Figure 3: The fall of the novel: Japan

Towards the end of the Tempo era (1830–44) commercial publishing came under . . . a legislative onslaught [which] started with a ban on woodblock prints depicting kabuki actors or courtesans . . . The light fictions known as gokan were also banned, on the grounds that the plots and illustrations were closely related to the kabuki theater and indulged in luxury colour covers and wrappers. Authors were urged instead to write uplifting tales of filial piety and chastity, both of which were somewhat alien to the traditions of popular literature . . . The principal literary victim of the new regime of enforcement was the genre of romantic novels known as ninjobon.

Peter Kornicki, The Book in Japan

[Matsudaira] Sadanobu saw popular fiction as harmful to public morality, especially when authors took ill-concealed potshots at government . . . To assure that publishers and authors took him seriously, in 1781 [Sadanobu's] censors made an example of Santo Kyoden, one of the most popular fiction writers of the day, convicting him of violating the law and handcuffing him for fifty days.

Conrad Totman, Early Modern Japan