

Introduction¹

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Shunga in History

When exploring the history of *shunga* 春画 (spring pictures), we immediately notice paradoxes. In early modern Japan, thousands of sexually explicit paintings and illustrated books with texts were produced and survive, in spite of the fact that the government had banned erotic or lascivious books (*kōshokubon* 好色本) from 1722 onwards. In contrast, paintings were never the subject of censorship, and commercial book lenders (*kashihon'ya* 貸本屋) also seem to have been free to peddle *shunga* throughout the land without fear of arrest.² Although strict Confucian laws governed public life in this period, and the Tokugawa government regularly issued edicts on public behavior, the private sphere was considerably less controlled in practice, except for specific periods of reform and government intervention, or when the authorities themselves felt threatened.

One indication of the ambiguous nature of the official view of *shunga* in the Edo period is the fact, perhaps startling to many today, that the Tokugawa government, after it acquiesced in Commodore Perry's request to open up Japanese ports to U.S. ships, offered Perry *shunga* paintings among other gifts during his return visit in 1854:

Among the presents received by Comm. Perry, was a box of obscene paintings of naked men and women, another proof of the lewdness of this exclusive people. (25 February 1854)³

This fact was not recorded in the official Perry report, and one wonders if this box of paintings still survives somewhere, hidden away in the U.S. Government archives. The quotation comes from the diary of Lieutenant George Henry Preble (1816–1885, later Admiral), who was serving on the *Macedonian*, which accompanied Perry to Japan. The sentence in Preble's diary that immediately follows this revelation offers an entirely different view of the officials, contributing what seems to be another paradox: "My messmates who went to Uraga speak in high terms of the manners and polite hospitality of the officials they communicated with, and also praised the finished workmanship of their arms" (25 February 1854). This practice of offering *shunga* as official gifts most likely followed that used for the Dutch Captains, who made their annual pilgrimages from Nagasaki to pay court to the Shogun in Edo. We

¹ The editors would like to thank Alfred Haft for assisting with preparation of the articles, and the anonymous reviewers for their most helpful criticisms and comments. We also are grateful to Rosina Buckland, Alfred Haft and Jennifer Preston for helping with translations of articles from Japanese.

² Nagatomo 1999, pp. 74–82; Moretti 2013.

³ *The Opening of Japan*, p. 126.

know that Adam Johann Ritter von Krusenstern, admiral of the Imperial Russian Armada, and Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov, Russian ambassador to Japan under Tsar Alexander I, received “several books full of obscene paintings” in Nagasaki between 1804 and 1805.⁴ The Tokugawa government clearly thought that *shunga* would be appreciated as an auspicious gift by the Americans. Preble, as did other visitors, saw both the ordered and polite surface of Japanese society, but also remarked on what they saw as the “lewdness of this exclusive people.” Hayakawa Monta’s article in this issue offers documentation on how *shunga* was viewed in the Edo period by Japanese audiences themselves.

Another diary from the 1850s (cited in both the Hayakawa and Ishigami articles) offers insight into *shunga*’s place in Japanese domestic life in the late Edo period, and not just among men. Francis Hall (1822–1902), an American businessman and journalist, arrived in Yokohama in November 1859, almost immediately after the opening of the port to Americans and Europeans. During his first month in Japan he explored Yokohama, and records entries for 26, 28 November and 5 December 1859 in which he describes being shown “vile pictures executed in the best style of Japanese art.” He was particularly shocked and intrigued that the women of the household were relaxed at viewing *shunga* with men present, were knowledgeable about the works and considered them to be household treasures. He noted also how common *shunga* was at the time:

These [*shunga*] books abound and are shamelessly exhibited. The official that comes into your house will pull perhaps an indecent print from his pocket. I have known this to be done.⁵

Hall further mentioned a few days later seeing “vile pictures” on porcelain saucers, and that a friend saw erotic masks and children’s toys in Edo. His impression, at least, was that *shunga* was widely available both in public and in private.

This indulgent official view of *shunga*, however, changed radically from the mid-to-late Meiji era around the turn of the twentieth century when, as Ishigami Aki’s article in this issue shows, the government began to enforce censorship of *shunga* with such vigor that it became taboo in the Shōwa era (1926–1989). This had the effect that Japanese academics and public institutions were constrained from publishing, collecting, or exhibiting *shunga*. Research on *shunga* after the 1920s was continued quietly by individuals in Japan such as Shibui Kiyoshi 渋井清 (1899–1992), Yoshida Teruji 吉田暎二 (1901–1972), Hayashi Yoshikazu 林美一 (1922–1999), and Richard Lane (1926–2002), but until recently scholars of *shunga* have worked almost entirely outside the academy.

Censorship of publications was only relaxed around 1990, but the taboo in Japan against exhibitions remains strong today, and *shunga* is still not widely accepted as a subject of academic study. Even in the twenty first century there have been incidents of famous university libraries refusing to accept donations of significant collections of *shunga* (such as those of Shibui Kiyoshi and Takahashi Sei’ichirō 高橋誠一郎 [1884–1982]). As a consequence, it has been difficult to conduct research on *shunga*, since most of the material is in private hands or in public collections that deflect access. Further, since until recently

⁴ Bru 2013.

⁵ Notehelfer 1992, p. 81.

few works have been reproduced with transcriptions of the text into modern print, the work of analyzing *shunga* books has been difficult for Japanese and non-Japanese researchers alike. As a consequence much of the research thus far has focused on the fundamental task of finding texts and determining bibliographical aspects, such as dating, attributing artist and author to unsigned works, and producing facsimile editions. Shirakura Yoshihiko's 白倉敬彦 *E-iri shunga ehon mokuroku* 絵入春画艶本目録 (Shirakura 2007) constitutes a major step forward in documenting bibliographical information on extant works.

Because of the taboo on *shunga*, many researchers have felt the need to argue that *shunga* is not "pornography" or "obscenity," and should be considered high art and relatively "wholesome," and that the view of *shunga* in the Edo period was different from that today. This was especially important in the 1990s when the censorship regime was first challenged successfully by publishing *shunga* ukiyo-e masterpieces in luxurious facsimile editions.⁶ Others have tended to construct the world of Edo period *shunga* as a kind of sexual utopia that was unchanging for centuries until modern Western influence introduced "Victorian" Christian morality.

Many have also felt the need to construct a general view of the essence of *shunga*. Timon Screech's book (1998) aimed to encapsulate the essence of *shunga* in its entirety, but his work contrasted with many earlier studies, in arguing that *shunga* was unabashedly pornographic and aimed primarily at men for masturbation, and not for women or for sex education.⁷ Screech's work, however like many others, has tended to over-generalize a period of almost 300 years, and thereby ignore the tremendous variety of production and the particular context of specific images, in order to support a general argument about what *shunga* is. Paul Berry importantly questioned this approach and highlighted debates on approaches to *shunga* research.⁸

"Pornography" is a nineteenth century Western construction, of course, and needs to be discussed historically to have any useful application to *shunga* before 1868. Screech's polemical work, nevertheless, has been a most welcome stimulus for others to examine particular aspects of *shunga* critically in more detail. The project that underlies this volume follows this trend: scholars were asked to explore particular works in their entirety, and analyze them in historical context, in order to build up a solid foundation of studies to deepen and complicate understanding of *shunga* as a discourse.

Another tendency of publications on *shunga*, until recently, has been to focus almost entirely on production in the city of Edo, ignoring Kyoto and Osaka, and thereby distorting history. One aim of this volume has been to counter this trend by focusing on several important artists and works produced in Kyoto and Osaka, which are often parodies or alternative erotic versions of non-*shunga* works: Alfred Haft's article on Yoshida Hanbei's 吉田半兵衛 *Kōshoku kinmō zui* 好色訓蒙図彙 (1686), Amaury García Rodríguez and Jennifer Preston on Nishikawa Sukenobu 西川祐信 (1671–1750), C. Andrew Gerstle and Laura Moretti on late eighteenth century parodies of educational books, and Yamamoto Yukari on Tsukioka Settei's 月岡雪鼎 (1726–1786) paintings. Each of these contributions explores in detail different aspects of Kyoto and Osaka *shunga*. Together they outline a long, distinctive and different tradition from that which developed in Edo.

6 *Ukiyo-e hizō meihin shū*.

7 Screech 1998; Screech 1999 (2009).

8 Berry 2004.

Along with the production of books and print sets by artists of the popular ukiyo-e school, there have also survived paintings in all the traditional styles such as Kano and Tosa, which would have been commissioned by courtiers, samurai and wealthy commoners. And doubtless more examples will trickle out of old storehouses throughout Japan, as the subject opens up. To date there has been some speculation about early paintings but little critical research. Akiko Yano examines pre-Edo paintings that later artists came to consider as part of the *shunga* heritage, particularly the famous “Phallic Contest” (*yōbutsu kurabe* 陽物比べ), which comically depicts men with exaggerated penises half the size of their bodies. She questions previous assumptions to determine what we actually know about pre-Edo *shunga*-related works.

Early modern Japan was certainly not a sex-paradise; however, one conclusion of this volume overall, and the four year project on *shunga* that led to it, is that the values promoted in *shunga* discourse are generally positive towards sexual pleasure for all participants. In fact, many works make it clear that men should learn techniques and strive to make sex pleasurable for women. *Wagō* 和合 (“harmony between the sexes”) is frequently presented within *shunga* itself as an ideal, and modern scholars often use this term to describe what they see as a fundamental tenet of *shunga*. However, as Higuchi Kazutaka’s article argues, sexual violence was also evident, although not prominent, in later *shunga*.

Erotic or pornographic paintings and books are found in all societies around the world from earlier times to now, of course, but *shunga* does seem to be distinctive in premodern or early modern world culture, in terms of its quantity, quality and nature. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries some Ming period Chinese erotic works entered Japan and had considerable impact, but Japanese *shunga* maintained its own distinctive style of representation.⁹ The Chinese examples offered a kind of legitimacy to *shunga* production, and did seem to encourage painting to shift from a narrative format, common in pre-Edo scrolls, to the pattern of a sequence of often unrelated couplings or scenes. Sets of twelve scenes became common in Japanese *shunga* from the seventeenth century in painted hand scrolls and later in printed sets.

The essays in this issue have not overtly engaged with the broader fields of comparative sexuality and gender studies; instead they aim to present solidly researched, focused studies, based on a wide range of primary sources, both images and texts, and on particular artists and aspects of *shunga*. The aim is to lay a foundation for the development of further research on the hundreds of works that have yet to be studied or published. At the same time, it is hoped that these essays will be of interest to scholars more broadly engaged with the history of sexuality and its representation, in both Asia and the West.

International Projects on *Shunga*

Since the relaxation of censorship of *shunga* publications from around 1990, many popular studies and series of reproductions have appeared. Individuals have continued to explore *shunga*, but it is still a subject not welcomed widely in academia or museums. An important step in the breaking of the academic and institutional taboo on *shunga* was taken by scholar and editor Shirakura Yoshihiko. His project to publish unexpurgated *shunga* with Gakushū

⁹ See Ishigami 2013 for a discussion of Chinese influence on *shunga*.

Kenkyūsha (Gakken) in the early 1990s was distinctive, since works from non-Japanese collections were included and because he invited established art historians such as Tsuji Nobuo 辻惟雄 and Kobayashi Tadashi 小林忠, as well as non-Japanese such as Timothy Clark, to contribute to the volumes.¹⁰

Other large projects with the aim of breaking the academic taboo on *shunga* research have come from outside Japan. In the mid-1990s, Sumie Jones of Indiana University organized a major research project sponsored by the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). This involved a wide variety of scholars from within and outside Japan, and stimulated many to address new aspects of *shunga*. The publication based on the conference in Indiana, *Imaging/Reading Eros: Proceedings for the Conference, Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750–1850* (1996) was a significant watershed in the field.¹¹ Henry D. Smith II raised many important questions concerning the historical characterization of *shunga* and *shunga* research and suggested new directions.¹² The aim of hosting a major exhibition on *shunga* was not, however, realized at the time. Nevertheless, the project proved to be influential in encouraging European museums to host exhibitions on *shunga*, in cities as widely spread as Helsinki (2002), Rotterdam (2005), Milan (2009), and other places.¹³

With the ambition to build further on these efforts, we developed an international project on *shunga*. One aim has been to get individual scholars to focus on particular works or themes, and to examine these critically in depth, within the social and cultural context of the time; in other words, to treat *shunga* with the same critical rigor as other art and literature of the period. This special issue is one outcome of the four year international research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust (U.K.), and carried out in collaboration by SOAS, University of London, the British Museum, the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) and Ritsumeikan University. The articles published here were first presented as working papers to the group at one of the periodic research meetings held since May 2009. The other main outcome of the project will be to host a major international exhibition “*Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*” that will take place at the British Museum from 3 October 2013 to 5 January 2014, and be accompanied by a substantial scholarly catalogue.

The project’s overall aim has been to document the *shunga* corpus as much as possible, make the information available through databases and other publications, and ultimately to bring the study of *shunga* into the mainstream of academic research concerning Japan. A key strategy has been for collaboration between Japanese and non-Japanese scholars. Surveys in the last several years of public and private collections have located over 1,200 illustrated books (of which approximately 1,000 have been photographed), as well as hundreds of paintings and prints. Information on the works surveyed, and complete photography of many texts, have been made available to the public through the database created by Dr. Ishigami Aki and hosted by the Art Research Center at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto.¹⁴ The other major digital resource is Nichibunken’s “Enpon” 艶本 (erotic book) Database, which contains

10 *Ukiyo-e hizō meihin shū; Edo meisaku ehon*.

11 Jones 1996.

12 Smith 1996.

13 “Forbidden Images: Erotic Art from Japan’s Edo Period” (Helsinki) catalogue in Japanese: *Shunga; himetaru warai no sekai; Japanese Erotic Fantasies; Shunga: Arte ed Eros nel Giappone*.

14 <http://www.dh-jac.net/db13/ehoncatalogue>.

more than 550 titles online.¹⁵ Hayakawa Monta's promotion of a policy at Nichibunken to open their major *shunga* collection to the world has had a decisive impact on *shunga* studies. Furthermore, this "establishment of the corpus" online during the last decade has made research on *shunga* possible for researchers around the world as never before.¹⁶

This *Japan Review* special issue is aimed at the scholarly community of Japanese studies worldwide, and will also be of interest, we trust, to individuals working on the history of sexuality and sexual representation more generally. We wish to encourage a fundamental reassessment of *shunga* as a legitimate subject of research on early modern Japan, and to stimulate debate on a topic that has been generally ignored in academia both in and outside Japan.

The British Museum exhibition catalogue *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* will be based on rigorous scholarship, and will aim to introduce and cover more systematically all major aspects of *shunga* and to engage with a more general audience than can be the case with this special issue. Several areas not discussed in this volume, such as the impact of Chinese erotic art and writings on Japanese *shunga*, will be the focus of essays in the exhibition catalogue. There will be overlap between the two publications, and they are certainly intended to complement each other.

New Research on *Shunga*

One common approach of *shunga* studies hitherto has been the practice of using *shunga* as a window on Edo period society. But does *shunga* itself accurately reflect any "reality"? Can we use it to gain useful insight into Edo society? What does it in fact reflect?

It is important here to recognize the strong impetus within *shunga* to present sex as generally unproblematic wish fulfillment, what literary historian Steven Marcus memorably called "pornotopia."¹⁷ And patently it was often produced with the aim of entertaining the reader and provoking laughter: it is fiction, and often fantastical fiction at that. Like other forms of fiction and art of the Edo period, particularly illustrated popular fiction, it is necessary to consider *shunga* as a distinctive discourse, with its own conventions and aims that vary with the particular context—time period, location, intended audience and format. *Shunga* books in fact often adopted the exact formats and conventions of the successive genres of popular literature, in an almost parasitical manner, constituting a parody of genres that were themselves already "playful." Rather than ask "What kind of reality does *shunga* represent?" it is more useful to frame the question as: "What kind of imaginative world does this discourse present and promote?" In order to outflank—and give an alternative perspective on—the central issue of discourse versus reality, it is useful to explore secondary questions such as: How was *shunga* viewed and by whom? Were women also consumers?

One conclusion from recent research is that *shunga* artists and writers were conscious of it as a particular "underground" or "private" sub-genre, one that existed in relation to acceptable public discourse. This consciousness most likely developed more sharply after 1722, when it became illegal to publish explicitly erotic works. Many *shunga* books, as opposed to paintings or print sets, were created in relation to non-*shunga* works, often as

15 <http://db.nichibun.ac.jp/en/category/enbon.html>.

16 Other important public databases of *shunga* can be accessed via the websites of the British Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

17 Marcus 1966.

expressly “*shunga* versions.” Andrew Gerstle has made a case that the erotic parody works of Tsukioka Settei in the 1750s–70s were aimed at an audience of women as well as men, and form a sustained counter-discourse to the Confucian-based educational and conduct books that were the “orthodox” basis of the education system.¹⁸ Jennifer Preston’s article “Allegories of Love” in this issue argues that Sukenobu, a generation before Settei, also used *shunga* for subversive aims to promote anti-Tokugawa sentiments.¹⁹ The Tokugawa government continually issued edicts on public conduct and encouraged Confucian-based education, but did not itself enter the publishing arena. Although there was censorship of any mention or criticism of the government, the range of commercial publications, which often adopted a coded format understood by the readers, is remarkably rich in this period.

The trend to create “*shunga* versions” is also evident for Edo fiction in, say, sexually explicit versions of Ryūtei Tanekihiko’s 柳亭種彦 (1783–1842) *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* 倅紫田舎源氏 (1829–1842) and Tamenaga Shunsui’s 為永春水 (1790–1843) *Shunshoku ume goyomi* 春色梅児誉美.²⁰ One conclusion from this volume and the *shunga* project overall has been that *shunga* prints and books were widely available through booksellers and commercial booklenders, and their impact on society was pervasive and significant; although this is only just beginning to be quantified.

A first hypothesis is that *shunga* present sexuality and sexual pleasure as natural and essential to the human condition for both men and women, regardless of whether this reflects lived experience, or contradicts the tenets of mainstream educational discourse. A further hypothesis is that *shunga* discourse was created often as irreverent jest and juxtaposed against non-*shunga* to counter the restrained and constrained public surface of society. Like non-explicit art or literature, it should not be viewed as a record of reality, but as a reflection of what its initial audiences might have considered a desirable or possible reality. It presents and promotes a particular aspirational view of the world.

A further premise is that although the explicitness of representation is a defining element of *shunga*, particular messages vary over time and place of production. Researchers were asked to explore whole works and not just selectively choose images out of context from across the centuries to argue a general point about *shunga*. Generalizations about whether *shunga* is pornography or not, for example, have been provocative but not terribly helpful, since the view of what constitutes pornography has changed and continues to change depending on the time and particular viewpoint. What is clear, however, is that the modern construction of *shunga* as obscene pornography by the Japanese authorities in the early twentieth century has hampered research. Much more work is needed on the primary materials with outside perspectives from specialists in related fields, in order to get an accurate assessment of *shunga*’s function in Edo period society. This special issue offers tightly argued case studies as a further step forward in this process.

The order of the articles that follow is primarily chronological according to the material considered, although groups of essays have been clustered by theme or region as well. The first section “**Reception**” has two essays that examine how *shunga* was viewed

18 Gerstle 2011.

19 This is more fully developed in her Ph.D. thesis, Preston 2012.

20 See Satō 2013; also see the catalogue entries on “Genji” related *shunga* books, as well as *Shunshoku hatsune no ume* 春色初音之六女 (1842), which is a *shunga* version of *Shunshoku ume goyomi* 春色梅児誉美 (1832–33), in *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure*.

initially by both the authorities and the populace in the Edo period (1600–1868), the early modern period, and how this view changed radically in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hayakawa Monta, first, examines the reception of *shunga* by exploring diaries and miscellaneous writings of the Edo period, arguing that *shunga* was considered a natural part of the private life of both men and women of all ages and backgrounds and at all levels of society, notwithstanding official censorship. Ishigami Aki next focuses on newspaper reports from the 1870s to the 1920s to determine how *shunga* was viewed in the public sphere, and how it steadily came to be suppressed by the authorities, particularly after the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), to the point where it became taboo in the academy and museums, as well as among the general population.

In the second section, **“Context and Format,”** Akiko Yano examines the pre-Tokugawa tradition of narrative handscroll paintings with sexual themes, especially the “Phallic Contest” scroll. Her concern is with how such paintings were received and copied in the Edo period, and gradually came to be considered part of the “classical” heritage. She concludes that the “Phallic Contest” most likely was not considered “*shunga*” until it was appropriated by *shunga* discourse in the Edo period. Next Ellis Tinios surveys the various formats of *shunga* books (*shunpon*) across the centuries in relation to non-*shunga* publishing, offering insights into the ways in which *shunga* books both conformed to usual formats, while also managing to be distinctive. He shows that many of the most luxurious and technically magnificent printed books of the Edo period are *shunpon*, particularly in the early nineteenth century.²¹

“*Shunga* in Kyoto and Osaka” examines a relatively unexplored area of *shunga*, that produced in the Kamigata region, centered on the cities of Kyoto and Osaka, and includes many important works of interest not only for the illustrations but also for their extensive texts. Alfred Haft examines the seminal work *Kōshoku kinmō zui* (1686), by Yoshida Hanbei, showing how it was a pioneer encyclopedia of sex and sexual practice. Two essays then follow that focus on the important Kyoto artist Nishikawa Sukenobu. Jennifer Preston examines the trope of conjugal sex as a subversive allegory of support for the imperial court and opposition to the Tokugawa government, arguing that Sukenobu used this trope to create a coded discourse with provocative hidden meanings. She uses Shintoist writings to support her thesis. Amaury A. García Rodríguez focuses on the question of why Sukenobu’s books, both *shunga* and non-*shunga*, were apparently the focus of the 1722 government censorship edicts. One conclusion is that the works presented women of all classes and levels of society within the same text, implying a degree of parity and thus threatening the strict class and status divisions upon which the Tokugawa system was predicated. A further conclusion is that this socially subversive element was more important than the explicit sexual representation in the shogunate’s decision to ban the publication of erotic books. Yamamoto Yukari next focuses on the paintings of Tsukioka Settei and their important influence on the development of the narrow horizontal erotic prints of Torii Kiyonaga 鳥居清長 (1752–1815). She shows how the paintings interact with the books Settei was publishing in parallel, and how through prefaces on paintings the artist constructed an “apologia” discourse on the classical Chinese and Japanese heritage of *shunga* and its mystical power to ward off fire and evil (as well as promote pleasure). C. Andrew Gerstle next examines *Makura dōji nukisashi*

21 Asano Shūgō argues that in the seventeenth century Hishikawa Moronobu’s development of the illustrated book (*ehon* 絵本) genre itself was stimulated by the demand for *shunga* books (Asano 2013).

manben tamaguki 枕童児拔差万遍玉茎, published in 1776, one of a number of *shunga* parodies of educational textbooks (*ōraimono*). He argues that it is a polemical work attacking the social and political system through its irreverent parody of a popular anthology textbook for children and in particular through its burlesquing of traditional iconic figures of Japanese history. Laura Moretti then examines *Onna enshi kyōkun kagami* 女艶姿茎群鑑 (1777), a *shunga* version of a popular book on the *Tale of Genji*, arguing that though it is not a polemical parody as such, it makes the implicit eroticism of *Genji* into explicit sexual representation, aimed at female readers as well as men.

“**Kabuki and Violence in Edo Shunga**” shifts the focus away from Kyoto and Osaka and back to Edo. Matsuba Ryōko examines how kabuki and kabuki actors became the subject of *shunga* books. Actors were popular sex idols of the day and the only individuals who, very occasionally, were depicted with recognizable features in *shunga*. One intriguing sub-genre is *shunga* books on actors’ private life scandals, which show how fans, just as today, were fascinated by gossip about the sex lives of their stage heroes. Higuchi Kazutaka questions the notion that *shunga* were always benign *warai-e* (“laughter pictures”), as is sometimes claimed, through an analysis of the depiction of sexual violence in the works of the Katsukawa School 勝川派 in the late eighteenth century and Utagawa Toyokuni I 歌川豊国 (1769–1825) in the early nineteenth century. Katsukawa and Utagawa School artists made their primary living by creating kabuki prints and illustrations for fiction, which routinely included violence as an element of popular narratives.

In the final section “**Modern Transformation,**” Rosina Buckland examines the changes in *shunga* production in the Meiji era, showing how it both inherited the earlier tradition but also began to depict the new technologies and other material aspects of modern life.

The essays presented here are varied and focus on relatively narrow topics; this volume is not intended as a thorough introduction to *shunga*, and interested readers are encouraged to use this in tandem with the British Museum exhibition catalogue. Through close analysis of specific topics, this volume raises many questions about *shunga* production and reception at different times and places, showing it to be dynamic and varied and a significant discourse in early modern Japan. Collectively, the essays challenge the field of Japanese studies to incorporate *shunga* as a legitimate source for academic research on the Edo period and Meiji era.

Note on *Shunga* Terminology

As *shunga* terminology is confusing and varied. It is helpful here review the vocabulary that will appear in the essays. “Posture or reclining pictures,” (*osokuzu no e* 偃息図絵) an ancient Japanese word, already archaic in the Edo period, referred to erotic pictures. In the Edo period itself, sexually explicit images were euphemistically called “pillow pictures” (*makura-e* 枕絵), “laughter pictures” (*warai-e* 笑い絵), “wa signs” (*wa jirushi* わ印, taking the first syllable of “warai,” but sometimes written with the character *wa* 和, meaning “Japan” or “harmony”), and *Nishikawa-e* 西川絵, after the prolific erotic output of Nishikawa Sukenobu. The most common term now is “spring pictures” (*shunga* 春画), a Chinese word for erotic paintings, used in Japan at least from the early eighteenth century and usually at that point in reference to paintings. “*Tsugai-e*” 番絵 (“coupling picture”) is another term,

and *higa* 秘画 (“hidden” or “secret pictures”) became common in the modern era. Erotic books were known by various terms such as *kōshokubon* 好色本 (“erotic or lascivious book”), *makurabon* 枕本 or *makura zōshi* 枕草子 (“pillow book”), *enpon* 艶本 (“erotic book”; more accurately pronounced as *ehon*), *warai ezōshi* 笑い絵草紙 (“laughter picture book”) or occasionally *shungabon* 春画本 (“*shunga* book”). Today *shunpon* 春本 is the common term used for “erotic books” in writings on *shunga*.

Note on *Shunga* Database Archives

A number of databases of *shunga*, particularly books, are referred to in these essays. All are open to the public.

1. International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken; registration is required to obtain access): <http://db.nichibun.ac.jp/en/category/enbon.html>;
2. Art Research Center of Ritsumeikan University: <http://www.dh-jac.net/db13/ehoncatalogue/>.
The Ritsumeikan database includes images of the Ebi Collection, also referred to in the articles.
3. Via the British Museum “Collection online” at <http://www.britishmuseum.org>.
4. Via the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston’s “Collections” at <http://www.mfa.org>.

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