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Lindsey/Fertility and Pleasure

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NB: Illustrations were deleted to decrease file size.
IN THE 1790S Kitagawa Utamaro (1750–1806) drew a portrait of the courtesan Hanaōgi, smiling as she dreams of her wedding procession and the start of a new life as a wife in a respectable household (fig. 1). Employing a technique of visual allusion—a picture within a picture (koma-e)—to point to the unreality of the dream world, Utamaro makes clear that the woman’s hope for a fabulous wedding is really a pipe dream. While it was not unusual for courtesans to marry after their term of service had expired, their husbands were usually simple commoners, or, in some cases, habitués of the world of licensed pleasure such as artists and writers and those who dreamed of becoming so. The hope that a wealthy patron might pay off a woman’s contract and take her as his wife was often an unrealized dream. Given his courtesan’s dream of a formal processional wedding representing a ceremony of high social rank, we may agree with Utamaro that her dream will vanish upon waking.

Yet Utamaro produced something more. He sketched a minimalist metaphor of a ritual and symbolic reality in which many women—both wives and courtesans—participated as actors. His metaphor of a courtesan dreaming of her wedding hints at a congruity between the incongruous roles of wife and courtesan in the composition of Tokugawa society (1600–1867). Much of this composition was forged from the late seventeenth century when political, economic, and ideological processes produced distinct valuations of female sexuality that constructed the roles of wife and courtesan as disparate signifiers of sexuality. From Utamaro emerge two links central to this composition: values and rituals. Wives and courtesans lived under, if not always by, distinct and idealized values concerning the purpose of their sexuality. A courtesan’s sexuality was
FIGURE 1 The courtesan Hanaōgi dreams of her wedding procession. From a Kitagawa Utamaro print. Courtesy of Les Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels.
valued as a type of play to serve the sensual pleasures of clients; a wife’s sexuality, while valued for the mutual pleasure it gave her and her husband, was also marked in the early years of a young woman’s marriage by hopes of a purposeful fertility to provide an heir for the household. In addition, Utamaro’s courtesan dreams not simply of being a wife, but of becoming a wife through a wedding ritual. In her hoped-for becoming, ritual accomplishes two things: one indicative of the young woman’s own dream and the other in line with the artist’s view of that dream. In her dream ritual serves as a bridge, a mediator, between the conflicting values of two intensely opposed female roles. Still, any bridge reveals the very gulf over which it spans; the presence of a mediator necessarily shows the unresolved differences between parties. In Utamaro’s view of the courtesan’s dream, ritual serves to make salient the gap marking divergent values and the constraint and behavioral expectations such values promoted.

This interplay between the artist and woman on what her dream wedding accomplishes—clarifying the disparity of values while also changing and reorienting the ritual player in the midst of such disparity—projects onto Tokugawa society the interplay between sexual values and rituals. Although the values that idealized the roles of wife and courtesan were highly disparate, the actual rituals, symbols, and popular practices in which women engaged exhibited a degree of similitude and parallelism that clouded the distilled clarity of values. This ritual activity is inseparable from the religious and social makeup of the time. Not only did this activity pull from the universe of symbols, but it also acted in and through society, and particularly within the context of a woman’s, usually a daughter’s, sexuality and her role in either the institution of the household or the pleasure quarter. Natal household, marriage household, and pleasure quarter sought to lay claim to a daughter’s identity and sexuality. Amidst these claims of communities upon individuals, ritual served to transform roles and social identities, orient women to new communities, and help them face crises of social and even mortal dimensions; but ritual could also be used to express a woman’s ambivalence toward her community and its values, create common worlds of immediate female experience underlying these values, or resist the values completely. The following discussion of rituals covers marriage, debut and first meeting of the courtesan with her clients, as well as pregnancy, betrothal, retirement from the quarters, and cutting ties. These rituals act as a type of narrative not because they tell the story of any one woman, but rather
because they narrate the constant interplay between competing values, conflicting notions of female sexuality, the coexistence of institutions dependent on women’s loyalty and sexuality, and the ritual responsibility women undertook in their participation in this narrative, as well as the religious underpinning of this interplay. Before beginning this narrative it is important first to place it against the dual background suggested by the courtesan’s dream of her wedding: 1) contextualizing wives and courtesans in Tokugawa society, and 2) conceptualizing ritual and religion.

Wives, Courtesans, and Tokugawa Society

Utamaro wanted to convey that the courtesan’s dream of becoming a wife is illusory. Her waking world of professional sexual play is a realm of activity antithetical to the behavior and role of the wife she becomes in her fantasy. Yet he also conveyed the constant connection Tokugawa society made between the two women as idealized, inverse images. Each image, through the negation of its qualities, necessarily implied the other. As sleep and wakefulness ultimately form two different experiences in the same individual, the courtesan and wife developed divergent but linked images in Tokugawa society. These images of night and day constituted part of a discourse concerning female sexuality. The root question of this discourse that the wife-courtesan dichotomy epitomized was this: is the purpose of female sexuality to serve the virilocal household through reproductive fertility, or is it to serve the commercial sex industry and its paying clients through nonreproductive pleasure? The ideal wife was obedient to her husband and in-laws and used her energy and skills to work toward the economic advancement of the household and her sexuality to produce an heir. This valuation formed fertility values. The ideal courtesan was sophisticated and spirited, an expert at pretending to love many men while loving none, and offered her sexuality for the economic advancement of the bordello holding her contract. This valuation constituted pleasure values. Other values existed, such as celibacy, which the Buddhist nun exemplified, and the sexual activities of many young villagers that were regulated more by local youth groups than they were by individual households. However, fertility and pleasure constituted a dichotomy of difference that profoundly shaped Tokugawa society and culture. Much of that shape developed from society affirming both sets of values, but doing so while seeking to keep one affirmation separate
from the other. Arts and literature, urban spatial configuration, and political policies expressed much of this orientation of bounded affirmation. Further, Tokugawa society did not simply affirm these values, but also produced them through its labor needs, the growth of a national book market, and the rise of economic class distinctions among commoners. In the following paragraphs I describe some aspects of the affirmation and production of these values.

For painters and printmakers like Utamaro and authors such as the playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724) and the novelist Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693), this orientation of bounded affirmation offered rich possibilities for animating their works with both tragic and humorous pathos. In his 1720 play *The Love Suicides at Amijima (Shinjū ten no amijima)*, Chikamatsu uses the pull of a wife’s love and loyalty and that of a courtesan for the same man to push the protagonist and his lover into the climax of double suicide. Saikaku, in his 1686 novel *The Life of an Amorous Woman (Kōshoku ichidai onna)*, allows his anti-heroine to romp on both sides of the wife-courtesan divide, revealing the humor and pathos of her life choices. Even musical instruments were not free of this orientation, at least in the early part of the period. The samisen was considered primarily an instrument appropriate only for entertainers of the pleasure quarters and for kabuki musicians. The koto was much preferred for training young women in the musical arts.

Affirmation of female sexuality as constituting both fertility and pleasure values also contributed to the creation of a distinct social space in urban areas. The pleasure quarters—settings in several of Chikamatsu’s and Saikaku’s works—were districts segregated from the rest of urban space. Edo’s famed quarter, the Yoshiwara, was walled off on all four sides with a single front gate marking its entrance. The Shinmachi of Osaka and the Shimabara of Kyoto, which with the Yoshiwara formed the country’s three great quarters, were similarly segregated. Spatially configuring the urban landscape was not uniquely connected to prostitution. Demarcating space for pleasure in Edo was part of a broader spatial categorization that included the creation of holy sites and class-based residential areas housed in a hierarchy defined in terms of geographic locality and size. Warriors (bushi) possessed more than two-thirds of residential space in the city, while temples and shrines—some with spacious grounds—and commoner housing split the remaining area. The walls of the Yoshiwara formed a subdivision of sexualized space within the area where commoners resided. Although Edo’s physical geography denied this spatial hierarchy the clean lines of perfect borders, there was
an underlying order that measured each allotment of space using the same grid pattern as that of the imperial city of Kyoto.\(^6\) This creation of social space, attentive to hierarchy, divisions of sacred, secular, and sexual activities, as well as to ancient political pedigree, reflects the insight that in Tokugawa Japan, “spatial and geographic discourses inhered in political practices and cultural forms.”\(^7\)

The pleasure quarters, along with theaters, formed one part of these spatial discourses. The national government, or shogunate (bakufu), viewed prostitution and kabuki, which was a new and wildly popular form of theater, as “two wheels of the vehicle of pleasure” and thus necessary evils.\(^8\) It realized that outlawing bordellos and theaters would essentially commit its limited resources to making arrests and meting out punishment for such public nuisances as gambling, drunkenness, and lewd behavior—all linked to sex and show businesses.\(^9\) The bakufu was not unconcerned about such behavior, but of greater concern to authorities was how to limit and control, rather than eliminate, morally corrupt behavior. The bakufu decided on a policy that circumscribed the behavior of pleasure and sexual play through spatial restrictions and walls. Further, female providers of such play were restricted to residences within the enclosure, while their male customers could leave upon receipt of services. Requiring courtesans to live within the quarter was one of the conditions the government set in 1617 when it allowed the Yoshiwara to be built in the hustle and bustle of Edo.\(^10\)

Men were the main players in the building and development of Edo in the first decades of the seventeenth century from a provincial castle town to the center of national government. Its swift growth into one of the largest cities in the world represents on an exaggerated scale the expansion of castle towns and markets throughout the country that had been taking place throughout the 1500s.\(^11\) However, with a rapidly expanding population consisting largely of warriors, laborers, artisans, and entrepreneurial merchants, Edo was in its early decades effectively a city of men.\(^12\) In fact, the demographics led the bakufu to occasionally employ Yoshiwara courtesans to serve as court attendants at formal functions during the first half of the seventeenth century. Women honored with these responsibilities abstained from sexual activity to purify themselves in preparation for their temporary duties.\(^13\) In a male metropolis, however, prostitution proved ubiquitous. Bordello Episodes (Ihon dōbō goen) describes unlicensed bordellos quickly developing along the outskirts of Edo during these first decades to meet the demands of the city’s unusual demographics.\(^14\) This unregulated prostitution boom and its predictably
attendant crimes and misdemeanors presented the kind of situation the government wanted to curb. By following the models of the earlier Shimabara and Shinmachi, the bakufu hoped the Yoshiwara and other authorized quarters would keep vice contained, allowing the government to regulate it and enjoy its benefits.

One such benefit was gaining a tax revenue. The ready attraction of additional tax revenue from prostitution, for example, lay behind a request from Edo magistrates in 1731 to have the government sanction areas of the city that had already developed heavy traffic in illegal prostitution. By spatially defining these as areas of public vice and bringing them under government regulation, the magistrates reasoned that taxes could be levied and collected and employment would consequently rise, since legal quarters required an abundant support staff of laborers, entertainers, waitresses, and cooks. Although the government eventually dismissed this proposal, it speaks to the readiness of municipal leaders to accept prostitution in order to share in its profitability. Still, the very profitability that national and local governments sought to regulate through sanctioned public prostitution (kōshō) in turn encouraged economically competitive varieties of private prostitution (shishō), ranging from semi-organized public bath women (yuna) to “hidden prostitutes” (kakushi baita) such as streetwalkers and wives, in partnership with husbands, either willingly or through coercion opening their homes for business.16

Prostitution was widespread in both public and private forms. Indeed, the bakufu sanctioned at least twenty-four profitable and revenue-producing quarters across the country. I focus, however, on the three great quarters in Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto, which were the institutional centers of pleasure values. Along with urban theater, they defined style and panache. A strict hierarchy among women in these quarters also defined the class, duties, and expectations placed upon them. Like any society, the quarters had haves, have-nots, and those in the middle. Women working at the lowest rung lived at the physical margins of the quarters and sold their bodies to many for minutes at a time. At the highest rungs, however, existed originally three ranks through which a woman might be promoted (from lowest to highest): kakoi, tenjin, and tayū.18 Rankings and names changed throughout the period and the terminology varied somewhat in the different quarters, but the notion of a hierarchy of idealized skills and beauty remained critical to the world of courtesans. I use “courtesan” rather than “prostitute” to refer to those women possessing status unavailable to private prostitutes and beyond the reach of
poor women scraping by on the margins of public prostitution. Additionally, Charles Bernheimer, in his work on literary and artistic depictions of prostitution in nineteenth-century France, stresses that “courtesan,” unlike “prostitute,” denotes a woman whose sexual services were reserved for men of some means and who was a public figure herself. The Parisian courtesan’s relation to moneved men and her own public and institutional stature parallels that of the ranking women of the Tokugawa pleasure quarters, though with one important caveat. Parisian courtesans, unlike their Japanese sisters, offered their clients pleasure free of a political policy of physical segregation.

The policy of restricting prostitution within approved pleasure quarters contributed to the bounded affirmation of the fertility-pleasure discourse in at least two ways. First, by quartering nonreproductive sex, this policy gave a degree of institutional definition to sexual purpose, as seen from the male perspective, as an “either/or” proposition between play within the walls and activity more bound up with emotional and household duty beyond the walls. The regulation of public prostitution throughout the country was a product of early modern political organization, which Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) commenced when he quartered Kyoto’s sexual workers in 1589 as part of his attempt to bring order to his new rule. This politically backed institutional segregation of nonreproductive sex altered an earlier social construction of women’s sexuality and partnership with men, which some identify as the medieval ideal of a wife. According to this ideal a woman was both wife and sexual friend, both household partner and play partner. Segregated institutions of play separated her roles of mother and household manager from her role as her husband’s sexual satisfier, leaving the latter function to be shared with the courtesan. How much this medieval model of the wife was a cultural ideal or how much a simple matter of the vague structural nature of sexual relationships in medieval culture is not clear. Still, in contrast, the early modern demarcation of female sexuality placed women in either the household or the bordello, idealized their roles as either wife or courtesan, and produced a discourse of sexuality as primarily serving either fertility or pleasure.

Second, institutional quartering recognized the courtesan’s profession as a female occupation equal to other jobs in that it entailed a woman contractually working outside the home. Contracts of the period typically apply the term hōkō to public prostitution, which denotes paid, contractual labor covering a wide range of mainly urban jobs that com-
moner men and women filled. Understanding Tokugawa prostitution as a form of contractual work connects with recent feminist approaches that analyze prostitution less as a type of oppression than as a type of work. In this analysis labor is the performance of self-interested economic activity that is rationally, if rarely freely, chosen. Wendy Chapkis terms this work “erotic labour.” Like other forms of labor, erotic labor’s value is contested in the fields of politics and culture, and within its own structure it provides, as with all types of labor, a hierarchy of social distinctions, statuses, and inequalities among its workers. From Chapkis’s description we may see the contours of Tokugawa prostitution—the coexistence of government-sanctioned and unlawful forms of prostitution, the attempts to redefine illegal districts as legal, and the use of hierarchical status to distinguish ranks—as a culturally specific example of erotic labor and its fields of contestation and hierarchy.

From the standpoint of erotic labor (with equal emphasis on both words), the fact that many late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century texts cataloging occupations registered “courtesan” (keisei, yüjo) alongside other types of female labor is not surprising. A Record of Treasures for Women (Onna chöhöki), which is a 1692 lifestyle guide for women and a central source of examination in this study, opens with an illustration depicting women of various classes, statuses, and occupations. Along with courtesans, the text pictures a woman who is a courtesan manager or a bordello owner’s wife, a peasant woman, townswomen, widows, a samurai wife, and an aristocratic woman. This pictorial jumble of women, independent figures drawn without any background of appropriate social environment to delineate them, is indicative of a cultural anxiety toward the rise of contractual female labor. This anxiety reflected the understanding that working outside the household positioned women in an unbounded public sphere where they were sexually vulnerable, especially if they lacked the moral education and internal discipline necessary to comport themselves with prudence and wisdom. In light of this anxiety the courtesan stood not simply as one occupation among others, but as the moral end result of labor performed outside the bounds of home and husband and without knowledge of correct social behavior and moral grounding. In this sense every unmarried daughter without such knowledge was in danger, especially if she worked, of, if not literally becoming a courtesan, then behaving in ways both sexual and social that would lead others to think of her as no better than a prostitute.
This anxiety was rooted in the economic environment that put many women in the workforce. Trends in the early modern political economy such as the growth of castle towns and large cities, urban migration, development and expansion of markets, rise of the merchant class, and the money economy hit their stride in the late seventeenth century, which the Genroku era (1688–1704) epitomizes with its prosperity and its celebration of the commoner classes. Young, unmarried women were an important element of this economy quite apart from prostitution per se. They found employment as maids in warrior and commoner households, as workers in cottage industries and textiles, and also in the service sectors of entertainment, food, and hospitality, which often overlapped with prostitution. Promotion of fertility values—idealization of marriage into a man’s household, of obedient and loyal behavior to that household, and of sexuality as purposeful fertility for that household—was born from the uneasy sense that young women, unattached to home or husband and untrained in right behaviors and moral grounding, needed protection against sexual exploitation while laboring outside the home.

Lifestyle guides and moral texts, many of which were originally published around the Genroku era and reissued throughout the period, promoted these fertility values. The rise of the printed book during the Tokugawa was critical to this process of promotion and dissemination. The same economic changes that produced anxiety about female labor also produced a means to a solution: a competitive, nationwide book market that churned out a variety of tomes including lifestyle guides and moral primers. These texts, written in Japanese script (kana) as opposed to Chinese, formed a popular genre called jokun, or “women’s training,” which contributed to the seventeenth-century publishing boom. These publications were intended for the edification of girls and young women and covered a range of topics such as moral values, proper deportment, home management, and general lifestyle matters. The quarters were also important in the growth of publishing. More than two hundred titles concerned with varying aspects of prostitution, from guides to the quarters and courtesan critiques to fiction, were published by the end of the seventeenth century. Further, as letter writing was central to a courtesan’s occupation, there was a need for books to satisfy her development as a literate professional. Female managers, themselves retired courtesans, were the main teachers of reading and writing to young girls serving as child attendants to their sister courtesans. Literacy among courtesans indicates that while not all women could read and write, especially...
those living far from cities and their surrounding villages, all categories of women could do so. Typically this literacy was functionally appropriate to their professional and personal aspirations. Among daughters from families of commercial traders, for example, the ability to read and write was important not only for their participation in family businesses, but also in making them attractive as potential daughters-in-law. Similarly, wealthy peasants invested significant time and resources to cultivate in their daughters both educational and cultural literacy gleaned from *jokun* books because they knew a family improved its own standing by grooming its daughters in the values, behavior, and cultural knowledge that *jokun* writings made available.

By promoting these values, authors of *jokun* books hoped to prepare girls and young women for the moral and social responsibilities of marriage and the life of a wife and household manager. Lifestyle guides such as *A Record of Treasures for Women* are particularly interesting as a means for espousing these values. The guides filtered fertility values from their elite origins in the warrior household by making available to commoners and their daughters descriptions of daily and ritual life loosely based on samurai household codes. The Ogasawara and Ise, which were noted houses of ritual, developed these codes in the Muromachi period (1338–1573) to codify military training styles and ceremonial deportment among warrior households. Lifestyle guides funneled fertility values less through moral didactics than through descriptions of rites, customs, and behaviors. Guides offered commoners a window through which they could view the world of elite ritual and etiquette, and then employ it in varying measures in their own lives. This borrowing acknowledged the period’s schematized hierarchy. Hierarchy serves to place individuals and groups in varying positions of social worth for purposes of organization and control, and yet it also produces in people aspirations and strategies to acquire as much status as the hierarchy makes possible. In this manner, guides like *A Record of Treasures for Women* were not published simply to show commoners an unattainable lifestyle reserved for those at the social top. Rather, they offered up the world of elite behaviors for commoners to seize as their own in acquiring forms of ritual and symbolic status that the given hierarchy defined as valuable. The commoners’ appropriation of warrior culture has been dubbed “pseudo-samurai pretensions,” but such so-called pretensions validated samurai culture as the primary operative field of status, and acted to recognize the hierarchy upon which that culture sat. In this context, *A Record of Treasures for Women* possesses a prescriptive quality in its idealization of warrior
lifestyle vis-à-vis commoners and a descriptive quality in that it allowed commoner daughters and their families to appropriate elements of the samurai lifestyle as they saw fit. In this manner the guide and other representatives of its genre offered to commoners an important means to begin creating the “samuraiization” of their own lives by narrowing through ritual and behaviors the social gap between them and the warrior class.43

A Record of Treasures for Women, which privileges Ogasawara ritual,44 consists of five illustrated chapters describing categories of life experience considered the epitome of feminine knowledge and practice. These chapters cover 1) the historical and contemporary position of women, illness and behavior, a vocabulary list for proper speech, and appropriate makeup and hairstyles; 2) the wedding ritual; 3) pregnancy and birth rituals; 4) penmanship, poetry reading, the care of the sick, and the maintenance and cleaning of clothing; and 5) bridal and clothing items, character recognition for common words, chapter names from the Tale of Genji, seasonal celebrations, definitions of literary phrases and words, and styles of wrapping items in paper. Sections dealing with speech, characters, Genji, and literary words indicate both the text’s assumption of female literacy and its educational function in developing that literacy.45

A Record of Treasures for Women offered a “values education” to families wishing to instruct their daughters to some degree on a lifestyle grounded in moral knowledge of elite female values, practical knowledge of maintaining health and home, and ritual knowledge for guiding one toward the text’s vision of womanhood: married, serving the household of one’s husband and in-laws with skill and loyalty, and giving birth to an heir.

This vision assumed the household (ie) was the institutional hub of fertility values, just as the pleasure quarter was institutionally central to the vision of pleasure values. Fertility values had their origin in samurai family morality and reflected the institutional structure of that morality. The early modern ie that spread among the commoner population was a collection, large and small, of individuals—typically related by blood but not always—committed to a corporate identity. The individuals were more than simply a family under a roof; they were an ongoing enterprise that was as much gesellschaft as gemeinschaft, and they recognized their official headship, if not always actual leadership, as an inherited male position ideally passed on from father to eldest son, but which in practice would often position a younger sibling, an uncle, or an adoptee for headship.46 A bride marrying into a middle-class or upper-class ie was expected to be loyal and industrious and possess organizational and edu-
cational skills to further the household economically; in addition, there was the hope she would provide an heir to succeed as head and continue the household for another generation. This description of the ister is generic and requires historical and social qualifications. It was not a family system buttressing an ideology of nationalism, as it would later become in the Meiji period; rather, it was a cultural ideal and economic unit that for the most part was not within the reach of the poor and propertyless. The Tokugawa ister was actually one pattern, albeit universal, among a patchwork of local family and inheritance patterns, some of which were matrilocal versions of the ister; it could be easily manipulated, especially on its points of virilocal marriage and agnatic inheritance, to fit the immediate, pressing needs of a household; and thus inheritance in the patrilineal ister, as was true of all Tokugawa inheritance patterns, was always more improvisational than mechanical. Still, as an economic and family unit, it constituted a growing norm—an ister-consciousness—among comfortable and confident rural and urban commoners whose relative economic stability encouraged institutional commitment to and identity with the household. Consequently, for many such commoners the question of household and marriage—to which household they should send their daughter and from which household they should accept a daughter-in-law—became a major concern. Lifestyle guides and moral primers read by them and their daughters bolstered the significance of this concern by presenting the ister as institutionally central to the moral and social development of girls who would one day become wives in the ister of future husbands.

In measurable ways the daughters of these commoners were direct opposites of those whose families sold them to the quarters. Quartered prostitution depended on the hardships of poverty and family misfortune. Buyers for the quarters often searched for girls and young women in economically vulnerable rural areas. One response to failed crops, market jolts, natural disasters, perennial poverty, and the sudden illness or death of a breadwinner was to release family members to become contractual wage laborers elsewhere, including discharging daughters to the erotic labor force. For example (albeit a later one), in 1900 half of the Yoshiwara’s women were from areas that had recently experienced damaging floods, which suggests a historical precedent of families releasing daughters during grim times. On the other side of the divide—one of real economic class interspersed within a social system that distinguished between peasant, artisan, and merchant—was an increasing number of rural and urban commoner families, with a growing ister-con-
sciousness, that managed their economic destinies well, tied a household identity to that destiny, and wished to partake of the forms of social status available to them culturally and financially. Financial success bred a desire for social success—those pseudo-samurai pretensions—and the economic ability of wealthy and middle-class commoners enabled them to access education for their sons and daughters, employ tutors, and purchase cultured literature such as jokun. Wealthy farmers, village headman families, and middle- and upper-class urbanites and those living in proximity to large and provincial cities constituted the primary readership of moral and ritual guides.

Raising commoner status by improving a daughter’s values, education, and ritual knowledge was central to Namura Jöhaku (d. ca. 1748), who wrote *A Record of Treasures for Women* under the penname Sōden Tadakishi. In 1693, a year after he wrote his seminal guide, Namura also wrote a companion manual for sons titled *A Record of Treasures for Men* (*Nan chöhöki*). Although Namura’s biography is meager, key elements of his time help us understand the intellectual milieu of his text and of himself as a writer. We know he was a physician and was likely a student of Itō Jinsai (1627–1705). Itō’s vision of a good society specifically reflected the “assumptions, ethical concerns, and material interests most characteristic” of the commercially active townspeople. His rejection of neo-Confucianism in favor of classical forms of Confucian ideas linked to Confucius and Mencius was largely meant as a critique of the warrior class’s embrace and interpretation of neo-Confucian ideas to suit and favor its social position and political concerns over those of rising commoners. In similar spirit, Namura wrote *A Record of Treasures for Women* as a positive means to assert the value of commoner life, particularly that of daughters becoming wives and mothers in their husbands’ households. Namura was determined that these daughters have the same ritual skills, lifestyle knowledge, and social values historically deemed worthy only of warrior daughters. Because of its popularity, *A Record of Treasures for Women* was republished throughout the period, and its replication charts the changing concerns of the times. Such change is particularly evident in its final 1847 edition, which novelist and culture critic Takai Ranzan (1762–1838) edited before its publication and which includes extensive passages he inserted in the manuscript, though without any erasure of Namura’s original text. The historical significance of Takai’s redactions is most apparent in the chapter on pregnancy, where his passages express later issues of nationalism and anti-Buddhism and ideas concerning obstetrics that were not relevant to Namura’s time. At
Desire among families to raise the status of their daughters points to the broader issue of female social standing in the Tokugawa. The period has traditionally been considered the “dark age for women” (onna ni totte ankoku jidai). In this view, the Tokugawa represents the historical nadir of female status and authority, a marked decline from preceding periods. This conclusion comes in part from a methodology focusing on laws and customs that locked women out of inheritance and on varieties of jokun, which, typical of the genre, directed their laser-like focus on women’s moral development while idealizing virilocal marriage. Recent scholarship has reacted to this view by reevaluating the educational value of moral texts and by stressing narrower, often biographical, studies of women to show “the limited but real power and prerogatives of Tokugawa women.” 61 Joyce Lebra, for example, has examined the life of a daughter whose skills and contributions to her sake-brewing family were so valuable that the family devised strategies, such as matrilocal marriage, to get around traditional customs barring women from participating in the brewing industry. 62

In another vein, Jennifer Robertson recounts the missionary activities of female devotees of the bourgeois religious movement Shingaku, with particular focus on a former Buddhist nun, Jion-ni Kenka (1716–1778), who propagated the religion’s teachings in the city of Edo. 63 Such research insists on adding the color and detail of real individuals’ lives to any canvas that portrays female life as simply one of social inferiority. Still, as Anne Walthall cautions in her biographical study of Matsuo Taseko (1811–1894), an accomplished peasant woman, methodologies “privileging the individual over the collective” must be careful not to raise the subject’s life above the fray of her time and place, to see her simply as an individual willing her life forward. 64 An individual history is arguably interesting precisely because it captures a life embedded in time and place that produces ironies of disjuncture and contradictions between self and peers and between individual achievements and culturally shared ideals. Thus in Robertson’s study of Shingaku women, the drive and accomplishment of Jion-ni Kenka—a celibate, unmarried woman active outside the home—is in complete opposition to the ideal of the Shingaku woman as an obedient wife, whose faith tied her to husband and home. Likewise, the life of the business-savvy daughter in Lebra’s work is remarkable because her career in the sake industry represents the exception rather than the rule, since the production of rice wine had become
largely a male enterprise in the Tokugawa period, whereas in previous centuries brewing was traditionally women’s work.\textsuperscript{65}

In addition to earlier studies emphasizing broad structures of social marginalization and more recent research stressing portraits of choice-making individuals and their families, an examination of ritual practices brings an additional layer of understanding to Tokugawa female life. Ritual is both an objective structure of culture that acts upon individuals and a subjective practice by which ritual actors shape their social environment.\textsuperscript{66} Ritual is both “structured and structuring.”\textsuperscript{67} This dual nature allows the investigator equal footing in the emphases of the above historical understandings: the stress on burdensome social inequalities and the stress on the strategies and choices individuals and their families employed within the limits allowed by Tokugawa society and their own stratagems. A focus on ritual allows for the consideration of the cultural ideals and social structures that defined the valuations and life patterns of a number of Tokugawa women, while it also reveals one way by which women gained the prerogative of communal status and, at times, even individual authority to alter that status. In short, the investigator of ritual can move between the discrete perspectives of Utamaro and his courtesan, or, in other words, between acknowledging discourses constructed on idealized sexual values and examining the employment of ritual by individuals as they affirmed, clouded, or resisted these values.

**Conceiving Ritual and Religion**

This study, at its root, is an examination of actions: women moving between households, into and out of quarters, marrying, dealing with pregnancy, and divorcing. These actions expressed communal values of fertility and pleasure as well as individual concerns of whether or not and to what degree to affirm these values. In chapter 2 I conceptualize the values of fertility and pleasure, their communal positions, and their ritual expression through the notion of a “value model.” The model’s triadic structure of values, institution, and rites puts forward fertility and pleasure as not simply abstracted discourses but as structured and enacted discourses. I divide women’s actions into three broad types: entrance, placement, and exit. In chapter 3, “entrance” describes a daughter’s marriage into the virilocal household and the rites by which a courtesan establishes a formal relationship with a client. “Placement” is concerned with ritual activity that not only takes place within an institution and exemplifies in
some measure a woman’s position there, but also places a woman within a range of gender-specific experiences that cut across social status and idealized roles. In chapter 4 I investigate pregnancy as placement. In chapter 5, “exit” describes a host of rituals meant to move a woman from one institution and role to another. Betrothal and bridal departure from a woman’s natal household prior to her entrance into marriage, as well as retirement of a courtesan from her quarter, are ritually mediated moves. Wives and courtesans could also employ other strategies to create unapproved exits from the marriage household and quarter through the respective actions of divorce and escape. While some of these practices of entrance, placement, and exit may be fruitfully interpreted as rites of passage of some sort, I avoid examining them as a single class of ritual. Instead, I am interested in describing them as a ritual narrative structuring, like the scenes and acts of a play, a larger drama. That drama was played out through the cultural coexistence of contradictory sexual values and the needs—sometimes corresponding and sometimes conflicting—between collectivities and their individual female members.

While I write much about buddhas, kami, ancestors, and other symbols, religion as I conceive it for this particular study fits awkwardly in the categories of Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism, and folk religion. Alone, of course, each is inadequate to the task; together they risk dividing the complex of human experience—those obligations and improvisations of making choices, facing challenges, and forcing changes—into a systematic artificiality that may miss as much as it captures. For this study, I focus on the individual and communal-centered ritual experiences of entrances, placement, and exits rather than on religious traditions per se, as such an approach has the greatest capacity for understanding the individual, collective, and cultural significance of those experiences. Tokugawa marriage is a case in point.

As a subject of religious inquiry it is difficult to locate the significance of Tokugawa marriage if one seeks to place it in terms of a tradition such as Shinto or Christianity. Before the start of the Meiji period (1868–1912), marriage ceremonies were household affairs. Family members were both ritual participants and ritual leaders; there were no priests, and the ritual locus was the house. The practice of Shinto weddings has hardly any more tradition behind it in Japan than a Christian-style ceremony, which is a popular option for many non-Christian Japanese brides and grooms today. Both ceremonies are creations of Japan’s modern period. During the Meiji period, weddings were one of many celebratory rituals that came largely under the purview of a newly self-con-
scious, professional Shinto priesthood. The starting point of the “traditional” ritual link between Shinto and weddings is arguably as late as 1900, when the crown prince and future Taishō emperor (1879–1926) married at the Grand Shrine of Ise in a shinzen (before kami) ceremony. Modern Shinto nuptials—conducted before kami, in shrines, and by priests—developed broadly in imitation of Christian weddings (conducted before God, in churches, and by clergy). Further, in moving marriage into shrines, Shinto adapted many ritual steps and ceremonial displays from the etiquette and ritual styles that Tokugawa guides had popularized. This modern form of marriage before the kami (shinzen kekkon) is in contrast to Tokugawa forms of marriage, which scholars of folk studies term marriage before people (jinzen kekkon) and marriage in the home (jitaku kekkon). Similarly, A Record of Treasures for Women provides incredible detail about elite wedding rituals—what people should do, when they should do it, and where they should do it—but it says nothing of kami as being part of this rite. Although this does not mean that participants did not symbolically engage kami in wedding ceremonies, the text’s emphasis on ritual activity itself is evidence of the importance of ritual as accomplishing or intending to accomplish something, which is itself a matter of significant concern to the collective or individual employing that ritual. In the remaining pages I examine these two points—the centrality of ritual and religion as a type of concern—in order to understand a level of significance in Tokugawa women’s lives amidst competing values, roles, and their social collectives.

An important aspect to ritual’s centrality is that it expresses ideals of the cultural order. Through ritual people may behave in ways that correspond to and affirm such ideals. Yet the cultural order is full of categories that also call on ritual to both affirm and transcend them. In the cultural order of Tokugawa Japan, “daughter” was a salient example of such a category. A young woman affirmed the behavioral ideals of a daughter—most notably obeying and supporting her natal family’s wishes and needs—by transcending the category of daughter. Waiting on the other side of that ritual transcendence—the person she was to become—were the categories of “wife” and “courtesan,” each with its own cultural ideals of role identity and enactment. In this way ritual entails a paradox in that it acts to affirm one’s present social identity as it also attempts to transform that identity and bring a new set of responsibilities and self-understanding to the ritual actor—but the two goals are often in tension and sometimes even left unresolved after the ritual. The rites I examine exhibit this tension of affirmation and transformation. Sometimes it
is explicit, sometimes implicit. It is most conspicuous in the rituals of entrance and exit. In these ritual moments the push and pull of a woman’s social identity and transformation take center stage, particularly from the perspective of daughter/wife and daughter/courtesan. It is at the boundaries of these perspectives that the values and behaviors of fertility and pleasure play out against the institutional need of the household and bordello to incorporate outside women as loyal wives and courtesans.

The centrality of ritual in Tokugawa society, particularly when mediating social movement and changes in social roles, points to the Tokugawa as a “unitized society.” All societies are composed of smaller “units,” such as families, workplaces, and schools, which are institutionalized, self-regulated to a lesser or greater extent, and oriented toward achieving a particular mission. A unitized society, however, stresses the social reality of each unit and its membership to such a high degree that identity outside of recognized units is considered anomie. In less unitized societies there are more opportunities for social interaction free of formalized role behavior, hierarchical order, and membership identity. In contrast, a strongly unitized society offers for the most part intensely private and highly public spheres of behavior and presentation that form a social experience with few arenas offering public presence absent formal role identity. This kind of society necessarily stresses rituals of entrance and exit because it sees space free of social units as space devoid of social meaning. Movement from one unit to another, from one prescribed role to another, takes on a dramatic sense of change and often depends on ritual to mediate it. The Tokugawa hence represents an intensely unitized society in this respect. Movement into and out of its units of natal household, marriage household, and bordello necessitated ritual activity of some kind, whether formal and celebratory (as in weddings and a courtesan’s first meeting with clients), or private and marginal (as in strategies designed to force a divorce and attempt escape from the pleasure quarter).

What can be said of this ritual activity, regardless of its kind? Time, place, and symbol are prominent factors. Rituals tied to becoming and un-becoming a wife or courtesan, whether formal and ceremonial or ad-hoc and personal, entailed various notions of time such as astronomical, institutional, and personal. The ritual practices I examine often overlap with these chronological categories. Once again, the wedding provides a good example. Marriage between two families took place after consultation with the ritual calendar and its astronomical calculations to ensure an auspicious day; the institution of the household, particularly
that of the groom and his parents’ house, underwent profound transition with the entrance of a new member whose role was critical to the continuation of the household; and as a rite of passage for both the groom and the bride, marriage meant a powerful change in personal identity. Cutting across these categories of time is “existential time.” Ritual moments emerging from existential time occurred when an individual confronted the specter of anomie shadowing her life. In this study, such existential crises include entering situations that challenge one’s sense of moral reasoning and behavior, reaching the limit of one’s physical strength and facing life’s finitude, and being no longer able to give consent to events in one’s life. Ritual practice often addresses such crises. It suggested itself in the lives of some Tokugawa women through such experiences as creating a new social identity, confronting the inherent health risks of pregnancy, and cutting personal and institutional ties. Becoming a courtesan, for example, demanded that a daughter leave her family behind and bind her loyalty, energies, and sexuality to a different community—her bordello—under the culturally affirming guise that she morally fulfill her role as a good daughter by abandoning that role and accepting another in the world of prostitution. Pregnancy exposed a woman to the potential of illness and death, and many of the ritual behaviors surrounding it were meant to provide for a woman’s deliverance from a dangerous situation as she faced her own finitude. Marriage and prostitution were not fixed experiences. Categories of the Tokugawa cultural order—wife and courtesan—that previously marked the “becoming” side of the “daughter” category could also be transcended in reverse. In the ritual version of “everything old becomes new again,” a woman who found she could no longer tolerate being a certain man’s wife or many men’s courtesan could attempt, through a variety of strategic practices, to find a way out of the marriage household or bordello and, if possible, back to the role of a daughter or even that of another man’s wife.

The place of ritual in these experiences was highly varied, ranging from the avenue of a pleasure quarter where a courtesan paraded to meet her client to the woman’s body in which a fetus developed. Ritual place in such experiences is more than a given locale; rather, it is an active construct of human imagination and practice. The practice of ritual not only takes place, but more importantly makes place. That is, it maps out the boundaries of an environment, often idealized and hierarchical, within which ritual actors play out roles, relations, and situations typically rev-
elatory of collective or individual concerns. The importance of place in this view is less that of a “particular location” of ritual activity than a “social position” constructed through ritual activity. The marriage of a bride and the first meeting of a courtesan with her client idealized human relations between women and men within the hierarchical structures of the household and pleasure quarter. They created the positions of wife and ranking courtesan and reflected the behavioral ideals of the values of fertility and pleasure. As a different kind of example, a variety of customs, taboos, and health practices attempted to establish the woman’s body as an ideal place through which to ensure safe childbirth. On the underside of such hierarchy and ideals, activities of divorce and escape, which were linked to places as varied as divorce nunneries, sacred trees, and shrines of tutelary deities, show that strategies of ritual action could also be used to move oneself out of place, out of the hierarchy and structure of the household and bordello, and out of the social position of wife and courtesan created earlier by marriage and first meeting rites.

Ritual makes place social, malleable, positional, and an active creation, but further ritual also establishes “perspectival boundaries.” These boundaries comprise the varying perspectives and positions of ritual actors and their actions in the context of the rite. Ritual place, at minimum, is concerned with either affirming existing or creating new perspectival boundaries. We can concretize this notion in relation to Tokugawa Japan as a unitized society. Women’s lives were marked by all sorts of perspectival boundaries such as pleasure quarter/household, natal household/marriage household, one’s family/one’s in-laws, wife/courtesan, not pregnant/pregnant, and—the most fundamental with regards to the tension between affirmation and transformation—daughter/wife—courtesan. All the particular localities of ritual activity in this study—natal household, marriage household, bordello, pregnant body, divorce nunnery, cutting-ties tree, and tutelary deity shrine—either guard existing boundaries or generate new spatial, personal, and experiential boundaries of varying perspectives from women as ritual actors. From this perspective, ritual place is “a generative center.” Wherever the place of ritual, it is that place in which activities are generated—whether through public ceremonies of celebration, cautionary practices of safe birth, or in shadowy plots of strategy to alter and better one’s life—that places a woman either on one side of a perspectival border or mediates her crossing the border to the opposite side. In this study, ritual place has multiple frames. It may be a location (often social, though sometimes
bodily), but it is always concerned with socially constructed positions and necessarily intensifies boundaries of identity, behaviors, values, and institutions.

Finally, an examination of rituals employed by Tokugawa women and their families also requires attention to ritual symbols and their meanings. There are three levels of meaning an interpreter may give to ritual symbols: the exegetical, the operational, and the positional.81 Exegetical meanings are those that people involved in the ritual expressly understand and articulate. Operational meanings provide evidence as to how symbols function in the logic of the ritual itself and the impressions and responses they encourage. Positional meanings show how symbols relate to one another in the full web of cultural practices and belief. This study primarily examines ritual symbols through the operational and positional levels as they speak to larger functional and cultural meanings that are more attuned to historical analysis. Still, through commentary by Namura and Ise Sadatake (1717–1784), the eighteenth-century head of the Ise house of ritual, views of individuals concerning the exegetical meanings of ritual are also available. This is particularly evident when data point to open differences. An example in chapter 5 discusses the ritual controversy concerning the use of funerary symbolism in the rite of bridal departure. Namura finds it appropriate for idealizing a daughter’s change in location, role, and, it is hoped, new sense of loyalty. Sadatake argues that funerary symbolism is in bad form and invites grave consequences by flagrantly mimicking death rites during such an auspicious occasion.

This difference between Namura and Sadatake reveals another interpretation of ritual symbols. One common assumption of how ritual symbols operate involves the idea of ritual as a system of symbols imbued with meanings accepted as true by participants and to which participants give intellectual consent. However, the gap between Namura and Sadatake concerning the “meaning” of funeral symbolism in wedding rites indicates that intangible elements such as mood, feeling, sense, and memory—in other words, the capacity of symbols to evoke rather than simply mean something—are part of a symbol’s power too.82 What does funeral symbolism evoke in a wedding? A somber but necessary separation of a daughter from her natal family reminiscent of the dead separating from life, or a jarring clash of emotional tones that raises a macabre specter in the midst of joy and life? The power of symbols lies as much in their ability to evoke something in us as in their ability to mean something to us. This helps us to configure ritual knowledge as being, at times,
as much implicit as explicit, as much created and intuited as learned, and as much intentionally employed as customarily practiced. Through this configuration we gain not only an understanding of the larger fields of operational and positional meanings possessed by rituals and their symbols, but also a sense of the ability of ritual and its symbols to evoke something in individuals and their communities. Thus, for example, the transparent intention and effort on the part of the pleasure quarters to create nuptial rites between courtesans and clients through mimicry of wedding ritual reveals less the meaning of the wedding itself, which was antithetical to the values and economics of prostitution, and more the ability of the ritual through imitation to produce a range of evocations, from aesthetics and playful love to assertions of elite cultural proclivities.

The paradox and tension of ritual to attempt both affirmation and transformation of female roles underlies much of the following examination of rites of entrance, placement, and exit. These rituals are characterized by time that is often existential, by place that is frequently social and hierarchical (sometimes bodily and always perspectival), by symbols that possess referential as well as evocative power, and by concerns of the individual and her collective, although at times individual and group concerns may conflict. How do we best understand the concerns of the individual and the collectivity to which ritual activity responds? This question leads to the final issue of conceiving religion as a type of concern.

As with Tokugawa marriage as a religious subject, the ritual practices of wives and courtesans require a definition of religion that is functional and not simply derivative of religious traditions. A functional definition seeks to understand how any phenomenon under investigation fits and operates within a transparent designation of religion. Such a definition does not rely on assumptions that religion possesses an unambiguous social reality, as sectarian studies of traditions assert, nor that it has an essence that may be plumbed, as comparative studies of “the sacred” assume. A functional definition acknowledges that religious inquiry is not determined by the phenomena under investigation, but rather by the kinds of questions put to the phenomena that best function to extract what the investigator thinks is religiously significant. Returning again to marriage helps in formulating a useful functional definition. Continuity of the ike became a matter of social, economic, and ritual concern for a growing number of commoners as the Tokugawa period progressed. Marriage was one such ritual concern, for it marked the re-creation of the family and household. As described in detail in A Record of Treasures
for Women, marriage, we can say, exhibited a “righteous and urgent tone.” The tone reverberates with a host of hopes and anxieties such as household continuity, harmony between bride and in-laws, reorientation of a woman’s sense of loyalty and identity, and her long-term health. Other experiences and their ritual expressions of the roles of wife and courtesan also exhibit these and other concerns, both communal and individual, as we will see throughout these pages. In short, these hopes and anxieties and their ritual expression reflect what I functionally term forms of ultimate concern. There are other functional definitions of religion, and ultimate concern has potential drawbacks, as does any methodological definition. Still, as a transparent designation of religion specifically intended to produce religious inquiry, particularly inquiry into phenomena not so easily placed within conventional categories, it has advantages, as, I think, the fullness of this study shows.

Among these advantages are the ability to 1) straddle competing conceptualizations of Japanese religion; 2) avoid religious and cultural essentialisms that obscure other methodological narratives; and 3) accept competing and conflicting claims of ultimate concern amongst groups and individuals. I want to touch upon these points briefly in closing. Contextualizing ultimate concern in the ritual world of wives and courtesans resonates typologically with several linked, sometimes even bifurcated, conceptualizations that have shaped the study of Japanese religion. These include stressing matters of social and political history over matters of doctrine, gaining practical benefits over salvific assurance, and being attentive to diffused religion versus that of institutional forms. This study draws on the front links of these sets, but it does not exclude attention to the back links. Despite the methodological tendency in the study of Japanese religion to split these links, ultimate concern requires focus on all of them because the ritual lives of many Tokugawa women touched upon all of them. For example, such a split is explored in a dialogue between Jamie Hubbard and Neil McMullin concerning the role and value of doctrine in understanding Japan’s religious history. McMullin argues that overt attention to doctrine, which tends to favor notions of autonomous traditions, great men and great ideas of history, and clear demarcations of sacred and secular, risks overlooking interpretations of religious phenomena ritually and institutionally situated in cultural, political, and economic discourses. Hubbard concurs with much of the critique. Nevertheless, he holds that doctrine possesses interpretive value if investigators are attentive to the role of doctrine in refiguring historical conditions in such ways that it “resonates ultimately for those who
believe it.” Although the methodology threaded through the pages of this book is more in line with McMullin’s view, Hubbard’s defense of doctrine is valuable for understanding the power of doctrine to act in refiguring forms of ultimate concern particular to time, place, and people. In chapter 4, for example, I discuss a specific symbolization of pregnancy disseminated in *A Record of Treasures for Women*. This symbolization visually depicts the development of a fetus from ritual items and is teamed with corresponding buddhas for each month in the womb. The symbolic logic of these illustrations was rooted in particular doctrinal environments that were in development before the Tokugawa period, but during the Tokugawa that logic was refigured in lifestyle guides to express the ultimate concern of pregnant women for a safe birth and for conceptualizing the life inside them.

This refiguring of doctrinally based symbols to express the hope of a safe birth indicates another aspect of ultimate concern in Japanese religion. Concerns about one’s life in terms of health, happy relationships, and wealth, and the avoidance of undesirable events and situations are central to understanding a range of religious activity in Japan characterized by the search for worldly or practical benefits (genze riyaku). Seeking such benefits intensely validates life in this world and the ultimacy of its concerns. A daughter’s marriage or debut as a courtesan, her pregnancy, and various forms of cutting human and institutional ties reveal the validation of seeking benefits for one’s collectivity or for oneself. While I focus on practical benefits as definitive of one form of ultimate concern for this particular study, I avoid the temptation of upholding worldly benefits as definitive of Japanese religiosity. Focus on the search for benefits as one expression of ultimate concern is, as part of a functional definition of religion, intentional in its methodological transparency. The methodological point of using worldly benefits in this study is not to uncover something essential about Japanese religion—to create an unchanging and timeless religious “metanarrative” of past and present that overshadows other approaches and the important stories of Japanese religion they can tell. Rather, the point is simply to put forward an approach that helps answer most fully the particular questions I ask in this study.

Putting forward a functional definition tied to practical benefits as a form of ultimate concern marks a valuable approach toward understanding the ritual practices of women and their social institutions because it can account for the dynamic of competing claims of ultimacy. In the context of this study, competing claims could arise between the benefits
looked for by a community and those an individual within that community hoped to realize, and the benefits different value-based communities sought. Not only did the household and bordello seek different benefits according to the ultimacy of their institutional needs and concerns, but each depended on a woman to serve a specific role that included defining her sexuality in terms of the values that benefited the institution’s economic success and future maintenance. Gaining benefits of institutional success and continuity sometimes paralleled those benefits an individual member sought, but institutional and individual concerns could run afoul of each other when collectivity and member each made irreconcilable claims of ultimacy concerning benefits. The potential for such a clash to erupt into domestic disharmony and dispute was a palpable concern among jokun authors, who addressed it both directly and obliquely in their writings. The potential for conflict between communal and individual claims in the pleasure quarters also was ever present and was resolved or circumvented at times through strategies of escape. The heterogeneity of claims between collective and individual also existed on a wider sociological plane between the values of fertility and the values of pleasure. These values not only co-existed, but were also institutionally co-sanctioned. The voice they gave to Tokugawa society that reaches us today is one of full-throated tension and difference. Indeed, these contradictory values scream out the real heterogeneity that existed in that society despite popular conceptions of social and cultural uniformity. In this study their cry resounds, reverberating off a methodology of religion constructed from elements of ritual, practical benefits, and ultimate concern. These elements, far from muffling these values and social tensions under metanarrative blankets of cultural and religious essentialism, amplify the cacophony of a complex and heterogeneous society.

The amplification of difference reminds us again of Utamaro’s illustration. In the sense that his courtesan’s dream of a wedding and his skepticism assert that ritual is about difference—whether bridging it (her dream) or exacerbating it (his skepticism)—its use by groups and individuals seeking benefits to their varied concerns amidst multiple discourses of sexual values is a portraiture of ritual that we will see throughout these pages.