films were in fact recordings of kabuki stage performances, and while Danjurō himself only played male roles, specialist male kabuki actors known as onnagata were used to portray female characters on film even after the decline of such movies, well into the 1920s.

Timothy Iles contends that the onnagata’s essentialized presentation of the ideal woman served as a source of “visual pleasure” for an audience which was presumed to be male, and that this coded “‘woman’ as an object of the male gaze” in Japanese film, creating a “gender division

97 The first public movie screening in Japan, consisting of twenty films of England, France, Italy, Russia, and New York shown by Louis and Auguste Lumière, was held in Osaka in 1897 (Cazdyn 16). The first Japanese film footage was shot the same year (High 24), while the first commercial Japanese film, produced in 1898, was of three geisha performing a dance (McDonald 2).

98 Kabuki onnagata, less commonly known as oyama, usually play only female roles; Nakamura Shichinosuke II, who stars in Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san, which I discuss in the next chapter, is one exception. Performers in the noh theatre are also traditionally all male, while the all-female Takarazuka Revue (founded in 1913) has male-role specialists (otokoyaku) and female-role specialists (musumeyaku).
between an active, male viewer, and a passive, female, viewed” (63). According to Iles, this coding continues in Japanese film today.

Iles’ analysis follows the argument Laura Mulvey put forward in her seminal 1973 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in which she claims that classic Hollywood cinema inevitably positions the off-screen film viewer as male and the on-screen female character as the object of his desire, mediated through the main male character: viewers, she asserts, are encouraged to identify with male protagonists, while female characters are coded as “to-be-looked-at” (Mulvey 19). In other words, the (necessarily male and heterosexual) film viewer is encouraged to identify with the male protagonist and to share his active power in gazing upon the female character who is (made to be) the object of both their desires.99

As Patrick Fuery has shown, Mulvey’s analysis is problematic in part because it is based on a misreading of Freud. He concludes: “it is impossible to . . . say that we are active lookers or passively looked at . . . or that there is a masculine/active/sadistic gaze and a feminine/passive/masochistic gazed at” (9-10). Vivian Sobchack argues similarly that “there is no such abstraction as a point of view in the cinema” (99). While she accepts that there is such a thing as a “gaze,” Anne Allison argues that Western male gaze theories may not apply in Japan because it cannot be assumed that sexual and gender constructions are the same as in the West; in manga, for example, she argues that men are positioned as “masterful viewers but passive . . . actors” (“Male Gaze” 34-36). And as Standish has shown, even when Japanese films are made for a heterosexual male audience, the gaze may be played with, manipulated, or experienced in unexpected or subversive ways.

99 Also, although Iles claims that early Japanese film audiences were presumed to be male, Standish points out that the film studios only began to perceive a gender divide in audiences with the advent of television in the 1950s (271).
I would argue that the onnagata confounds Mulvey’s construction because, no matter how skilled his performance, the viewing audience is aware from the beginning that he is male—this kind of extra-diegetic cross-dressing is different from examples like Neil Jordan’s 1992 psychological thriller *The Crying Game*, in which the plot hinges on the audience not knowing that a *character* is cross-dressed. In other words, a male viewer gazing upon a woman embodied by an onnagata knows that what he is seeing is a man performing an idealized portrayal of femininity which is necessarily *artificial*—as is often said, no “real” woman could be so feminine. Indeed, the onnagata’s femininity is not only explicitly decoupled from women’s bodies, but is one which I would argue is in fact *masculine* in that it can only be produced by a man. A male film viewer who identifies with a male protagonist for whom the object of desire is a woman who is actually a man, then, is engaging in a very queer form of heterosexuality, because although the object of desire may be *coded* “female,” the (real) female is explicitly excluded from this construction. As Julian Stringer remarks in his discussion of recent “absolute transvestite films,” this kind of “expert drag act” simultaneously offers a seemingly secure representation of a stable gender identity and “throw[s] into the air the whole nature of gender identity by encouraging a total (mis?)recognition of a successful masquerade”

100 The onnagata film performance is instead an example of what Julian Stringer calls the “absolute transvestite film”: one in which a man plays a woman or a woman plays a man throughout the film without attention being drawn to that fact in the story (113).

101 It might be said that every portrayal of femininity is “artificial”; as Ayako Kano puts it, “Acting like a woman does not come naturally. It has to be taught, learned, rehearsed, and repeated. It does not arise from a moment of inspiration, but from many years of persistent inculcation” (3).
Onnagata (most notably Bandō Tamasaburō V, who was born in 1950) still occasionally portray female characters in films, although this is no longer the norm, but a thorough exploration of the onnagata tradition is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I will return very briefly to the onnagata below, but I should like to make one last point about the sexual aspect of gazing upon such performers: since their presentation of the female is explicitly artificial, and perhaps more importantly because it is explicitly linked with the kabuki tradition, I would argue that appreciation of the female film character played by an onnagata is less about coding “women” as passive objects of a male gaze than about admiration of the (explicitly male) actor’s virtuosity, as in a kabuki performance. I would argue further that, despite the decline in the shudō tradition and the reformulation of understandings of homosexuality in the early twentieth century, there remains an explicit homoerotic element to gazing upon the male actor playing a female character by both male and female audiences. Indeed, Samuel L. Leiter argues that it is men who are commodified as sex objects in kabuki, not women (212), irrespective of the virtuosity of the onnagata’s performance.

3.2 Contemporary Gay-Themed Japanese Films

Although, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, themes of male-male sexuality have featured throughout Japan’s long literary history (from the very earliest works, according to

102 One similarity between the onnagata, the “expert drag” of the absolute transvestite film, and the “Takarasienne” performers of the Takarazuka theatre is that in all three cases the cross-dressing occurs extra-diegetically but with the audience’s knowledge. As Jennifer Robertson says, the notion of gender as a performance has a centuries old history in Japan, and such credible performances reveal gender as “a type of artifice and performance and not a natural, uniform, original fact of female or male bodies” (38).
some scholars), they remained largely absent from Japanese cinema for more than half a century from its inception, and overtly gay characters and stories—with only two exceptions of which I am aware: Ōshima Nagisa’s 1999 *Gohatto* (to which I return shortly) and Kudō Kankurō’s 2005 *Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san* (which I discuss in detail in the next chapter)—have overwhelmingly been drawn from and set in the modern period. This is remarkable for several reasons.

First, as I discussed above, the subject of the earliest extant Japanese film, which was shot in 1899, shortly after the very first Japanese film footage was recorded, is a kabuki actor, Ichikawa Danjūrō IX. This is fitting since, as Keiko McDonald argues, not only was early Japanese moviemaking “fixed on the stage,” but the use of kabuki onnagata is a “definitive characteristic” of Japanese film (1-2). As I explain in more detail in Chapter Four, the kabuki theatre in general, and onnagata performers in particular, were historically associated with male-male sexuality, and the homoerotic potential of the art form has not escaped modern observers: Mishima Yukio’s 1957 short story “Onnagata,” for example, is about an implicitly straight man who, despite being fully aware of and even troubled by the actor’s maleness, falls in love with an onnagata. Chinese director Chen Kaige’s 1993 film *Farewell My Concubine* (based on the novel by Lilian Lee) explores similar themes in the context of traditional Beijing opera training, but surprisingly Japanese filmmakers have not exploited the rich and obvious queer possibilities/realities of kabuki and kabuki actors and their association with Japanese film.  

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103 For example, a popular Japanese film titled *Yukinojō Henge* (English titles *An Actor’s Revenge, Revenge of a Kabuki Actor*), originally released in 1935 and remade by Ichikawa Kon in 1963—both times starring Hasegawa Kazuo—concerns an Edo-era onnagata who dresses as a woman offstage as well as on, and who seeks revenge against the men who murdered his parents, part of which involves the seduction of a woman, a courtesan of the shogun. Despite the
Second, despite the enduring popularity of jidaigeki, period films and television shows set in eras when the practice of shudō was normative, there are virtually no films that reflect this historical reality. Ōshima Nagisa’s Gohatto (Taboo) is one exception. Based on the 1962 short story “Maegami no Sōzaburō” (Sōzaburō with the Forelocks\(^{104}\)) by Shiba Ryōtarō (1923-1996, born Fukuda Teiichi), it stars Matsuda Ryūhei (see Big Bang Love Juvenile A, below) as an attractive youth whose erotic allure has deadly consequences for a group of men. The short story is set at the end of the Edo period when the shudō tradition had already faded, and just five years before the advent of the Meiji period, when it would be rejected as an embarrassing and even barbaric relic of the pre-modern past. Male-male attraction/eroticism is presented in both the short story and the film as dangerous and destructive, and homosexual males as feminized, reflecting the early twentieth century views of the sexologists that would have been prevalent when Shiba was growing up.

Third, given the enduring presence of male-male themes in Japanese literature, including, in the modern period, such genres as Boys’ Love manga, and the frequency with which books are adapted as films in Japan (according to Eric Cazdyn almost every work in the Japanese literary canon has been made into film at least once), the lack of such themes in film is even more surprising.\(^ {105}\)

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\(^{104}\) For more about the significance of forelocks in the shudō tradition, see Chapter Four.

\(^{105}\) It should be noted that while this is true in the case of live-action film, there are many animated films with themes of male same-sex relationships. These are mostly in the Boys’ Love genre, which is aimed at a female audience, and are adaptations of manga stories. One example is Fujimi Ni-chôme Kōkyō Gakudan: Kanrei Zensen/Ame Nochi Arashi (Fujimi [Shinjuku] Ni-
Andrew Grossman argues that what he calls the first “authentic queer films in Japan” appeared in the Leftist new wave of the 1960s. However, most films of this era exploited homosexuality, along with other sexual taboos and deviant sexualities, to shock (“Japanese Film”). The same period saw the development of the pink film, soft-core pornographic movies some of which had gay themes; a particularly well-known example is Ōki Hiroyuki’s Anata ga Suki desu...Daisuki desu (I Like You...I Like You Very Much), in which two men must confront the effect that cheating has on their relationship.\footnote{It was not until the “gay boom” of the 1990s, however, that gay themes began to appear in mainstream films.} Male homosexuality continues to feature in Japanese films, in the form of plots dealing with main characters who are explicitly gay, or simply as homoerotic subtexts—recent examples include Ōgata Akira’s 2000 Dokuritsu Shōnen Gasshōdan (Boy’s Choir [sic]\footnote{Imaizumi Kōichi, whose film Hatsukoi I discuss in the present chapter, got his start in the film industry as an actor in pink films.} and Takashi Miike’s 2006 Yonjūroku Okunen no Koi (Big Bang Love Juvenile A\footnote{Set against the backdrop of early 1970s youth activism, Ōgata’s directorial debut Boy’s Choir stars Itō Atsushi as the recently orphaned Michio, who is sent to a boys’ Catholic boarding school where he meets and develops an extraordinarily close relationship with a fellow student who convinces him to join the school choir.}\footnote{Takashi’s 2006 Big Bang Love Juvenile A (the Japanese title means “the love of 4.6 billion years”) is set in a detention facility. The story follows Jun (Matsuda Ryūhei, who also stars in Gohatto), an employee of a gay bar who murdered his rapist, and Shiro (Ando Masanobu), a gang member also accused of murder, who develop a close but tragic relationship.}}. However, many films, even those created by openly gay directors, seem to treat either women or homosexuality as a problem, either by depicting a triangle in which a woman threatens the relationship of a gay male couple, or by dealing with problems caused by homosexuality itself.
As discussed in the previous chapter, when the second gay boom began in the early 1990s, (mainly male) gay issues began to be widely covered in mainstream Japanese media from newspapers and magazines to photo books, television documentaries and talk shows, and gay male themes appeared in novels, anime, television dramas, and big screen films. Much of these productions were aimed at a female audience: it is usually acknowledged that the boom was touched off by a special feature in a women’s magazine (Hall 41). Three widely-discussed feature-length movies about gay men were released at this time; all have been subtitled and distributed abroad, and they remain the best-known explicitly gay-themed Japanese films. They are Okoge (Fag Hag, by Murata Takehiro, 1992); Kira Kira Hikaru (Twinkle, by Matsuoka Jōji, 1993, based on the 1991 novel by Ekuni Kaori); and Hatachi no Binetsu (A Touch of Fever, by Hashiguchi Ryōsuke, 1993).

Jonathan M. Hall contends that Okoge and other films of the gay boom represent a “cinematic commodification of male homosexuality,” arguing that they have a potentially problematic “global trajectory,” being accepted abroad uncritically as realistic depictions of gay Japanese life (33-41). McLelland remarks that although these films deal with gay men as their central characters they are “not, in fact, about gay men at all, but [are] media fantasies which used the popularity of male homosexuality with young women to increase numbers at the box-office” (Male Homosexuality 32). In fact, like many gay-themed Japanese films and television productions, both Okoge and Kira Kira Hikaru concern complicated relationships between a central female character and a gay male couple (a formula replicated in both Hashiguchi Ryōsuke’s Hasshu! and Inudō Isshin’s Mezon do Himiko, both of which I discuss below). In Kira Kira Hikaru Mutsuki, a gay male doctor who is in love with a young college student, and Shōko, an alcoholic heterosexual woman whose mother and father worry that she is past
marriageable age, get married in order to satisfy their parents but struggle to maintain the fiction. *Hatachi no Binetsu* concerns two young hustlers (both with girlfriends), one of whom falls in love with his possibly straight counterpart.

The exoticization of gay men and gay sex for the pleasure of women is most explicit in *Okoge*, in which the main female character meets lovers Goh and Tochi and soon offers her apartment for them to have sex in—indeed, I would argue that it is central to the plot. In a scene lasting fully five minutes and during which the only dialogue is “Tochi, I love you,” the men have passionate sex in an upstairs room lit by a string of small twinkling coloured lights and under a large poster of Frida Kahlo’s 1940 *Autorretrato Dedicado al Dr. Eloesser* (*Self-Portrait Dedicated To Dr Eloesser*). The camera cross-cuts between the lovers’ writhing, naked, tanned, muscular bodies; the photographs in a large book of Kahlo paintings Sayako leafs through; and Sayako’s face, as she listens with obvious pleasure from her own bedroom directly below. After this, Sayoko soon begins to attempt to heal her own history of abuse by becoming more and more involved in Goh and Tochi’s relationship, leading to their breakup, her rape and

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109 Frieda Kahlo, a bisexual, was a Mexican artist of German, Amerindian and Spanish ancestry. In her *Self Portrait Dedicated to Dr Eloesser* she is seen from the chest up against a background of twigs, flowers, and leaves. She wears flowers in her hair, an earring in the shape of a hand (a gift from Pablo Picasso), and a necklace of thorns, some of which have pierced her neck, which is bleeding. The necklace symbolizes the physical pain from which Kahlo suffered for most of her life, but as Janice Helland argues, it also recalls the self-mutilation performed by Aztec priests with agave thorns, symbolizing human sacrifice; and both the necklace and the hand represent the goddess Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess of the earth who was both creator and destroyer, a recurring theme in Kahlo’s work (11). In an interesting coincidence, like Eve, who is evoked in Hiruma Hisao’s *YES YES YES* by Jun’s reference to his anus as his “Eden,” Coatlicue, whose symbol adorns the figure who watches Toshi and Goh as they have anal sex, is also the goddess of both childbirth and of sexual impurity (unlike Eve, she is also the patron of adulterers). The symbolism in the painting—pain, beauty, destruction, creation—is thus a rather fitting metaphor for the plot of the film, while Kahlo herself becomes both a surrogate for Sayoko, who literally gazes on the private lives of the men through the artist’s eyes, and a marker of the exoticism of the two men, their relationship and their sex.
impregnation by a man whose violence she endures because she believes (incorrectly) that she can get him to fall in love with Goh; and her eventual creation of a new heterosexual nuclear family unit with Goh and her rapist’s child. Indeed, although it does attempt to show the difficulties faced by gay men in Japanese society—Tochi is married and closeted, a source of conflict in the men’s relationship; Goh’s family attempts to arrange a marriage for him and when he tries to explain why he is not interested they pretend not to hear; the two men have difficulty even finding a space in which to be together—the film’s primary focus is on Sayoko, her problems and desires, and her fascination with gay men and gay sex.

3.3 Hashiguchi Ryōsuke’s Hasshu!

Hashiguchi Ryōsuke was born in Nagasaki in 1962. The Japan Times describes him as “one of the few gay filmmakers in Japan to have had a measure of popular success making films with gay themes” (Schilling). His works have garnered multiple awards in a variety of categories both in Japan and internationally. One of his earliest films, Yūbe no Himitsu (A Secret Evening, or The Secret of Last Night), featuring a high school boy who is in love with a male classmate, won the Grand Prize for New Directors at the 1989 Pia Film Festival. Nagisa no Shindobaddo (English title Like Grains of Sand, 1995), which has a similar plot, won the 1995 Mainichi Film Award for Best Screenplay and the Grand Prizes at the 1996 Rotterdam International Film Festival and the 1997 Torino International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, among others. And his Gururi no koto (All Around Us, 2008), which is not gay-themed, won four awards including the 2008 Hochi Film Award for Best Director and the 2009 Mainichi Film Award for Best Screenplay.
Hasshu! (Hush!) was released in 2001 and stars Tanabe Seiichi, Takahashi Kazuya and Kataoka Reiko. It garnered multiple awards: besides winning in several best performer categories it was an official selection at the Toronto Film Festival, at the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, and at the Directors’ Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival; and won three prizes at the 2003 Yokohama Film Festival, including Best Director and Best Film. It follows two men who become involved with a woman who wants to conceive a child. Despite its cliché theme of a gay male couple whose relationship is endangered by a woman, Hasshu! is notable for its implicit criticism—and more importantly, explicit rejection—of social norms that discriminate against gays and other socially marginalized populations, and for the degree of independence its three main characters seek to assert over their own lives and desires. It is also notable for the resistance to these efforts on the part of the characters’ families and of society, and perhaps most importantly for the protagonists’ ultimate success in overcoming that resistance.

Hasshu! opens with a long cross-cut montage which serves to set the scene, establish the characters, and quickly provide key information. While an upbeat take by Bobby McFerrin and Yo-Yo Ma on the traditional lullaby “Hush Little Baby” plays in the background, we discover that the protagonists have not yet met but are nevertheless connected. Fujikura Asako (Kataoka) and Kurita Katsuhiro (Tanabe) ride the same bus, she to her job at a dental laboratory, and he to

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110 Tanabe (born 1969) is an award-winning film, stage, and television actor, director, and writer.
111 Takahashi (born 1969) is a film, stage, and television actor, voice actor, and musician. He is a former member of Johnny & Associates idol band Otokogumi.
112 Kataoka (born 1971) is a film and television actor and singer. She also appears in two other films by Hashiguchi: Hatachi no Binetsu (A Touch of Fever, 1993), and Gururi no Koto (All Around Us, 2008). Yamada Sō, who plays Naoya’s friend in Hasshu!, also appears in Gururi no Koto.
his work at a boat design firm; Katsuhiro is at a party for his colleague; Asako has detached sex with a young man; Hase Naoya (Takahashi) is at a gay bar with friends; Katsuhiro walks past Naoya in Tokyo’s gay district of Shinjuku ni-chôme, and the following morning he is in Naoya’s apartment. The pace slows. Some time has evidently passed. A doctor tells Asako that she has an ovarian cyst and recommends a hysterectomy. Later, she is having lunch in the same restaurant as Katsuhiro and Naoya, and overhears them talking about children. Someone has stolen her umbrella, so Katsuhiro gives her his, and shortly afterwards she visits him at his workplace and suddenly asks him if he will help her to have a baby.

In Hasshu! we see the struggles faced by the characters from the beginning of the film: in one part of the montage just described, Katsuhiro attempts to communicate something to his colleague, and later events suggest that he was trying to come out to him as gay. We also see traditional society and the family trying to assert themselves over the lives and sexualities of the protagonists nearly immediately, in the scene in which Asako, in a doctor’s consulting room, learns that she has an ovarian cyst:

    Doctor: There are other opinions, but in layman’s terms you can say it’s from doing it. It’s probably because when you do it with various people, microorganisms enter. Wow, you’ve already had two abortions? You interested in kids?—

    Asako: Huh?

    Doctor: —If not why not just remove your womb? If you don’t need it, just quickly take it out. It’s unpleasant to worry about children every time

113 Here the doctor actually uses a rather vulgar portmanteau of two words: yari (from yaru, meaning to do it, to screw) and dako (tako), literally callus or corn, which the English subtitles render as “a sex callus.”
you do the dirty, right? I'll arrange a bed right away. You won’t be able
to have sex for a month or two, but please be patient!

Doctor: 諸説あるけど、俗に「ヤリだこ」とも言うなぁ。いろんな人と
やってると雑菌が入るわけでしょう。ウワー、あなた二回も中絶し
てるのか。子供うむき、あるんですか—

Asako: えっ?

Doctor: —ないんだったら子宮ごとお取りになったらどうですか。いらない
ものはさっさと取ってさ。エッチするたんびに子供の心配する
の、いやでしょう。すぐにベッドの用意しますから。一、二ヶ月
セックスできないけど、我慢してくださいよ。

The scene is remarkable for the casual, brusque manner in which the doctor addresses
Asako and his characterisation of her sexual habits; his use of slang terms like *yaridako* and
*etchi*; and his nonchalant recommendation of a hysterectomy as a form of birth control. But it
is perhaps most remarkable for the way in which the doctor blames Asako’s alleged sexual
promiscuity for her condition—there is no link I am aware of between the number of sexual
partners a woman has and her propensity to develop ovarian cysts—and his strong suggestion

114 *Etchi*, sometimes written *ecchi* when used in the West, is a contraction of the word *hentai*,
which means “abnormality” or “perversion,” and is used to refer to the act of sex as well as to
pornography including anime and manga.

115 It is by no means clear that Asako is indeed sexually promiscuous. In the opening montage
we see her having sex with a man, but a later scene suggests that they are semi-regular sex
partners, and for the rest of the film she has no sex at all. Later on there is some suggestion that
she may have had several partners in the past. The judgement about the impropriety of this past
behaviour and the unacceptably high number of partners the phrase “all those men” represents,
however, is being made by an older, conservative character and is given in the context of, and as
one reason for, rejecting Asako as a suitable wife, so her assessment may not be reliable.
that she should remove the possibility of conception in order to indulge what he implicitly considers her transgressive sexual behaviour: the implication (and this is certainly how Asako herself understands his suggestion) is that a woman of her character should not have children. As we learn at the end of the film, Asako will not only reject the doctor’s advice and his attempt to assert control, but will choose to become the unmarried mother to the children of two gay men.

Whilst in the scene with the doctor we see an overt and deliberate attempt by an authority figure representing a powerful social institution to exert control over a heterosexual woman’s sexuality, Katsuhiro’s secrecy about his homosexuality and Katsuhiro and Naoya’s views on the social role/limitations of gay men can also be understood as a manifestation of societal control. In the scene where she tells Katsuhiro that she wants to have a baby with him, Asako explains that she is not looking for a boyfriend and that she understands that he is both gay and in a relationship anyway. When Katsuhiro seems confused she apologizes and asks whether these things were secret. Katsuhiro responds that they are not, but says that he has tried to live his life “very carefully.” When he later tells Naoya about the conversation, Naoya retorts that it is no wonder that Katsuhiro has never imagined of himself as a father: after all, he is gay, and according to Naoya, he has always understood that being gay meant that having a family was out of the question.

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Although he claims that his homosexuality is not a secret Katsuhiro is not out to his co-workers, as we see in the earlier scene when he seems to want come out to a colleague but stops himself, and as is revealed by a female co-worker’s clumsy attempts to woo him. Indeed, the inability of this character, Nagata Emi, to accept Katsuhiro’s homosexuality is the cause of the meeting during which Katsuhiro is outed to his family. Katsuhiro’s boyfriend Naoya, in contrast, does seem to be out to his co-workers. However, he works as a pet groomer—a more artistic occupation with far less of the traditional hierarchy and formality of a typical company job.
We learn a lot about the social milieu of early 2000s big city Japan from these three early scenes. First, we see clearly that sexual behaviour that falls outside a narrowly defined norm is tolerated only so long as it does not intrude into the carefully constructed façade of society at large. For Asako, this means choosing between sexual freedom and autonomy on one hand, and motherhood on the other. For Katsuhiro, it means that he can live with his same-sex partner, but must maintain constant vigilance to ensure that his homosexuality is not revealed. Second, we see that choosing to live in a way that falls outside societal expectations—for Katsuhiro and Naoya, having a same-sex partner and not marrying a woman, and for Asako, remaining single and pursuing her sexual interests—means being excluded from, and being precluded from creating, perhaps the most important social institution: family.

Not only is this theme of control explicitly reflected in the male protagonists’ families, it is literally embodied in Naoya’s mother Katsumi. When we first meet her she is a larger-than-life figure with permed hair who bustles unannounced and uninvited into Naoya and Katsuhiro’s apartment, assuring her son that she is not a woman easily shocked, loudly proclaiming that she is “famous for loving tofu,” and pantomiming large breasts as she indicates what kind of surgery she believes he wishes to have. When Naoya exasperatedly denies any desire for breasts, Katsumi begins to cry; she says that he will understand when he gets older that it is all about blood, family, and that Katsuhiro (“that man in the photo,” as she refers to him) is a stranger.

117 There is some suggestion that this restriction applies only to women of Asako’s class and social status: she is unmarried, has a background in the theatre, and does not appear wealthy. Meanwhile, in another early scene, at Naoya’s work, it is strongly suggested that a different woman, a client of the grooming salon, is having an affair with the salon’s owner. She sends her young child to the convenience store while she and the owner engage in thinly disguised flirtation as they encourage two dogs to mate and the salon employees exchange knowing glances. Here again, children must be removed from even the suggestion of female sexual impropriety, but the woman’s obvious wealth and social class mean that her indiscretion is tolerated.
Meanwhile, Katsuhiro visits his family home, a traditional house in a rural area. We see him praying at the kamidana, the family altar. Later his sister-in-law Yōko muses about her arranged marriage to his brother Katsuji. She was already thirty when they married, both older than the norm for a woman and older than her husband, and this community, she says, is fussy about that sort of thing. She asks if Katsuhiro has someone special and when he says no she urges him not to settle for anything less than someone he really loves.

After Katsuhiro’s return to Tokyo, he, Naoya and Asako decide to go through with the plan for Asako to conceive using Katsuhiro’s sperm. Later in the film comes a pivotal scene. Katsuhiro’s co-worker Emi, who is in love with him, having previously pretended to Naoya’s mother that she and Katsuhiro are dating, has had a private detective write a report on him and Asako, with whom she claims he is having an affair. She has given the report to Katsumi, and has asked her to get Katsuhiro’s brother involved to make things right. Now Katsuji, Katsuhiro’s brother, Yōko, his sister-in-law, and Naoya’s mother Katsumi have come to their apartment unannounced, and are demanding answers.\(^{118}\)

It is in this scene where Katsumi embodies social control. She has undergone a complete transformation. Whereas before she was brash and brassy, now she is subdued, muted, and proper. She has literally enrobed herself in tradition: although it is the height of summer she is wearing a full kimono, her curly hair has been swept up and back in a restrained, traditional, conservative style, and although Naoya and Katsuhiro have a modern apartment with Western-style furniture, she chooses to sit in the traditional, formal Japanese manner: in seiza (正座, literally “proper sitting”), on her knees on a cushion on the floor with her legs tucked under her

\(^{118}\) Notably absent from this meeting is Asako’s father, a ne’er do well whom we meet only briefly, at the start of the film.
body.

Although she sits primly and uses formal language, however, the audience already knows that Katsumi is not what she is pretending to be in this scene, and despite her best efforts the cracks soon begin to appear. She is unable to resist fanning herself in the heat—a violation of etiquette on highly formal occasions—and dabs the sweat from her face with a handkerchief. And although she tells Katsuhiro to stop playing around with her son and just get married, exclaiming that “everybody does it!,” she seems motivated not by anti-gay animus or a desire to enforce social norms on either man, but instead by the mistaken belief that Katsuhiro has been cheating on Naoya with two different women, and she makes no attempt to convince her own boy to get married.

Meanwhile, Katsuhiro, who has introduced Naoya as his roommate, insists that their families have misunderstood the two men’s relationship. Apparently having believed the detective’s report and thinking that Katsuhiro intends to marry Asako, Yōko attempts to assume the role of family representative. Despite her earlier admonition to accept nothing less than true love, she begins to enumerate the many reasons why Asako is an unsuitable match: the suicide attempt, the years of seeing a psychiatrist, “all those men,” the two abortions. Whatever the problem is, it is in her blood, and the Kuritas, Yōko says, do not want that blood.¹¹⁹ Katsuji protests that it is not up to her, but she insists it is: Katsuji must consider Yōko, their daughter Kaoru, and the issue of inheritance. Asako tries to explain that although it is not her only ambition in life, she wants to have a baby; when she met Katsuhiro and Naoya she realized she

¹¹⁹ It is interesting that despite attempting to dissuade Katsuhiro from marrying Asako, Yōko does not try to persuade him to marry Emi instead, although she would appear to be a much more traditionally acceptable match: a quiet, feminine, modest office lady who wears sweater sets and pearls.
did not want to give up on human relationships. She wants to choose her own family.

In this scene we see clearly the tension between generations, between tradition and modernity, between families and individuals, between urban and rural, and also between personal desires and social roles and responsibilities. Katsumi, a big city woman who likes to think of herself as modern and worldly, has literally wrapped herself in tradition in order to lend authority to her attempt to pressure Katsuhiro to marry a woman. But it is evident that she is not comfortable in this role, and this is because, rather than forcing a gay man to marry a woman in order to make him conform to society’s expectations, her motive is to protect her son by sparing him the heartbreak that she is certain will result from his boyfriend’s supposed infidelities. However, she does not exert similar pressure on Naoya: despite her conflation of homosexuality and transsexuality\(^\text{120}\) earlier in the film, and her insistence that a same-sex partner is not “family,”\(^\text{121}\) Katsumi has long since accepted that Naoya is gay.

\[^{120}\text{As I discuss further in the context of the film Mezon do Himiko in the next section, as well as in the context of Yaji and Kita: The Midnight Pilgrims in the next chapter, this remains common in Japan, particularly in the mainstream media.}\]

\[^{121}\text{Katsumi tells Asako that people do not get to choose their families. This underscores the absurdity of the present scene, in which she and Katsuhiro’s sister-in-law are attempting to force Katsuhiro to select a wife (indeed, Yōko is trying to select a wife on his behalf). That Katsumi cannot see Katsuhiro as part of her and her son’s family despite accepting Naoya’s homosexuality emphasizes the complicated barriers to acceptance that gay people face in Japan. It also reflects the constant conflation of the ideas of “children” and “family” throughout the film: in the context of a discussion of fatherhood Naoya tells Katsuhiro that being gay means never having a family; Katsumi tells Naoya that life is all about blood, family, and that Katsuhiro is a stranger to them; Yōko suggests that Asako has tainted blood, and that the Kurita family does not want that blood; and when Asako says that she wants to choose her family, Yōko says that children are precious precisely because one does not get to choose them, yet she herself was apparently bullied by her mother-in-law because she did not produce a son. In other words, what matters is the preservation of the family line: the unrelated spouse who marries into the clan becomes family because he or she participates in creating a son who will pass the family blood to future generations.}\]
In Yōko, we see the clash between tradition and modernity and between urban and rural. Originally from Osaka, Japan’s second largest city, she married into an old family and lives in their traditional Japanese home in a small rural village, where she has apparently suffered ever since from the disapproval of her husband’s parents and community. Yet, despite her own history, and the bitterness she evidently feels and the discord it has caused in her own marriage, it is she who takes on the same role as her own mother-in-law before her, and attempts to force Katsuhiro to abandon the woman she believes he loves, not because she sees Asako as a bad match for Katsuhiro, but because she sees her as an unsuitable match for the family, which includes both its existing and its yet-to-be-conceived children.

In marked contrast, Yōko’s own young daughter Kaoru sides with Asako. While she makes no comment on her suitability as a wife, she rejects her mother’s views by saying that she understands Asako’s feelings about wanting to choose her own family, opining that this is why sperm banks have become so popular. In other words, on behalf of a young woman only a few years older than herself, Kaoru rejects the views and expectations that her grandmother’s generation had of women, and to which her own mother submitted despite the pain it has obviously caused her and the estrangement from her husband to which it is strongly suggested it has led. We will learn at the end of the film that Yōko and Kaoru have moved to Osaka, and this move to the big city along with Kaoru’s stated views suggest that she will never submit to the same social pressures that caused her mother so much pain.

Ironically, Yōko seems to be the one who is the most upset about Katsuhiro’s supposed desire to marry Asako: despite having suffered herself from family interference and social disapproval, it is she who attempts to perpetuate the same cycle, in the name of protecting the family that rejected her. Her husband Katsuji, meanwhile, has allowed Yōko to speak on the
family’s behalf. But when Yōko, having said that she forbids Katsuhiro to marry Asako, and furthermore that Asako has no right to have a child, shouts at Katsuji that his whole family is crazy, he slaps her (although he immediately seems to regret it). Later he apologizes to Katsuhiro, and Katsuhiro learns that his brother has long known that he is gay. Remarkably, given that he himself has only a daughter and Katsuhiro not marrying a woman will therefore mean the end of the Kurita line, Katsuji says that Naoya seems like a nice person and that it is Katsuhiro’s life: he should do what he wants.

Much later, after Katsuji’s sudden death in a traffic accident, the family home has been sold and torn down. Whereas earlier in the film Katsuhiro has lamented his inability to tell his family to stop interfering in his life, he has now been symbolically freed. Back in Tokyo, Asako has bought a turkey baster for each of the men. She says it is lonely to be an only child so after Katsuhiro’s baby she will have Naoya’s baby too.

While in Hasshu! we again see the conflation of male homosexuality with femininity and trans identities, this link is explicitly rejected: Naoya’s mother loves her son and has accepted that he is gay but, we are clearly meant to understand, is simply misinformed. Perhaps more importantly, these stereotypes are not reflected in the two protagonists. Instead, the two men are portrayed as no different from any other male character in the film, and indeed, Katsuhiro’s ability to pass as straight in the eyes of most of society is the cause of the two major conflicts in the plot: his co-worker Emi becoming obsessed with him, and his sister-in-law and brother believing that he is cheating on Emi with Asako.

But this is not a film about passing, or about problems associated with homosexuality. Instead, it is a story about overcoming prejudices and becoming freer and happier as a result. Both Naoya and Katsuhiro overcome their internalized homophobia and their beliefs about how
being gay must necessarily restrict their lives and ambitions, while Asako overcomes society’s expectations and proscriptions on which behaviours and ways of living are appropriate for women. Even more significantly, all three characters overcome the narrow views of the wider community regarding what and who does, can, or should make a family.

Thus, Asako overcomes society’s prejudices about women, while Naoya and Katsuhiro have overcome both their own and society’s prejudices and have found a way to live openly and happily as gay men in contemporary Japan, creating a new family and the kind of life we might imagine LGBT people anywhere aspiring to.

3.4 Inudō Isshin’s *Mezon do Himiko*

Born in 1960 in Tokyo, Inudō Isshin is a prolific award-winning film and television director and writer whose works encompass a variety of genres including animation, romance, comedy, drama, and period drama. *Mezon do Himiko* (The House of Himiko; the title is often given in French as *La Maison de Himiko* because the name appears in French on the house itself in the film) was released in 2005 and stars Shibasaki Kou, Tanaka Min, and Odagiri Jō.

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122 I have romanised Shibasaki’s name as Kou because she writes it in katakana as コウ.

Shibasaki, a singer and film and TV actor, was born in 1981. She is best known outside Japan for playing Sōma Mitsuko in Fukasaku Kinji’s 2000 thriller *Battle Royale*, but has appeared in a number of high-profile films and television dramas alongside such well-known stars as Beat Takeshi and Kimura Takuya, including a role as the shōgun Tokugawa Yoshimune in the 2010 film adaptation of Yoshinaga Fumi’s manga series Ōoku (*The Inner Chambers*) directed by Fuminori Kaneko. She is slated to appear as Mika, the leading female role in a Keanu Reeves-led English language adaptation of the *Chūshingura* story, a fantasy-adventure titled *47 Ronin*.

123 Born in 1945, Tanaka is a Japan Academy Prize-winning actor and classically trained dancer.

124 Odagiri (born in 1976 and also known as Joe Odagiri or Odajō) is a multi award-winning actor and singer who has appeared in a wide range of genres, including *tokusatsu* (live-action
It won Best Actor and Best Director awards in 2005 and 2006, and also garnered Inudō an arts prize awarded by the Minister for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (the ministry known as MEXT).

In the film, Yoshida Saori (Shibasaki) is a twenty-four year-old woman who accepts a job as an assistant at a seaside retirement home for gay men. It was founded by her estranged father (Tanaka), who is known as Himiko. Himiko is in the final stages of cancer and rarely leaves his room; in an effort to reunite Himiko with his daughter before he dies, his much younger boyfriend Haruhiko (Odagiri), the manager of La Maison de Himiko, has tracked Saori to the painting company where she works and has offered her a substantial salary to help out at the home part time. The film deals with issues such as the consequences of choosing to live as openly gay; what happens to people who do make that choice when they become old; family relationships; loss; and discrimination.

*Mezon do Himiko* is interesting because it represents a conscious effort on the part of its makers to create a positive image of gay men in contemporary Japan while also highlighting the discrimination, difficulties, and the often painful choices both they and their family members can face. In addition, despite its good intentions and the range of masculinities its characters

Shinjō Ikuo, an Associate Professor of Japanese Literature at the University of the Ryukyus, begins his chapter on Japanese queer film in a volume on Japanese film history with the remarkable claim that “Inudō Isshin’s 2005 film called *Mezon do Himiko* can be considered as composed entirely of homophobia” (全編がホモフォビアによって構成されているとさえ思われる犬童一心『メゾン・ド・ヒミコ』(二〇〇五)といった映画) (113). He does not subsequently explain the remark or discuss the film, and does not appear to have written about this film further elsewhere.
represent, the film is notable for conflating male homosexuality with transgender identities, as remains common in mainstream Japanese entertainment.

This conflation of sexuality and transgender identities is evident from the earliest scenes. The film opens with a series of black and white photographs of Tokyo’s upscale Ginza district in the 1950s. A voiceover informs us that in 1958—perhaps not coincidentally the year that saw the start of Japan’s first gay boom—a gay bar called Himiko opened in Corridor Street. The bar became wildly popular with “regular customers” (*ippan kyaku*, i.e.: heterosexuals) and the cultural elite, becoming a Ginza legend. In 1985, however, the original proprietor retired and a new *mama-san* took over, exploding onto the scene and becoming an overnight sensation. This was forty year-old Yoshida Teruo, the man who, we will soon learn, now lies dying in a retirement home in Kanagawa. While as I discussed in Chapter Two the term *mama-san* usually denotes the *female* manager of a *mizu shōbai* (night time entertainment) establishment, it is also used by some male managers of gay establishments. Teruo’s name, though, which is written with kanji meaning “illuminate or shine” and (among other things) “masculine, male, hero,” clearly marks him as a man. Yet in the photographs in the opening scene and indeed throughout the film, he is only seen in feminine clothing, almost always with a turban, and has finely manicured, blood red-painted nails. Also, he is known throughout the film as Himiko, a female name.

Himiko’s long-time friend Ruby (*Utazawa Torauemon*\(^{126}\)) also appears in the old photographs of the bar and is one of the older residents of the home. Like Himiko, she too always wears women’s clothes; she also wears makeup and has pink hair, and says that when she was young she dreamed of being a ballerina. While her story is central to the plot, what is most

\(^{126}\) Utazawa (born Hirata Mamoru in 1930) is a stage, film, and television actor and dancer.
interesting about Ruby is that her ontological status—her sexuality, sex, and gender—is ambiguous and shifting throughout the film.

First, she is one of three residents of La Maison de Himiko—a “home for gays,” as it is described by various characters—who consistently wear women’s clothing. Like Himiko she also wears women’s clothes in the old photographs from the bar, and with her apparently male body and thinning hair, we initially assume that, like Himiko, Ruby is a drag queen, which is to say a gay man. The first hint that she may be something else comes early on, when we learn that Ruby used to be married: she says that she “tried her best to somehow make it as a man” and even had a son. She has not seen him since he was five, when she got divorced, but for many years she received updates about him from her ex-wife: Ruby says that her son is “properly married” and has a child—a girl, she thinks, but she has never seen her. Two years ago the ex-wife died, and Ruby resigned herself to the thought that there would be no further contact, but then last year she got a postcard. All it contained was the apparently nonsense phrase “piki piki pikkiiii,” but Ruby is sure it was from her granddaughter.

Second, although this complication is absent from the original dialogue, the question of

127 Himiko, Ruby, and Kikue always appear in women’s clothes. Yamazaki cross-dresses twice: once in a dress-up montage with Saori (and later when they go dancing), and again when Himiko dies. Chubby never wears any overtly women’s clothes, but he wears makeup and what appear to be women’s earrings.

128 どうにか男としてやっていけんじゃないかって頑張ってみたことがあってさ。

129 ちゃんと結婚もして、子供も生まれて。

130 Ruby has been trying to work out what this apparently nonsense phrase means ever since. Saori tells her it is a magic spell from an anime called Rainbow Warrior, which features a Sailor Moon-type fighting girl who uses the incantation to transform when she must do battle. There appears to be no such anime, but the “rainbow” of the title is obviously no coincidence. The “spell” will become important later in the story.
Ruby’s and Himiko’s identities is uniquely confounded by the English subtitles. While the Japanese dialogue avoids all pronouns—as is usual in Japanese speech, characters are referred to either by name or as “that person” (*ano hito*) rather than as “he” or “she”—the subtitles make a specific distinction with only two of the characters, Ruby and Himiko, and although there does not seem to be any indication in the Japanese (besides his adoption of a female name\(^{131}\)) that he identifies as female, the subtitles frequently refer to Himiko in the feminine and to Ruby in the masculine.\(^{132}\) This is particularly confusing because, as is revealed in a pivotal scene to which I return below, Ruby is the only character in the film who can be said with any certainty to be transsexual, because she has had genital reassignment surgery. But like most of the other residents, the audience is not aware of this fact until Kikue, whose identity is similarly ambiguous (and remains so), reveals it.

Third, Ruby consistently refers to herself as an *okama*, a term that she applies both to herself and to the other residents, and vice versa. According to McLelland, *okama*, which derives from the slang for buttocks and is an allusion to anal sex, usually refers, like the English term “queen,” to a gay man who is effeminate and/or cross-dressed.\(^{133}\) However, he notes, homosexuality in Japan is *generally* conflated with cross-dressing and transgender identity (“Male Homosexuality and Popular Culture”). Yet the residents fall on a spectrum from Ruby,  

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\(^{131}\) Himiko does refer to himself using the first-person pronoun *atakushi* (I), but this type of feminine speech pattern, known as *oni-kotoba* (literally sister language) is not uncommon among gay Japanese men within gay contexts, and does not in itself suggest a transgender identity.

\(^{132}\) In fact, both masculine and feminine pronouns are used for both characters in the subtitles, although Himiko seems to be more frequently referred to in the feminine and Ruby in the masculine.

\(^{133}\) The English subtitles consistently translate the term as “queen.”
who always wears women’s clothes and dreams of being a ballerina, to Takao, a masculine ex-yakuza who is covered in traditional tattoos.

Although one could understand okama in the context of the film as a sort of catch-all term like “queer,” this is complicated by the fact that when Chubby introduces her to Ruby he jokes that Saori is a newhalf (nyūhāfu ニューハーフ). Newhalf is a term coined by the Japanese mass media in the 1980s which denotes categories that are often very loosely defined, according to Wim Lunsing, covering people who “range from transvestites to transsexuals and anything in between and/or [who] are gay” (“Transgender Practices” 26).

The central crisis of the plot occurs when Ruby suffers a stroke and is no longer able to care for herself. The other residents cannot look after her themselves, but they cannot afford to hire someone else to do it either. They cannot leave her at the hospital, but without a family member to assume responsibility for her finances, they cannot move her to a home that is equipped to look after her. Desperate, they decide to take a chance: they contact her son, hoping that if they dress Ruby in men’s clothes, cut her hair, and throw away her dresses and makeup, the family need never know that she is an okama.

Resident Kikue (Yōchan), however, makes a surprising revelation: Ruby has had “the operation.” Nevertheless, they decide to take a gamble: they will contact Ruby’s son but they will not mention that she is an okama, even though Ruby’s physical body will soon reveal her secret. In a touching scene, Chubby (played by Murakami Hiroki) is telling the unresponsive,

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134 La Maison de Himiko appears to be the first film performance by Yōchan (born 1937). According to the movie’s official website, he trained as a chef in Asakusa, and then opened his own restaurant, called Yōchan, in Shinjuku. He was recruited for the film by a member of the production team who is a regular customer at the restaurant.

135 手術を受けてる。
diaper-clad Ruby that he will definitely visit her as he gives her a sponge bath in her outrageously camp bed, which is in the shape of a gilded landau complete with wheels. At the same time, Haruhiko is throwing away Ruby’s makeup, photographs and letters, among which are dozens of unsent postcards she has created with variations on the theme of rainbows and piki piki pikkiii. Soon, Ruby’s family arrive to pick her up. While her granddaughter is dressed up in her Rainbow Warrior costume, Ruby has been transformed into a respectable-looking elderly man: as he says goodbye, Chubby calls her Mr Sugimura.\textsuperscript{136}

Ruby’s storyline is important for the way in which it gives viewers insight, via a funny and highly sympathetic character, into the difficulties and discrimination faced by queer people in Japan. Perhaps more importantly, Ruby’s story represents a powerful criticism of the way that contemporary Japanese society deals with people who are different, particularly those with gay and trans identities. Like at least two other characters in the story, Ruby forced herself to try live as society demanded: she “tried to make it as a man”; she married a woman; and she even produced a child and has a grandchild. In order to be herself, however, she had to give up all of these things. Although it is common for the non-custodial parent (nearly always the father) to lose all contact with his young children in divorces in Japan, the fact that Ruby’s ex-wife kept her informed about her son’s life suggests that the reason that Ruby has not seen her son since he was five years old is because of her identity.

One issue faced by transsexual people in Japan particularly highlighted by Ruby’s story is that of the “severe requirements” for changing one’s official sex for legal purposes. According

\textsuperscript{136} Sugimura-san. Although san is a universal honorific that is attached to both male and female names and can be translated into English as Mr, Mrs, Miss, or Ms, it is clear in this scene that Chubby intends Ruby’s family to understand it as “Mr.”
to Taniguchi Hiroyuki, the Law for the Protection of the Maternal Body\textsuperscript{137} prohibits “the elimination of an individual’s ability to procreate without legitimate grounds,” and for this reason the legality of sex-change operations had been uncertain. The Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology (JSPN), Taniguchi explains, officially recognised the treatment in 1996, but legal issues remained until the passage, in 2004, of the Exceptional Treatment Act for People with Gender Identity Disorder (hereafter GID Act). According to this act an individual wishing to change his or her legal sex must: (1) be over the age of majority, (2) not be married, (3) have no children, (4) “be deprived of their gonad or gonad function,”\textsuperscript{138} and (5) “have external genital organs similar to other members of the sex to which they were being reassigned.” A male-to-female transsexual who has satisfied these conditions can apply to the family court for a judgement allowing her to be treated as female for the purpose of the application of the Civil Code and other laws (and vice versa) (“The Legal Situation Facing Sexual Minorities in Japan”).

\textit{Mezon do Himiko} was released and is set in 2005, a year after the passage of the GID Act. We know that Himiko is sixty years old, and as Ruby is about ten years older she likely had her genital reassignment in the 1980s, after her divorce, at a time when such surgery was not only in a legal grey area but also offered no legal recognition of her “new” sex. This lack of legal recognition is one explanation for Ruby not having had breast surgery: being able to pass as male when necessary would not only have meant more opportunities to work, and less difficulty finding jobs, but also less inconvenience and less likelihood of suffering discrimination when

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{137}母体保護法 (botai hogo-hō), formerly the Eugenic Protection Act 優生保護法 (yūsei hogo-hō).
\end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{138} In males, the testes; in females, the ovaries.
\end{flushright}
conducting official business. There are two other possible reasons: Ruby may have hoped that by continuing to be able to pass as male when necessary she would also be more likely to be able to one day meet her son again, and her granddaughter as well. And of course, the fact that Ruby can be outwardly transformed into a respectable-looking man makes for a far more compelling story: were it not possible her son might have rejected her outright, not allowing for the alternative scenarios about which the audience is left to speculate. While some of these scenarios are happy—for example, the son could discover the truth but either accept Ruby or at least decide to keep the secret—the other residents’ worries (that if they had waited for her family to accept her Ruby would have died), and Saori’s reaction (that dying alone is Ruby’s punishment for abandoning her family and pleasing herself, and that the residents have not thought about how much the son will have to suffer), are a stark reminder that some of the possibilities are very unpleasant.

One of the central aims of the film appears to be to show that there exists a wide range of types of gay people. This is reflected in several of the characters besides Ruby. For instance, Kikue, the only character who knew Ruby’s secret, also consistently wears women’s clothing, while Chubby wears men’s clothes with women’s earrings and makeup. Yamazaki (Aoyama Kira) always wears men’s clothes, but partway through the film he confesses that although he has never worn a dress he has always wanted to. In fact, he has been sewing one to be buried in: it will be his first and last dress, but, he says, it will be so wonderful to wear what he wants and he is so convinced that he will be reborn as a woman that he is not afraid to die. With the encouragement of Saori, Yamazaki does, in fact, decide to wear a dress before he dies, but the result is the realization of his greatest fear: he is publicly humiliated by a former co-worker in a
Of course, besides Ruby the most ambiguous character is Himiko. What we know about him we learn largely through old photographs and from how he is seen by the other characters, and rarely from himself: even when Saori angrily accuses him of abandoning her he merely responds that she is right. We are introduced to him as the glamorous and popular *mama-san* who was so inextricably linked with Bar Himiko that when he retired the business closed. His boyfriend Haruhiko sees him as a “precious person” whom he loves. The other residents of the home see him as a friend and protector, while the “sponsor” of the home, Kanda, seems to have seen him as a prostitute. Meanwhile, his daughter Saori sees him as responsible for her mother’s death: a useless husband who abandoned his family and threw away his career in order to be “degraded by living as a filthy faggot.”

The viewer, however, is clearly meant to understand Himiko, like Ruby, as a complicated, perhaps slightly tragic, but nevertheless brave and principled figure. Indeed, although it is true that in a trajectory very similar to Ruby’s he gave up his career and left his wife and young child—implicitly, he was forced to do so in order to be true to himself—we later learn that he maintained a close friendship with Saori’s mother after their separation. Furthermore, it becomes clear that Himiko has been prostituting himself to Kanda in order to allow the home to stay open so that the other residents, who have nowhere else to go, will not be forced to leave.

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139 The former co-worker also reveals that despite Yamazaki’s efforts all his former workmates whispered about him being “swishy.” This painful scene marks a significant turning point for both Yamazaki, who recovers from the shock of the confrontation and goes on to be freer in his choice of dress, and for Saori, who sees and experiences the difficulties and discrimination people like her father suffer for the first time.

140 薄汚いオカマとして成り下がって生きてきた。
But it is perhaps Saori’s story that most underscores the effect on families of societal
discrimination against queer people. Angry and upset, she comes back into Himiko’s life only
because she desperately needs the money, and is initially disgusted by the residents of the home
and remains deeply hostile towards her father throughout most of the film (indeed, it is an
interesting aspect of this story, and one which sets it apart from boom-era movies with plots
concerning a central gay male couple and a woman, that Saori has no interest in Haruhiko and
Himiko or any of the other characters as gay men per se). Yet she quickly warms to the other
residents and despite her stubbornness (and sometimes cruelty), even softens towards her
father—to the extent that she tries, in one scene, to have sex with his boyfriend, which I argue is
an attempt by both characters to retain a link to Himiko. However, after Himiko’s death, and
when Saori realizes that Haruhiko too has prostituted himself to Kanda in a desperate effort to
keep the home from closing, she packs up Himiko’s belongings and leaves, refusing to allow
Haruhiko to keep even one memento of his dead lover. But in the final scene, when the painting
company is called to the home to remove some graffiti, we see that the residents—although she
does not appear in the scene we are tempted to imagine that Ruby might be back among them—
have painted the magic spell from Rainbow Warrior on the outside wall to summon Saori back,
and the joyful reunion suggests that her previous rejection was a symptom of her grief, and that
all is now forgiven.

As in Hasshu!, in Mezon do Himiko family is a central concern, and femininity and gay
and trans identities are conflated. Although the depictions of some of the characters may be
problematic, it is clear that one of the aims of the film is to show that there are many types of gay
people. Furthermore, by emphasizing issues surrounding the family the film draws attention to
the difficulties faced by people who are different—especially those who are gender non-
conforming or who are sexual minorities—in contemporary Japanese society. In particular, in the lives of Himiko, Saori and Ruby we see the destructive effects of social discrimination on families.

In *Mezon do Himiko* several characters reflect the theme of overcoming and becoming. Himiko’s daughter Saori initially dislikes gay people, but she is transformed in part because of the kindness shown to her by Yamazaki, and by witnessing first-hand the discrimination faced by him and others like him, and in the end she has come to see the residents of the home as her dear friends. Yamazaki is also transformed: he has overcome his own prejudices and fear and, like Jun in *YES YES YES*, has embraced his femininity and is freer, happier, and truer to himself as a result. In addition, in characters like Ruby’s young granddaughter (and perhaps even in Ruby’s daughter-in-law and son), as well as in Saori herself, we see that the younger generations are becoming more accepting than their parents and grandparents.

Discrimination against queer people, and the effects it has on them and their families, is a major theme of the film *Hatsukoi*, to which I turn in the following section.

### 3.5 Imaizumi Kōichi’s *Hatsukoi*

Imaizumi Kōichi was an actor in pink (soft-core pornographic) films before a chance to write a gay porn movie in 1998 led to his debut as an independent director with *Hibakari Tenshi* (Angel of the Toilet) the following year. *Hatsukoi* (First Love), which premiered in 2007, is the fourth film directed by Imaizumi; it was followed by *Famirii Konpuriito* (English subtitle *The Family Complete*, 2010), which again deals with Japanese gay men’s love and sex lives and is
described on its official website as “a Japanesque hardcore home drama”\footnote{“Japanesuku hādokoa hōmu dorama.”} (Kazoku Konpuriito). Imaizumi’s newest film, Subesube no Himitsu (English title The Secret to My Silky Skin), had its world debut in October 2013 at Porn Film Festival Berlin. It is based on a short manga by Takasaki Keiichi about a young man from Kyoto who travels to Tokyo to spend several days at his lover’s house.

On the surface, Hatsukoi is just a simple love story: Nakajima Tadashi, who is in his final year of high school, has a crush on his classmate Kōta. But Tadashi is the object of homophobic taunting from his schoolmates, occasionally including Kōta, and is deeply conflicted about his feelings. Meanwhile, in a parallel story, Yoshida Keigo, an out gay man all of whose friends seem to be in established relationships, laments his unluckiness in love and the fact that he cannot seem to find a boyfriend. After Kōta abandons him at the train station on the way to school and goes off with a group of boys who have been bullying him, Tadashi catches sight of a gay couple on the train: he will later learn that they are Keigo’s friends Satō Hiroki and Takahashi Shin. He decides to follow them and is surprised and excited to see them kiss as they part outside Shin’s used bookstore. Tadashi follows Hiroki into a park toilet; Hiroki, who had realized he was being followed, confronts Tadashi and asks him if he is gay. Tadashi runs away and Hiroki, running after him, is hit by a car. When he goes to visit Hiroki in hospital, Tadashi meets Keigo, and they fall in love.

The simple, perhaps even predictable plot notwithstanding, Hatsukoi is an important film which is unique among the movies I discuss in this dissertation in several ways. First, most of its personnel are openly gay. As well as writer/director Imaizumi Kōichi (who also has a small part
in the movie), all of the lead characters are played by gay men. In addition, drag queens Yajiko and Kitako, who make a brief cameo appearance, are well known in the gay community, and both work in HIV prevention at AKTA, Japan’s first gay community centre, which is located in Tokyo’s gay district Shinjuku ni-chōme, and which serves as the venue for the film’s wedding scene.

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142 Murakami Hiroshi (b. 1985), who plays Tadashi, got his start as a gravure (semi-nude) model in gay publications, and is particularly known for his work in gay monthly magazine *Badi*, where he is now a member of the editorial department. Matsunoki Teppen (Keigo; born 1974) is a dancer, writer and director known for his work with Idevian Crew, Opera Theater Konnyaku-za, and Mono×Poly Opera Theater. Following *Hatsukoi* he appeared in another gay film, *Sono Tsuki ga Michiru Made* (Until That Moon Waxes, 2007), and directed *Pabu no Naka* (In The Pub, 2010), a film about a gay dancer. Kawashima Ryōya (Hiroki; b. 1983) also got his start modelling. He posed for gravure photographs by gay photographer Taguchi Hiroki, and later appeared in Taguchi’s short *Kagayoi* (Sparkle), which was part of the 2004 collection *Queer Boys and Girls on the Shinkansen*, also by Hibakari Cinema. Horie Shinji (Shinji; b. 1971) is known as a stage actor and dancer, most recently with Mika Kurozawa & Dancers, along with Matsunoki Teppen. Shibata Kei (b. 1981), who plays Kōta, the only straight main character, is a gay activist and graduate student who focuses on issues of HIV in the gay community and on sociological aspects of homosexuality.

143 Drag queen, dancer and entertainer Yajiko is also known as Madame Bonjour JohnJ [sic], while artist, sex worker, and gay activist/AIDS activist Kitako is also known as Hasurā Akira (Akira the Hustler) and Merodiasu (Melodius). As “chonmage [topknot] drag queens” Yajiko and Kitako (based on Yaji and Kita, fictional comic characters created in the early 1800s whom I discuss in detail in the next chapter), they perform and engage in AIDS education and activism, writing a column in the newsletter of Community Center AKTA titled “Yajiko Kitako no Shinjuku Dōchū Yoioi” (English subtitle “The Adventure [sic] of Yajiko Kitako Shinjuku/Tokyo”). Yajiko’s website can be seen at instant.typepad.com/johnj. AKTA’s site is at akta.jp.

Akira the Hustler was born Chō Yukio in 1969. In 2000 he was credited as Akira in the film *I.K.U* (a pun on “I’m coming”), the first pornographic movie screened at the Sundance Festival. Set in 2030, the film opens, according to Johannes Schönherr, with a team of female data collection cyborgs who “suck up sexual knowledge in the bustling subterranean sex world of the city with their always ready cunts . . . [fucking] their way through one beautifully shot, highly artificial set after another” (197). He has been credited as Akira the Hustler in three films. The first was a minor role in Hashiguchi Ryōsuke’s *Hashshu!* in 2001, and the second was in the 2002 film *NAUGHTY BOYS* ノーティー・ボーイズ (Naughty Boys), which was directed by and stars Imaizumi Kōichi. In 2004 Akira wrote, directed and starred in the short パイパイ・
Second, *Hatsukoi* is unique in that it is explicitly about gay rights; it also represents the most overtly political narrative that I study in this dissertation. A major focus of the film is homophobia and the ill effects it has not only on its victims but on society at large. For instance, Tadashi is the target of vicious anti-gay bullying by his schoolmates—they call him a faggot (*okama*); leave a note in his shoe locker which reads “forbidden to come to school; homos: stop inconveniencing everyone by coming to school”; suggest that he is somehow “infectious”; and even stick a sign on his back reading “death penalty.” Keigo later reveals that he was bullied for the same reason when he was in high school. And even Kōta is the target of bullying while he maintains a public friendship with Tadashi.

Besides the general anti-gay atmosphere of Tadashi’s school, the film deals with internalized homophobia, homophobically motivated parental abandonment, and institutionalized homophobia. Tadashi’s internalized homophobia is depicted graphically in the form of an imagined rape. Following a brief and rather sweet opening scene—soon revealed to have actually been a dream—in which Kōta hugs and kisses Tadashi and tells him he loves him, Tadashi says in voiceover: “When I realized I was in love with Kōta, I started to hate myself.”\(^{145}\) Soon, we see the two friends being accosted by bullies as they walk to school; after the confrontation, each vehemently denies to the other that he is gay. Later, however, Tadashi fantasizes about Kōta as he masturbates in his bedroom. His inner conflict is symbolized by the

オーバー・ザ・レインボウ (Bye Bye Over The Rainbow), which was part of the Hibakari Cinema-produced film *Queer Boys and Girls on the Shinkansen.*

\(^{144}\)通学禁止：ホモは学校くるな みんなに迷惑かけないように。

\(^{145}\)僕は、コータのことが好きなんだっって気が付いた時、僕は、自分のことが嫌いになった。
fantasy, in which Kōta is raping him. In the fantasy, Tadashi repeatedly says “no” (iyada) while Kōta penetrates him roughly and painfully, grunting “shut up you faggot” (urusē yo, kono okama). Tadashi is smiling as he jerks off, but at the end of the scene he is crying.

We see the impact of parental abandonment when Shinji reveals that when his family discovered he was gay, they disowned him. The scene takes place in Shinji and Hiroshi’s bedroom which, with its tatami floor, futons, and tansu cupboard, is marked as traditionally Japanese, in contrast with the rest of their apartment, which has Western furniture. The language used in this scene is revealing: Shinji is specific in saying that the fact of his homosexuality “leaked,” and that when it did his parents disinherited him. The suggestion, therefore, is that Shinji did not actively come out, but rather was outed, by rumours or perhaps even maliciously, and that his parents’ response was to cut off all contact. The scene ends with Hiroki telling Shinji that he wants to be with him forever. The setting reflects the “traditional” attitude of Shinji’s parents. At the same time, however, by showing Shinji and Hiroki in one of their most intimate and loving moments (they are in bed together) in an explicitly Japanese space, it simultaneously locates them firmly within Japan, rejecting any suggestion that lives and relationships like theirs are somehow non-Japanese. This assertion of Japaneseness is also reflected in the tin robots that Tadashi collects: although no longer favoured by Japanese children, they are nevertheless traditional toys that recall an earlier Japan. In a gesture to the global aspect of this film, they also recall the tin toys made from American castoffs which were among postwar Japan’s first exports, as I discuss in Chapter One.

This is linked to the institutionalized homophobia against which Keigo rails so passionately early in the film, his argument turning out to be prophetic when Hiroki is

146 俺さ、ゲイだってことがばれて、親に勘当されちゃった。
hospitalized and Shin is unable to visit him. Keigo complains that gays are disadvantaged in many ways in Japanese society: not just in terms of mundane things like taxes or because being unmarried can affect one’s career, but regarding matters of basic humanity: a gay man cannot list his boyfriend as his heir, cannot visit him in hospital, and cannot even attend his funeral without the family’s permission.

Indeed, if there can be said to be one overriding political point being made in the film, it is that marriage equality is important, desirable, and possible for Japan. In one of the first scenes, Keigo is reading aloud an article in a magazine about South Africa becoming the fifth country to legalize same-sex marriage. Hiroki remarks that it is great, but that it has nothing to do with him. Keigo asks if he has never considered marriage, and Hiroki replies that while he wants to be with Shinji forever, he is not sure whether that can be called marriage. When Keigo presses him, Hiroki agrees that it is unfair that same-sex couples cannot marry in Japan: he wants to at least have the choice. At the same time, though, he realizes that that is not the reality in Japan.

Later, over dinner, the conversation returns to marriage. Keigo points out that, for example, married couples pay less tax. Shin adds that same-sex couples are also not eligible for the Family Support Allowance, and that it is harder for them to get loans. Keigo says that what is at stake is “social credibility” (shakai-teki shin’yō), and that in some companies being unmarried can even affect one’s career prospects. He points out that a man cannot list his male partner as his dependant or heir, or even visit him in the hospital or attend his funeral. When Hiroki protests that these things cannot be true, Keigo tells him that the family’s permission is required: he met a man at the bar recently who was sobbing for just that reason. Hiroki asks why this is the case, and Shin muses that it is because the law does not recognize same-sex couples as family. Still, Hiroki thinks same-sex marriage is “strange” (hen). The discussion in this scene
foreshadows Hiroki’s accident in the film, when Shin receives no official word about his partner’s condition and is initially unable to visit him.

In the film, however, we see that change is possible. Not only do both Tadashi’s mother and his former crush Kōta attend his wedding to Keigo, but Hiroki’s mother sends him a gift of matrimonial tea cups; in her letter she includes her regards to Shin, and says that she is looking forward to being properly introduced.

While homophobia and discrimination are dealt with in several of the texts I discuss, in Hatsukoi they are a central concern. Indeed, I would argue that Hatsukoi is the most overtly and explicitly political of all the texts in this study, emphasizing awareness of issues facing gay men including homophobia and social discrimination, parental abandonment, and social and legal inequality, as well as presenting a compelling argument in favour of marriage rights for LGBT people in Japan.

Protagonist Tadashi’s journey sees him overcoming homophobia and becoming an out gay man, but several other characters also transform. Tadashi’s former crush Kōta also overcomes his homophobia and becomes an ally, as does Hiroki’s mother when she sends her son and his boyfriend a gift of meoto chawan. Also, Hiroki and Shin become more aware of their own inequality and the official discrimination they face in Japan. Although the characters do not overcome all their problems, this serves as a reminder for the audience that such discrimination continues.

Meoto chawan or meoto yunomi are matching pairs of Japanese-style teacups, a large one for the man and a small one for the woman, given as gifts to newlyweds.
3.6 Conclusion

Film began cross-culturally and transnationally, and the Japanese film industry underwent several changes, starting with the importation of foreign technology and foreign pictures. The first Japanese movies were recordings of stage performances, yet even as this ceased to be the focus of the industry, male actors continued to portray women on film into the 1920s. Despite the obvious homoerotic possibilities of such performances, and the enduring popularity of jidaigeki period films set in periods during which male-male eroticism was normative, it was not until the 1960s that “authentic queer films” began to appear in Japan; and the queer themes in these films, as Grossman argues, were often employed for their shock value. It was not until the 1990s that gay themes began to appear in mainstream films, but, as many scholars have argued, such films are often clearly aimed at a heterosexual female audience and have little to do with the lived realities of gay men. Nevertheless, such movies have what Jonathan M. Hall has called a “global trajectory”: they travel around the world on the film festival circuit where they are viewed by both gay and straight audiences. Hall sees this trajectory as potentially problematic because, as he argues, the films are accepted uncritically as realistic depictions of gay life in Japan. I would counter that, in some cases at least, the realities of gay life are reflected in these films: one of the best-known gay boom-era films, Okoge, for instance, portrays the very real pressure to marry, as well as the family rejection and social difficulties faced by same-sex couples in Japan.

In this chapter, I discussed three contemporary gay-themed films. Released in 2001, Hasshu! is thematically closest to the gay boom-era films, in that its focus is on a gay male couple whose relationship is complicated, and even threatened, by a woman. However, while in Okoge the female character’s actions result in the ultimate destruction of the gay couple’s
relationship, and in *Kira Kira Hikaru* the three characters end up in a kind of threesome, with Mutsuki maintaining his both his sexual and romantic relationship with his boyfriend Kon and his companionate marriage with his wife Shōko, *Hasshu!* takes a very different approach: in this film, although she ultimately grows close to them as friends, the main female character has no wish to involve herself in the male characters’ relationship. Instead she sees that, like herself, the two men reject society’s norms, and she seeks therefore to ally herself with them. Rather than destroying their relationship, their friendship with Asako results in a strengthening of the bond between Naoya and Katsuhiro, and leads in the end to their being able to live more openly. Rather than bowing to the considerable social and familial pressure exerted upon them, all three characters reject these attempts at control: Asako remains a single woman who makes her own decisions about her sexuality, and who chooses to create her own family by having children by two gay men, and Naoya and Katsuhiro not only stay together as a fully out gay couple, but also reject the notion that gay men cannot be fathers.

Furthermore, the film shows that Japanese social norms do not necessarily reflect the real concerns and desires of Japanese people. Naoya’s mother has long accepted his homosexuality, although she retains some of the misconceptions about gay men that continue to obtain in mainstream Japanese media. And although she rejects the notion that a same-sex partner can be “family,” the suggestion is that she will shed this prejudice along with her mistaken belief that her son wishes to be a woman. Yōko, who suffered because of traditional conservative attitudes about marriage and family, initially attempts to perpetuate the same norms that caused her so much pain, but implicitly rejects those attitudes in the face of her own daughter’s objections, when the two move back to the big city. Meanwhile, Katsuhiro’s older brother, who as the head of an old and traditional family might be expected to be the most conservative character of all, is
not only unconcerned by Katsuhiro’s homosexuality, but seems similarly untroubled by the prospect of the family line coming to an end, as long as his brother is happy.

Like *Hasshu!*, *Mezon do Himiko* (2005) also concerns a gay male couple, Himiko and Haruhiko, and a woman, Saori, and family is again an important aspect of the film. In this case, however, the woman does not threaten or complicate the men’s relationship. Rather, by showing a gay man’s attempts to reconnect with his adult daughter, a reconciliation that is brokered by the man’s boyfriend, the film exposes the discrimination suffered by sexual minorities in contemporary Japan, and shows how that discrimination affects not only queer people themselves, but their families as well. Saori is estranged from her father not because he willingly abandoned her, but because he was *forced* to cut off contact in order to live as a gay man, just as Ruby was forced to cut off contact with her son in order to live as a woman. And although Haruhiko and Saori do attempt (unsuccessfully) to have sex, it is clear that they do this as a way to maintain their link to Himiko, who is on the verge of death.

While *Hasshu!* seems more like a call for individuals to be true to themselves, *Himiko* represents a forceful argument against discrimination. Through characters like Himiko, Ruby, Yamazaki, and the other residents of the home, we see the devastating consequences of social and familial rejection and opprobrium. But the film also has a positive message: that such discrimination can end. This is suggested by Ruby’s granddaughter’s obsession with *Rainbow Warrior* and the positive graffiti that appears on the home’s wall at the end of the film, which references the manga’s magic spell.

It is also particularly embodied in the character of Jun’ya, a teenaged boy who, along with a group of friends, initially participates in harassing the residents and defacing the wall of the home with anti-gay graffiti. While on various occasions they taunt and laugh at Saori, Ruby and
Chubby, they flee in fear when the more masculine Haruhiko calmly but menacingly warns them to back off, and pushes Jun’ya. And in another moment which is clearly pivotal for the boy, the gang happen to see the rough Takao strip naked to go swimming, his intimidating yakuza-style tattoos on full display. Later, during the festival of Obon, when people honour the spirits of their ancestors and return to their traditional family homes to visit and to clean their relatives’ graves, and when the spirits of the dead revisit the household altars, the boys again approach the home. This time, however, Jun’ya has obviously told the group that he intends to make amends, adding that if they no longer want to be friends, it cannot be helped. As he assists them with their preparations for the festival, Jun’ya learns things about Obon from the various residents, and later shares a meal with them. Whether Jun’ya is himself gay or has just realized that his behaviour was wrong is left to the viewer to decide, however it is surely no coincidence that the T-shirt Jun’ya wears in this scene bears an image of a Transformers-type robot emblazoned with the English word TRANS.

Like Mezon do Himiko, Hatsukoi, released in 2007, exposes the inequality of gay people in contemporary Japan, and the discrimination they suffer. While at its heart it was conceived as a simple romance, in this film we have at least four parallel stories: the love story of two men who meet and end up marrying; the coming of age of a young gay man and his acceptance of his homosexuality; the political enlightenment of a gay couple regarding their own social and legal inequality; and at least two characters’ transition from discrimination to acceptance. But over all of these is a clear, persistent, and powerful argument for the need for gay rights, particularly for marriage equality, in Japan and globally. The film’s final scene features AKTA’s AIDS awareness slogan “We are already living together” borrowed as a reminder that denying equal
rights to gay couples is ultimately futile: they already form partnerships that are celebrated by their communities and families as no different from marriage.

The trajectory of Japanese movies with gay themes goes from films intended to shock, to pictures aimed at straight female audiences and reflecting their interests and desires, to calls for equality and an end to pointless discrimination. Despite Japan’s long history of representations of same-sex erotic relationships, however, films featuring such stories and characters are overwhelming set in the contemporary era. In the following chapter, I discuss one exception: Kudō Kankurō’s Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san, which features characters who are both gay and pre-modern.
Chapter 4: Yaji and Kita, Gay Men of Edo in Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san

As I explained in the previous chapter, with rare exceptions Japanese stories of unambiguous male-male eroticism are to be found only in modern films set in the contemporary era. One recent mainstream film that centres on explicitly gay characters in a premodern setting is Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san (Yaji and Kita: The Midnight Pilgrims).

The 2005 directorial debut of Kudō Kankurō, the film is based on an award-winning manga series by Shiriagari Kotobuki called Yaji Kita In DEEP, and on Jippensha Ikku’s 1802-1822 picaresque comic novel Tōkaidōchū Hizakurige. Yaji and Kita is unusual not only because it is a strikingly sympathetic portrait of a gay couple set in the Edo period which explicitly challenges modern homophobic assumptions about homosexuality, but also because it has not been marketed or received as a “gay film” in Japan. I will argue that unlike mainstream films from the gay boom period discussed in Chapter Three, Mayonaka no Yaji-san

148 Despite being set (mostly) in the Edo period, as I will explain the film is surreal and anachronistic, which is one reason why I feel comfortable using the modern word “gay” to describe its protagonists.

149 Hizakurige, literally “knee” and “chestnut-coloured hair,” links the human leg to the chestnut coat of a horse, and is used in much the same way as the British term “Shanks’ pony” to mean “travelling on foot,” or “walking.” Thus, the first translation of the novel was titled Shank’s Mare: Being a Translation of the TOKAIDO Volumes of HIZAKURIGE, Japan’s Great Comic Novel of Travel and Ribaldry by Ikku Jippensha (1765-1831). In his 2002 anthology, Shirane Haruo uses the rather more terse title Travels on the Eastern Seaboard which, though more concise, loses some of the vernacular flavour of the original.

150 This is in direct contrast to its overseas marketing. The film has played at queer film festivals around the world and has been explicitly promoted as a gay love story. Similarly, while the English Wikipedia article includes the film in the category “Japanese LGBT-related films,” the Japanese Wikipedia article does not include it in this category. Interestingly Japanese Wikipedia does include in the category the movie Big Bang Love, Juvenile A (“Category: Nihon no LGBT Kanren Eiga”).
Kita-san is unique among Japanese films in that it directly links a positive modern gay identity with premodern same-sex eroticism.

4.1 Background

Kudō Kankurō (b. 1970) is known for his work writing for and acting in various films and television programmes, including the popular variety show SMAP X SMAP. Described on the DVD cover as a “hallucinogenic gay love story,” Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san was released as a mainstream comedy in Japan in 2005, and has been playing at film festivals around the world since its debut. While Yaji and Kita is like many of the mainstream gay-themed Japanese films discussed in the previous chapter in that it is written, directed and acted by heterosexuals, it differs from those movies because the relationship between the two main characters, but not their homosexuality, is central to the plot; because it is a strikingly sympathetic portrait of a male-male couple which explicitly challenges modern homophobic assumptions about homosexuality; because it reads a modern gay identity back onto characters who are associated with the pre-modern shudō tradition; and because it is set in the Edo period.

Like Robin Hood, with whom they share a certain roguish charm and outlaw panache, Yaji and Kita are characters who have been adopted and adapted by various storytellers to become archetypal folk heroes. They first appeared in a series of comic travel adventure stories by Jippensha Ikku (1765-1831), a prolific writer of kibyōshi (satirical novels) and kokkeibon (humorous books). In 1802, Ikku published the first part of a series of comic adventures that took place on the Tōkaidō, the main highway between Edo and Kyoto, which travelled along the

151 From the back cover of the two-disc special edition DVD released in the US and Canada by Tokyo Shock.
eastern coast of Honshū. *Hizakurige* follows the adventures of the cheeky and boorish Yajirobei (Yaji) and Kitahachi (Kita) on the road. The series, according to Satchell, brought Ikku to the same degree of prominence in Japan as Dickens would later achieve in England, and Yaji and Kita became familiar and beloved figures (“Jippensha” 14). The Yaji Kita no Yu hot springs in Hakone and the statue of the duo at the Sanjō Ōhashi bridge in Kyoto (which was the terminus of the Tōkaidō during the Edo period) are just two testaments to the characters’ enduring popularity, as is their continuing use in advertising: Yaji and Kita have lent their names to everything from cafes to pachinko machines to toasted seaweed.\(^{152}\)

Ikku’s 1814 introduction to the *Hizakurige* series gave the life stories of Yaji and Kita prior to the start of their travels twelve years before, and was printed at the beginning of all subsequent editions of the story. It explains that Tochimen’ya Yajirobei of Fuchū in the province of Shunshū had been left “fairly well off” by his father, but was

so wrapped up in a boy called Hananosuke . . . that, keeping to this path as though it were the path of filial duty, and as happy as a man who has dug up a pot of gold, by means of all sorts of foolish pranks he managed to make a tremendous hole in his property, and was finally compelled to . . . fly with the boy from the town of Fuchū.

(Satchell, “Ikku’s ‘Afterthought’” 369)

The two travel to Edo and settle in a small house in Hatchō-bori (now Tokyo’s Chūō ward). Soon their money is gone. Hananosuke comes of age, takes the name Kitahachi, and begins an apprenticeship at a shop, while Yajirobei takes on a variety of odd jobs, marries, and becomes increasingly destitute.

\(^{152}\) For more information on the Yaji Kita no Yu, see the *Tachiyori Onsen Mishuran* (Michelin Onsen Day Trip) website, available at bit.ly/tVApFi. A photograph of the statue of Yaji and Kita can be seen at the “Sanjō Ōhashi” article in Japanese *Wikipedia.*
Twenty years pass. One day, independent schemes concocted by Yaji (to trick his wife into leaving so he can take a new wife) and Kita (to avoid marrying a woman who is carrying his child) collide: the new woman Yaji plans to marry and the lover Kita wants to avoid marrying are one and the same. The truth emerges as the unfortunate Tsubo goes into labour, falls unconscious and dies. Meanwhile, Kita’s boss has also died, and word arrives from his widow that she has decided to dismiss Kita and “return him” to Yaji:

As Kitahachi . . . had again become a hanger-on of Yaji, and as both were tired of their way of living and were anxious to mend their luck, they decided to leave Edo. Thus it was that [they started] along the East Sea route to welcome what they hoped would prove a lucky spring by making a pilgrimage to the Grande Shrine of Isé.\(^{153}\)

(Satchell, “Ikku’s ‘Afterthought’ Introduction” 385)

Thus began the journeys of Yaji and Kita. In 1831, nine years after finishing the series and shortly before his death, Ikku again released a story concerning the portion of Yaji and Kita’s lives before they left Edo; he planned another story as well, but died before he completed it (Satchell, “Life of Jippensha” 14-15).

Yaji and Kita’s popularity did not decline after Ikku’s death. On the contrary, the stories were so popular that “imitations” were published before Ikku even finished his series (Shirane 733). Nearly fifty years after Ikku died, in 1870, Kanagaki Robun (1829-1894, born Nozaki Bunzō, a journalist and popular writer of humorous fiction) published Seiyō Dōchū Hizakurige, 

\(^{153}\) According to Peter Ackermann, pilgrimages (mairi) to Ise Shrine, which is dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu, the legendary ancestor of the emperor, began to gain popularity towards the end of the Heian period (794-1192), and “[a]s early as the Muromachi period (1336-1573) a visit to Ise was seen to have the highest priority in a person’s life.” He adds that in the Edo period “the journey to Ise was a way for couples to elope without committing a punishable offence” (8).
which follows the original heroes’ grandsons, also named Yaji and Kita, on a journey between Yokohama and London. *Seiyō Dōchū Hizakurige* (title variously translated as Travels to the West or Through the West by Shanks’ Mare) features racist depictions of foreigners, especially those with dark skin, and descriptions of places taken from the writings of Fukuzawa Yukichi (who was lampooned by many comic writers) and from a friend of Robun’s who had recently returned from abroad (Keene 16-18).

A little more than a decade after the first ever film footage was shot in Japan in 1897, the pair made their movie debut in a production starring kabuki actor Nakamura Kangorō and Ichikawa Ennoji. Further Yaji and Kita films appeared in 1911, 1913, and 1917. Between 1920 and 1940, the duo appeared in at least fourteen movies produced by Nikkatsu Corporation alone, the first two released only thirteen days apart; the earliest ones featured “Japan’s first movie star” (Irie 67), kabuki actor Onoe Matsunosuke. The *Complete Index to World Film Since 1895* lists fifty-one titles starring Yaji and Kita between 1910 and 1960.

In the 1920s, almost one hundred years after Ikku’s death, the duo returned to Tokyo on the kabuki stage. This was the “official” adaptation of Ikku’s stories by Kimura Kina. A

154 The *Film Database* lists two films starring Nakamura Kangorō and Ichikawa Ennoji, one from 1909 titled *Dochū Hizakurige* and one from 1910 titled *Yajirobei Kitahachi*.

155 For a list of Nikkatsu’s films featuring Yaji and Kita, see nikkatsu.com.

156 These are only the films whose titles contain Yaji and Kita’s names; there are also numerous other films whose titles contain some variant of the phrase *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige*.

157 Yaji and Kita have long been associated with kabuki, and have frequently been portrayed by kabuki actors, even in film: not only the earliest Yaji and Kita movies but also the most recent releases feature well-known kabuki stars in leading roles: the 2005 production discussed in this chapter stars Nakamura Shichinosuke II as Kita, and a 2007 movie titled *Yaji Kita dochū teresuko* (international title *Three For The Road*) stars his father Nakamura Kanzaburō XVIII as Yaji. Kanzaburō also has a small part in the 2005 film.
series of plays featuring Yaji and Kita were also adapted by James Brandon for performance in English in 1977 as *The Road to Kyōto* (Maurin 101-102). This was not to be the duo’s last appearance on stage. Performances of Brandon’s *The Road to Kyōto* are still staged, and the characters have continued to appear all over the world in genres as diverse as *kuruma ningyō* (a type of puppet play in which the puppeteers sit on small wheeled carts), *jōruri* (chanting recitation), *bunraku* puppet theatre, and children’s shows. A Kudan Project play written and directed by Amano Tengai called *Yaji and Kita*, also based on the manga by Shiriagari, was first performed in 2002. The production has been nominated for several prizes and toured China and Malaysia. In the play, our two heroes take refuge at a small inn during a long rainstorm on their way to Ise. The rain continues for days, causing the pair to lose track of time and reality (“Kudan Project”).

In 1984, Yaji and Kita made a fresh appearance in print, this time in a series of manga by Shitō Ryōko, who reimagined the beloved characters as second-year high school girls. Shitō published twenty-two volumes of *Yaji Kita Gakuen Dōchūki* (*Yaji and Kita’s School Travel Diary*). The stories were first serialized in the now-defunct *shōjo* magazine *Bonita* between 1982 and 1991, but have been re-released by publisher Akita Shoten, along with seven more volumes released between 2004 and 2006, and additional ones in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013. In the series, Kita (whose full name is Shinokita Reiko, and who is blonde, as is the male Kita in Shiriagari’s manga and in the 2005 film) and Yaji (full name Yajima Junko) travel from school to school all over Japan fighting corruption, yakuza, and ninja. Kita looks so masculine when not in her school uniform that at one point she begins working part-time at a host bar, where she wears a tuxedo and calls herself “Rei,” and several women fall in love with her, while in another episode she develops an aversion to males that causes her to break out in a rash from their touch.
Two animated episodes of *Yaji Kita gakuen dōchūki* have been released on video, in 1989 and 1991. They feature voice work by veteran voice actors Yamamoto Yuriko as Yaji and Yamada Eiko as Kita, and storylines involving the duo saving various schools from plots by evildoers. Once again, the plots feature a female student (voiced by Mitsuishi Kotono, who first gained fame with her work on *Sailor Moon*) falling in love with Kita.

The most recent Yaji and Kita manga are by Shiriagari Kotobuki (b. 1958). His two-volume *Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san* (Midnight Yaji Kita, first volume 1996) and eight-volume series *Yaji Kita In DEEP* (first volume 1998) inspired both Amano’s 2002 play and Kudō’s 2005 film (Shiriagari has a small role in the film, as the proprietor of Tower Phonographs). In 2001, *Yaji Kita In DEEP* won the Award for Excellence in the fifth annual Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize. Shiriagari has also released a novel, *Shōsetsu Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san* (Novel Midnight Yaji Kita, released in 2000), and a one-volume Yaji and Kita collection (released in 2005), along with another manga, *Mayonaka no Hige no Yaji-san Kita-san* (Midnight Yaji Kita with Beards).

### 4.2 Kudō Kankurō’s *Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san*

Kudō’s 2005 film *Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san* has a surrealistic and complicated plot that follows Yaji and Kita as they make a pilgrimage to Ise Shrine. The film is divided into five parts, each with a title that evokes the inns that sprang up along the Tōkaidō to accommodate travellers, and the many inns that Yaji and Kita visit in Ikku’s stories. After the introductory episode, which is unnamed, the episodes are: “Warai no yado” (translated as the Laugh Inn); “Yorokobi no yado” (the Pleasure Inn); “Uta no yado” (the Singing Inn); and “Ō no yado” (the King’s Inn).
Yaji (played by Nagase Tomoya\textsuperscript{158}) and his lover Kita (Nakamura Shichinosuke II\textsuperscript{159}) are low-ranking Edoites who have never left the city. Yaji is married to a woman, and Kita is a “washed-up actor” and junkie who has lost his grip on reality and who is hopelessly in debt. While sifting through Kita’s collection notices one day, Yaji comes across an advertisement for Ise Shrine, which reads “reality is out there.”\textsuperscript{160} Hoping to cure Kita of his drug addiction (and following a rousing musical number in which they sing about travelling to Ise and being “born to be gay”\textsuperscript{161}), the two set out on their pilgrimage. Meanwhile, Inspector Kin Kin (Abe Sadao\textsuperscript{162}) discovers the corpse of Yaji’s wife Ohatsu (media personality Koike Eiko), and Kita becomes his prime suspect.

Although the story’s main conflict initially stems from Kita’s addiction and Yaji’s efforts to prevent him from using drugs, at The Singing Inn, at the base of Mt. Fuji, the lovers meet a young woman named Oyuki (Shimizu Yumi), and before long Kita reveals to Yaji that he has fallen in love and wants to stay with her: Oyuki will solve his “gay problem” and his drug

\textsuperscript{158} Nagase (b. 1978) is the lead singer of Johnny and Associates idol band TOKIO. He has appeared in four feature films and over thirty television dramas.

\textsuperscript{159} Nakamura Shichinosuke II (born Takayuki Namino in 1983) is a kabuki, television and screen actor. He is the son of famed kabuki actor Nakamura Kanzaburō XVIII, who also appears in the film. Unusually, unlike most kabuki actors, who specialize in either male or female parts, Shichinosuke plays both types of roles. He made his first stage appearance at Tokyo’s Kabuki-za at the age of three. Besides his kabuki career he has appeared in numerous plays, television programmes and films, including his 2004 film debut as Emperor Meiji in Edward Zwick’s \textit{The Last Samurai}.

\textsuperscript{160} リアル、当地にあり。This translation is from the subtitles.

\textsuperscript{161} This is how the line is translated in the subtitles, but a more accurate translation of the Japanese lyrics (女子供は連れてかねえぜ . . . どっこいオレたちホモだもん) would be “we aren’t taking any women or children . . . Hey ho! Because we’re homos!”

\textsuperscript{162} Abe (born 1970) is a prolific and popular television and film actor, and member of comedy-rock band Gurūpu Tamashii.
problem;\textsuperscript{163} she is his Ise. When Kita confesses his love to Oyuki, however, she reveals that she has fallen in love with Yaji. Here, the film seems in danger of slipping into the plot cliché of a gay male relationship endangered by a woman; indeed, it appears to do so in extreme fashion: consumed with jealousy and rage, strung out and hallucinating, Kita murders Yaji by running him through with a sword. The death of a lover would usually mean the end of the relationship, and indeed THE END flashes up on the screen as a bewildered Kita finds himself in a theatre watching his life in a movie. However, at the Sanzu River, Yaji meets Datsueba (Ken Naoko).\textsuperscript{164} She informs him that he has been murdered by Kita and offers him a ride to the river’s source: if he goes there, he may be able to beat death.

Kita is filled with remorse. Following a hallucination involving a fake “Yaji” (played by Tsumabuki Satoshi\textsuperscript{165}) and a trip to a fake “Ise” (the Shinjuku branch of the Isetan department store),\textsuperscript{166} Kita finds himself at a tiny bar. The bartender (model and performer ARATA) tells

\begin{quote}
お幸さんがいるや、ホモやク中も直る。
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{163} Ken Naoko (born Asada Naoko in 1953) is a highly successful and popular comedian, actor, media personality and singer. She has had several hit singles and albums, and appeared in a large number of television programmes and films, including competing several times in NHK’s annual New Year’s Eve “Kōhaku Uta Gassen” (Red and White Song Battle). The Sanzu River (Sanzu no Kawa) is a mythical river in Japanese Buddhist tradition which is similar to the River Styx of Greek mythology. It separates the worlds of the living and the dead, and people must cross it when they die. The “clothes-stealing crone” Datsueba (奪衣婆), also known as Jigoku no Baba (the Old Hag of Hell), is a demon who steals the clothes of the dead (the weight of which represents their sins) before they cross the River. Datsueba is sometimes represented as male, possibly due to confusing her with Keneō, her demon assistant (“Datsueba”).

\textsuperscript{165} Tsumabuki (born 1980) is the lead singer of the group Basking Lite and a multi-award winning film and television actor.

\textsuperscript{166} According to an interview with the director on the DVD, this scene was filmed spontaneously and without securing the necessary permits. In the scene, passersby can be seen looking on in surprise as “Yaji” and Kita appear in full Edo costume and, holding hands, skip down a busy Shinjuku street.
Kita that bringing his dead lover back will take a great deal of concentration: if he loses focus Yaji will disappear. The bartender reveals that he himself is dead; he exists only because his wife is dreaming about him. Concentrating hard, Kita conjures the Phantom Yaji, whereupon he too falls asleep and begins turning into a mushroom. Meanwhile Yaji and Datsueba reach the Source (played by Arakawa Yoshiyoshi), whose tears form the Sanzu River. The Source is Ohatsu, Yaji’s wife.

Inspector Kin Kin and his assistant arrive to arrest Phantom Yaji, who is drinking at the bar, and Kita, who is still asleep. The commotion they cause threatens to wake Kita. The bartender reminds Phantom Yaji that he is only Kita’s dream. He must concentrate and only think of Kita, or he will disappear. But he cannot stop thinking of Ohatsu. A phantom Ohatsu appears holding Excalibur, which she dangles over the sleeping Kita, threatening to kill him because he is Yaji’s lover. Phantom Yaji reminds her that they both exist only in Kita’s dream: if he dies, they will cease to exist.

At the Sanzu River, Yaji realizes it is his fault Ohatsu is crying. In an extended flashback, we learn that Ohatsu’s death was accidental. Ohatsu the Source asks Yaji whether he hates Kita for killing him; he says he does not, and Ohatsu replies that in that case she does not hate Yaji either. At the bar in the forest, a tear falls from Phantom Ohatsu’s eye and splashes on Kita’s forehead, waking him up, and Phantom Yaji and Phantom Ohatsu disappear. At the Sanzu River, Ohatsu the Source allows the real Yaji to cross back into life.

Back in the forest, Kita sits at the bar. He is done with dreams, and just as he thinks that

167 “Fake Yaji” (うそのやじ).

168 While both living Ohatsu and Phantom Ohatsu are played by Koike Eiko, Ohatsu the Source is played by Arakawa, who portrays the soul of every dead person in the film.
death with Yaji would not be so bad, Yaji comes stumbling in. The two are reunited, and Kita
tells Yaji that he is Kita’s only reality. In the penultimate scene, Kita and Yaji (who has been
eating magic mushrooms plucked from the body of Kita) are riding on a pink elephant with long
spindly legs that resembles the beasts in Salvador Dali’s *Los Elefantes*. In the final scene, the
two ride into the distance on a motorcycle.

As discussed previously, Mark McLelland and others have documented the early 1990s
gay boom which “swept” Japan and which saw a “rapid escalation” in representations of gays in
mainstream film and television and other media. McLelland points out, however, that “much of
this material was clearly pitched at a female audience” (McLelland, “Local Meanings”). In his
discussion of the most well known 1990s gay boom-era gay-themed films, Dobbins argues that
they represent “cultural tourism or voyeurism of the gay world” by heterosexual writers and
viewers, with heterosexual directors shifting the focus of *yaoi* and *bishōnen* texts to their own
“favourite objects, heterosexual women”:

Rather than consider the possibility that gay men of themselves can constitute
interesting subject material, the director’s ‘interest’ lies in answering the
questions, ‘what type of woman would be interested in or entangled in
relationships with gay men?’ and to a lesser extent, ‘what kind of men are gay?
These questions are indicative of a shallow curiosity and preconclude that there is
something wrong with gay men and the women who seek their company. (Dobbins
41-43)

Although it is written, directed and performed by heterosexuals, *Mayonaka no Yaji-san*
*Kita-san* does not fit this mould. The fact that the film stars so many highly popular mainstream
straight celebrities, in particular heartthrob Nagase, who is a fixture on television variety shows,
places it firmly in the mainstream. But at the same time, it also represents a categorical
disavowal of the stereotypical non-threatening, sensitive, funny, female-friendly, fashion-
conscious gay male—not just the characters in the films discussed previously, but the real-life
celebrities who appear daily on television programmes aimed at a female audience and on
popular TV variety shows, like cross-dressing *tarento* and columnist Matsuko Deluxe (Matsui
Takahiro); *tarento, chanson* singer and film and fashion critic Piiko (Sugiura Katsuaki);
transgender makeup artist IKKO (Toyoda Kazuyuki); choreographer and reality show star
KABA-chan (Kabashima Eiji); author, drag queen and director Miwa Akihiro; *enka* singer
Mikawa Kenichi; ikebana artist Kariyazaki Shōgo; or even the (arguably homophobic) Razor
Ramon Hard Gay (Sumitani Masaki).\textsuperscript{169} Similarly, while the main characters are played by
attractive young actors with an undeniable appeal to a female audience, unlike gay boom-era
films like *Okoge*, neither women nor a sense of the voyeuristic pleasure of gazing upon the
exotic are the focus of this story. Instead, when we strip away the farcical and surrealistic
elements, what we are left with is a tale of love and commitment that happens to be between two
men.

\textsuperscript{169} Razor Ramon Hard Gay is a gay male character created by comedian Sumitani, who is not
himself gay; Sumitani’s meteoric rise to fame was precipitated by the character in the early
2000s. Hard Gay wears tight black leather shorts and a leather waistcoat with a motorcycle cap
and mirrored aviator glasses. He is known for his frequent pelvic thrusts, his flamboyant hand
gestures and his trademark expression, a sort of high-pitched squeal. When asked by a reporter
in 2005 how she felt about how the media represents sexual minorities, Otsuji Kanako replied,
“It makes me angry. This morning I saw Razor Ramon for the first time . . . He’s not
homosexual. He just uses gayness for his act, to make people laugh” (Tsubuku). In his PhD
dissertation “Invisible People: An Ethnography of Same-Sexuality in Contemporary Japan,”
Hawkins suggests that mainstream Japanese media prefers to portray gay men as feminine in part
because this makes them funny (322). Hard Gay represents just such an approach: a tall, well-
built, masculine man, Sumitani dresses Hard Gay in an outfit that references an ultra-masculine
(i.e.: “hard”) gay style, while the behaviour of the character himself, and the way he wears the
clothing, are very feminine. Hard Gay is funny because he is feminine; he is feminine because
he is gay; and his femininity is revealed both in his dress and his behaviour.
The film is not entirely unproblematic in its depiction of the main characters and the way it deals with their sexuality, however. One problem is with terminology: the English subtitles and DVD packaging use the word “gay” throughout, but in the Japanese dialogue the word most frequently used is “homo” (ホモ).\(^{170}\) In one episode, for example, Yaji and Kita are holding hands as they walk through the woods, and a passing woman remarks, “my, you two are good friends aren’t you.”\(^{171}\) Yaji retorts “we love men more than three meals a day; we’re two homos madly in love.”\(^{172}\)

The word “homosekushuaru” (“homo” for short) gained popularity in Japan around the 1950s (McLelland, *Queer Japan* 82). On the other hand, the term *gei* (gay) has also been in use since at least the 1950s, and is now probably the most common self-referent for same-sex-desiring Japanese men, having displaced “homo” by the 1990s (McLelland, *Queer Japan* 100, 185). The existence and widespread popularity of figures like Hard Gay mean that the term *gei* is well known not only among non-heterosexual people, but in mainstream Japanese culture as well. But since both terms are anachronistic for the Edo period, when the film is set, the question remains why the writer chose “homo” instead of “gei.” It is possible, but improbable, that Kudō, who is heterosexual, was simply unaware of the terminology preferred by modern

\(^{170}\) The official website for the film (yajikita.com) describes Yaji and Kita as “sweetheart-companions who are deeply in love” (ディープに愛し合う恋人同士). In one scene in the film, Yaji uses the term “dōseiai” (homosexuality).

\(^{171}\) あら、お二人さん、仲がよろしいのね。

\(^{172}\) This translation is from the English subtitles. In this instance the Japanese dialogue uses the word dōseiaisha, or homosexuals, while the English subtitles use “gay” and “homo.” A closer translation of the original line, 三度の飯よりも男が好きで好きでたまらねえ、同性愛者のコンコンちきです, would be “we loooove men so much it’s unbearable, more than we like three meals a day[. We’re not ‘good friends,’ you fool], we’re fucking homosexuals!”
Japanese gay men. It is also possible that the choice was deliberate: an anachronism within an anachronism intended to avoid linking the heroes too explicitly with modern gay culture. Both of these possibilities seem unlikely given the many references to the current era, such as the characters’ appearance in modern Shinjuku, the locus of Japan’s largest gay neighbourhood. Another possibility is the comedic value of employing a slightly old-fashioned term: being over the top makes it funnier and therefore both more palatable and more marketable. “Homo,” however, is a potentially problematic word. In 1991, author Fushimi Noriaki wrote of the word that it has the “dark image of a pervert” (10). In Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan, McLelland remarks that terms like okama and homo are conflated with femininity and transgenderism (195). And in its article on homosexuality, Japanese Wikipedia notes that the abbreviation is sometimes used as an insult (“Dōseiai”).

But what would be a more suitable term to describe Yaji and Kita and their relationship? Would it be appropriate to refer to Yaji and Kita as gay? In Ikku’s original stories, the characters begin their association with a shudō-type relationship, with Yaji as the adult (nenja) and the much younger Kita as the wakashu, or youth. Indeed, it is this specific aspect of their relationship that sets their entire story in motion, since the two initially decide to move to Edo precisely because Yaji has squandered much of his inheritance pursuing the handsome young Kita. Ultimately though, in true shudō fashion, when Kita comes of age the relationship evolves into a non-sexual friendship, and Yaji marries one woman and Kita impregnates another. In their subsequent adventures the two remain close, but never again have sex together.

In Kudō’s 2005 film, Yaji is married to a woman and, not unusually for the Edo period, also has a male lover: Kita. In this story, however, Kita is, like Yaji, an adult. This is remarkable as an utter (for the Edo period perhaps even shocking) denegation of the rules of
shudō, in which male youths—but not mature males—were appropriate lovers for adult men. In the Edo period age and social status (by which here I mean the status of “adult male” versus that of “male youth”) were clearly and very strictly delineated by particular cultural markings in the form of modes of hairstyle and dress. The transition from childhood to manhood was symbolized by a layering on of masculine markers with increasing age, culminating in the adoption of adult forms of dress and hairstyle. Between the ages of about ten (Leupp 125) and twelve (Schalow 29), the crown of a boy’s head was partially shaven, leaving long forelocks or maegami, around which there developed a “highly fetishized erotic” (Pflugfelder 32). Now marked as a youth, he wore this hairstyle for several years, and then the fringe was reshaped in the “cornered forelocks” or sumi-maegami style (Leupp 125; Pflugfelder 33). Finally, both the forelocks and crown were fully shaved, the remaining hair restyled in a chonmage (topknot), and the youth “was expected to exchange his wide-sleeved robes (furisode) for adult male garb” (Pflugfelder 33). Now properly attired and coiffed he was a man, and while he was thus no longer supposed to be an object of desire for other men he was, however, now eligible to take the adult role in a new shudō relationship with a male youth.

In the Edo period it was therefore cultural symbols rather than physical (i.e.: secondary sex) characteristics or calendar age that made one a man. In Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san, however, the hairstyles and dress of both men mark them unambiguously as adults of similar age and status. Yet, in Kita’s case at least, a scene in which Inspector Kin Kin learns that he is a

173 As Schalow points out in his introduction to Partings At Dawn, however, “the strict formulation of male love as a relationship between an adult man and a youth [was] frequently maintained only in the form of fictive role-playing” (15).

174 His unshaved forelocks are a significant part of Sōzaburo’s charms in Shiba Ryōtarō’s “Maegami no Sōzaburo” and the film Gohatto, discussed in the previous chapter.

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“washed-up actor” explicitly links him with the shudō tradition, since kabuki actors were associated with both male-male sexuality and prostitution. However, this is not a film about shudō, and whilst as I have explained participating in a shudō relationship by no means precluded sex with females, the evidence in the film is that Kita has never had any type of relationship with a woman: indeed, when he confesses his love to Oyuki he specifically says that it is his “first time.”

According to Robert Lang, in the “queer road movie” it is understood that “the opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality but marriage” (9). Although as I discussed in Chapter One in the context of Japanese society marriages of homosexually-identified people to partners of the opposite sex have not been uncommon, this is explicitly and roundly rejected in Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san. For Yaji, despite being married to Ohatsu, his relationship with Kita explicitly remains his primary love bond, so much so that when pleading with the Source of the Sanzu River—who is the soul of his dead wife, and who blames him for her death—to be allowed to go back to the land of the living, Yaji states that he wants to return to life so that he can continue travelling with his lover. Indeed, although he is married, Yaji seems to have so little interest in women that when another character asks if he has a girlfriend (kanojo) his

175 This is also a self-referential joke, since Nakamura Shichinosuke II, who plays Kita, is himself a kabuki actor. As I discussed previously, Nakamura plays both male and female roles on the kabuki stage, a rather unusual practice since actors usually specialize in one or the other type of role. It is also interesting that Yaji and Kita features rather a lot of cross-dressing, both extra-diegetic and as part of the story: as Kita, Nakamura appears in drag at least once; among dozens of characters he plays in the film, Arakawa Yoshiyoshi portrays at least one woman, as Ohatsu the Source; Yamaguchi Tomomitsu plays the drag queen Ochin, father of Oyuki; and Suzuki Matsuo plays Hige no Oiran, the Bearded Courtesan.

In at least one edition of Ikku’s stories about the pair, both Yaji and Kita are linked with kabuki: Shirane notes that the preface to the 1814 edition of Travels on the Eastern Seaboard features portraits of Yaji and Kita with Chinese-style descriptions and haiku about each character. Yaji is described as having a heart “like that of a sexy kabuki actor,” while Kita “was a boy actor selling sexual favors” (734).
bewildered response is, “what’s that?” In *Yaji and Kita* the strong and inescapable suggestion is that for a gay man marriage to a woman is a hindrance to a happy same-sex relationship: Yaji’s symbolic release from his marriage when Ohatsu permits him to return to life (the essential element of the ultimate success of his relationship with Yaji) is literally the reversal of a death sentence.\(^{176}\)

Given the anachronistic features of the film, the nature of the relationship between the protagonists, and the use of the modern words “*homo*” and “*dōsei*” in the Japanese dialogue, therefore, I would argue that it is appropriate to understand the two main characters as gay in the sense that it is usually understood today: an innate and enduring sexual orientation and identity.

In terms of the depiction of the characters, a bigger problem than terminology is the frequent linking of Kita with women and femininity. As I have explained, this type of representation is still common in Japan—gay television personalities are often feminine or cross-dressed, for example, and in general gay men are not often portrayed as masculine in the mainstream Japanese media (Hawkins 322). As McLelland puts it, in representations of homosexual men in Japanese popular culture, “there is a basic agreement about the nature of same-sex desire: it somehow ‘feminizes’ a man.” This same-sex desire, according to McLelland, “is read as necessarily expressing itself through the body and personality” (*Male Homosexuality* 120). It is significant that the linking of Kita with women and femininity in the film occurs in the scenes that are furthest removed from reality.

The entire narrative of *Yaji Kita* is surreal, so it can be difficult to separate the fantasy elements (dreams, hallucinations and flashbacks) from the story’s “reality,” especially since

\(^{176}\) For a detailed examination of gay men and marriage in Japan, see Mark McLelland’s *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan.*
these elements always feature characters from the main story, and since parts of the story’s “reality” are also fantastical. I therefore categorize these fantastical elements in three distinct ways: as “dreams,” “hallucinations,” and “flashbacks.”

I have called scenes that end with a character waking up “dreams,” including the scene where Yaji first appears, which is explicitly referred to as a dream, and the scene where Yaji sees himself killing his wife. In the final scenes of the film, characters who appear in dreams seem to be connected with their counterparts in reality (when Ohatsu the Source cries, for example, Phantom Ohatsu cries as well), and dream characters are able to interact with real characters (for instance, the bartender is a product of his wife’s dream, but he can interact with Kita when he is awake, and with Inspector Kin Kin), but I take this as part of the general surreality of the story. That the magic mushrooms that grow on Kita’s body while he is sleeping in the final scenes remain on his body when he awakes further convinces me that these scenes are dreams rather than hallucinations.

I have identified certain of the dreamlike scenes as “hallucinations.” These are scenes that contain fantastical elements (such as characters from reality appearing in bizarre or absurd forms) and are usually preceded by an incident of drug-taking, or of drug withdrawal. Hallucinations are always associated with Kita, who can often be seen coming to when they end. In the sequence where Kita kills Yaji using Excalibur, for example, he has eaten magic mushrooms. In the subsequent scene in the movie theatre, he learns that he was too high to remember the incident correctly.

Finally, I have called certain scenes “flashbacks.” In fact, as we learn at the end, the film’s very first scene is a flashback of Ohatsu washing rice on the night she died. This is explicitly presented as a flashback since the full scene plays out later when Yaji, who is pleading with the
Source to be allowed to return to life, is remembering that night. There are three other short flashbacks in the film, all of which occur when Kita is confessing his love to Oyuki. In the first, Kita sees himself as a child, standing before his mother. In the second, his mother is putting lipstick on the child Kita’s lips. And in the third, the child Kita is being molested by a man, possibly his father. I have called these “flashbacks” since Kita is not asleep or high when they occur, he does not regain consciousness when they end, and they are realistic rather than fantastic.

As I have noted, Kita is nearly always linked with women and femininity in these unreal elements of the film. In one hallucination, for example, he joins a crowd of office ladies who are gossiping on their lunch break. In another, he puts on a pink sweatshirt and joins a group of similarly dressed women. In the first appearance of Kita as a child, in a flashback, he wears a feminine-looking red kimono and the other children call him a “sissy”; in a later flashback, he is wearing lipstick. When Yaji and Kita briefly become separated in “Yorokobi no Yado,” Kita joins a group of modern-day high school girls, putting on a girl’s school uniform and telling Yaji, who calls him “gyaru Kita” (girl Kita), that he has “become a girl.” Finally, Kita is implicitly linked with Yaji’s wife Ohatsu when Kin Kin assumes that Kita has murdered her out of jealousy, and when Ohatsu threatens to kill him for being Yaji’s lover.

These depictions, however, are out of place with the overall representation of Kita in the film’s reality, which is not especially feminine: rather, both Yaji and Kita are as masculine as any of the other male characters, and it is significant that all but one of these brief episodes take place in hallucinations. Indeed, there is no evidence in the story to suggest that Kita wants to be or sees himself as a woman, and it is strongly suggested that his mother was responsible for his
feminine appearance as a child, rather than this being a youthful manifestation of his “true” nature.

This aspect of the film—the contradiction between Kita’s femininity in the context of hallucinations and his actual masculinity—is important for two reasons. First, it echoes the contradiction between modern and traditional Japanese views of same-sex desire. In the Edo period the shudō tradition was associated with samurai culture of “hypermasculinity” which formed the core of the bushidō aesthetic (Vincent, “Writing Sexuality” 138). This contrasts with the modern view in Japan (and elsewhere) that sees male-male sexuality as inherently feminizing and the behaviour of gay men as therefore necessarily feminine. As McLelland says, for gay men “even going to the gym in pursuit of a perfect, masculine body is somehow ‘feminine’ as it is unnatural for a man to be too concerned with physical appearance” (McLelland, Male Homosexuality 120; emphasis added).177

Second, it is strongly suggested that Kita was raped as a child by his father or by other men, and it may be tempting to read this as the explanation for the adult Kita’s homosexuality. I would argue, however, that there is insufficient evidence for such an interpretation, and that Kita’s hallucinations of femininity are instead intended to signal the real reason for Kita’s drug addiction: not hatred of his homosexuality, but rather the experience of being molested.

The suggestion that Kita is uncomfortable with his homosexuality occurs in his statement

177 This echoes Lacan’s comment that “virile display” always seems feminine (291), yet it appears to apply primarily to openly gay men: there are many cases in which heterosexual men are valorised for their bodily focus. For example, singers Gō Hiromi (who appears to be both a target and an icon of Hard Gay), Gackt (Kamui Gakuto), and SMAP member Kimura Takuya have all appeared in beauty salon and cosmetic campaigns aimed at women.
that being with Oyuki will “cure” him of it,\textsuperscript{178} and is perhaps the most problematic issue with his depiction. However, aside from this one remark there is no evidence at all in the story that Kita is unhappy with this aspect of himself. Kita and Yaji frequently express their love for each other by hugging and kissing, holding hands, and exchanging joking shouts of \textit{beranmē!} (bloody fool!) and \textit{teyandei!} (screw you!), and Kita is distraught when he finds himself without Yaji and facing the possibility that he will never return.

Indeed, Kita’s only real problem (besides being in debt) seems to be his drug addiction. The staging of the final flashback (in which the child Kita stands before his mother), which occurs during and mirrors the scene where the adult Kita stands before Oyuki, strongly suggests that he sees Oyuki as a mother figure rather than as a potential lover—indeed, other than his \textit{assertions} of love for her, we get absolutely no sense of the sexual attraction and the true, literally transcendent love we see in his relationship with Yaji. Kita’s pleas for Oyuki to help him suggest the same thing, particularly as they immediately follow a flashback during which he is molested by his father.

Indeed, I would argue that when he tells Oyuki that he loves her, Kita is actually asking for her help, saying that he is afraid of reality. “Reality” is not a hatred of his homosexuality, however: as is made clear at the start of the film, for Kita reality is a spiral of debt and drug addiction:

\begin{quote}
Yaji, I’m losing it. I’m always high, but I have to go on living. To live, I need drugs. For drugs, I need money. If living like this until I die is reality, I’ve had
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{178} ホモ [が] 治る。
enough. I can’t deal with this reality, Yaji.  

弥次さん、オイラ、リアルがとんと分からねぇ。ヤク中で寝たきり 

なのに、生きなきゃなんねぇ。生きるためにはヤクが要る。薬物ためには金 

が要る。そんな暮らし死ぬまで続けるのがリアルなら、オイラはもうたくさ 

んだ。そんなリアルは御免だぜ、弥次さん。

It significant, therefore, that the scene in which the child Kita is molested occurs in a flashback 

rather than a hallucination, strongly suggesting that he takes drugs to avoid just this type of 

memory.

As Lang points out, flashbacks are an inherently unreliable form of narration: “we cannot 

know, from these images alone . . . whether they represent something that really did happen” 

(Lang 7).  

The same problem is inherent in scenes that occur as drug- or drug withdrawal-
induced hallucinations or as dreams: in these sequences, whose vision is represented (in other 

words, who is “narrating”), and can they be believed? We know, for example, that two of Yaji’s 

dreams, though they are terrifyingly realistic, are not real: hundreds of bodies, including several 

doppelgangers of his own lover, did not actually float down the river on sliding doors to become 

part of a grisly video game, and he did not murder Ohatsu by breaking her head with an axe.


179 This translation is mine. The subtitles read: “Yaji-san… I can’t make heads or tails of reality. 

I have to go on living but I’m always high and in bed. To live, I need drugs. To do drugs, I need 

money. If living like this until I die is reality… then I’ve had enough. Who needs that kind of 

reality?”

180 In this passage, Lang is discussing a scene concerning the hustler Joe in the film Midnight 

Cowboy. He says: “we cannot know, from these images alone . . . whether they represent 

something that really did happen to Joe, but which is unrepresentable (except as a false memory) 

because profoundly traumatic; or whether the filmmaker is merely using a cinematic convention 

that would render an ‘explanation’ . . . that is orderly but psychoanalytically false.”
It is easy enough to interpret Yaji’s dreams (he is worried about his drug-addicted lover and feels guilty about the death of his wife), but hallucinations and flashbacks are less easy to pin down. Is Kita himself suffering these hallucinations—he appears to be—and if so, is their content reliable enough to give important clues about Kita and the story, or are the hallucination and flashback sequences “narrated” by the director, and therefore merely a cinematic device intended to convey the extent of Kita’s addiction? Or, as Lang suggests in his discussion of Midnight Cowboy (7-8), are such scenes an attempt, on the part of a heterosexual director, to interpret the feelings, fears, and neuroses of a homosexual character or to explain his desires?

The answer is likely some combination of these. Nevertheless, the problems with the depictions of Kita and the difficulty of placing them in context do not lessen the impact of the film as a positive representation of a male same-sex love relationship: it is the love between the two protagonists that finally frees Kita from his drug habit and creates a new reality for him, allowing the two main characters to live happily ever after, as the rules of the romantic comedy genre demand.  

Despite the unsuccessful attempts to link Kita with femininity, the film represents a rejection of both the hyper-masculine stereotype of traditional Japanese homosexuality and the modern stereotype of gay men as weak, feminine, and unhappy. Even the death of Yaji, a common fate of gay male characters in film, is turned on its head: he dies neither of disease nor at the hand of a homophobe (indeed, all the other characters seem to celebrate the men’s relationship), and the love between him and Kita is so strong that it not only transcends death—even the evil Datsueba goes out of her way to help him—but literally brings him back to

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181 The film loosely follows a typical—albeit surreal—romantic comedy plot structure: the lovers encounter a series of difficulties culminating in a brief separation, but overcome them and are reunited in the end: a gay twist on the typical plot scenario often expressed as the formula “boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl.”
4.3 Conclusion

The mainstream Japanese media often portrays gay men as feminine in part because, as Hawkins points out, since they are seen as “female-like” (*joseiteki*), and therefore “anomalous,” they are funny. Conversely, says Hawkins, “masculine-appearing” (*danseiteki*) men “are seen as men, and as such they are who they represent themselves to be, ‘normative men,’ and because of their straight appearance, their [gayness] becomes invisible” (Hawkins 323). In contrast, the gay media in Japan seems to present gay men as only and always masculine: “If the main paradigm for understanding homosexuality in popular culture is that of transgenderism (a homosexual man is in some ways like a woman), in the gay media, the most prevalent image is that of the gay man as hyper-masculine and hyper-sexual,” and gay men are presented “primarily in sexual, not emotional terms” (McLelland, *Male Homosexuality* 124, 160).

*Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san* reverses and rejects all of these paradigms. A mainstream, heterosexually authored and acted production, the film portrays its gay protagonists as no more or less masculine than other men, and as appealing people whose relationship is both deeply emotional and physical. The audience is supposed to laugh at them not because they are gay and feminine, and therefore peculiar or ridiculous, but because they, like the original Yaji and Kita, are sympathetic and funny characters who find themselves in absurd situations—indeed, when all seems lost, with Kita questioning his sexuality and Yaji dead by his lover’s own hand,

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182 This does, however, vary somewhat according to the specific publication.

183 While there are no sex scenes in the film, Yaji and Kita do express their love in physical ways: by kissing and holding hands, for example.
the audience is clearly supposed to be rooting for the two to somehow reunite. More importantly, *Yaji Kita* presents its main characters as simultaneously gay and gender-normative, people with whom both the mainstream Japanese public and Japanese gay men can identify.\(^\text{184}\)

Unlike mainstream Japanese films from the gay boom period of the early 1990s which present the homosexuality of their protagonists for the “voyeuristic pleasure” of a straight, largely female audience (Dobbins 28), and even the 1999 film *Gohatto*, which presents the forbidden pleasure of sex and romance between males as inherently dangerous, the relationship of the protagonists of *Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san* is central to the movie’s plot, but the sexuality of the characters is not: in the words of William Friedkind in his discussion of *And The Band Played On*, “This film is not about homosexuality, it’s about human problems” (qtd. in Barrios 5). Far from engaging in what Dobbins has called “cultural tourism” of the gay world by heterosexuals (41), *Yaji Kita* does not attempt to present the life or sexual relationship of a male couple for the fetishistic pleasure or titillation of the audience. Rather, the film treats a relationship between two men as subject matter worthy and interesting in itself, and moreover presents this relationship as a source of strength and a reflection of a love so pure and powerful that it brings one character back from the dead, and helps the other to kick a hopeless addiction.

Unlike other mainstream Japanese media which present gays as both funny and contemptible, and which seldom consider the notion that “two gender-normative men might find each other attractive and come together in a relationship much as men and women do” (McLelland, *Male Homosexuality* 3, 59), *Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san*, a surreal work of fiction written, directed and acted by heterosexuals, and set in the Edo period, succeeds in

\[^{184}\text{The effect of this presentation is heightened by the use of popular celebrities in the main roles.}\]
creating a sympathetic (and, paradoxically, realistic) portrayal of gay men, and turns characters first created two hundred years ago into modern gay icons.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation has focused on contemporary Japanese novels and feature films, published or released between 1989 and 2007, which feature gay male characters. Although they were produced in Japanese and for the Japanese market, and reflect contemporary Japan’s social, cultural and political milieu, I have argued that they not only articulate the concerns and desires of gay men and other queer people in Japan, but also that they reflect and participate in a transnational global gay culture and identity. While some of the representations are problematical, I have argued that they can nevertheless be read as positive, supportive, and even explicitly political, and further that, over the nearly twenty year period covered by the novels and films I examine, we can discern a tendency towards slightly less stereotyped, and notably more overtly political, portrayals. Although the novels and films I discuss represent a disparate range of genres, producers, and representations, and characters who are straight, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual, all have in common universal themes of overcoming or becoming, ranging from journeys to coming out, growing up, and finding the self, to stories of triumphing and prevailing over discrimination.

I began by examining transnational cultural flows. As I explained, in the modern world contemporary ideas, identities and popular culture products travel out into the marketplace influencing and being influenced by foreign cultures in an increasingly transnational, hybridized global culture. Although Japan is frequently represented as uniquely inward-looking, closed and homogenous, Japanese history has in fact been continuously marked by interaction with the global, with foreign goods and ideas streaming into Japan and Japanese products pouring back out.
Although this is often seen as a contemporary phenomenon, as I show Japan’s exchanges with the global began well before the advent of modernity, and continued even during the two centuries of self-imposed national isolation. In the late nineteenth century the feudal period was a very recent memory, but there had been major changes in society, government, national identity, and personal subjectivity which were often paradoxical. New technologies were flooding the country, and bringing changes in how Japanese people understood, saw and represented themselves and their nation. This was a process of absorption, adoption, and adaptation, as old forms were incorporated into and replaced by new forms, or were enhanced and changed by new technologies and ideas from abroad—for example, this period saw the start of the Japanese film industry, which was built on imported technologies initially used for recordings of kabuki performances, and later for the creation of a kind of hybridized cinema in which the films were creations in their own right (rather than simple recordings of stage plays), but female roles continued to be played by male onnagata (McDonald 1-2).

We have seen that major upheavals in Japanese culture and society have played out on two scales: the national and the personal, and that both of these also interacted with the global: as the country sought its place among the powerful nations following the Meiji Restoration—which modern historians see as Japan’s transition to modernity in 1868—individual Japanese struggled to find a new identity and subjectivity that blended the foreign ideas rapidly entering the country from the West with traditional Japanese ways of being. These reciprocal flows continued following the Second World War, with the Allied Occupation, the rise and collapse of the bubble economy, recession, and continuing social changes, as the Japanese people continually negotiated national and personal identities in relation to the constantly changing world.
During the years of war and occupation and recovery, Japan once again had to negotiate changing identities of the nation (particularly vis-à-vis other nations and Japan’s place in the world) and the individual (especially with regard to war responsibility and the Japanese people’s new place within the nation). The previous period had been marked by a sudden increase in foreign influence followed by a significant drop during the war years; the post-war period again saw a sudden increase in foreign, now primarily American, influence, but it also saw the beginnings of a once more progressively reciprocal relationship between Japanese and global culture, as Japanese products (even those not immediately identified/identifiable as such) increasingly went out into and were even tailored for the world market, while the global also influenced culture at home. Important industries, including the film industry, began rebuilding and had their first successes overseas, and the manga medium grew into the culturally monolithic and globally significant presence it is today. Film, literature and now television continued to be used to reflect and create Japanese identity, often directly influenced by the foreign/global, particularly the American.

Less than two decades after the war and only sixteen years after the Occupation ended, the country, which had previously been focused on rebuilding and recovery, was reborn as an economic power, becoming the world’s second largest economy. Now Japanese ideas and technologies were pouring into the global market, and by the 1990s the cultural products that had been steadily gaining in overseas markets were a major part of global culture.

As I discussed, however, there is some disagreement amongst scholars about how “foreign,” “global,” or “Japanese” cultural products and ideas are or become as they cross Japan’s borders. For example, while some argue that there was no Japanese fascism during WWII, Asato Ikeda argues that the ideology was “translated” as it crossed Japan’s boundaries,
where it became both Japanese and fascist. And Anne Allison shows that Japanese toys and entertainment products are influenced and shaped by different cultures as they flow into the globalized market, underscoring the difficulty of stating definitively whether any product is really “Japanese” or “global.”

While Iwabuchi Kōichi states that Japan has a “substantial role in global cultural flows” (23), he claims that such transnational flows are dominated by the West, and that Japanese products on the international market are *mukokuseki*, not perceptibly Japanese. Still, he concedes that origins are becoming both harder to trace and “increasingly insignificant and irrelevant,” so that the “absolute symbolic center no longer belongs to a particular country or region” (45-46). Azuma Hiroki disagrees with Iwabuchi on this point, arguing that there *is* an explicit connection between products like anime and manga and traditional Japanese culture, while Susan Napier argues that the Japanese identity depicted in anime is increasingly a global one.

As these and other scholars’ disagreements on the topic illustrate, “Japan,” has always been marked by intersections with (and sometimes resistance against) the non-Japanese, but the further we get from the Meiji Restoration, the more these intersections have become reciprocal, as global culture and Japanese products and cultural goods flow back and forth across the country’s borders, influencing the international marketplace and being influenced by global culture in turn, and making it increasingly difficult to differentiate between what is “foreign” or “global” or “Japanese.” Japanese culture, then, has become thoroughly linked with world culture.

As Iles says, identity is the sense of being unique, an “essentially *individual* person separate from the other individuals who make up the society in which one lives yet connected by a shared awareness of history, tradition, value system, and cultural experience” (5). As is often argued, Japan is still struggling to come to terms with its history, tradition, past, present and
future nearly 150 years after the Meiji Restoration, the advent of modernity. For Iles, the disconnect between traditional values (which subordinate the individual to the needs of the group) and the increasing pressure for people to think of themselves as individual are at the root of the search for Japanese identity, a statement that echoes Harada’s remarks about Japanese gay identity. Iles notes that this disconnect is potentially problematic for the country’s project of internationalization, since Japan has traditionally seen itself as unique yet to some degree closed and internally homogenous. The result, he says, is that “internationalization” really means sending Japan “out into the world,” rather than the other way around. Ironically, as Japanese culture thus becomes “world culture,” maintaining a distinct Japanese identity becomes more difficult (42).

As I have shown, however, even as Japan has traditionally seen itself as closed and unique, it has always been marked by interaction with the world and the influence of the foreign/global. It is precisely for this reason that Japanese culture can be called “world culture,” as it is by Iles, Napier, Azuma, and many others. As Iwabuchi points out, American cultural, political, and financial power still has global reach. This global reach contributed to the expansion of the worldwide market for Japanese goods in the early years, but now it has become increasingly difficult, perhaps even impossible, to locate any one centre of power. This means both that the cultural specificity of many global products and ideas is less important and visible, and that Americanization is less prevalent. Images of “Japeneseness”—including national identity, gendered and sexual identities—are reflected in and influenced by literature and popular culture products such as live-action films. Such products are also influenced by and in turn influence international culture as they travel out into the world marketplace and the global imagination.
In the next sections, I turned to the question of whether there is a transnational gay identity, and of whether there is a gay identity in Japan. As I explain, scholars disagree about whether or not there can be said to be a global gay culture. While some writers argue that there is such a thing, others assert Western terms and concepts still do not or cannot apply in non-Western contexts, claiming that “gay” represents a white, English-speaking, primarily American and male culture and politics, and that what other scholars see as a universal gay identity is really evidence of a kind of cultural imperialism that represents the erasure of traditional identities and practices.

As we have seen, however, in the Japanese context the shudō tradition has not existed for two centuries or more, and modern laws, ethics, and understandings of sexuality and childhood mean that it could not be revived. Additionally, to claim that Japanese LGBT people are simply unwitting or helpless subjects of a Western effort to impose a foreign identity upon them is, I argue, ethnocentric: it is not only to deny their agency, it is to deny history, culture, and contemporary reality.

As I have shown, same-sex desiring people in Japan understand, organize and express themselves as gay: the preferred self-referent is gei, a word that has become part of the mainstream vocabulary and is understood to refer to a lasting sexual orientation primarily to members of one’s own sex. There is a Japanese gay rights movement—even a same-sex marriage movement—and non-heterosexuals are increasingly choosing to come out publicly in all or most areas of their lives. Japanese scholars undertake critical examinations of non-heterosexual identities. There is an open and thriving gay scene. There are openly LGBT politicians and many gay celebrities. And there are even the beginnings of government recognition of LGBT people, issues, and culture.

In addition to this, homosexuality is a common theme of mainstream Japanese cultural
productions including film and literature, and especially in popular culture products like manga and anime; as we have seen, however, the representations within such products, as in the mainstream media, are frequently problematic. Nevertheless, it has been my argument in this dissertation that Japanese popular culture does support the notion of a modern gay identity, and that contemporary gay-themed works of Japanese fiction and film—although they are primarily entertainment products—do explore political issues surrounding gay identity, such as equality, discrimination, and the fundamental human right to make a life with a partner of one’s choosing, and that their cardinal messages are often pointedly activist.

Still, one cannot avoid the fact that such representations are often highly stereotypical. Yet, as Judith Halberstam argues, “Queer stereotypes are supposed to render visible what has been represented as invisible,” and “stereotyping does not always and only work on behalf of a conservative . . . agenda” (180-184). So while, as I pointed out in the first chapter, it may be difficult at first to see how a violent rapist and murderer like Tokuyama in the novel Būrūsu can in any way represent a positive image of a gay man, or how a story like Mezon do Himiko that makes no mention of homophobia, marriage, equality, human rights or the law can be a powerful statement about exactly those issues, I argue that this is precisely what they are, as I explain further below.

I have said that the representations of gay men (and other queer people) in the texts I study in this dissertation are, on balance, positive, although they are problematic. In particular, in these texts, we see the continuing tendency to present gay men as feminine and to conflate gay and trans identities. This is especially evident in Hiruma Hisao’s YES YES YES, in which protagonist Jun’s journey to coming out is explicitly linked to femininity and to being depicted and treated as a woman, specifically as an abused woman. However, the novels and films I discuss span a
nearly twenty year period, and I also argue that it is possible to discern a gradual trend away
from stereotyped presentations and towards more nuanced, and even expressly political, ones. I
contend that the representations are affirmative in part because they are embedded within
narratives of overcoming and becoming that are beneficial or somehow positive for the gay
characters they concern, even if only in very small ways. Furthermore, I argue that these novels
and films articulate the concerns and desires of gay men and other queer people in Japan, and
reflect a transnational global gay culture and identity.

Along with Burūsu, to which I return shortly, YES YES YES is arguably the hardest of the
texts I study to read as affirmative. Published in 1989, it is the earliest production I examine, and
temporally the closest to the beginning of the early 1990s gay boom period when, as has been
argued, narratives featuring gay men were produced for the voyeuristic enjoyment of a
heterosexual female audience—indeed, as Kakinuma Eiko states, YES YES YES was
“explosively” popular amongst young women. Why this particular population would identify
with (or at least enjoy reading about) a character who transforms, if only in his own imagination,
into a young woman who is raped and abused is a difficult question. It could be, as Kazumi
Nagaike and others have argued, that female readers experience the novel as a psychologically
safe way to enjoy the pleasure of reading about sex: feminizing one of the characters places a
heterosexual veneer on the same-sex intercourse while still allowing a female reader to mentally
distance herself from the abuse depicted. Another possibility is that young women, themselves a
socially disadvantaged group, identify with the abused young gay male hustler as a fellow
subaltern, much in the same way that gay men have historically identified with and elevated
tragic female figures like Judy Garland to the status of icons—indeed, just to see one’s own
usually invisible oppression openly displayed can be liberating, even in the absence of a
satisfying intra-diegetic amelioration of the injustice.

I argue that the representation is ultimately positive because, like a gay icon, in the novel’s last scene Jun has finally overcome the barriers in his life to find success; yet the ending is ambiguous: the imagery is of abuse (the powerful yakuza client injects the “pathetic,” “pitiful” Jun with methamphetamine) and surrender (Jun’s drooping underpants look like a white flag), but also of pleasure, desire, and transformation. In the end, Jun has found the entrance to paradise, and we finally understand the reference to flowers and Eden; he feels that his heart and body have at last become one\(^\text{185}\)—both a fitting metaphor for coming out and an analogy for gay identity.

Less than a decade later, in Yoshida Shūichi’s 1997 *Saigo no Musuko*, Enma-chan also transforms. Here again male homosexuality is conflated with femininity (we recall that Enma-chan is “womanish”), but there is a wider range of perhaps more realistic, or at least more inclusive, representation: there are more feminine and less feminine gay characters, as well as the “not womanish” bisexual “*boku*.” In this novel Yoshida throws the hypocrisy of traditional gender roles into relief: whilst as a teenager “*boku*” initially tries to copy the style of the more feminine Ukon in an effort to get the other boy to like him, he later tries to act like a man (or more accurately, the way he thinks a man should act) in order to keep Enma-chan in love with him. He is unsuccessful both times. As a boy, his father called him an *okama* when he went home wearing a red scarf, and forced him to take up the “manly” sport of kendo. And as an adult, treating the feminine Enma-chan like a woman—that is, in the same way his father treats his mother—ultimately leads his boyfriend to leave him.

\(^\text{185}\) 僕の心と肉体は次第に一つになっていく (239).
Bisexual “boku” does not have a successful resolution: he has lost the boyfriend who had supported him and who had provided for his elegant and comfortable lifestyle in Tokyo; his female lover is likely to stop seeing him soon, when she marries her fiancé; and he is reduced to a pitiful, explicitly infantile state: his “child-protecting deity” (Enma) has left, he is all alone, and he is reduced to plaintive and pathetic cries of hunger. Although he has lost his boyfriend, in this novel it is the gay Enma-chan who has a successful resolution: he overcomes his own prejudices about what it means to be a feminine gay man, and realizes that “boku” does not treat him well and does not love him. Unlike the protagonist’s mother, who leaves her husband for a short time in order to teach him a lesson but hurries back when she realizes he is hungry and cannot cook for himself, Enma-chan has taken to heart the female scholar’s angry shout that women are not housemaids.

Enma-chan is unashamed of his identity and his femininity, even in the face of the hypocritical opinions of some gay men (represented by the regular customer of the okama bar who pharisically rails against gays who are “womanish”), and at the end of the novel he has come to understand that he is being used by the feckless, lying “boku,” and has decided that he is not willing to spend the rest of his life looking after him. In so doing, Enma-chan has allied himself with the new generation of women, like Sawako, who are less concerned with taking care of their husbands than with pursuing their own desires (the narrator’s mother, on the other hand, a “traditional” woman, does not quite manage to cross this line). Yet while Sawako still follows the socially expected path of “obtaining” a marriage that will make her friends envious, Enma-chan rejects this too, and leaves the man whom some of his friends admired for being “non-womanish.” But he also allies himself with modern men (by enjoying cooking), and it is in this way that he represents a contemporary global gay identity: unashamed, unwilling to
compromise, and comfortable with both the masculine and feminine aspects of himself.

Tokuyama, the main gay character in Hanamura Mangetsu’s 1998 Burūsu, is one of the least feminized in all the texts I examine—indeed, he is a yakuza, one of the manliest figures in the Japanese popular imagination. But Tokuyama’s, perhaps even more than Jun’s, is difficult to categorize as a positive representation. Masculine and tough he may be, but he is also apparently dangerously insane: he waves a samurai sword around and frequently threatens people with it (and just as frequently follows through on those threats), kills at least five people, rapes at least one, and perhaps most disturbingly of all conflates sex and love with violence and murder. But despite all this, he is arguably the character in the novel who is most true to himself: he never tries to hide who he is or how he feels, and he does his best to protect the man he loves.

Indeed, a convincing argument could be made that Tokuyama is actually the most principled character in the novel. Murakami is an uncommitted, immature, and indecisive alcoholic who meekly submits to mistreatment and who, despite his talent, is unable to perform (either on the guitar or in bed), and gives up his dream of becoming a successful blues musician. Aya is beautiful and also talented, but she betrays Tokuyama—who sees her as his closest friend—by pursuing the man he loves.

In contrast Tokuyama both lives and dies honourably: not only is he remarkable for being an openly gay yakuza, but he (nevertheless) commands the respect of his underlings, and as the incident with Yagi—who tries to protect Murakami because he knows Tokuyama loves him—demonstrates, this respect is not borne only of fear. And furthermore, by provoking Murakami to try to kill him, Tokuyama heroically fulfils the Oedipal father role that is missing in Murakami’s life in an attempt to allow him to transition to maturity. While the end of the novel is ambiguous for Murakami—as I explain in Chapter Two his future remains uncertain and we do not see him
transition successfully to adulthood by getting the girl or rediscovering his music—for Tokuyama it is slightly less so; although he dies, he has not only lived with honour but has also got very nearly what he wanted above all else: if not to be loved by Murakami, then at least to be killed by him—a fitting, perhaps even ideal, end for a gangster.

Moving into the 2000s we begin to see a much more overtly political inclination in the narratives. This can be explained partly by the changing nature of global politics and human rights discourses in recent years, but I would also argue that the medium of film, which seems to travel more easily across international borders, may be a secondary reason.

In Hashiguchi Ryōsuke’s 2001 film Hasshu! we again see the conflation of male homosexuality with femininity and trans identities; here, though, this is rejected as the ignorant belief of a character whom the audience is clearly meant to view as well-meaning but misinformed and slightly ridiculous, and this conflation is not reflected in the two gay protagonists. Instead, Hasshu! is a story about overcoming prejudice and societal control.

Although it initially seems as though the plot will hew to the gay boom-era cliché of a gay male couple whose relationship is threatened by a woman, as in films like Okoge (1992) and Kira Kira Hikaru (1992), it quickly becomes evident that is not the case. Rather, the relationship of our protagonists Naoya and Katsuhiro is strengthened, and they each undergo remarkable transformations. Naoya overcomes his prejudiced beliefs about the lives and roles of gay men: whereas he initially asserted that being in “a world like ours” (oretachi mitai na sekai) meant not only that having a family was out of the question but that even having a long relationship was rare, by the end of the film he and Katsuhiro have each agreed to father a child with Asako, and the three have thus created a new kind of family—not one based on a heterosexual model, as in gay boom-era films like Okoge, but rather a blended family comprising two households: one
headed by two gay lovers, the other by a woman who has sex with whomever she chooses, both united by their shared children.

Meanwhile, Katsuhiro has of course learned that being gay does not mean never being a father. And even though his parents and brother have died, it is strongly suggested that his niece will be supportive as she grows up, so that even the loss of connection with his birth family occasioned by their deaths and underscored by the demolishing of the family home will only be temporary. Moreover it is clear that Katsuhiro, who at the start of the film refuses even to meet Naoya for lunch at a restaurant near his office for fear of being seen by a co-worker, has also overcome the internalized homophobia that used to keep him in the closet except among other gay people.

Naoya and Katsuhiro have thus found a way to live successfully as modern gay men in contemporary Japan: openly, happily, and as a family, and with the implied support of their relatives—the kind of life we might imagine LGBT people everywhere aspiring to. At the same time, for her part, Asako has overcome society’s prejudice against women who are in control of their own sexuality, of unwed mothers, and even, if Yōko’s claims about Asako’s past suicide attempts are true, of mental illness. She has learned that it is possible to choose one’s own family, and furthermore that making unconventional choices can lead to success. While she was formerly unhappy and lonely, she now has at least two good friends, and will soon have at least two children of her own as well.

Like Hasshu! Inudō Isshin’s 2005 film Mezon do Himiko also deals with issues of family, and again we see gay male identity confounded with femininity and trans identities. While there may be reasons to object to aspects of this film—for example, the fact that some of the residents of a home that is described within the story as specifically for gay men are transsexual and/or
transgender conflates those identities in a way that is likely to be confusing for some viewers—it is clear that the aim was to present a wide range of characters and personalities, and indeed the residents represent a spectrum from pink-haired transsexual Ruby, who dreams of being a ballerina, to Japanese chess-loving former elementary school teacher Yanagisawa, to tough yakuza Takao with his traditional tattoos. Furthermore, every major characterization is delicately shaded and complex: unlike the two-dimensional “traditional” characters represented by the parents of “boku” in Saigo no Musuko, no one character in Mezon do Himiko is “just strong,” “just beautiful,” “just good, or just bad; there are no caricatures in this film. For instance, Ruby is funny, silly, even ridiculous, but she is also sad, empathetic, and deeply appealing. And Himiko is glamorous, cruel, self-indulgent and aloof, but also loving, kind, and self-sacrificing.

If, as I argue, Hasshu! can be viewed as a political statement, Himiko is even more so: it is clear that one of the film’s aims is to show that there are many types of gay people. But the film goes far beyond that. Mezon do Himiko represents a powerful and moving indictment of the way contemporary Japanese society deals with people who are different, and of the toll this ill treatment takes on both individuals and families. In the movie we see how children suffer because their parents are forced to abandon them in order to live as they are, and we see how those parents suffer from being separated from their children. We see the discrimination and homophobia endured by LGBT people in their daily lives (we recall Yamazaki’s unpleasant work life and his humiliation on an evening out), and even in their very homes (the graffiti painted on La Maison de Himiko’s wall). And we are also shown one of the consequences of the lack of recognition of same-sex relationships when Saori, in a fit of pique, refuses Haruhiko’s request for even a single keepsake from amongst Himiko’s belongings after he dies.

But the ending of Himiko is nonetheless hopeful. The dreadful possibilities
notwithstanding, the strong suggestion is that Ruby’s family have accepted her, and she may even have recovered enough to return to live amongst her friends. While at the start of the film Saori clearly dislikes gay people—this is a consequence, we understand, of her anger with her father—by the end she stands up to a homophobic bully, and despite earlier leaving in a bluster, in the final scene she has reconciled with the residents, whom she clearly counts among her dear friends. Although Himiko has succumbed to cancer—a miraculous eleventh-hour recovery would have been trite and distracting—the home, which was in danger of closing down, has remained open, evidently due to the support of the former habitués of Himiko’s bar. Yamazaki has finally grown comfortable with his own identity, and even the recently bereaved Haruhiko seems happy.

That the story is performed by highly popular mainstream actors like Shibasaki Kou, and in particular heartthrob and frequent romantic lead Odagiri Jō in the role of a gay man, is highly significant. In an interview, producer Kubota Osamu remarked that *Mezon do Himiko* is “the kind of film that people wouldn’t have wanted to see if hadn’t had famous actors in it.” Odagiri added: “In terms of the subject it’s difficult isn’t it? It’s not just that it’s a story about an old folks’ home, it’s that it’s gay.” Interestingly, Odagiri stated that he deliberately set out to not portray Haruhiko in a stereotypical way, saying that the obvious approach would have been to play him as feminine as this would have made it easy for audiences to understand him as gay: “like, ‘see? I’m gay!’” 著作権所有者との協力により提供された翻訳を用いて以下の文章を作成しました。

186 The interviews described in this section are on a secondary disc titled “Supplement,” which was packaged with the Korean-subtitled edition of *Mezon do Himiko*. The interviews are in Japanese and are subtitled in Korean; translations are mine.

187 内容的に難しいじゃないですか。老人ホームの話だけど、それだけじゃなく、ゲイだと。
comfortable with gay people:\(^{188}\)

When I thought [about it that way I realized] that on the contrary playing
[Haruhiko as feminine] because he’s gay would seem to produce distance [from
the character on the part of the audience] . . . For me, really, by playing one young
man who is called Haruhiko, [a youth] who happened to fall in love with a man
named Himiko, and by excluding everything else gayish [i.e. feminine or
stereotypically gay] my intention was [to be true to the character]; if those who do
us the honour of watching the film experience him as more familiar, as more real,
without discomfort, that will make me really happy, you know?
そう思った時にその、ゲイであるからこういう芝居っていうことやるのが、
逆に距離を生んじゃいそうで、その見かたと… 本当に僕の中で一青年で
ある春彦っていう男の人が愛したのがたまたま卑弥呼という男性だったっ
ていうだけで、あとは一切ゲイ的なものをむしろ排除しておこうと思って、
僕ができる春彦像っていうものは一応やったつもりなんで、これがこう、
見ていただく方により身近に、よりリアルに、違和感なく入り込んでくれ
るのが一番嬉しいなと思いますね。

Odagiri ends the interview by saying that the themes of love and loss are universal.

If Mezon do Himiko is notable for its popular mainstream actors, Kudō Kankurō’s 2005
Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san is even more so: the cast is the very definition of star-studded,
with representatives from nearly every branch of the Japanese entertainment industry, including
actors, singers and musicians, television personalities, models, and comedians.

\(^{188}\) ゲイに対する、こう、距離がたぶん他の方に比べたら近いはずですよ、違和感がなく。
While this may be the most affirmative representation of gay men among the narratives I discuss, as with *Himiko* and the other texts the presentation of the two main characters in *Yaji Kita* is not entirely unproblematic, primarily with respect to the attempts to feminize Kita. As I argue in Chapter Four, however, these problems do not lessen the impact of the film as a progressive depiction of a gay relationship, and in fact the film represents a rejection of both the hyper-masculine stereotype of traditional Japanese homosexuality and of the modern stereotype of gay men as weak, feminine or trans-identified, and ultimately as unhappy. On the contrary, the heroes are presented as equally masculine as the other male characters, and perhaps more importantly their relationship—which is clearly both romantic and sexual—is depicted as both deeply emotional and as good for the two men, so good, in fact, that even Ohatsu the Source, the soul of Yaji’s wife who blames him for her death, realizes that she must let Yaji cross back to the world of the living so that he can resume his travels with Kita. The audience is supposed to laugh at Yaji and Kita—this is a comedy, after all—but crucially not because they are gay and (therefore) feminine; rather, they are funny because they are amusing yet sympathetic characters in an absurd and entertaining story. Most importantly, the viewer is obviously supposed to root for the two to succeed, and success in this story means the release of Yaji from his wife so that he can be reunited with his boyfriend Kita, in order to continue the relationship that is obviously so good for both of them.

Yaji and Kita are gay and this is a mainstream film, but unlike mainstream productions from the gay boom period of the early 1990s in which exoticized gay men are presented for what Dobbins terms the “voyeuristic pleasure” of the audience, in this movie the characters are people with whom both the mainstream Japanese public and Japanese gay men can identify; as Odagiri says, everyone can relate to themes of love and loss. By focusing on themes with universal
appeal, Kudō has used a surrealistic story to create a paradoxically realistic portrayal of gay men, and turned two hundred year-old characters ago into modern gay icons.

In Yaji Kita the protagonists do not have to overcome homophobia; rather, their challenge is to conquer addiction. In Imaizumi Kōichi’s 2007 independent film Hatsukoi, in contrast, homophobia is of central importance. I would argue that Hatsukoi is the most overtly and explicitly political of all the texts in this study, weaving together several strands to raise awareness of issues facing gay men in contemporary Japan, including homophobia and social discrimination, parental abandonment, and social and legal inequality. The film also represents a compelling argument in favour of marriage rights for LGBT people in Japan.

The characters are pointedly unable to overcome all of these problems: although Tadashi and Keigo hold a wedding ceremony at the end, the audience knows that their marriage will not be legally recognized, and for the viewer the joyousness of the scene is moderated by the uncomfortable awareness that should a tragedy akin to the one suffered by Hiroki and Shin befall the men, they will find themselves in a similar situation (the scene’s location in Community Center AKTA is also a stark reminder, for viewers familiar with Tokyo’s gay community, of the continuing challenge of HIV/AIDS). Also, Shin’s parents do not have a last-minute change of heart and embrace their gay son; this might have stretched the audience’s credulity too far, but it serves as a poignant reminder of how discrimination can tear families apart.

Nevertheless, the characters do overcome many of their problems. Protagonist Tadashi becomes a man: he graduates from high school, learns to respect himself as gay, and comes out of the closet in grand and high camp fashion, marching along a red carpet to the altar wearing a white wedding dress with his similarly attired fiancé Keigo on his arm. He is abandoned neither by his mother (we never meet his father) nor by his former crush and sometime anti-gay bully
Kōta, both of whom attend his wedding and seem genuinely happy for him and his partner. Keigo himself, who has been hitherto unlucky in love, has finally met the man of his dreams, and has also fulfilled his cherished ambition of walking down the aisle with the one he loves, wearing a wedding dress. And Hiroki’s mother, who was initially shocked when she discovered he is gay, not only says that she wants to meet his boyfriend Shin, but explicitly recognizes him as her son’s spouse when she sends the couple a gift of *meoto chawan*, wedding tea cups.

Although the present study has been concerned primarily with portrayals of gay men in contemporary literature and film, as we have seen, representations are rarely so limited. Along with gay men, in the examples studied we have encountered bisexual, transgender and transsexual people as well (along with heterosexual primary and secondary characters), covering a range of presentation from very masculine to very feminine. Future research directions could include fictional representations of these and other queer populations.

It is notable that one group we did not encounter in any of the primary or secondary texts dealt with in this study was lesbians. This may be because, as James Welker points out, lesbians are simply much less visible in Japan than gay men. Nevertheless there have been anthologies of Japanese lesbian fiction, including translations into English. One example is “Sparkling Rain” and Other Fiction From Japan on Women who Love Women (2008), which includes short stories and manga primarily from lesbian journals and magazines. A recent film example is Kawano Kōji’s 2007 *Rabu Mai Raifu* (Love My Life), which is about a lesbian university student who when she comes out to her father learns that not only was her now dead mother a lesbian, but her father is also gay. It would be useful to examine fictional depictions of lesbian characters to see if the themes, representations, and political approaches are similar to or different from those identified in this study.
Another group almost entirely missing from the present study is women producers: although it was not a deliberate decision, all of the novels and films I discuss in this dissertation were produced by men (although the screenwriter for *Mezou do Himiko* is a woman, Watanabe Aya; in addition, the book upon which the film *Kira Kira Hikaru* is based was written by a woman, Ekuni Kaori). It would be useful to compare gay-themed non-yaoi films and novels by female and male producers.

Finally, although trans-identified characters seem to be fairly common in contemporary Japanese fiction and film (examples include Eriko in Yoshimoto Banana’s 1988 novel *Kitchen* and Hana in Kon Satoshi’s 2003 animated film *Tokyo Godfathers*), such identities, too, are understudied. One particularly interesting recent example is Nakagawa Haruka’s blog-turned-book *Boku ga Kanojo no Kanojo ni Naru Toki* (When I Become my Girlfriend’s Girlfriend), a purportedly true but almost certainly fictional account of a young man who decides to have a sex change in order to remain with his girlfriend, who has come out as a lesbian.

At the beginning of this dissertation I asked what made the “It’s Time” video, which was designed for and promoted in a particular linguistic, cultural, and political context, so globally appealing. According to GetUp! Marriage Equality Campaigner Paul Mackay, “the theme and appeal [of the clip] is universal. The fight for equality is happening all over the world and the story of a young couple growing together is one that most people can connect with” (Vaca). As we have seen, contemporary Japanese novels and films with gay characters also deal with universal themes: love and marriage; family and children; the struggle to find oneself and one’s place in the world; loss and pain; joy and sadness; and even the need for a good laugh; and it is for this reason that they are so successful and appealing, both as Japanese and as global products.
Works Cited


