

foreign contact wiped clean from the deck (although, as the case of Kaempfer shows, certain important issues clearly have yet to be swept away), Japan specialists have started to navigate entirely new waters. For this reason, some of the most interesting work in early modern Japanese studies relates to the subfield of foreign affairs and frontiers. At the same time, however, so much still could be done: multiethnic communities in Nagasaki, Japanese-trading stations in Korea, foreign trade and environmental degradation in Japan, early-seventeenth-century Japanese trading communities in Southeast Asia and their environmental impact, and many other topics cry out for investigation by talented scholars.

Second, an interpretative gulf exists among scholars of early modern Japan. Those who study domestic-centered topics, ranging from literary studies to domainal politics and economics, often sound like they are talking about a different country than those writing on foreign affairs and frontiers. Increasingly, historians such as Philip Brown, Luke Roberts, and Mark Ravina paint a picture of an early modern polity where local domains remained the most pervasive manifestation of the political and economic country. However, in the realm of foreign affairs, few would dispute the idea that the Edo shogunate maintained tight control over contact with the outside world, a concrete manifestation of a state in the process of centering power. These two ideas are not mutually exclusive, but Japan specialists have yet to integrate them into one con-

vincing narrative of Japan's early modern experience. To date, in the collective scholarship of Japan specialists, two political countries coincide and sometimes collide in one temporal and spatial frame. One aim of future research should be to reconcile some of these differences.

Third, the new writings on early modern foreign affairs and frontiers have failed to convince historians of the modern period of the complexity of Japan's pre-Meiji relations with the outside world. Many modernists still slavishly use the "closed country" (*sakoku*) and "open country" (*kaikoku*) dichotomy to explain Japan's plunge into the modern age. It is still common to talk of the "opening of the country" with Matthew C. Perry, and how in the 1850s Japan was forced to confront for the first time the practice of international diplomacy. This is, of course, highly misleading, but it does make the task of writing about the Meiji years easier. With *sakoku*, we can be told that only in the Meiji period did Japan master diplomacy, conduct foreign trade, conquer foreign lands, and develop collective philosophies similar to what might be described as a "national" identity. The next step, it seems to me, is to have a broader penetration of the complexity of early modern foreign affairs and frontiers into the other sub-fields of Japanese studies. This would require the onerous process of rethinking topics such as modern Japan expansionism, but it would surely enrich our understanding of Japan's past and present.

Timon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan 1700-1820*.

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Contents: (1) Introduction; Erotic Images, Pornography, *Shunga* and Their Use; (2) Time and Place in Edo Erotic Images; (3) Bodies, Boundaries, Pictures; (4) Symbols in *Shunga*; The Scopic Regimes of *Shunga*; (5) Sex and the Outside World. References, bibliography, list of illustrations (115 monochrome, 34 color). 319 pages.

Summary (Introduction, 9-10): Chapter 1 aims to correct "those who persist in seeing Japanese *shunga* as categorically separate from solitary-use pornography" [i.e., masturbation]. Chapter 2 "investigates social relations to the exotic images which proliferated during the eighteenth century." Regarding their impact on social health, these images were not "benignly viewed in their own time," and with "anxiety peaking in the 1790s" they "include the non-overtly sexual pictures of the Floating World as well as pornography." Chapters 3 and 4 "offer close readings of some images, both overtly sexual and more subtly libidinous, in order to assess their status as figures

within the larger field of painting and printing, and also within the field of sexual practice.” Chapter 5 investigates “the politics and mechanics of the gaze,” both of viewers and actors, in which “the signification of peering, peeping, magnifying and shrinking were all implicated.” Chapter 6 looks at “the end of the Floating World ... with the movement of erotica out of the pleasure quarters and into the open,” especially after the establishment of “a new contract between cities (especially Edo) and their rural hinterland [that] underpinned this refashioning of pornography.” After this time, it is “appropriate to abandon the term ‘*shunga*.’”

The word *shunga* conjures up a host of urgent questions: What were the motives and conditions leading up to and guiding the development of this sensational genre? How did it evolve over time? What is its relationship to the themes and techniques of *ukiyo-e* art in general? Were its artists and practices any different from those involved in other sorts of *ukiyo-e* art? Does it exhibit anything like the range of *ukiyo-e*? Like *ukiyo-e*, did it grow darker, more violent and brutal - more “decadent” - over time? Under what commercial and legal conditions was *shunga* being sold and bought, and by whom? How was it regarded by the government? By the masses? How accurately does it reflect actual Edo sexual practices?

This study addresses some but not all of these questions. The author’s goal appears to be a reworking of what he regards as an outmoded and inadequate, if not entirely absent, conceptual underpinning of the artistic genre. As the summary above suggests, the study sets itself the task of examining everything from uses to social contexts, promising to place the images – in turn beautiful, crude, surprising, humorous, outrageous, horrifying, but generally intended to be erotically stimulating – within contemporaneous contexts of both artistic and sexual practice. It examines old and new technologies that were working both to sustain and to change artistic practice and reception, often simultaneously. To achieve these sorts of goals demands breadth of scholarship, and the book’s 15 pages of small-print annotations attest to the breadth of the author’s reading, comprising not only much of the expected scholarship on *ukiyo-e* and *shunga* art and history, but also the poetry, fiction, and cul-

tural history of the time, as well as the critical literature on these subjects in both Japan and the west. As demonstrated in his earlier publications and fluency with his materials, Screech’s credentials for the act of an informed new reading of *shunga* appear to be more than adequate. And, while this is often the impression this study gives, in its sweep and detail, it also all too often seems to stray and sometimes stumble in its determined rush toward new and broader horizons.

For nearly half a century, Edo *shunga* scholarship has been dominated by the monumental body of work amassed by Hayashi Yoshikazu, who since 1955 has published some 30 monographs detailing the *shunga* works of such major *ukiyo-e* artists as Toyokuni, Shigenobu, Kunisada, Utamaro, Harunobu, Hiroshige, Shigemasa, Eisen, Oei, Moronobu, Hokusai, Kiyonaga, and Shunsho, as well as more general studies of the subject (nine of Hayashi’s studies are cited in Screech’s bibliography). Hayashi is also, with Richard Lane, editor of a magnificent recent 26-volume series reproducing representative *shunga* art, *Teihon ukiyo-e shunga meihin shusei*¹ (only one volume of this series is cited here). Others like Fukuda Kazuhiko have also published collections and studies of *shunga*. The most substantial overviews of the field in English until now have been Richard Lane’s study “The *Shunga* in Japanese Art”² and his later more extensive but relatively inaccessible *The Erotic Theme in Japanese Painting and Prints*³ (neither of which is mentioned here). Recently, the scope of the field has been broadened and deepened by a series of conference essays collected in Sumie Jones, ed., *Imaging Reading Eros: Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850*.⁴ Decades of challenges to ever more unworkable censorship laws in Japan have finally burst open the floodgates, and we are now up to our eyeballs in uncensored reproductions of the once-infamous and usually bowdlerized *estampes Japonaises*. A serious study of this genre in English has been needed, and this book proposes not

¹ Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 1995

² In Philip Rawson, ed., *Erotic Art of the East* (NY: G.P. Putnam, 1968), 283-375.

³ Tokyo: Gabun-do, 1979.

⁴ Bloomington: Indiana University East Asian Studies Center, 1996.

only to fill this void, but to change the field. Whether it succeeds in doing so is another matter.

The first problem with the book is a conceptual one. Even a cursory look through the most widely consulted English-language reference work on *ukiyo-e*, Richard Lane's *Images from the Floating World: The Japanese Print: Including an Illustrated Dictionary of Ukiyo-e*,⁵ will reveal that, far from a separate genre, *shunga* constitutes at least half of the output of all Edo *ukiyo-e* art, and often the largest part of any given artist's production, an impression that is supported by such well-known studies as Jack Hillier's *The Art of the Japanese Book*.⁶ This continuity, once surprising and only recently beginning to be taken for granted, between the greatest masterpieces of *ukiyo-e* art, often acclaimed for their subtlety, elegance, refinement, and novel composition, and the blatantly pornographic images produced by the same artists, which can often be acclaimed for the very same reasons, represents something of a problem for the work at hand. For, in spite of claims to have extended the boundaries of *shunga*, Screech elects instead to isolate the genre from its broader *ukiyo-e* contexts, treating it as an entirely separate artistic genre that can be adequately comprehended by examining the social and artistic and ideological conditions and boundaries of "pornography" alone.

One telling example of this attitude is the author's description of Nishikawa Sukenobu (1670-1750) as "the great pornographer" (173). There are very few *ukiyo-e* artists who are not equally deserving of this title (as Hayashi's extended roster of studies about them suggests). It would be far more accurate to call Sukenobu "the great Kyoto illustrator and antiquarian" (Screech stubbornly refers to Kyoto throughout as "Keishi," one of its more obscure historical monikers). For a "great pornographer," moreover, Sukenobu is curiously absent in this study: examples of his work constitute a mere one percent of the 149 illustrations in this book, while those of Utamaro, who is not thus distinguished, constitute some

twenty percent. We are forced to ask whether it has been not only the anachronistic mischief of modern prudery, a Meiji era Victorian relic which survives today in official attitudes, that necessitates the hyperbolic claims made here for an entirely separate realm of pornography, one that traumatically severs the intrinsic continuity of *shunga* from *ukiyo-e* in general. This situation is perhaps analogous to the way in which the full range of Edo sexuality was earlier deformed by the similar modern amputation of *nanshoku*, or male-male sex, from its larger Edo gestalt in such a way that now requires it to be celebrated as something unique by its modern champions. *Shunga* is an integral part of *ukiyo-e* art, just as *nanshoku*, for all its particularity, is an essential part of Edo eroticism (*koshoku*) in general. Just as the full range and meaning of Edo literature cannot be understood without the one, neither can its arts be understood without the other.

While there is much of interest in this book, there is perhaps even more to dispute. As the author himself warns (and he seems always to be hectoring the reader), "Whenever people write about the fields of aspiration and desire, they are apt to fabricate, to twist the facts to suit their purposes" (83-84). What he aspires to offer is "a new interpretation of Japanese erotic images from the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century," by "set[ting] "erotic images properly into their social context" and "go[ing] beyond the domain of what are known as *shunga*..." (7) But while his study moves boldly to detail the presumed sexual practices of the period, it rarely ventures beyond the realm of the pornographic, defining the social context of erotic images narrowly in terms of sexual practices alone. In doing this, even if his own study is more up to date in lexicon and attitudes, Screech reflects in an odd way the sort of sexological approach favored by older scholars such as Lane.

Since the author acknowledges an Edo "libidinous economy" that comprehends its artistic representation, that same "economy" might better be extended to its involvement in the production and consumption of goods and practices of every sort. *Shunga* can best be understood as one telling manifestation among many of a complex and greatly expanded *circulation of desire* that marks the Edo period, an economy defined by all sorts

⁵ New York: Putnam, 1978.

⁶ London: published for Sotheby's Publications by Philip Wilson Publishers; New York: Distributed in the U.S. by Harper & Row, 1987.

of material practices in every aspect of life, and not merely by the representation of its sexual practices, narrowly defined as sex acts (however spectacularly illustrated).

From the outset, Screech holds that male masturbation – the subject of the entire first chapter – was the sole motivating force behind all *shunga* art, “the central practice that accounts for the genres” that he examines, to the near exclusion of any other. This is in effect to reduce to one narrow and solitary sexual practice (in the too-often repeated cute euphemism “reading with one hand”) of an early male-heavy and male-oriented Edo the wide range of male *and female* desire of the entire period for every sort of stimulation, titillation, humor, and parody, as well as overtly sexual behavior (for all his insistence on men’s practices, Screech does occasionally allow for women’s as well, though often in a backhanded way). Given such a sweeping claim, one might well wish to look up “masturbation” in the index in order to locate the various examples of this argument and the proofs adduced of its asserted centrality; but the book lacks an index, even of proper nouns. However, a look through the images reproduced in this study, and certainly those available elsewhere, suggests that the greatest proportion of *shunga* showing people engaged in the consumption of pornography depicts love-making couples, not masturbating males (though both males and females are often shown masturbating while watching other couples making love). And if, as Screech claims, “there was not much to choose” (41) between *shunga* produced in its first flourishing, ca. 1675-1700 in Kansai and Kanto, and in its second surge in Kyoto ca. 1710 (43), then why should the specifically bachelor state of Edo be singled out as *the* condition for the production of *shunga*? There was after all no shortage of women (or of boys) in Kyoto.

As Screech himself accurately observes, “the *shunga* market was not unitary” (46), but rather fragmented along the expected fault-lines of male/female, old/young, and rich/poor (but are there no gradations of these?) – bifurcations to which should be added those of courtier/samurai/commoner and *nyoshoku* /*nanshoku* (as he observes elsewhere, the last are not the same as “heterosexual” and “homosexual,”

though the reader will find simpler and clearer explanations of these terms and their uses in Paul Schalow’s introduction to Saikaku’s *The Great Mirror of Male Love*,⁷ not cited here). While he is correct to warn that we cannot understand Edo sexuality by simple projection, Screech still presumes to understand the psychological structure of the Edo “process of masturbation” (46). He notes that typical housing conditions and social practices made a modern notion of privacy almost impossible, but this only makes one wonder how sex in general was then any more possible than masturbation – in the dark? But if in the dark, how were *shunga* used as visual aids? Both men and women are shown engaging in self-gratification in *shunga*, and usually with no more privacy, or concern for it, than they exhibit in any other form of sex, which was at best an un-private business in a crowded city of flimsy one- and two-story buildings built largely of wood and paper. Edo voyeurism (*nozoki*) was in part a product of this historical lack of privacy, already central a millennium past as a culturally venerable and still charged fetish in *The Tale of Genji*, and in part a product of the Edo importation of western telescopes and other optical devices (the subject of chapter four). Again, after noting that books other than the pornographic *koshokubon* rarely came in the convenient *koban* size ideal for purposes requiring “holding in one hand” (but what about holding in *no* hands as depicted in prints?), Screech tells us that *koshokubon* in fact came in all of *fifty* different sizes (47), a number that would seem to make it difficult if not impossible to generalize about their presumed uses in this authoritative way.

“Erotic images began to appear in appreciable numbers from about the 1680s,” writes the author, “But it was only in the first decades of the eighteenth century that production in quantity seems to have begun” (7). Before this period, he tells us, erotic images “have to do with humor and parody, and seldom show couples copulating.” I have a hard time imagining the young males in the early decades of Edo, desperate for sexual relief, dashing out to buy works of humor and parody for the purpose of masturbation. What Screech emphati-

⁷ Stanford University Press, 1990.

cally does not allow is the possibility that it may rather have been men of flagging or jaded appetites who could have been the primary consumers of such materials. This consideration opens up the possibility that such materials were being produced as a form of advertising for the stimulation of consumer appetites, rather than solely as an avenue of relief for male sexual appetites that probably already had short fuses. The new and rapidly growing Edo of the first half of the seventeenth century may well have been two-thirds male (i.e., a 2:1 ratio of men to women) even as late as the 1680s, as Screech claims; but we are not to imagine that anything like such an imbalance persisted throughout the entire period (13). Writing of the probable gender ratios that obtained over the entire Edo period, for example, Henry Smith notes “a crucial change in the demographic reality of [the city of] Edo throughout the last half of its history,” with “the sex ratios of the commoner population moving steadily in the direction of parity.”⁸ Thus by 1733-47 (the 120-year span of Screech’s study begins in 1730), Smith writes, the earlier imbalance had already declined from 1.73:1 to 1.69:1; to 1.35:1 in 1798; and in the period 1822-67, the disparity disappeared entirely, from 1.2:1 to near parity.

Even granting that the male:female ratio in early Edo may indeed have been 2:1, however, can we really conclude that this fact alone is sufficient to serve as the major motivation for the production of pornography? We might wish to know what proportion of such women as were actually in Edo were, in one way or another, helping to relieve alleged male frustrations, in every occupation from the highest *oiran* courtesan down to the lowest shop servants - the infamous tea-pouring *chakumi-musume*, the licentious *yumiya-musume* archery stall attendants, the *yadoya-musume* at inns who even as late an artist as Hiroshige depicts as hauling unwilling men in off the streets, the notorious *yuna* bath attendants, and so on right down to the appalling *yotaka* streetwalkers – and all the way up the other side

of the social scale to the large numbers of maids and ladies-in-waiting formally in service in samurai residences and at Edo castle, about whom so much lusty art and literature was produced. In the Goto Museum’s famous Hayashi *Edo-zu byobu* screen of 1644 depicting daily commoner life around the city, a small crowd of lower-class *Azuma-otoko* or “men of the East” are shown brawling – the men of Mushashi were a notoriously rowdy lot – but they and their betters are to be found in far larger numbers downtown in the fleshpots of Sakaimachi and Fukiyamachi, amusing themselves with every sort of woman as well as with young *wakashu* and *kagema* “actors” (we do not learn how many of *them* there were for every male).

Screech is fond of using poems as evidence to bolster his points, but the *senryu* he cites about a female servant who uses an actor’s likeness (*yakusha nigao-e*) for masturbation (22) would appear to contradict the idea of sex-starved men as the only audience for pornography in a female-deprived city. From this and numerous other examples, there were clearly women who availed themselves of it as well. Even if some proportion of the huge output of actor prints were in fact employed by men and women for purposes of masturbation, it seems just as reasonable to assume that at least as many, and likely even more, were not. In the absence of more compelling documentation, to claim conclusively that male self-gratification is indeed how they were used amounts to a willful distortion of the materials.

Finally, there is the problem that many of the early *shunga* artists such as Nishikawa Sukenobu (Screech’s “great pornographer”) worked in Kansai, not Edo; Sukenobu himself was the leader of the famed early *ukiyo-e* school of Kyoto, an area where no male-female imbalance can be presumed to have existed. While Screech does produce examples of prints showing men masturbating over various sorts of pornography, these few examples do not add up to a refutation – however firmly asserted – of the scorned *idée reçue* that much of this sort of work was produced for use in brothels, whether the most expensive ones at Yoshiwara, the cheaper mass-entertainment areas around Shinagawa Shinjuku and Naito Shinjuku (just plain Shinjuku today), or even the truly

⁸ “The Floating World in its Edo Locale, 1750-1850,” in Donald Jenkins, ed., *The Floating World Revisited* (Portland Museum of Art and Hawaii University Press, 1993), 25-46, 36.

cheap *okabasho* areas scattered around the city. The customer in today's toney Tokyo fashion shops will find expensive glossy style magazines – an elegant form of soft porn – strewn about, while those in the grungy ramen shops have to make do with piles of cheap manga and less elegant sorts of porn stacked by the door for the entertainment of the student-and-worker crowd. Wherever people gather, it would seem, erotica and pornography will always exist, and an actively if inconsistently repressive government only makes its existence more likely.

This comparison is of course an anachronism; but my point is merely to raise the question of whether Edo was really so very different in the variety of uses to which its reading-matter was put than other large cities then and now. Even while making the gesture against anachronistic reading, Screech does it all the same: “I sought to overturn the Romanticist notion that Edo pictures were somehow different from what we know similar images are produced for today” (40) – unless I misinterpret, “what we know they are produced for today” is precisely what he is arguing against as interpretation. The U.S. and Europe are not demographically imbalanced societies (though China and India with their high rates of female infanticide promise to become so), yet pornographic materials of every sort have never been more available in those lands.

Screech is at some pains to refute what he calls the “outright mythologies” that have customarily been brought forward to explain the production of pornography in the Edo period. He specifies three of these myths in particular: its superstitious uses in homes to avert fires, and by soldiers to avoid injury; its pedagogical use in sex education as “pillow books” for innocent brides; and its use for viewing by couples rather than by solitary masturbators. Such explanations only reveal what Screech calls “a woefully naïve interpretation of the nature of pictorial evidence” (34). Why, we might wonder, couldn't it have served all these purposes, and more? While pornography may indeed have been “kept well out of the way” in “the better class of establishment” – as was the case with other sexual aids (the varieties reproduced in *shunga* art and *kibyoshi* fiction beggar description), how can Screech be so confident that they weren't kept *just* out of the way, in

drawers or cabinets near to hand or under pillows? Their use is so often depicted with such stunning casualness in fiction and art as to suggest that they were probably not an uncommon sight in stylish, keeping-up-with-the Satos households, let alone in brothels of every sort.

Edo was simply more laid-back about such matters, though here again the author fails to distinguish the attitudes of Confucian officials and moralists, from whom we have testimony, from those of the population at large, from whom we do not. He asserts that the populace was actually far more censorious of immoral behavior than modern scholarship's apologetic attitudes suggest: “Edo literature is not short on characterizations of the good bourgeois outraged by the wastage of time and money in the pleasure quarters” (50). True, but the uptight Pecksniffs who served as stereotypes of moral disapproval were butts of humor, even in Saikaku's tales of bourgeois virtue. Saikaku disapproved, as Screech might have put it, with one hand.

Censorship did exist, of course, but the government was not after pornography so much as materials it regarded as seditious and capable of leading to social disorder. Screech may dislike the “safety-valve” notion, but it seems clear that the authorities viewed sex (licensed and kept close watch over) as a way of maintaining social order. While erotica did occasionally fall almost inadvertently into the wide snares cast in the relatively few years when reform edicts were actually stringently enforced, these edicts were enacted primarily to put the brakes on politically and socially “dangerous” activities, and only incidentally on other sorts of behavior that could be deemed “immoral” by extension. For example the punishment meted out to Kitagawa Utamaro – the harshest instance of repression in the art world – had nothing at all to do with pornography; it was for imprudently taunting the authorities with an infamous, though not the slightest bit erotic, triptych print of 1804 depicting “Hideyoshi and His Five Wives Viewing the Blossoms at Daigoji.”⁹

⁹ Kitagawa Utamaro, *Taiko gosai Rakuto yukan no zu* (1804). See Sarah D. Thompson and H.D. Harootunian, *Undercurrents in the Floating World: Censorship and Japanese Prints*. (NY: The Asia Society Galleries, 1991), pp. 44-45.

Stories and pictures of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-98, known as the Taiko or "Chief Minister"), the last of the great hegemony who preceded the start of the Tokugawa polity, had been popular with the masses since the publication of Oze Hoan's *Taikoki* (1626), and he was therefore viewed with apprehension as a potentially subversive figure by the authorities, who wanted him banished from the popular imagination, even when actual names and events were conventionally masked – and in this instance the artist foolishly used actual names. Following an official investigation, all unsold copies of this print were confiscated, the artist was jailed for three days and kept in manacles for fifty, and the printer and publisher were heavily fined.¹⁰ Just six months later the artist was dead in the prime of life at the age of fifty-three, and it is generally assumed that his early demise was no coincidence. The point is that, compared to works deemed politically subversive by the authorities, those regarded as merely pornographic encountered very little official interference.

Even if actual names could not be used for a while after the early 1790s, well-known prostitutes and actors (and political figures) were easily identified by their crests and shop-signs, indeed even by parodic distortions of them. Artists and publishers did often use rebuses for names on their prints rather than the names themselves, as much for diversion as for concealment, and rebuses were often used together with the names.

While we can always agree that a certain amount of pornography was put to the solitary use that Screech insists on, insistence on this use alone only serves to obscure its more significant purpose. The entire economy of Edo, after all, a city that produced mainly for its own consumption, was increasingly organized around the desires of ever more sophisticated and educated – and jaded – urban consumers, and as in the capitalist economies of goods and their desires today, those needs were not merely catered to but *created* by advertising of all sorts. Edo was the

world's first great advertising culture.¹¹ Every sort of *ukiyo-e* art, including *shunga*, displays goods and clothing that, like the beautiful and scantily-clad models in today's ads, both set a tone of desire for the scene portrayed, and are in turn the objects of cathected desire (as the Freudian ad-psych jargon might put it) stimulated by the models. While the lust stimulated by eroticism registers as a desire for sex, that immediate primitive response is also easily rerouted as a desire for goods. We are used to seeing this in the more "artistic" sorts of *ukiyo-e* representations of the famous upper class of *keisei* prostitutes identified by name and house such as the well-known examples by Utamaro – an example I use advisedly, for it should be noted, in keeping with that *continuum of the erotic* that I am proposing, that *shunga* by this artist comprise thirteen percent of Screech's 149 illustrations. "You could not even display a Floating World print for very long," writes Screech, "before it had to be replaced with something more up to date" (52). "Even" is the wrong logic – it was the very purpose of much of the genre to function as fashion advertising, to show people the latest fads, and to make last season's patterns (and the sort of women who would wear them) seem somehow less desirable.

In chapter 2, Screech posits a trend away from *nishiki-e* (polychrome) *shunga*: in a brief six year period. He says 74% of all *koshokubon* were in color, while in the 16 years between 1772-88, only 20% were. He focuses on the cost/profit ratio as an explanation, but ignores the possibility that the decrease could be due to official proscription, not of *koshokubon* as such, but of expensive editions of such works printed *in color*. As their name literally suggests, the equation of *shoku/iro* as both "color" and "sex" is central to the representation of desire in the Edo period.

Even Screech's interpretations of the works themselves are far from dependable. A pornographic print by Isoda Koryusai is called a "reissue" of a sweet scene by Suzuki Harunobu (fig. 6

¹⁰ Suwa Haruo, *Shuppan Kotohajime*, pp. 172-175; also manacled for fifty days during this crackdown were the artists Toyokuni, Shuntei, Shun'ei, Tsukimaro and Ikku.

¹¹ See David Pollack, "Marketing Desire: Advertising and Sexuality in the Edo Arts." *Gender & Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Norman Bryson, et al. University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming.

- it must be remembered that at least half of Harunobu's work was pornographic), but is clearly nothing of the sort; rather, it is a *mitate* scene in which Harunobu's open options are narrowed to Koryusai's sex-act. Again, referring to fig. 16, Screech oddly fails to comment on the complex *nanshoku* eroticism of a bath-house scene (22): against a background of women and children bathing, a *wakashu* (easily identifiable by the mandatory shaved spot on his pate) is gazing at the women while hiding his erection from the elegant and wealthy older man who is his patron, and whose gaze in turn is only for *him*. The unimpressed women simply ignore both men, leaving only a small child to point gleefully at the *wakashu*'s erection. Screech unaccountably decipher this fascinating scene with its complex circular gaze merely as an eroticized example of heterosexual mixed bathing, yet the scene is all the more titillating because of its clearly bisexual subject-matter. *Nanshoku* in its most common form, rather than as an idealized and celebrated ideological position, was perhaps most often bisexual in nature, perhaps because desirable and less gender-marked boys grew to become desiring and more gender-marked men. In the terms of the day, this *wakashu* may be *otoko-zuki* (man-loving), but he is clearly not *onna-girai* (woman-hating), non-exclusive categories that indicate the fluidity and scope of Edo sexuality and eroticism.

Screech's style is both idiosyncratic in its authoritative-sounding reliance on assertion rather than evidence to make his case. How can he be so certain, for example, that "*most people* only went to the theatre in order to have orgies with young men and women" (55, my italics)? There is no documentary evidence from the period to support such a claim. While we are often left to wonder where such information about what "most people" did or thought comes from, the argument all too often relies on suspect rhetorical constructions such as "surely," "it must have been the case," and "it cannot be coincidental." On just one page we find "it must be conceded," "might be," "would have," "said to be," "might hasten," "would have been," "would be," and, most improbably, the syntactically alarming "would probably already have been" (21). This reliance on asseveration demands that the reader swallow quite a mouthful of probability on the basis of

nothing but the author's say-so. "*It must be conceded that all 'beautiful person' pictures [bijinga] could have been used for auto-erotic purposes,*" Screech writes (21, my italics) – certainly, and as well that *some might not have been*. Again, in a calendar-print of 1765 by Harunobu, Screech finds that the woman shown taking in her laundry "is more comely than the average woman employed in such labor" (45). She may well be, since *all* of Harunobu's women are uncommonly comely – but how does he know? Has he seen enough "average women" elsewhere to know what they looked like? True, the invariably good-looking women in prints compare favorably to actual photographs of prostitutes taken in the 1880s and '90s. Either the national physiognomy went into very sudden decline in the few decades between Hokusai's *One Hundred Views* and the advent of photography, or we are dealing with – dare we say it? – artistic license and convention. The women shown in early studio photographs are indeed often lovely (but it is an interesting question whether their loveliness accords more with presumed western standards of pulchritude or native ones), while those in unstaged photographs (well, less-staged: it was still impossible to take candid photos) suggest a very different idea of what the "average woman" looked like. Even photos of *oiran* scarcely suggest Utamaro's tall, lissome and willowy beauties.

"Of course" (the reader should be wary of this phrase by now), "in pornography a viewer is unlikely to want genuine uncertainty about gender, since his or her imagination will be inclining to one or the other option (or to a two-gender threesome, but there too the roles will be clear" (86). On what authority is this stated, other than the author's own educated surmise? Screech calls modern pornography, in Japan and elsewhere, "binary" (92), but one would never guess this from the ambiguous depictions of *wakashu*, or from the products purveyed today on the web and in sex stores, where every variation of sexuality is catered to. The example of the bath-house scene above suggests that there is nothing necessarily "binary" about how artists' and readers' imaginations are inclining, and to corral them into that model is to do them violence.

Screech does not hesitate to set up the occasional easy straw man to knock down: "People of

the present," he writes, for example, "misinterpret the ukiyo as representing all of Edo" (79). But the weight of scholarship of the last quarter-century and more has tended in exactly the opposite direction. Screech appears to believe that immorality causes moral decline; but could it be that what he calls the "enfeeblement" of the samurai is a phenomenon that is *reflected in ukiyo-e* prints rather than *caused by* them? Is it in fact the case that "erotica was prematurely eroticizing children" and bringing Japan "to the brink"? Or could it be that the country was increasingly moving in a brinkly direction and that erotic representation merely reflected this drift? Screech wants to have the notion of an effeminate samurai class both ways, deconstructing the mythology of the samurai in *Hagakure* even as he quotes that work to demonstrate how effeminate the samurai had become (82). The fact that the Yoshiwara was a sword-free zone does not necessarily prove that samurai were becoming limp-wristed, but may in fact suggest the very opposite: that swords had to be left outside the gate because they were responsible for too many fatalities when they were allowed inside these testosterone-drenched zones (though the style code of the Yoshiwara sagely discouraged manly muscle in favor of wimply wealth). Screech's emphasis on the notion of the effeminization of formerly manly men appears to harken back to the notion of an earlier and purer era when men kept manly by consorting only with other men – a romanticization not of samurai, but of *nanshoku* as a higher calling. Such defences of *nanshoku* as those he quotes (84) were widespread, and the worship of "heroic" male sex in a world of effete fops is merely another tack leading in the same direction. I would suggest that, rather than blame eroticism for the "effeminization" of the samurai, it is more useful to understand Edo *nanshoku* practices as a perhaps inevitable result of the enforced urbanization and bureaucratization of the *bushi*, a way of translating the logic of formerly rural and feudal male relationships of muscle to a new and more ambiguous urban environment of wealth.

Screech finds a "lack of secondary sexual characteristics" in *shunga* to be significant (100) since he needs their "unimportance" to be the reason for the extreme focus on genitals (107-8). One immediately thinks of Chinese erotica, how-

ever, in which secondary sexual characteristics are if anything even *less* pronounced and yet genitals are not hypertrophied (Screech's suggestion that the genitals are the same size as their owners' heads because "*shunga* wishes to propose a egalitarianism of thought and sex-drive" (128) is just plain silly). Why not instead find that the obsession with these secondary characteristics in western representation is what is odd? Breasts are universally maternal, after all, and are used in Chinese and Japanese pornography (and perhaps everywhere) for suckling only by children and by men who desire to be infantilized. And of course Asians tend not to be as hirsute as *kebukai* westerners (and even other Asians are invidiously thought of as *ketto* in contrast to Japanese). His interpretation has some strange repercussions. For example, it comes as something of a surprise to learn that the child in fig. 41 who is only "apparently reaching for the breast" of a woman we might assume to be his mother (since she is herself reaching to free her breast from the kimono in response to the child's upward reach), is "actually reaching for the woman's skirt as she leans back in apparent excitement" (110). But no, she is leaning *forward* with a very maternal smile on her face as she clearly prepares to nurse her child, and the child has his hand on her robe because he is still crawling on the floor and cannot reach her breast. There are plenty of prints that show children fondling and suckling at a breast. Screech may think the child "too old for breast-feeding," but as in many societies, Japanese children in the Edo period were regularly suckled to a later age than they are today – a custom that, like so much else in that relatively innocent land, came to an abrupt end with the shock of scandalized Victorian visitors. Screech's view of the picture as "entirely erotic" is accurate, but only because of its use of maternal masking. Children are not "prematurely sexualized" (though certainly young girls were brought up in the Quarter to be trained for the sexual bondage they were sold into), but infants are regularly used as voyeuristic devices in *shunga*, a diversion to the maternal of quite another impulse, since the child is uncritically allowed access to and behavior toward the woman that the adult male may find more problematic. This helps account for the many *shunga* showing couples engaged in lovemaking while

the woman nurses or otherwise diverts the child – the latter offers the male reader, and perhaps the female one as well, a different point of entry into the scene. But this does not mean as Screech proposes that this particular child is trying to reach up his mother’s skirt to reach her willing genitals; it only means that the eroticized gaze between the two figures reaching toward one another and the urgent request for and happy imminent release of the breast create the charged path along which the viewer’s desire is channeled and released. And what should coincidentally lie smack in the middle of that exchange of gazes but a great swath of elegant kimono material that has the not-so-innocent look of product-placement to it. Eroticism was regularly directed to the latest designs on sale in the great material emporiums of the time that are so often seen in *ukiyo-e* prints of the city.

Indeed, as Screech quite accurately observes, “In pictures of the Floating World, the clothes themselves carry sexual weight” (110). This is, as he notes, not a question of an acceptance of or a preference for semi-concealment, but is rather a fetishization of clothing. Still, his catalogue of clothing and accessories often requires some comment. For example, Screech finds that Utamaro’s three Kansei beauties in fig. 44 (*Tosei san bijin*, 1793) are “wearing meaner sorts of cloth than those of the former age” (117). They may very well be, since the Kansei sumptuary laws against gorgeous clothing were in effect, whether in art or in life. But it would be hard to tell in this monochrome reproduction, which scarcely does justice to the gorgeousness of the fabrics depicted. If we look closely, for example, we find that one robe has a finely-patterned and clearly expensive *kasuri* design; a second sports a very delicate *karaori* design whose discreet *mon* in white – undoubtedly a crest – is almost indistinguishable from its greyscale *ji* ground; and the central and tallest of the women (and thus the most important of the three) is wearing a simple crested *haori* that was never intended to be gaudy but rather to suggest the beauty underneath (the crest of the woman in *kasuri* is shown on her fan). Color reproductions of prints by the same artist about five years later (figs. 26, 57) make use of gaudy robes that might well look “mean” as well if they too were reproduced in monochrome. The

robes on the figures shown in the pornographic fig. 57 are as gorgeous as any in the genre. Fig. 26, like the *Three Beauties*, is erotic though not pornographic, with both bearing the artist’s signature and censor’s *kiwame* seal, as *shunga* prints never did since they were not intended for sale in bookshops. Contrary to Screech’s suggestion that it was only the prints that the censors saw that showed “mean” clothes, however, the robes in all of those bearing the censor’s seal are equally exquisite. Screech’s elaborate explanation (121) of what clothing is for is much too difficult when its role is, quite simply, to frame and provide the setting for the action of the genitals. It is useful to think of clothing as the setting for characters on stage.

There is a great deal more here that might be critiqued. The book is well-organized in that it tries to provide a place for nearly everything; but in trying to cover nearly everything, it ends up seeming disorganized. Almost every time Screech proposes a good idea, he spoils it with a bad one, or a weak or erroneous interpretation, or a hectoring and arrogant manner that makes the reader disinclined to accept even the best of ideas. His illustrations seem selected to make his points, rather than serve as representative examples of the genre. But perhaps the greatest problem remains the fact that *shunga* pictures do not really constitute a separate genre at all; they are part and parcel of *ukiyo-e* art in general, and can only be understood in close reference to it.

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The *Deshima Dagregisters*, the near daily record of the Dutch trading post at Nagasaki, makes fascinating reading. Even the material of the first nine years contained in the volume under review of this over two-hundred-year record is so varied that most people working on Tokugawa Japan will find – if not substantial material – at least some interesting snippets of information.