

ACADEMIC NEWS 学会通信

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Indiana University turned into a hot spot for the research of sexuality in Edo culture when it hosted the international conference, "Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850" from August 17 to 20, 1995. As the organizer, Sumie Jones, mentioned in her opening remarks, sexuality in Edo culture has been largely ignored by academics in the U.S. and, to an even greater extent, Japan. The conference was designed to not only cast new light on the study of Edo Culture within the U.S. and Europe but to also stimulate the scholar pursuing his/her research from within Japan.

Over twenty scholars from the U.S., Europe, Japan and Korea with specialties in literature, sociology, folklore, history and art history were invited to speak during the conference. The international and multi-disciplinary collaborations and conversations encouraged by the mix of Japan specialists and non-specialists provided an ideal forum for the study of multi-layered Edo culture. Over three days, papers were loosely grouped into seven panels: "Positioning Shunga Historically," "Eros and Consumerism," "Otherness Within and Without," "The Place of Love," "Configurations of Gender," "The Rhythm and Play of Flesh and Words," and "Desire for Narrative in Stories and Pictures." Although Edo culture was discussed from multiple points of view, some common issues and concerns ran through papers presented during the conference. It became clear by the last day of the conference that modernity, the fluidity of gender and genre, as well as performance were important features of Edo cultures and deserved further study

Among the multiple points of view offered during the conference were those originating in a historical perspective. Two historians, Susan Burns and Henry Smith, demonstrated how important a solid understanding of specific historical conditions is to our understanding of Edo culture. In "Bodies Possessed and Hearts Disordered: Sexuality and Madness in Early Modern Japan," Burns discussed how the analysis of "monotsuki" became a major obsession of the emergent psychiatric profession during the early Meiji period in order to show the constructedness of madness as well as the consequences, social and cultural, of such a construction. Smith turned a historian's eye to shunga in an effort to distinguish between Edo attitudes and modern attitudes toward shunga. The work of literary historians such as that of Robert Campbell was also presented at the conference. In his "Poems on the Way to Yoshiwara," Campbell poses the question: Why did Yoshiwara become the object of historical study?

Two art historians attempted to contextualize shunga by focusing on a particular artist and a particular shunga series respectively. Drawing from a case study of Utamaro, Matthias Forrer located shunga within the tradition of print and book publishing in Edo culture in "Shunga Production in the 18th and 19th Centuries: Designing 'un enfer en style bibliographique.'" In "Shunga and Mitate: Suzuki Harunobu's *Eight Views of Modern Pleasure (Fūryū Zashiki Hakkei)*," Hayakawa situated the shunga series in relation to the original Chinese series and Harunobu's earlier non-shunga "Eight Views of Entertainment." After discussing the nature of mitate, he gave a nuanced reading of the series which brought to light the pictures' semantic richness. Like Hayakawa, Haga Toru offered a creative way of reading shunga. However, rather than focus on a particular series, Haga discussed more general aspects of

shunga in his paper "The Precariousness of Love." According to Haga, the ingenious use of space in shunga prints i.e., verandas, balconies, windows, etc. underlined three important qualities of "love" for Edoites: transiency, improvisation, and "abnormality."

Tanaka Yuko and Ueno Chizuko opened up new avenues in shunga research which originate in a female point of view by pointing to the way that shunga challenges traditional constructions of gender. In "Erotic Textiles," Tanaka argued that shunga, rich in textiles, depends on the practice of "concealing but revealing" and effectively stimulated the viewer's imagination. Working with the assumption that the eroticization of textiles is one of the most distinctive aspects of Japanese art, Tanaka argued that the change in role of fabrics signaled a shift in conceptions of the erotic. In drawing our attention to the structure of the erotic in shunga, Tanaka introduced a conception of the erotic female gaze, supposedly absent from modern erotic art in which naked female bodies are predominant. Ueno was even more explicit in her call for a recognition of the female perspective in a discussion of shunga, which she holds was made by and for men. In "The Formation of Female Sexuality in Shunga," Ueno asserted that the presence of lusty pregnant women and eroticized mothers in shunga offer female sexuality a form of representation other than the traditional pleasure quarters. While acknowledging the fact that the eroticization of motherhood allowed a patriarchal society to reduce women to wombs, she discussed how shunga blurs the traditional boundary between the mother and the prostitute.

Sumie Jones also discussed shunga in terms of the blurring of boundaries in her paper, "Interminable Reflections: The Semiotic Flow in Edo Arts." By using Suzuki Harunobu's work in which a man and woman are transformed into identical twins by mirroring, she put forth her claim that repetition and reflection are among the most salient features of Edo arts. The fluidity of gender pointed out by Jones is in fact one of the most striking characteristics of Edo culture and represents a marked difference from the significance of gender difference in the Western tradition. This fluidity of gender can account for the prominence of male homosexuality in Edo culture, especially in the theater district and samurai society. During the conference, both Gary Leupp and Ujiie Mikito, two important specialists in male homosexuality, presented papers on the topic. Leupp presented evidence for demographic reasons behind the rise and decline of homosexuality in "Male Homosexuality in Edo during the Late Tokugawa Period, 1750-1850: Decline of a Tradition?" while Ujiie traced the roots of male homosexuality to the samurai tradition and described its decline during the Edo period in terms of changes in that tradition in "The Erotic Roots of Bushido: Male Love in Theory and Practice."

Although their papers were highly informative and stimulating, I think that there has yet to be any detailed discussions of the aesthetic and philosophical sides of male homosexuality. Moreover, terms such as "homosexuality" and "love" used in English papers are loaded with other cultural discourses not present in their Japanese counterparts and hence extremely problematic. As Paul Schalow pointed out in his response to the panel, "Configurations of Gender," "iro," translated as love in English, does not distinguish between body and soul. Unlike love within the Judeo-Christian tradition which can be purely moral and spiritual, in "iro" sex and love are intertwined. Because of problems inherent in translations of iro, shudo or "nanshoku," I think it was useful to hear a paper like Ujiie's in the original Japanese. Finally, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the lack of representations of lesbianism in shunga that was pointed out by Ueno, female homosexuality in Edo culture remains an unexplored but potentially fascinating area of research.

Behind many of the conference papers was the belief that "modernity" or "modernism" is important for discussing all aspects of Edo culture and I might add, Japanese culture in general.

For some such as David Pollack, for example, modernity could be discussed in terms of a commodification of culture which figured heavily in the erotic imagination of Edo culture. In "Marketing Desire: Advertising and Sexuality in Edo Literature, Drama and Art," Pollack argued that advertising practices are part of a larger economy of desire which forms the context of more remarkable manifestations of erotic life. For others speakers such as Charles Inoue, modernity was used to describe a more abstract set of beliefs prevalent in Japanese culture. In "Pictocentrism: The Chinese Roots of Japanese Modernity," Inoue proposed that the balance of illustration and text was an important determinate of the semiotic structure of modern consciousness. A separation of word and image occurred during the last decades of the 19th century and the modern configuration of illustration and text that we encounter in "gokan" is the result of a logocentric realignment of signs that continued during the Meiji, Taisho and Showa periods. Eiji Sekine also focused on the conceptual changes wrought by modernity through an analysis of literature. In "Love Triangle in *Shunshoku Tatsumi no Sono*," he noted a changing conception of love and sexuality and located the change within the late Edo era. According to Sekine, Shunsui's apparent reconfirmation of the traditionally valued harmony in love attenuates an ideologically unrecognized but nevertheless provocative conceptualization of part of a split sensibility toward reality.

Although neither Choi Park-Kwang nor Miyata Noboru explicitly discussed modernity nor did they concentrate on urban life in their papers, I found that their observations highlighted the link between the heightened attention to sexuality and the spread of urban culture. In his paper "Japanese Sexual Customs and Cultures Seen from the Perspective of the Korean delegation to Japan," Choi offered an account of Tokugawa Japan as seen through the eyes of the Korean Delegation during the Edo period. According to Choi, the Koreans were scandalized by the immorality of the Japanese. Although from the paper it was difficult to see how urban culture figured into the observations of the Koreans, I think Choi's comments pointed us in the right direction for further study. In my opinion, a comparative study of Confucianism and urban culture within Japanese and Korean cultures (as well as other Asian countries) would prove extremely fruitful. Furthermore, the fact that Choi was the only scholar speaking from a non-Japanese Asian perspective, pointed to a lack in the conference and perhaps in Edo studies in general.

As a leading Japanese folklorist interested in village life, Miyata Noboru presented important facts on the function of sexuality within Edo villages in "The Cult of Genitalia and the Return of the Land in late Edo Culture." By looking at life in the country, Miyata provided another perspective on the effects of modernity in Japan. In his opinion, as a result of the decline of villages and growth of cities, a sexual religion emerged in the villages which drew the community closer together.

Along with "modernity," performance is a facet of Edo culture analyzed by the participants. Nobuhiro Shinji, a distinguished scholar of Edo literature, taught us how to look at Santō Kyōden's "books of manners" through the lens of the author's private life. Furthermore, Nobuhiro showed us that such reading was encouraged by Kyōden who wanted the reader to be privy to his personal life because, as a quintessential Edo artist, his life and his work were his performance. In discussing the connection between the creative and the personal, Nobuhiro underlines the close relationship between the author and reader of books--an intimate relationship which reminds us of that between kabuki actors and their audience. Andrew Markus was also interested in the influence personal experience had on the creative life of the author. In his paper "Prostitutes and Prosperity in the Works of Terakado Seiken," he discussed Seiken's ambivalent depiction of prostitution in the Edo and Yoshiwara of the author's time.

The charm of Edo culture is the fusion of high and low art. At the hand of Edoites, ideas, no matter how dry, could be turned into entertainment. In keeping with this spirit, the conference brought together intellectual and sensual pleasures and became a performance in itself. Howard Hibbett's keynote address, "The Yoshiwara Wits," best exemplified the mix of the academic and serious with the joyful and pleasurable. By citing stories and jokes, one after another, Hibbett gave us a witty guide to the Edoites' games with language and performance. Indeed, Hibbett's talk was in itself a refined performance. In addition, on the first evening of the conference, we enjoyed popular Edo songs by Nishimatsu Fuei whose performance vividly recalled the atmosphere of Edo (I was so impressed by her songs that I nearly wept when I heard her sing). She also accompanied John Solt during the conference itself while he read provocative translations of "Willow Leaf tips." Participants also had the opportunity to attend an exhibition, "The Erotic Art of Ukiyoe" mounted by the Indiana Art Museum as well as a special conference exhibition from the collections of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction.

Before ending I would like to make note of the highly qualified respondents who took part in the conference. The responses of George Wilson, Harold Bolitho, Michael Robinson, Andrew Gerstle, Norman Bryson, Paul Schalow, and Toru Takahashi to their particular panels were witty, lucid and often thought provoking. They all took their duties as respondents so seriously that I often thought that another paper was being presented when hearing their responses. Finally, let me say that I find it telling that both Professors Choi and Nobuhiro chose the conference as a reason for their first trips to the U.S. "Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850" was a ground breaking event. Let's hope that the questions raised here will spur Edo scholars on into the exploration of new territory.