Stories That Should Not Be Told

Sharebon, kibyōshi and censorship in early modern Japan

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Introduction

Japan has a historical time period which is unique in world history: the Edo period (1600 – 1868), alternatively named the Tokugawa period after the shōgunal dynasty which ruled at that time. During this period, Japan was virtually closed off to the rest of the world. The Netherlands, China and the Ryūkyū Kingdom (contemporary Okinawa) were the sole exceptions to the self-imposed isolation and constituted Japan's only windows on the rest of the world.

A peculiar characteristic of the this period is the relationship between the Japanese state and the public life of Edo Japan. As described by Mary Elizabeth Berry in her 1998 paper "Public Life in Authoritarian Japan", the relationship between the public sphere of Japanese society and the authoritarian regime of the shogunate has been problematic for modern historians. The problem has been how to account for the active public life in Edo Japan, even though its state was organized on authoritarian princples. These principles should have negated the existence of a public life, but there is overwhelming evidence of its existence. Prints and books which voiced criticism of the government from the Edo period have survived up to this day. Based on the inherent contradictions, however, many historians have condemned the possibility of Edo Japan having a public life.

Berry, however, makes a good case for a relationship between the authoritarian government and the public life of early modern Japan. According to her, the political organization of the shogunate created room for a public sphere (or public life), while this public sphere could generally be said to aim at the betterment of the shogunate. This complementary relationship was possible, because the samurai – considered as part of the ruling class during the Edo period – far outnumbered any official positions the shogunate had available for them as a job. Still considered to belong to the highest class of the early modern society, many samurai were left without a purpose. Consequently, they created one for themselves. They dedicated themselves to roles which were part of the public sphere, by focussing on “learning and learned criticism of the regime” as well as becoming educators, researchers and/or writers.[1]

I will focus on this public sphere in my thesis and try to make an argument for its existence by looking at the presence of censure in “fiction” – specifically in prose writing in *sharebon* 洒落本 (“witty booklets”) and *kibyōshi* 黄表紙 (“yellow cover booklets”) and *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵(“pictures from the Floating World”) prints. By examining censorship in this “fiction”, problems with the different commodities can be identified. These problems might indicate if there was a public sphere as Berry argues and if so, what triggered the censorship in these works. As such, this thesis can form an argument to prove the existence of a public sphere despite an authoritarian government.

According to Berry, the early modern Japanese public sphere had two parts: the normal, “public” part containing politics, social dissent in academies and information/instruction in the book market, and the parallel but opposite “private” part which covered prose fiction, drama, satiric painting and poetry. Because the narratives of *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* parodied and satirized, it could therefore be said they are a part of this private sphere. However, in order to continue to exist, this “private sphere” had to offer up parodying and satirizing *contemporary* rulers, peoples and events in exchange for official tolerance [emphasis added].[2]

The Kyōhō Reforms of the 1720s was one of the edicts in which the shogunate stated what was and what was not allowed in literature. It was reiterated in several later statements, because the shogunate felt that many authors and publishers had failed to live up to those decrees. This reissuing of edicts on (the publishing of) fiction was not only because the shogunate tried to re-establish its authority, it was also because it felt the need to silence unwanted critics.[3] This critique was voiced, in part, in literature – such as the *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* booklets.

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[1] Berry, 1998, p. 143
[2] Ibid. p. 155

Both *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* are subgenres of the larger *gesaku* 戯作 genre; *gesaku* meaning that books of its genre were supposedly written in jest. However, as the narratives of both *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* contain either parody or satire, are they really written in jest? This inquiry is deepened by the fact that many of their authors were samurai,[4] who had an intimate knowledge of the shogunate's organisation and could therefore easily parody or satirize it. Moreover, the booklets were read mostly by *chōnin* 町人, townspeople, and so the booklets reached a very wide audience. These booklets could therefore be argued to be part of the strategies of the public in which it expressed its criticism of the regime. At the same time, in having to oblige criteria set by the shogunate before they could be published could make them part of the strategies used by the government to construct society or to construct an authorized view of society.

Having been subject to edicts such as those of the Kyōhō Reform, the shogunate also obviously found these booklets problematic in greater or lesser extent. I will investigate what (kind(s) of) problems the shogunate had or could have had with these booklets and what could have prompted them to censure them. Were they problems that were similar to the problems that prompted the censure of *ukiyo-e* prints, or were they problems specific to *sharebon* and *kibyōshi*/literature? And how does this relate to the possible role(s) it/they had in the public sphere?

In order to try and form an answer for these questions, I will conduct a literature research. First the notion of the "public sphere" must be examined. Was there a public sphere in Japan during the Edo period, and if so, was it similar to the Western public sphere? If not, where does it differ from it Western counterpart? In order to answer this question, Berry's aforementioned article as well as the monograph that evolved from it (*Japan in Print*, 2006) will be relied upon, as well as works such as Gerrit Steunebrink and Evert van der Zweerde's *Civil Society, Religion and the Nation* (2004). Hopefully this will also generate an argument for whether or not the term "civil society" can be used in the context of early modern Japan, instead of Berry's "public sphere".

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[3] Kornicki, 1977, p. 155
[4] Keene, 1978, p. 400 – 1

In this part of my thesis, I hope to also create a working definition for terms such as "the public sphere". As the double quotation marks here suggest, they are not readily applicable to Japan's situation. However, as there are no other terms available in either English or Japanese, I have no choice but to use these terms. By starting with a chapter on the "public sphere" and its (non)existence in early modern Japan I hope to lay the foundation of the content which will be referred to when the term "public sphere", or terms such as "civil society", is used in my thesis.

After the (non)existence and the nature of the "public sphere" have been established, I will move on to examine how literature may have figured in this "public sphere". As was mentioned before, literature was part of a kind of sub-public sphere according to Berry. Could this be said to be true for *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* as well as for *ukiyo-e* prints? And if so, why were literature and *ukiyo-e* prints allocated their own part of the "public sphere"? The examination of *ukiyo-e* prints, then, will function as a baseline with which the situation of *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* can be compared and contrasted, to see if these booklets were unique or if the problem of censure pervaded more cultural expressions in Edo Japan.

I hope to answer these questions by relying on a variety of literature, which covers both the nature of *sharebon* and *kibyōshi*, as well as looking at censorship in literature and arts to see if the booklets have problems similar to those with which the censure in *ukiyo-e* prints was concerned. Locating potential problems and their nature will in turn contribute to the confirmation or rejection of Berry’s argument for the existence of a public sphere in Edo Japan.

Chapter 1 – Civil Society, public sphere and public life

Before the relationship between the shogunate and any kind of civil society, public sphere and public life in early modern Japan can be examined, it is important to establish the content of such terms. Establishing the terms that are pivotal to this thesis is the goal of this chapter.

A Very Short History of the Term " Civil Society"

Although the term "civil society" has medieval origins,[1] the term has only come into frequent use after the Second World War. It gained prominence during the 1970s and 1980s, as the previously dominant models of liberal and Marxist state organization fell apart.[2] That is not to say that the term had not been in use before, in the 1950s and the 1960s. In those decades, however, the term "civil society" did not have any political prominence in Western political thought.[3] The term gained political prominence in the 1970s, as it started to be used as an antagonistic idea which opposed the authoritarian governments and regimes of eastern Europe and Latin America. The term is still current in use, although its meaning has shifted from opposing authoritarian governments to becoming a construct which unites socialism and democracy. [4]

The development of the term's meaning, i.e. a shift from non-political to political, and from an idea antagonizing authoritarian regimes to reconciling socialism and democracy, shows that the term "civil society" is not a stable term. Semantic change does not only occur as time passes by and the term acquires new (dimensions of) meanings. The sheer amount of literature on "civil society" shows that the experts also do not agree on a clear definition of

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[1] Black, 2001, p. 33
[2] Khilnani, 2001, p. 12
[3] Ibid. p. 15
[4] Ibid. p. 16

"civil society".[5] In the case of "civil society" there are clear turning points in the history of its meaning. This plurality of meaning is not something that has developed with the recent use of the term. Rather, it is part of its historical heritage. As such, it is necessary to look at (a part of) the history of the term. Because this thesis offers a limited space, I will only look at the history superficially, highlighting those elements which are relevant for the purpose of this thesis.

Looking back at its classical Graeco-Roman roots, the term *societas civilis*, or "civil society", simply denoted a community or society of "human beings united within a legitimate political order".[6] During the Middle Ages, it came to denote a secular legal and political order, an entity that could be distinguished from a primitive or ecclesiastical society.[7] During the Renaissance, it came to denote the circular system of exchanging goods out of necessity which motivated human interactions in society,[8] similar to what the Scottish theorists would later call the "commercial society".

The developments that would have the greatest impact on modern poltical theories, however, started with the ideas of John Locke (1632 – 1704). In Locke's eyes, "civil society" was a term used for a benign state, the government of which rested on the support of its citizens. At the same time, it was "an aggregation of civilized human beings, […] a society of human beings who had succeeded in disciplining their conduct".[9]

A second turn in meaning was developed by the Scottish theorists of the commercial society. Unlike Locke, they took a wholly secular approach. In their theory the society of human beings was being held together by commercial need, rather than by their discipline of conduct. At the same time, the network of commercial need engendered a new network, that of free personal interactions, morals, affections and sentiments. These interactions would be governed by social moral and thereby become self-sustained through natural, social interactions. It gave individuals independence and liberty, and the following social self-cohesiveness could impede any political power.[10]

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[5] Schwartz, 2002, p. 195
[6] Khilnani, 2001, p. 17
[7] Black, 2001, p. 33
[8] Ibid. p. 34
[9] Khilnani, 2001, p. 18

The greatest turning point in the history of the meaning of “civil society” was the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), which incorporated principles both from Locke’s ideas as well as the ideas of the Scottish theorists. Already somewhat present in the thinking of these theorists, Hegel was the first to draw a clear line between the state and the “civil society”. In the “civil society” Hegel tried to incorporate all that he considered of value in a modern community: liberal individual freedoms and a moral and political life. In his eyes, “civil society” was not only a system based on needs, but also a “sphere of recognition”, where the individual could enter into relationships that were mediated by social recognition.[11]

While there is still no clear-cut definition of “civil society”,[12] what all the *current* uses have in common is that they posit a socio-political space which is distinct from the state,[13] in which individual human beings can unite themselves voluntarily.[14] It is its own legitimate political order, which stands apart from any nation’s government, in which individual autonomy and moral solidarity are safeguarded.[15] It is to these basic features that I will refer when I use the term “civil society” in this thesis.

Civil society can also be equated roughly with the “public sphere”, as being the space where the public – that is, those individuals not involved in government – can express and unite themselves. This seems especially the case in Japan. The similarity of these two terms is borne out by the fact that one of the major Japanese political philosophers, Maruyama Masao

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[10] Ibid. pp. 20 - 22
[11] Ibid. pp. 23 - 24
[12] See, for example, Khilnani, 2001, p. 11 or Schwartz, 2002, p. 195; both acknowledge the vagueness of the notion of civil society.
[13] Najita, 2004, p. 114
[14] Reverda, 2005, p. 18
[15] Ibid. p. 19

(1914 – 1996),[16] preferred the term “public sphere” over “civil society”.[17] A similar defitinion is also posited by Jürgen Habermas .[18] The term “public life” would then constitute any and all activities that flow from the public sphere.

Civil Society in Modern Japan

As the history of the term civil society shows, it is a thoroughly Western concept. A pervasive question has been whether the concept of civil society can be transposed onto non-Western countries and/or cultures, such as Japan. For the initial test of applicability, Japan is an ideal candidate, as it is a mix of “Western institutions [with an] Eastern cultural background”.[19] It is also important to first test the applicability in modern Japan, as the results can affect the test for early modern Japan. If Japan does indeed have a civil society, then any precursors of that can be referred to as symptoms of a kind of proto-civil society. If there is no civil society in Japan, any parallels with the Western civil society or its precursors need a new, or at least different, conceptual framework.

Considering the existence of studies such as those of Frank Schwartz (2002) and Tetsuo Najita (2004), it certainly can be said that modern Japan has at least some kind or type of civil society.[20] The question still remains to what extent this civil society is like the Western civil society. For example, in Japan itself civil society is considered more like an idea that is currently coming into being rather than an idea that needs to be renewed.[21]

What Schwartz and Najita make abundantly clear at least is that any notion of a Japanese civil society is thoroughly intertwined with Japan’s *modernity*, even though the initial ideas concerning civil society were introduced over one hundred years ago during the

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[16] In this thesis I will follow the Japanese order of names, giving the family name before the given name.
[17] Najita, 2004, p.105
[18] Habermas, 1997, p. 105
[19] Schwartz, 2002, p. 197
[20] Schwarz, 2002, pp. 195 – 215; Najita, 2004, pp. 101 - 15
[21] Najita, 2004, p. 102

Meiji Restoration (1868).[22] Ueki Emori (1857 – 1892) theorized that the autonomous space of individuals allowed them to express their criticism of the regime.[23] However, the term is most clearly identified with the post-war period and the *shimin undō* 市民運動, or citizens' protest movements, of the 1960s. That the earliest manifestations of civil society in Japan were protest movements testify of the historical roots as the idea was imported to Japan by Emori.

Needless to say, groups that oppose the government are far from the only groups to make up civil society in modern Japan. However, that many of them are associated so strongly with the history of the idea in Japan is interesting. It bears testimony to the Western ideas that it constituted a space that was different from the government, while also exemplifying the ideas of the scholar who introduced the idea of civil society in Japan. For now, then, we can only partly say that Japanese civil society is similar to Western civil society.

Civil Society in Early Modern Japan

As was pointed out earlier in this chapter, the terms "public sphere" and "civil society" can be roughly equated with each other, especially in the case of Japan. This is important to keep in mind when examining the possible existence of civil society in early modern Japan. Mentioned in the introduction, many historians are uncomfortable with recognizing something similar to civil society in early modern Japan's public life. This is deemed impossible due to the authoritarian shogunal regime. There is no question that early modern Japan had a lively popular culture, which created space for a discourse that could question state authority. The manifold survival of period prints, booklets, charters, etc. bear witness to it. The problem is how to account for their survival while also recognizing the authoritarian principles on which the regime of the shogunate rested.

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[22] Ibid. p. 103
[23] Ibid. p. 104

One part of this problem is the fact that there is no adequate terminology to describe the phenomenon. By necessity, scholars have to turn to terms such as civil society, public sphere and authoritarianism. As with most things Western, they cannot be applied as such to Japan. However, the lack of available alternative terminology forces us to do so, thereby highlighting the Japanese “anomalies”. The existence of the early modern Japanese “civil society” under an authoritarian regime is one such “anomaly”. However, when the phenomenon is looked at in its own right and the terminology is only used as a discursive aid, the relation between Japan’s early modern “civil society” and the shogunate becomes much less problematic.

To examine that relation, it is important to understand the development of “civil society” in early modern Japan. Under normal (Western?) circumstances, it is next to impossible to have civil society exist under an authoritarian regime, because the ultimate power lies in the hands of one person or a small elite, who does not answer to the people and who requires absolute submission from the people to the those in power.[24] There is no freedom to oppose those in power via popular or political movements. In principle, this was also true for the organization of the shogunate in early modern Japan. Officially, the ultimate political power lay in the hands of the emperor. Practically, however, the Tokugawa *shōgun* 将軍 wielded the ultimate political power. There was no popular influence, nor was he held in check by any existing laws. As such, the shogunate was an authoritarian regime. However, in an effort to secure and stablize its own authority, the government made two decisions that would open up a space where an early modern civil society could form.

The first decision, made by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537 – 1598) slighty before the installation of the Tokugawa shogunate, removed large numbers of samurai from the countryside, especially where there had been rebellions previously. The second decision, made after succession battles when Hideyoshi had died, took away much of the autonomy of the daimyō by installing the *sankin kōtai* 参勤交代 system, requiring the daimyō to spend half of their time in Edo.[25] This triggered urbanization on an enormous scale, as not only the samurai and daimyō themselves moved to Edo, but their familes and retinue moved with them. In turn, this drew many craftsmen, merchants, servants, etc. to Edo – and other cities – as well.[26]

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[24] Encyclopedia Brittanica Online

By claiming and stablizing their authority, the Tokugawa regime produced a hitherto unknown period of continued relative peace. This posed a problem for the samurai, as it left most of them unemployed. Under the *shi-nō-kō-shō* 士農工商 system, the hierarchical ordering of society in the Edo period, the samurai belonged to the highest social class – the ruling class. However, they far outnumbered the administrative positions available in the shogunate. No longer required to fight and unable to procure a job with their official employer, the samurai fashioned jobs for themselves.[27] By the same token, authority that previously lay with the samurai and/or daimyō was (temporarily) conferred upon villages themselves. Village officials were made responisble for collecting taxes, disciplining and conciliation, and other duties that had formerly been held by samurai or daimyō.[28] As such, common people were integrated into the authoritarian regime, which opened up a space for commoners to think about this regime.

Similarly, the nascent shogunate, then still led by Hideyoshi, had held cartographical and cadastral surveys "to collect data on natural and human resources".[29] These surveys would become the models on which other material such as gazetteers, catalogues of food or plants, city maps, road maps and much more would be based. In fact, the regime itself regularly put out information concerning production figures, personnel rosters, travel schedules and even provided publishing companies with their own maps. This offcial information would inform other publications concerning the regime, and so the official models and information would keep being emulated.[30]

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[25] Berry, 2006, pp. 27 - 8
[26] Ibid. p. 107
[27] Ibid. p. 32
[28] Berry, 1998, p.143
[29] Berry, 2006, p. 26

In their cartographical and cadastral surveys, the nascent shogunate first of all trained many samurai, and by extension commoners too as they had to help the samurai, to be cartographic or cadastral registrars. Secondly, it educated people about investigating and being investigated.[31] Possessing knowledge of how to investigate something and having been investigated themselves, the regime unwittingly opened up the possibility of becoming the object of scrutiny itself.

This was enhanced by a shift that linked authority not with blood but with merit. Already premised by Hideyoshi himself,[32] the social academies that had been formed by samurai linked their being samurai to virtue and learning[33] and thereby linked to the same characteristics. Focussing on the kind of learning others had no time for gave the samurai a purpose. Consequently, many of the jobs they fashioned for themselves had to do with learning. Organized in social academies, the learned samurai presumed that they had access to the rulers and that the rules should hear, if not heed, them.[34] Leaving the samurai largely unemployed had paved the way for an opening that could develop into civil society.

Similar to the presumtion of learned men having access to rulers, commoners understood the link between learning and virtue to be separate from blood and profession.[35] As such, they also began to learn, using material from the abundance produced by popular printing presses since much of the informational literature produced was aimed at self-improvement.[36] Combined with the fact that the regime had opened itself up by involving commoners, for example by training them to be surveyors, another opening for civil society was created.

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[30] Ibid. p. 43
[31] Ibid. pp. 42 – 3
[32] Ibid. p. 32
[33] Berry, 1998, p. 147
[34] Ibid. p. 148
[35] Ibid. p. 149

In ruling the country as they did, the regime itself had created a space for civil society. However, unlike the development of civil society in the West, the early modern civil society of Edo Japan never developed as or into an idea that could be used to undermine the state. This seems to have two underlying reasons. First and foremost, as an authoritarian regime, the shogunate exercised censorship despite its relatively positive relationship with popular presses. It forbade publications on politcally sensitive information, such as military households, foreign affairs, heterodox beliefs such as Christianity and disturbing current events.[37] Careful not to touch upon such subjects, politically sensitive material rarely circulated. Secondly, the authority of the shogunate was never questioned from the start.

Criticism which was put forth, for example by the social academies, questioned the merit of the individual ruler, but not the system. Thoroughly Confucian in its organization, the early modern society was accustomed to social hierarchy. Confucianism also legitimized authoritarian rule.[38] It never conceived the existence of a space that was separate from the government where people could unite themselves, possibly against the government.[39] In fact, the idea of civil society completely goes against the Confucian ideal of the paternalistic state.[40] Confucianism had instilled the idea that, like a filial son, a Confucian citizen was to submit to the authority.[41] Citizens were allowed to remonstrate with the state, but only when they perceived the state to be lacking in fulfilling its responsibilities. After that, it is up to the authorities to mend their ways and for the citizens to keep quiet when they do not.[42] As Confucius himself had stated: “Citizens not in government service ‘do not discuss its policies’”.[43] The organization of the state, then, was never an issue to be called into question.

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[36] Ibid. p. 153
[37] Berry, 2006, p. 52
[38] Ibid. p. 49
[39] Nosco, 2001, p. 336
[40] Ibid. p. 341
[41] Ibid. p. 339

The development as explained above shows how something similar to civil society could exist under authoritarian rule. Not only did the shogunate itself create such a space, the all-encompassing doctrine of Confucianism ensured that the given space would not be used against the shogunate. However, as always the development also highlights the unsuitability of the term “civil society” for Japan’s situation. Early modern Japanese civil society was never truly separate from the government, nor did it function in entirely the same way as it did in Europe. As no other terminology is available yet, the current terminology will continue to have to be used instead. Perhaps most important, though, is the fact that, broadly speaking, civil society *can* describe the developments which occurred during the Edo period and that there appears to be a certain level of continuation between the Edo period and the Meiji period, when Ueki Emori introduced the Western concept of civil society.[44] The criticism of the regime that Ueki argued for can be aligned with the remonstrance with the shogunate Confucian ideology allowed. Japanese civil society today, then, is not merely a Japanese version of a Western idea.

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[42] Ibid. p. 350 – 1
[43] Chan, 1963, p. 34
[44] Najita, 2004, pp. 103-4

Chapter 2 – Censorship in *ukiyo-e*

Before turning to the literary works of *sharebon* and *kibyōshi*, I want to take a closer look at the relationship between *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 ("pictures from the floating world") and censorship in early modern Japan. This relationship has been the object of previous studies and can therefore be thought of as a good way to establish a baseline against which the relationship of *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* and censorship can be compared. Outlining the relationship of *ukiyo-e* and censorship is the objective of this chapter. It will also look at the division of the public sphere in early modern Japan, as this may also bear on the reasons for government censure of *ukiyo-e*, *sharebon* and *kibyōshi*.

The Public Public Sphere and the Private Public Sphere

Before examining the relationship between *ukiyo-e* and censorship, I first want to explore another idea that was introduced by Mary Elizabeth Berry. She argues that the public sphere of early modern Japan can be divided into a public and a private part. I believe that this division is helpful when it comes to analyzing the relationship of not only *ukiyo-e* and censorship, but also that of *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* and censorship. The division may help to explain why the shogunate seems to have targeted only specific printed matter in its edicts rather than printed matter in general. At the same time, by placing *ukiyo-e* in either of the sub-spheres means to acknowledge them as means available in the public sphere through which the general public could interact with and express their criticism of the government.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, it seems more appropriate to speak of a public sphere in early modern Japan than to speak of a civil society, as the space where the general population voiced its different opinions was never completely free from government interference. The idea of freedom from government interference is strongly linked to the term 'civil society', as was outlined in the brief history of the term. The Japanese civil society was never complete free from government influence. This notion becomes even more important when Berry's suggestion of a division within the public sphere is followed.

The division between a public and private sub-sphere can be made, because certain subjects were more dangerous to mention than others.[1] Much of the literature produced within the overarching public sphere was aimed at self-improvement,[2] giving commoners knowledge that was previously the privilege of the higher echelons of society (i.e., the samurai). In return, the general public added knowledge that was also previously a privilege of their own station in life. Exchanging and expanding the available knowledge, the general public created a sphere where criticism could be expressed, but which "remained orderly and gradually adaptive".[3]

This orderliness was to become a characteristic of the public sub-sphere. Criticism, whether social or political, could be expressed, but it was always done in an orderly manner. Whatever was expressed, it operated within the boundaries of the polity. It included the politics of villages, dissent in the (social) academies and the information and instruction fields of the book market.[4] Their practices always followed a certain "protocol", ensuring that the order was safeguarded. The criticism expressed in the public sub-sphere is similar to the criticism discussed in the social academies mentioned in Chapter 1: it questioned someone's or something's merit rather than the (legitimacy of) system or the authority of the shogunate.

The abstinence of questioning the system or authority was apparently due to a legacy in which the "public" had been equated with the "good" since at least the seventh century A.D – a legacy that was already over 900 years old by the time of the early modern period. The

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[1] Berry, 1998, p. 154
[2] Ibid. p. 153
[3] Ibid. p, 154
[4] Ibid. p. 154

"public" was the locus of interdependence,[5] an important part of the Tokugawa ideology.[6] Everyone and everything functioned for the betterment of the collective, much like the modern adage "There is no I in team". In order to cement the ideology of interdependence into public life, the Tokugawa government created a strict social hierarchy; the *shi – nō – kō – shō* system (see Chapter 1). This system "lubricated the social hierarchy's interdependent relations",[7] because it institutionalized the divisions of ruling and material production.[8] The *shi*, i.e. the samurai, were given the task of ruling over the other classes, which in turn were given the task to produce and distribute the goods needed in society. In creating the bonds of interdependence, the government made contributing to the wellbeing of the whole a fundamental moral duty.[9]

The private sub-sphere, on the other hand, was the opposite of the public sub-sphere, violating collectivity through selfishness.[10] The private sub-sphere was associated with the sphere of art and play, the mysterious, the divisive, vicious and anti-social. It was the realm of powerful emotions and physical passions, whether displaying a "natural" response or libertine excess. In either case, the response was seen as disorderly and regarded as a source of instability. As such, it was separated from the public sub-sphere and made subordinate to it. Because the private sphere was associated with art and play, it included fields such as drama, fiction, satiric painting and poetry, all of which explored the more subversive topics of sex, money and honour.[11]

In exploring these topics, art and play were inherently political, according to Berry. While prints, booklets and kabuki plays certainly expressed political criticism overtly, I want to explain that we are dealing with two different types of political criticism in this case. On the one hand, there is actual political criticism, which often referred to the misconduct or misrule of the *shōgun*. This can be equated with modern political cartoons, for example. On the other hand, there is the inherent politicality which can be seen as an invisible "foundation" of the private sub-sphere as a whole. This politicality is present in every commodity associated with the private sphere, because all of its forms violate the ideology of collectivity. I call it invisible, because it is not until one thinks about the position of commodities of the private sphere in relation to the ideology of collectivity that is becomes clear how they may be seen as inherently political.

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[5] Ibid. p. 154
[6] Ibid. p. 141
[7] Hirano, 2013, p. 54
[8] Ibid. p. 53
[9] Ibid. p. 53
[10] Berry, p. 154
[11] Ibid. p. 154

Take, for example, the *bijin-ga* 美人画, "pictures of beautiful people" if translated literally. However, because *bijin-ga* as a rule depict women, it is customarily translated as "pictures of beautiful women". Making (colour) prints of women hardly seems an act with political connotations or political criticism. In most cases, and exemplified by the genre's name, this was also true; there was little connection with (contemporary) politics. However, the *bijin-ga* was a subgenre of the larger *ukiyo-e* genre. *Ukiyo-e* were prints which had as their main subject the so-called "Floating World", i.e., the world of entertainment. *Ukiyo-e* depicted geisha and kabuki actors, amongst others. The danger of *bijin-ga* was twofold: inherent to it being a subgenre of *ukiyo-e*, *bijin-ga* concerned themselves with a subject that distracted people from working for the collective, as the Floating World was mainly focused on providing experiences of personal, individual pleasure. Secondly, as the genre of *bijin-ga* often portrayed geisha, if ordinary women were portrayed in (the style of) *bijin-ga* they might be associated with geisha. In itself, the genre of *bijin-ga* may not contain open political criticism, but they violated the ideology of collectivity and subverted the normal social order by drawing attention away from a commoner's moral duty to fulfil his role for the well-being of the collective. This short analysis demonstrates how these prints are inherently political despite not containing any overt political messages.

In this thesis, I will attempt to look at explicit political criticism rather than the criticism that is inherent to the commodities of the private sphere. Both the *ukiyo-e* examined in this chapter and the *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* examined in the next chapter are commodities of the private sphere, as they are both art and fiction. By their very nature they would have been regarded as dangerous substances, because they could undermine the social order of early modern Japanese society as was explained above in the example of *bijin-ga*. However, they could also carry explicit political criticism. An example of explicit criticism in *ukiyo-e* will be provided in the following section.

Ukiyo-e *and Censorship*

When looking at the history of censorship in the early modern period, there are three major historical landmarks to be found: the Kyōhō Reforms (1720s), the Kansei Reforms (1790s) and the Tempō Reforms (1840s).[12] Despite the lapse of time between the reforms, the Kansei and the Tempō Reforms oftentimes reiterated edicts that had been issued during the Kyōhō Reforms. The Kyōhō era lasted from 1716-1735, a few decades before famous artists such as Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806), Katshushika Hokusai (1760- 1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797 – 1858) were active and the genre reached its peak. Much work on the impact of these three reforms has already been done by Sarah Thompson, and I rely on her work for what is presented below.

Before exploring the impact of the reforms on *ukiyo-e*, it is important to discuss a particular aspect of Tokugawa ideology concerning the mind and the body, because this can be related to some of the censorship edicts. Explored in detail by Katsuya Hirano in his 2013 study *The Politics of Dialogical Imagination*, I will briefly summarize his argument here.[13] One of the main goals of the government was to safeguard the harmony of the social order. In order to accomplish this, the government expected full co-operation from all members of society, each individual fulfilling the task accorded to him or her by the individual's social status: the *shi – nō – kō –shō* system. In the words of Hirano, "[t]his highly classificatory system was devised to institute and perpetuate the hierarchical arrangement of authority and to facilitate the interdependent relations of material production."[14] The system, however, could only be perpetuated if the body was conceived of in terms of its productive power, because the system relied on interdependency of the different classes. It was for their productivity that farmers (*nō*) were placed higher in the hierarchy than artisans and merchants. Those who worked in entertainment, prostitutes and vagrants were even classified as *jingaisha* 人外者 – non-humans.

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[12] Thomspon and Harootunian, 1991, p. 39
[13] The argument is extracted from pp. 30 - 43

The classification of productiveness also created a sharp dichotomy between the mind and the body. Where the body was regarded in terms of productiveness, the mind was regarded as something that could be cultivated, giving expression to a higher self. This higher self had to be separated from its mortal coils, by subordinating the physical to the mental faculties. Given that at the start of the Tokugawa government only samurai had the time to cultivate their mind, this dichotomy also endorsed the high social status of samurai as rulers of the common classes. At the same time, it anchored to common classes to their body, which should only be perceived in terms of its productivity. The entire system of social hierarchy, then, was only successful as long as the body was perceived in terms of productivity only. Promulgating the social hierarchy by fulfilling one's social role was seen as an individual's moral duty. Celebrating the body by being idle and excessive consumption by those of lower classes was perceived to be a failing of the system, and thus by extent failure of the government.

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[14] Hirano, 2013, p. 31

As an overarching genre, *ukiyo-e* showed a wide variety of topics depicted in its prints: geisha, kabuki actors, beautiful women, erotica, historical scenes, myths and legends, and flora and fauna to name but a few. Prints were usually differentiated from each other within the *ukiyo-e* genre on technical or formal grounds. For example, the *ōkubi-e* 大首絵 ("large head pictures") depicted close-ups of the heads of kabuki actors like our modern portrait photographs. *Abuna-e* 危な絵 ("dangerous pictures") were prints that showed women in erotically suggestive poses, whereas *ai-e* 青絵 ("blue pictures") were prints that used the Prussian blue pigment almost exclusively for colouring.

It did not take long before *ukiyo-e* clashed with the shogunate, both with the subjects of its prints as with the luxurious execution of the prints. The Confucian ideology on which the shogunate had built its base demanded a frugal and strongly moralistic lifestyle from all subjects. Laws concerning proper attire for each class of society and other lifestyle related consumption had readily been put into place. These so-called sumptuary laws were especially strictly applied to *chōnin* ("townspeople") as they had the economic strength and leisure to live well beyond their Confucian means, and so could threaten the order of society.[15]

These laws were issued to regulate the articles of consumption and the types of entertainment that the government thought to be appropriate for the different classes.[16] If there was logic in the distinction in function for the different social classes, it only followed that a distinction in appearance should also be maintained.[17] One of the main reasons may have been that with the establishment of the Tokugawa government, the military power of the samurai was replaced with wealth.[18] The nationwide peace that was established under the Tokugawa regime meant that samurai were no longer required to hone their martial skills. The wealth they would have previously spent on martial equipment became to be used to purchase luxury items that displayed the wealth and status of the samurai. During the eighteenth century, however, townspeople, especially, became so wealthy that they could afford a lifestyle that had formerly been reserved for their social superiors. In adopting a luxurious lifestyle, the townspeople blurred the (visual) class distinctions. The sumptuary laws were issued to attempt and maintain class distinctions, by regulating what was considered an appropriate lifestyle for each class and so in essence return the townspeople to the low social class accorded to them by Confucianist theories.[19]

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[15] Ibid. p. 30
[16] Shively, 1964, p. 124
[17] Ibid. p. 125
[18] Ibid. p. 138

As *ukiyo-e* grew in the frivolity of their subject and the luxuriousness of their execution (multicoloured prints, using mica powder for glitter effects) the prints themselves also became the objects of sumptuary laws. The potential power of publishing prints and books was well understood by the shogunate.[20] In order to safeguard its control over the lives of its citizens, the shogunate issued several edicts which censured *ukiyo-e*.[21] They were issued in the Kyōhō, Kansei and Tempō Reforms mentioned before. As the latter two repeated much of the edicts issued by the former reforms, I will explore the Kyōhō Reforms below and only refer to the other reforms when necessary.

The Kyōhō Reforms were the reforms that would have a lasting impact on *ukiyo-e*. The primary goal for the reforms, of which the edicts concerning *ukiyo-e* were only a minor part, was to restore the political stability of the shogunate and the samurai class.[22] The reforms were begun by Tokugawa Yoshimune, already a reformer before he became *shōgun*.[23] Yoshimune had to face the challenge of the ailing national economy and the shogunate's own finances, both of which were in an appalling state. He tried to remedy them with a strict frugality campaign.[24] For Yoshimune to get the economy and the shogunate's finances in order, he needed everyone to participate in the activities belonging to his or her status, all for the good of the collective. *Ukiyo-e* could distract from this duty because they focussed on the idle body and they were a relatively luxurious commodity, so stricter censorship of these prints would be a logical step.

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[19] Ibid. p. 124

[20] Davis, 2007, p. 282

[21] Thompson and Harootunian, p. 29

[22] Ibid. p. 42

[23] Hall, 1991, p. 441

[24] Ibid. p. 445

Censorship had already been a step in the early production process of *ukiyo-e*. Between designing and production, the publishers had to send the design of the print to the *bugyō* 奉行, Edo's magistrates, for approval before the print could actually be published. Today, the seals of approval are often used by art historians to date prints. What was and what was not allowed to be published, however, seem to have been dependent on the personal taste of the *bugyō* rather than what was officially dictated.

The edicts that are of most concern here are those published in 1722. They would become the foundation for all subsequent edicts regarding publishing.[25] They stated that:

1) Newly printed works should not include fallacious or heterodox theories, such as Christianity[26]
2) Erotica could no longer be printed, as they were bad for public morals
3) People's lineage could not appear in print
4) The names of the author and/or artist and publisher must be included
5) The Tokugawa family may not be mentioned

Especially the second provision, banning the publishing of erotica, would have a great impact on *ukiyo-e*. [27] Officially banned as a subject, *ukiyo-e* that had previously dealt with erotica slowly diverted its attention from focussing mainly on the many different aspects of the pleasure quarters, which had explicit erotic overtones, to focussing equally on the kabuki theatre. Although at first sight not a very erotic subject, early kabuki theatre was also very much associated with prostitution. Artists, then, obeyed the letter of the law, rather the spirit of it, because the associations with prostitution imbued kabuki prints with certain eroticism. This “letter over spirit”-idea would prove to become a theme in dealing with the different edicts that were to be issued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. However, despite the ban on erotica, works of a (highly) erotic nature still continued to appear, albeit illegally as they did not have the signatures of the author/artist or publisher. [28] Thereby, they were obviously violating the fourth point of the edict. Circumvention of the rules would also be copied in subsequent eras: despite the bans on subject matter or use of colour (this edict was issued in the Tempō era), prints and books that openly flouted the rules continued to appear. This suggests that the rules or prohibitions from the edicts may never have been very strictly enforced.[29]

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[25] Thompson and Harootunian, 1991, p. 43

[26] The original edict specifies that any writing that does not contain plots that are specifically used for "good things", such as Confucianist, Buddhist, Shintoist, medical or poetic writings, is deemed useless. Ishii Ryōsuke 石井良助 and Takayanagi Shinzō 高柳眞三 (eds.) *Ofuregaki Kanpō Shūsei* 御触書寛保集成. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1934, p. 993, no, 2020.

[27] Thompson and Harootunian, 1991, p. 44

Moreover, the edicts seem to have stimulated the development of other sub-genres of *ukiyo-e*, such as the previously mentioned *abuna-e* and the *ai-e*. Since explicit erotica was no longer allowed to be published legally, the *abuna-e* flirted with the letter of the law by depicting sexually *suggestive* subjects rather than *explicit* ones.[30] While the *ai-e* itself may have been inspired by the discovery of the Prussian blue pigment which was of a better quality than previous blue pigments, they have also been seen as the result of artists’ response to an edict from the Tempō Reforms which limited the number of colours that could be used in a print.[31]

In a similar way, artists invented a way to circumvent the prohibition on publishing matters related to current affairs. Rather than being implicitly critical, publications on current affairs had the power to be really socially unsettling. The frequency with which the edicts concerning current events were repeated suggests that the edicts were flouted on a regular basis.[32] To legally publish on current events, the stories were transposed to different eras in earlier Japanese history and the names of the protagonists changed.[33] Although this could be sufficient to escape censorship (the 1748 kabuki play *Kanadehon Chūshingura* 仮名手本忠臣蔵 is a good example), artists and their audience became so proficient at transposing current events that, despite the different temporal setting and the different names, people and events could still be readily identified. For example, a print designed by Utagawa Yoshitora (active 1850 – 1880) depicts four samurai warriors making traditional New Year's rice cakes. Three warriors are hard at work making the cakes, while the fourth enjoys the finished product. The poem that accompanies the illustration referred to a well-known verse about the warlords who had unified Japan at the end of the sixteenth century. The combination of the poem and the illustration pointed to a common criticism that Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first *shōgun*, had profited from the efforts of the earlier warlords, without doing anything himself.[34] The print thus attacked the founder of the Tokugawa line, a blatant transgression of the fifth provision of the edict issued in 1722.

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[28] Ibid. p. 45
[29] Ibid. p. 46
[30] Ibid. p. 48
[31] Ibid. p. 75

In 1790, the Kansei Reforms reissued the 1722 edict mentioned above, as part of a larger program of reforms. To the provisions cited above, it added one extra provision: children's picture books set in ancient times that were carelessly created were now forbidden.[35] This indicates that not only prints, but also certain types of literature had become problematic. In a similar vein, albeit quite a few years later in 1798, the shogunate put a ban on publishing women's (actual) names on prints if they were not courtesans, whether written normally or published in rebus form.[36] Much more significant, however, was the ban of

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[32] Ibid. p. 34
[33] Ibid. p. 38
[34] Ibid. p. 70
[35] Ibid. pp. 59-60; Ishii Ryōsuke 石井良助 and Takayanagi Shinzō 高柳眞三 (eds.) *Ofuregaki Tempō Shūsei* 御触書天保集成. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1937-1941, II, pp. 809-10, no. 6417
[36] Thompson and Harootunian, 1991, p. 68

ōkubi-e. A popular format, the *ōkubi-e* were used frequently for pictures of kabuki actors or as the framework for *bijin-ga*. Combined with a ban on the publishing of "pictures detrimental to public morality" in 1800 (probably a reissuing of the second point of the 1722 edict) the Kansei Reforms put an end to the heyday of *ukiyo-e*, after finding that all sorts of officially prohibited prints were still being published despite the previously issued edicts.

Like the Kansei Reforms before, the Tempō Reforms were modelled after its predecessors. Although the Reforms lasted only two years, from 1841 to 1842, they were the most severe and the least successful of all three reform movements. [37] The previous edicts concerning publishing *ukiyo-e* were reissued once again, but in line with the overall movement to decrease frivolous spending, the Tempō Reforms stipulated that only a limited number of colours could be used in prints.[38] These reforms also extended the scope of what was considered "detrimental to public morality" to include the depiction of kabuki actors, prostitutes, and geisha – effectively banning two of the main subjects of *ukiyo-e*.[39] Unlike the previous reforms, the shogunate also actively prosecuted authors, artists and publishers who violated the rules set out in the edicts.[40]

What the edicts make clear is that the shogunate seems to only have had issues with certain types of published material. While the first provision of one of the original edicts of 1722 (Kyōhō) banned the subject of heterodox theories, nullifying discussions about Christianity in the academies for example, other provisions in following edicts seem to purposefully target subjects that were dealt with specifically in print matter such as *ukiyo-e* and popular fiction. Especially relevant for this chapter are the prohibition of erotica, and the prohibition of the *ōkubi-e*. Whatever subject *ukiyo-e* chose to depict, it nearly always had a focus on the body; first and foremost the object of erotica, *bijin-ga*, actor prints and *ōkubi-e*.

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[37] Ibid. p. 76
[38] Ibid. p. 75
[39] Ibid. p. 79
[40] Ibid. p. 76-8

Contextualizing the body other than in its role to be productive to the support of social unity meant that, albeit most likely unconsciously, the producers of *ukiyo-e* were violating one of the most fundamental principles of the Tokugawa government. As the prints can also be argued to belong to the private sub-sphere of the general public sphere, and they would have therefore already had an uncomfortable relationship with the shogunate to begin with. The obsession with the corporeal, and the possibility for overt political criticism on rulers, meant that the *ukiyo-e* could be seen as a manner in which commoners could express their political criticism. To maintain the social order, the chances to express criticism had to be made as low as possible; to achieve this, the sumptuary laws were issued.

However, one thing that cannot be stressed enough is that despite all the edicts that were issued by the shogunate, the edicts themselves were very vague.[41] The extent to which they were to be obeyed was also never quite clear. Moreover, the fact that they had to be reissued several times, sometimes within the same era, indicates that the edicts were repeatedly ignored by authors, artists and publishers. This was not restricted to edicts related to publishing. Many other sumptuary laws were also frequently (re)issued.[42] Added to the frequency with which the laws were reissued is the fact that the number of recorded prosecutions for violating the rules is small. The frequent reissuing of edicts and lack of persecution added to the quantity of books and prints which survived despite being forbidden seem to point to an inherent lacuna in these edicts. Likewise, the sumptuary laws were "outbursts of indignation", that attacked the *symptoms* rather than the *causes* of the blurring of class distinctions.[43]

From what has been explored above, it is clear that *ukiyo-e* were actively censured by the government. There are a few examples of prints that contain explicit political criticism, firmly locating *ukiyo-e* in the public sphere. Its subjects and the manner in which those subjects were depicted categorises *ukiyo-e* as belonging to the private sub-sphere. Although explicit political criticism did occur, it seems that the government was more concerned with the *potential* of subversion in *ukiyo-e*, its preoccupation with the idle body and the genre's entertainment value. When the government felt that the chosen subject would not do, it issued publishing edicts against those subjects. Conversely, these edicts inspired *ukiyo-e* artists to come up with new ways of depicting their subjects that, although adhering to the letter of the law, remained by and large the same as before the edicts were issued. It was not until the Kansei Reforms banned the main two subjects of *ukiyo-e* that the shogunate finally seemed to gain the upper hand over this popular art form.

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[41] Ibid. p. 42
[42] Shively, p. 134
[43] Ibid. p. 134

The problem with *ukiyo-e*, then, seems to have been located on a much more foundational level than its ability to articulate political criticism. Consequently, this also broadens the field of meaning when we speak of "political criticism" in relation to *ukiyo-e*. As will be explored in the next chapter, *gesaku literature* – like *ukiyo-e* – was also considered to be entertainment and, in the case of the *sharebon*, it was preoccupied with the (idle) body. At the same time, it also bore the potential for explicit political criticism. The next chapter will be devoted to exploring the relationship between *gesaku* literature and censorship and any parallels that relationship may have had to the relationship of *ukiyo-e* and censorship.

Chapter 3 – *Sharebon, kibyōshi,* and censorship

Sharebon and *kibyōshi* are only two out of a myriad of literary genres that were available during the Edo period. However, they are also the two genres that are most known for their examples of explicit political criticism. It is therefore that I have chosen to look at these two genres in examining the relationship of the government to the public sphere of early modern Japan.

As both genres could rely on several methods to convey a message (text and images) made *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* harder to censure than *ukiyo-e*. Prohibiting one method of portrayal or one type of story line would, in theory, only lead to the development of others as was also seen with *ukiyo-e*. The amount of edicts concerning publishing that can be found, however, does suggest that the government actively tried to censure these booklets. This chapter will explore the relationship of *sharebon*, *kibyōshi* and censorship.

Before starting on the research, I want to point out that there exists relatively little material on this subject, both in Japanese and in English. One of the first large studies into censorship of the Edo period was Miyatake Gaikotsu's *Hikkashi* 筆禍史.[1] This was published in 1926. The next big study after that was Nakamura Yukihiko's *Gesakuron* 戯作論, published in 1968.[2] His ideas were introduced in the west by Donald Keene, in the 1970s. Keene and Peter Kornicki did groundbreaking work on investigating *gesaku* and making that genre known in the West. Apart from their works, there exists an anthology by Haruo Shirane and the most recent large study into the subject was done by Adam Kern in 2006. All of the studies into *gesaku*, and so also inquiries pertaining to *sharebon* and *kibyōshi*, generally on primary sources such as the original edicts or booklets that have survived. By necessity, I therefore have to rely on many older English sources for my research.

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[1] Miyatake, 1926

[2] Nakamura, 1968

Before being to explore the relationship of *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* with censorship, it is important to look at these genres to establish possible problems that may have had bearing on the edicts that were issued to censor these booklets. In order to identify the problems, this section will briefly delineate the respective genre's characteristics. Both genres of this chapter belong to the overarching genre of *gesaku*, a literary genre in which works with "a playful attitude" were produced.[3] Authors included *chōnin*, townspeople, and samurai;[4] the audience was mainly comprised of *chōnin*. The works that were produced were not meant to be taken seriously, unlike works such as encyclopaedias or poetry anthologies. Nevertheless, *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* were very apt at expressing political criticism as will be shown later.

Sharebon

The characters of the name of this booklet, 洒落本 already throw some light on contents of the *sharebon*. The name can be divided into two parts, *share* 洒落 and *hon* 本. *Share* can roughly be translated as 'witty', and *hon* is the generic name for 'book' in Japanese, so the *sharebon* are 'witty books'.[5] They are generally referred to as booklets rather than books, because of their size: they measure four-and-a-half by six inches on average.[6]

Like *ukiyo-e,* these booklets were printed using woodblocks and were often accompanied by one or more illustrations. Generally speaking, however, *sharebon* relied on text to narrate its story. Although some *sharebon* do sometimes contain a different story line, or have a different setting,[7] most *sharebon* share a similar story line. This story line was established with the publication of *Yūshi hōgen* 遊子方言 ("The Playboy Dialect") in 1770.[8] This "prototype" *sharebon* recounted the story of two townsmen and their "cycle of pleasure-seeking", starting with their decision to spend the night in Edo's pleasure quarters Yoshiwara, their journey to Yoshiwara and a night of activities considered typical for a visit to Yoshiwara: a visit to a teahouse and frequenting a brothel. As this reflected the common practice of visiting the pleasure quarters, the basis of the story line was not considered witty.

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[3] Keene, 1978, p. 397
[4] Ibid. p. 400 - 1
[5] Araki, 1969, p. 31
[6] Ibid. p. 31
[7] Ibid. pp. 39 – 43
[8] Shirane, 2002, p. 632

The wit of the *sharebon* was infused with the main characters of the story. The protagonists were generally one older and one younger man, with the older man attempting to initiate the younger man into the ways of Yoshiwara. There is, however, one problem. The older man is a fake *tsū* 通. The *tsū* was the true sophisticate, and initiated in the ways of Yoshiwara. A fake *tsū* is someone who pretends to be that. Surprisingly, *sharebon* never expressly describe the true business of the pleasure quarters: prostitution.[9] Instead, the main focus is to make fun of the fake *tsū*.[10] This ridiculing of faulty behaviour also turned the *sharebon* into etiquette books for the pleasure quarters.

Because *sharebon* in general follow a pre-set story line, it might appear to be hard to incorporate explicit criticism into them. However, details in description would tell perceptive readers exactly which brothel, teahouse or prostitute was being discussed in the story, even if fictional names were used.[11] Therefore, it would not stretch the imagination to think that similar techniques could invoke prominent politicians. Given the story line and the location of the story, these booklets would generate highly unwanted attention for politicians, as any sexual scandal involving politicians of modern times can attest. The setting also creates a focus on the corporeal, as the reader never forgets that he is reading about brothels and prostitutes, even if the story itself appears to omit these facts. In the eyes of the government, then, *sharebon* could be considered unwanted, if not dangerous, literature. Not only did it show a potential to articulate political criticism, it also distracted citizens from fulfilling their duties for the collective. This located *sharebon* in the private sub-sphere, as it could be classified as “unruly” literature.

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[9] Keene, 1978, p. 402-3
[10] Shirane, 2002, p. 632
[11] Araki, 1969, p. 38

Kibyōshi

It has been posited that *kibyōshi* could be the illustrated versions of *sharebon*, to explain the narrative to those who could not read so well.[12] However, as the range of subjects depicted in *kibyōshi* is much more varied than for *sharebon*, this seems unlikely. Unlike *sharebon*, the characters, 黄表紙, tell us nothing about the contents of the *kibyōshi*. Literally translated, the characters mean “yellow cover”. It is assumed that *kibyōshi* evolved from the earlier *aobon* 青本, booklets with blue covers that narrated plots of plays, the accounts of military heroes and ghost stories. Before the introduction of Prussian blue, a blue pigment that would slowly fade yellow was used, turning blue covers into yellow covers.[13] Another difference with *sharebon* is that *kibyōshi* do not rely so heavily on text to narrate their story. In fact, the story is told as much by the text on the page as it is by its illustrations.[14] Moreover, there is no single subject that or setting that dominates in *kibyōshi*. Nevertheless, like *sharebon*, *kibyōshi* do seem to be preoccupied with stories that are somehow connected with the pleasure quarters. However, even if the stories that did concern themselves with the pleasure quarters were very different from *sharebon*, because *kibyōshi* did not have a pre-set story line to deal with. Even more so than *sharebon*, *kibyōshi* were concerned with everyday matters and contemporary life.

The epitome of *kibyōshi* was a work by Santō Kyōden: *Edo Umare Uwaki no Kabayaki* 江戸生艶氣樺焼 (“Romantic Embroilments Born in Edo”). It recounts the story of the playboy Enjirō and his pursuit to become the most famous playboy Edo has ever known. There is, however, one major catch: Enjirō is anything but attractive. Nor is he very knowledgeable about how to become a famous playboy. So instead of recounting Enjirō's successes along the way to becoming a famous playboy, the story recounts Enjirō's failures through which he becomes an infamous boor pretending to be a playboy.[15]

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[12] Hirobe, 1989, pp. 23-32
[13] Keene, 1978, p. 400
[14] Kern, 2006, p. 156

Because *kibyōshi* relied as much on their illustrations as on their text to recount the story, they had a greater potential to incorporate social or political criticism since they simply had more ways to do so at their disposal. In the manner of prints of famous geisha or famous actors, illustrations of people could be made to look like someone by depicting famous characteristics. In *ukiyo-e*, a famous example is the "Danjirō nose", which was used on nearly all prints of the actor family Danjirō with which they were immediately identifiable. Family crests could be incorporated into clothes, or familiar fictional names, such as Mashiba Hisayoshi for Toyotomi Hideyoshi, could be incorporated into the narrative of *kibyōshi*. That *kibyōshi* were heavily illustrated may also not have helped their reputation, because they could actually visualize the geisha, brothels and teahouses that the story was about and deflect the reader's attention from his or her moral duty to support the collective. Like *sharebon*, *kibyōshi* was also regarded as unwanted by the government, for its potential for criticism and its distractions from one's moral duties.

Sharebon, kibyōshi *and censorship*

As *gesaku* only developed in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Tokugawa government had few previously issued edicts to fall back on when it found that *gesaku*, and in particular *kibyōshi*, were becoming a problem. However, many of the provisions supplied to censor *ukiyo-e* were also used to censor *gesaku*, as several provisions were applicable to either commodity. As with *ukiyo-e*, the most important edict for censoring *gesaku* was the edict issued in 1722, which forbade mention of current events, people's lineage and the Tokugawa name to appear in print. Many of the later edicts referring to *gesaku* would elaborate on this edict.

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[15] Ibid. pp. 333 – 44

Like *ukiyo-e*, the government had been censoring publications from their earliest beginnings. An edict published in 1673 forbade the use of the Tokugawa name in print without explicit approval of the *machi bugyō* 町奉行, the town magistrates, making no distinction between factual of fictional use of the name. The edict itself, however, appears to refer to an edict published even earlier, but unfortunately the original text of that edict has been lost. It was also the ban on the Tokugawa name that first engendered a distinction in literature that had to be censored and that which could be allowed relative freedom. When a topographical work that had been presented to the government mentioned Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first *shōgun*, by name in 1735, the government slightly relaxed their policy and allowed the mentioning of the *name*, but not matters concerning their person such as health or their lifestyle, of Tokugawa Ieyasu and his successors, with the provision that this could only be done in "serious books". *Kana* 仮名 books, books that predominantly used the kana syllabaries for their written texts, were not considered "serious books" and therefore did not profit from the more lenient legislation.[16] As both *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* predominantly used the kana syllabaries to write their text in, they too did not profit from this change. Moreover, the distinction between "serious" and other literature could also have confirmed the status of *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* as literature that was not to be taken seriously.

This classification of *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* as *gesaku*, written in jest, seems very contradictory when one looks at the edicts the government issued concerning these books. Despite being called *gesaku*, no less than four edicts on publishing were issued in 1790 alone.[17] The edicts remained vaguely worded, however. Qualifications were never so detailed that a specific type of book was addressed, but the edicts were more concerned with categories such as “amorous books” or “wicked children’s books”.[18] As love never played a big role in *sharebon*, they could be considered exempt from this legislation. At the same time, their setting of Yoshiwara did not completely rule out love as an element, since many geisha or courtesans had patrons, i.e. regular customers that would visit frequently and/or maintain them. This vagueness probably was one reason that edicts were issued repeatedly, as many authors found ways to obey the letter rather than the spirit of the law.

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[16] Kornicki, 1982, pp. 505 – 11.
[17] Kornicki, 1977, p. 154

Another, more direct provocation seems to have had more bearing on the issuing of edicts in 1790. When Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758 – 1829) came to power as *rojū* 老中 (“Senior Councillor”) in 1788, several satirical *kibyōshi* were published that had the change of power as their subject. The change of power came with a great change in politics, as the former relaxed, or even lax, administration of Tanuma Okitsugu (1719 – 1788) was replaced by the reformist administration of Matsudaira. The *kibyōshi* were all set in a different time and none referred to Matsudaira or other contemporaries by their real names, all in compliance with the edicts Matsudaria had issues. However, like the details used in *sharebon* to describe a particular teahouse or prostitute, the perceptive reader could readily identify Matsudaira, either by a character in the story or by association with his *bunbu* 文武 (“literary and military arts”) philosophy.[19]

These *kibyōshi*, published in 1788 and 1789, contain explicit political criticism and/or satire. One of the most famous ones, *Bunbu nidou mangokudōshi* 文武二道万石通, “Twin Arts Threshing Device” by Hōseidō Kisanji 朋誠堂喜三二 (1735 – 1813), parodied Matsudaira’s policy of having samurai study literature (*bun* 文) and martial arts (*bu* 武). Minamoto Yoritomo orders daimyō to separate in a *bun* and a *bu* group, by choosing one entrance to a cave. The lords are charmed into choosing, by being promised that in the cave they can find the elixer of life. Those who prove themselves interested in neither *bun* nor *bu* are shipped off to Hakone and repent in the hot springs there. The person to ensure that Yoritomo's orders are carried out, Shigetada, was modeled on Matsudaira and could be readily identified as such.[20] Their publication highlighted the need for the new administration to regain control over the publishing world,[21] and the government tried to do so by issuing edicts that restricted certain types of publications.

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[18] Examples taken from Kornicki’s translation of a 1790 edict in Kornicki, 1977, p. 156

[19] Kornicki, 1977, pp. 154 – 5

Ironically, the Tokugawa government itself was part of what caused the need for censorship. As with any great change, whether it is political, social or economical, people will resist that change. In that light, it is only natural that criticism would be expressed, even more so because Matsudaira Sadanobu was so much stricter than Tanuma Okitsugu. In a fairly illiterate society, only a select few would be privy to that criticism. However, samurai were not the only social class that could read. Previously established policies meant that large groups of people in early modern Japan could read.[22] A high literacy rate combined with the mass-product nature of *gesaku* meant that people with access to book shops or lending libraries could obtain these satirical *kibyōshi* and read how the new *rojū* was being ridiculed. In a sense, it was even worse that this satire was published in *kibyōshi* format, because any deficiency in reading the kana syllabaries was compensated with illustrations, so that even those that could barely read could understand the story. With such a large potential audience to read about the shortcomings of the government, that government was compelled to intervene.

As was mentioned before, the edicts themselves are vague to identify the print matter it finds problematic. They make rather sweeping statements, which can encompass a great variety of popular literature. At the same time, reasons or formal devices can be made to argue that a certain book is not addressed in those edicts, as was demonstrated with the example of *sharebon*. In general, *sharebon* seem to have been less problematic that *kibyōshi*. There are hardly any, if any at all, known cases where *sharebon* reference contemporary politicians, while there are at least five *kibyōshi* that have been identified by scholars that make reference to the change of power in 1788.[23] This does not, however, mean that the Tokugawa government did not think that *sharebon* were problematic. In 1790, the government published a prohibition on *sharebon*.[24] One of the genre's most famous authors, Santō Kyōden (1761-1816), was manacled for fifty days and fined for having produced books that went against the government edits.[25] The authors of *sharebon*, however, were left in relative piece. Authors of satirical *kibyōshi*, on the other hand, were actively persecuted by the Matsudaira administration. The authors of the satirical *kibyōshi* that had appeared between 1788 and 1789 were all forced to give up writing, summoned to explain themselves, or manacled and/or fined like Santō Kyōden.[26]

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[20] Ibid. pp. 154-5
[21] Summary based on Kornicki, 1977, pp. 154 - 5
[22] Shirane, 2002, p. 10-1

Similar to *ukiyo-e*, the relationship between *sharebon*, *kibyōshi* and censorship is complicated. In the case of *kibyōshi*, the censorship is relatively straightforward. Contemporary politicians, rumours, scandals and other social misgivings were readily satirized in these booklets, thinly disguised by a setting in a previous era, fake names or under the guise of didacticism. The government, however, was not fooled, and actively pursued the authors as part of their reforms. To boot, many *kibyōshi* also had stories that alluded to or were somehow connected with the pleasure quarters of Edo. This added focus on the corporeal made them highly unwanted in the eyes of the Tokugawa government, because the booklets were considered to be distractions from the people's moral duty to work for the collective. It appears that *sharebon* too were thought to be offensive to the government's ideology. Their stock story line was the cycle of pleasure seeking, whereby fun is poked at the visitors who do not quite know how to act and the boors who have no idea whatsoever as to what constitutes appropriate behaviour in the pleasure quarters. This focus or preoccupation with the corporeal was unwanted by the government, as its ideology demanded the body to be subjugated to the mind. In the *sharebon* the mind is subjugated to corporeal desires. Moreover, the stock story line could serve as a kind of etiquette book for desired behaviour in the pleasure quarters. This didactic level of *sharebon* was also undesirable to the government, as it distracted the general public from their moral duty to work for the good of the collective.

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[23] Several titles are mentioned by Kornicki, 1977, pp. 154 – 155. The two most famous works, *Bunbu nidou mangokudōshi* 文武二道万石通("Twin Arts Threshing Device") and *Ōmugaeshi bunbu no futamichi* 鸚鵡返文武二道("Twin Arts, Parroted") are treated in detail, including analyses of their satire, by Mizuno, 1976, pp. 166 – 178.

[24] Mizuno, 1976, p. 184

[25] Kornicki, 1977, p. 158-9

[26] Ibid. p. 182

These booklets voiced criticism of the government, questioning its legitimacy and/or authority, and overtly withdrew from obeying the body/mind ideology of the shogunate. They were also widely read, as commercial publishers could provide relatively unlimited editions of each book and the early modern people enjoyed a high literacy rate. This means that a large number of people could read about government failure, be distracted from their moral duty to serve the collective by frivolous literature and adopt unwanted or even dangerous ideas. It appears to have been for these reasons that the government actively persued and persecuted those people who created these unwanted commodities.

However, because the rules concerning the publishing of *gesaku* were based on many of the same rules that formed the basis for censorship in *ukiyo-e*, censorship encountered many of the same problems. What was and what was not permitted to be published was never clearly articulated, so even when the *bugyō* were involved in the early processes of censoring, permission for publication depended more on individual interpretation of the rules than on the rules themselves. Authors found ways to abide by the letter of the law, rather than by its spirit, such as using historical settings to discuss contemporary events. The one thing that appeared to make the censorship of publishing more efficient than the censorship of *ukiyo-e* was the fact that the Matsudaira government was far more proactive in enforcing its own rules. The government actively persecuted those authors it considered to be in violation of the rules, and set a loud and clear example with the punishment of Santō Kyōden. However, this zeal also depended on the ideals of one administrator, Matsudaira Sadanobu, rather than efficient regulations.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the relationship between *sharebon*, *kibyōshi* and censorship, in hopes of uncovering evidence to support Mary Elizabeth Berry's argument that early modern Japan also had a public sphere despite the authoritarian government. In order to do that, first the existence of a public sphere in modern Japan was established. If a modern civil society, or public sphere, existed in Japan, anything resembling that during the Edo period could suggest that Japan's civil society was not merely of Western import and the Edo period could have developed something akin to a 'proto-civil society'.

As there are known cases of political criticism, a *par excellence* manifestation of civil society, in *ukiyo-e*, the relationship between the prints of the Floating world and government censorship was examined as a baseline. Although explicit political criticism is also present in several prints and several series of prints, it appears that the government was far more concerned with *ukiyo-e*'s potential to subvert its body/mind ideology. In order to regulate society, the government viewed the body only in terms of its productiveness. *Ukiyo-e* only depicted the body in unproductive ways, because in its depictions the body never contributed to the good of the collective. The body was always idle, and as such *ukiyo-e* were inherently antagonizing the government. Through censorship edicts, the government slowly constrained what *ukiyo-e* could and could not depict, until it eventually left nothing for *ukiyo-e* to depict and the genre slowly petered out.

Sharebon and *kibyōshi* appear to have suffered the same fate. As part of the *gesaku* genre, they were works that were supposedly written in jest. Therefore, their narrative ought not to be taken seriously. In several cases, however, especially *kibyōshi* could express overt, if not harsh, political criticism. *Gesaku* also had more ways of incorporating criticism available, as it did not have to rely solely on pictures. Explicit criticism, however, was not the only reason that made *gesaku* unwanted literature in the eyes of the government. *Sharebon* had an almost single-minded focus on the pleasure quarters of Yoshiwara. Their stories were focused on corporeal pleasure and so distracted their readers from their moral duties. Moreover, in *sharebon* the mind was subjugated to the body, rather than vice versa, which was the official take of the government.

Censorship, then, did not only occur because of explicit political criticism. In most of the cases, explicit criticism only came to the foreground sporadically. This appears to have come from the Confucianist principles on which the Tokugawa government based its organization of society. It taught citizens that it could remonstrate with the government, but never question its legitimacy or authority. The frequent reissuing of edicts concerning censorship of *ukiyo-e* and *gesaku*, however, indicates that the government nevertheless encountered problems with these commodities. Apart from embarassement from explicit criticism, the government also disliked the focus on the corporeal and the idle body found in *ukiyo-e* and *gesaku*, especially in *sharebon*. This points to a much broader definition of or view of political criticism in the context of early modern Japan, as the evidence shows that what the government found offensive is much more that those works that contained explicit political criticism, such as ridicule of government policies.

Moreover, the existence of explicit criticism conerning matters such as government policies, points to the existence of a public sphere in early modern Japan. Despite the authoritarian principles on which the shogunate was founded, the general public felt it had a space where it could voice its disagreement or disapproval. The government was, in the cases examined in this thesis, not pleased with the existence of this sphere, but it could not deny that the sphere was there. In order to control the private sub-sphere where *ukiyo-e*, *sharebon* and *kibyōshi* belonged, the government tried to restrict modes of expression by issuing censorship edicts. The frequent reissuing of the edicts, however, point to several problems. First, and perhaps foremost, was the vague wording of the edicts. It was never crystal clear what the government considered unwanted and so approval for publication rested on the personal taste of the *bugyō* rather than official regulations. Second, both *ukiyo-e* artists and *gesaku* writers found ways with which their work adhered to the letter rather than the spirit of the law, and therefore could have their work published. Third, before Matsudaira Sadanobu came to power, the government failed to prosecute those they thought in violation of the edicts on a regular basis. While prosecutions did happen before the rise of Matsudaira, they were not severe enough to have a profound impact in either genre and so edicts had to issued and reissued in an attempt to control the production of *ukiyo-e* and *gesaku*.

This thesis accomplished not one, but two things. First, it provided evidence for Berry's argument that early modern Japan also had its own public sphere despite having an authoritarian government. Second, it showed that the Tokugawa government had a much broader interpretation of "political criticism" than merely criticism of government policies, as Hirano helped to demonstrate. Future research might re-evaluate known cases of political criticism and censorship, but also the relationship between the government and popular culture as a whole as it may be much more complex than hitherto assumed. Research may also look into and/or re-evaluate Japan's political history, as Japan's modern civil society appears to have deeper roots than the import of the idea by theorists such as Maruyama Masao and Ueki Emori. This thesis, then, not only answered questions, it also appears to have raised new ones.

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