

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE

In this book I have attempted to elucidate all of the illustrations in Harunobu's major sets of *shunga*—the *Fûryû ensboku Maneemon* (total twenty-four) and the *Fûryû zashiki bakkei* (total eight)—as well as thirteen illustrations from the *Imayô tsuma kagami*. In the *Fûryû ensboku Maneemon*, through seeking out a variety of love-making spots of the common people of the time and the Yoshiwara—the major entertainment district of the Edo period—we caught a glimpse of the erotic mode of life of Edo people and its diversity. Moreover, in the *Fûryû zashiki bakkei*, through the overlapping of scenes from the *Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang* belonging to the traditional “classical world” with love-making scenes regarded as “vulgar,” we saw a strange world of “sublime things” making an appearance within “mundane things.” Finally, in the *Imayô tsuma kagami*, through likening the poetic ideas of classical *kanshi* to the common people's psychology of love-making, we got a taste of the “refined world” melting into the “world near ourselves.” The fascination of Harunobu's *shunga* is precisely in this balancing of “elegant” and “vulgar,” and “exterior” and “interior.”

There are undoubtedly cases where people will not agree with the judgments and personal views that I have ventured in my explanations of the plates. However, in interpreting the pictures of Harunobu's *shunga*, I feel that some disagreement about readings is acceptable. Through their respective experiences, knowledge, and observations, viewers can discover original meanings in the abbreviated illustrations and take in the subtle nuances of the expressions in the text and the characters' dialogues written into the illustrations. It is therefore possible for people to come

up with differing interpretations. Of course it is desirable to have more precise and more abundant knowledge and information, but in explicating *shunga*, things remain that cannot be neatly settled. That is because the way people see sex-related things varies subtly according to their different life experiences. One could perhaps say that the fun of interpreting *shunga* lies in the coming to the surface of that kind of personal sensitivity and human nature.

This monograph is not a general survey of *shunga*, but I would like to point out just one surprising aspect of the actual images in ukiyo-e *shunga*. Most of the characters who appear in *shunga* are anonymous common people, and there is tremendous variety in age as well as occupation. People who have only had the opportunity to look at the “outward forms of ukiyo-e” are under the impression that the love-making scenes depicted in *shunga* revolve around the diversions of courtesans and their clients. In the actual world of *shunga* of course there are situations involving courtesans and clients, but beyond that, there are people ranging from young men and young women to elderly couples, from male and female servants to married couples belonging to wealthy and samurai families. In fact it is the quotidian—scenes of love-making in everyday life—that is preponderant.

In sum, if we can get people to understand the enjoyment of ukiyo-e *shunga* by means of the method I have tried to use in this book, it is my hope that perhaps the general image of *shunga* will change a little. Speaking from my own experience of appreciation, most ukiyo-e *shunga* are not pornographic, in the sense of being made exclusively for the purpose of arousing sexual excitement, or pictures especially for male use. Of course that doesn’t mean that there is no sexual excitement in *shunga*. Just as for a young person who is hungry, anything as long as it is edible becomes an object of appetite, for a person seeking sexual stimulus, if something is depicted that is even a little bit related to sex, anything can become an object of sexual desire. Just as it is necessary to have skillful cooking methods in order to appreciate food as culture, *shunga* is the cultural preparation of raw sex. The flavor of *shunga* is born from those cooking methods, and savoring that flavor becomes the pleasure of *shunga*. In

looking at Edo-period ukiyo-e *shunga*, not only Harunobu, but all artists in their own way exercised ingenuity and intellect in designing *shunga*. Savoring those differences as one is reading and interpreting *shunga* is truly delightful. I would be highly gratified if this book could serve as a guide to enjoying the marvelous diversity of ukiyo-e *shunga*.