

The *Shunga* Collection of the Mito Tokugawa

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This article analyzes the *shunga* collection owned by the Mito Tokugawa family. It presents the discovery of six pieces from the Mito Tokugawa, one of the three branches of the Tokugawa. This collection helps us understand the uses and the spread of erotic art among the ruling classes in Edo period Japan. The collection, formed of different types of works (scrolls, books, prints, and sex toys) is important in documenting the high degree of acceptance of erotic art within the Tokugawa family. In particular, the manuscript notes written by the daimyo, Tokugawa Nariaki, show that the works were acquired as part of a regular family practice over the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. This suggests that it was common for all daimyo families to collect *shunga*.

Keywords: *shunga*, *higa*, *higi*, daimyo, Mito, erotic, Edo period, Tokugawa Nariaki, *saya-e*, *harigata*

Introduction: Daimyo Families and *Shunga*

Studies of traditional Japanese erotic art have proliferated in recent decades, as the genre has gradually ceased to be a taboo subject. It was censored during the Shōwa 昭和 period (1926–1989), but has become the focus of academic study and appreciation today, both in Japan and elsewhere. The exhibition staged at the British Museum in 2013 (*Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*) was the first major show to present Japanese erotic art in a complete way and marked a turning point, opening up new fields of study and key areas for research that will no doubt continue to develop over the coming decades as both public and private collections become more widely known. These collections will enable the continuing reappraisal of the social and cultural value of *shunga* 春画, and reveal a page in the history of Japanese art that has previously been denied to scholars and hidden from view.¹

The known extant corpus is vast and demonstrates clearly that most *shunga* from the Edo period (1615–1868) were produced in response to the tastes and demands of the *chōnin*, commoner inhabitants of the large cities. However, Japanese erotic art, both during the Edo period and in previous epochs, was known in much wider circles, indeed virtually

1 A great many studies of *shunga* have been made, from the publications of Hayashi Yoshikazu and Richard Lane to more recent works by Shirakura Yoshihiko, Hayakawa Monta, Ishigami Aki, and others. For a complete, rigorous introduction that provides the background to this article, I recommend particularly the catalogue for the exhibition staged at the British Museum by Clark, Gerstle, Ishigami, and Yano 2013.

throughout the whole of Japanese society. This essay aims to contribute to recovering the history of erotic art not only among the *chōnin* but, particularly, among the samurai class in Edo period Japan.

The samurai's familiarity with and possession of *shunga* finds increasing documentary confirmation in the written testimonies of firsthand witnesses close to the Tokugawa 徳川 shogunate. Today, we are aware of the existence of *shunga* in the hands of several Japanese daimyo. Two examples are the powerful Hosokawa 細川 clan of Kumamoto domain, who treasured a Kanō school handscroll dated to the seventeenth century and a copy of the erotic illustrated book *Enshi gojūyochō* 艶紫娛拾余帖 (1835) by Utagawa Kunisada 歌川国貞 (1786–1865), and also the daimyo of Hirado domain, Matsura Hiromu 松浦熙 (1791–1867), who owned a two-panel erotic folding screen painted by Teisai Hokuba 蹄斎北馬 (1770–1844).² Other erotic works have also been documented in the possession of the retired daimyo of Kōriyama 郡山 domain, Yanagisawa Nobutoki 柳沢信鴻 (1724–1792) and Matsudaira Shungaku 松平春嶽 (1828–1890), daimyo of Fukui 福井 domain.³ Indeed, authors of the Edo, Meiji 明治 (1868–1912), and Taishō 大正 (1912–1926) periods left records and descriptions of the regular and extensive use of *shunga* among the daimyo closest to the Tokugawa. Their comments include the following by Mitamura Engyo 三田村鳶魚 (1870–1952) in 1925:

For the weddings of a bride from daimyo lords or high-ranking shogunal retainers (*hatamoto* 旗本), sets of twelve erotic pictures (*warai-e* 笑い絵) would be included in the bride's trousseau. They would have gorgeous wrappings and were always presented as two scrolls. [...] Even today these families have old *shunga* paintings that are six or seven hundred years old. There are many more recent examples in the households of Edo period daimyo and courtiers.⁴

However, information available until now regarding the existence of *shunga* in the hands of the Tokugawa family was only indirect; indeed, scholars have doubted the extent of upper class participation in *shunga* culture. Such is the context of this study, which aims to make widely known the valuable collection of *shunga* acquired by the Mito branch of the Tokugawa family during the Edo period in the hope that in the future these works can be studied and analyzed in greater detail.

2 The Hosokawa *shunga* collection was presented by the Eisei Bunko Museum in 2015 in the first *shunga* exhibition ever held in Japan. Matsura's folding screen was first reproduced by Charles Grosbois in 1964, but it was not identified as a work owned by the daimyo of the Hirado domain until 2015 (Grosbois 1964, p. 115; *Nikubitsu ukuyoe* 2015 (*shunga* volume), p. 132; Miyake 2015a, pp. 90–91 and Miyake 2015b, pp. 124–27, 414–19.)

3 Yanagisawa Nobutoki acquired several erotic books and scrolls (*makura-e*), such as a copy of the *shunga* book *Haikai yokuko-dori* (1788) by Katsukawa Shunshō, and in 1783 sent to his wife five volumes of the *shunga* *Mame'emon* [sic] book (Clark, Gerstle, Ishigami, and Yano 2013, pp. 30, 44, and 195). For more details and comments on *shunga* owned by Yanagisawa Nobutoki, Matsura Kiyoshi, and Matsudaira Shungaku, see also Miyake 2015a and Miyake 2015b, pp. 593–97.

4 Mitamura 1977.

The Mito Tokugawa *Shunga* Collection

The Mito Tokugawa collection, including the documents accompanying it, provides credible evidence that erotic art circulated not only among the commoner classes but also—and particularly—among upper-class samurai families. It is well known that the Tokugawa commissioned and possessed erotic paintings, including copies of some of the oldest-known erotic handscrolls. According to the scholar Kurokawa Mayori 黒川真頼 (1829–1906), the collection of the Tokugawa government included copies of the scrolls *Koshibagaki zōshi* 小柴垣草子 and *Fukuro hōshi ekotoba* 袋法師絵詞.⁵ In the case of the *Koshibagaki zōshi* scroll, a copy with text by Horikawa Michitomo 堀川通具 (Horikawa *dainagon* 堀川大納言 1171–1227) was delivered to the bakufu in 1849 but was later lost in a fire in 1860. Another copy of the same handscroll appears to have been still in existence in 1884, even though Kurokawa himself mentioned the possibility that it may have been destroyed in a fire. The *Fukuro hōshi ekotoba* was apparently painted by Hida no kami Korehisa 飛騨守惟久 and allegedly lost in a fire after being copied by Sumiyoshi Gukei 住吉具慶 (1631–1705). In any case, evidence that members of the court, the samurai class, and other segments of society acquired similar works is proven by the presence of other old handscroll copies in the collections of the Kyoto courtier, Hashimoto Tsuneakira 橋本経亮 (1755–1805), the poet, writer, and shogunal retainer Ōta Nanpo 大田南畝 (1749–1823), and the viscount and statesman of the Meiji period Fukuoka Takachika 福岡孝弟 (1835–1919).⁶ Fortunately, not all the erotic works in the Tokugawa collection were lost: some were sold, while others ended up in private hands. This would appear to be the case, for example, with the most outstanding known erotic painting by Katsukawa Shunshō 勝川春章 (1726–1793), entitled *Shungū higi zukan* 春宮秘戯図巻 (Secret Games in the Spring Palace). *Shungū higi* is a superb handscroll comprising twelve scenes, accompanied by a preface by the poet Baba Zongi 馬場存義 (1703–1782). According to the commentary of Togari Soshin'an 外狩素心庵 in 1933, Baba Zongi asked Shunshō to create this work at the behest of the Tokugawa family in Kii province. Years later and for unknown reasons, the painting passed into the hands of the Higuchi 樋口 family of Osaka. Later still, in the first third of the twentieth century, the collector Nakano Chūtarō 中野忠太郎 of Niigata acquired the piece.⁷

In any case, the only *shunga* collection of the three Tokugawa families (*go sanke* 御三家) currently known to be extant is that of the Mito branch. Thus, although more *shunga* may appear in the future, none have yet been made public apart from those described in this study. The value of the Mito collection is not least in it being the rarest of sources for studying and assessing the Tokugawa's interest in *shunga*.

5 Yano 2013, p. 64; Kurokawa 1910, vol. 1, pp. 171–72; and vol. 2, pp. 199–200.

6 Hayakawa 2013, p. 45; and Kurokawa 1910, vol. 1, p. 172.

7 The work was commented on for the first time in June 1932 by Shibui Kiyoshi in the magazine *Ukiyo-e geijutsu* 浮世絵藝術, by which time the first scene in the scroll had been removed and converted into a hanging scroll. It is thought that this work later formed part of the collection built up by the businessman Nagata Masaichi 永田雅一 (1906–1985). Today, three scenes are conserved as hanging scrolls in the collections of the Ōta Memorial Museum of Art, the John C. Weber Collection, and a private collection, respectively. The other nine, in the original handscroll format, were auctioned at Christie's in New York on 17 March 2009. For more details, see the reproduction and complete study of the whole work published by Naitō and Kobayashi (2003).

The six pieces discovered may be described as follows:

1. Two *saya-e* 鞘絵. Box entitled *Gankyō utsushi higi zu* 丸鏡移秘戯図. Mid-eighteenth century. One signed by Morita Kōun 森田高運. Owned by Tokugawa Munemoto 徳川宗翰 (1728–1766).
2. Handscroll by Kanō Eisen'in Michinobu 狩野栄川院典信 (1730–1790), copy of an original painting by Kanō Motonobu 狩野元信 (1476–1559). Box entitled *Higa* 秘画. Second half of the eighteenth century. Probably owned by Tokugawa Harumori 徳川治保 (1751–1805).
3. Chinese album of erotic paintings. Box entitled *Higi zu* 秘戯図. Late-seventeenth century to first half of the eighteenth century. Owned by Tokugawa Harumori.
4. Erotic printed album by Ike no Taiga 池大雅 (1723–1776). Box entitled *Taigadō hitsu shunga* 大雅堂筆春画. Early-nineteenth century (1814). Owned by Tokugawa Narinobu 徳川斉脩 (1797–1829).
5. Set of sex toys. Box entitled *Kasugasaki* 春日咲. First half of the nineteenth century. Owned by Tokugawa Nariaki 徳川斉昭 (1800–1860).
6. French lithograph and Japanese woodblock printed wrapper for a woodblock illustrated erotic book. Box entitled *Kōmō dōban shunga* 紅毛銅板春画. First half of the nineteenth century.

All these works were kept together in six different boxes, one each for the items listed here. The wooden boxes are labelled with titles and brief descriptions, providing evidence of provenance at the latest to the fifth daimyo of Mito, Tokugawa Munemoto in the mid-eighteenth century, and to the sixth and eighth daimyos of Mito, Tokugawa Harumori and Tokugawa Narinobu. The collection was finally catalogued probably in the Tenpō era 天保 (1830–1844) by Tokugawa Nariaki, ninth daimyo of the Mito domain and the father of the last shogun of Japan, Tokugawa Yoshinobu 徳川慶喜 (1837–1913).

No. 1: Two *saya-e* (scabbard pictures)

Among the most unusual items in this collection are two *saya-e* handscrolls conserved together in a single case entitled *higi zu* (literally “playful secret pictures”) and accompanied by the cylindrical mirror (17 x 5 cm) that is needed to view correctly the reflection of the distorted images (catoptric anamorphosis).⁸ *Saya-e* (also known as *kyōchū zu* 鏡中図 or “scabbard pictures”) were a new type of pictorial representation that first appeared in Japan in the eighteenth century as a consequence of the interest in acquiring new knowledge about optics and perspective that were being introduced from the West.

The first scroll, entitled *Shichifukujin* 七福神, consists of eight scenes and a final composition that includes the title and the name of the artist, Morita Kōun (dates unknown). The first scene features Hotei 布袋, and is followed, consecutively, by Fukurokuju 福祿寿, Bishamonten 毘沙門天, Daikokuten 大黒天, Ebisu えびす (Figure 1),

⁸ The several titles on the wooden boxes in which the Mito Tokugawa *shunga* collection is preserved offer interesting terminological diversity. The box containing the two *saya-e* includes the inscription *higi zu* written by Tokugawa Nariaki, perhaps as a reference to the literary term for erotic paintings used in China, *mixi tú*. Indeed, the twelve explicit sexual images of the scroll are clearly inspired by Chinese models (Dalin 2002, p. 599).



Figure 1. Morita Kōun. *Shichifukujin. Saya-e* handscroll (section, Ebisu). Mid-eighteenth century. Painting on paper. 40.5 x 1105.8 cm (full size). Mito Tokugawa private collection.



Figure 2. *Saya-e* erotic handscroll (section). Mid-eighteenth century. Painting on paper. 37 x 1127.7 cm (full size). Mito Tokugawa private collection.

Jurōjin 寿老人, Benzaiten 弁才天, an image of a mythical palace called Hōraigū 宝来宮 and, finally, there is the title, the signature of Morita Kōun, and the expression *kawarrie* (カハリエ, lit. “strange image”), written according to the same optical laws as the other scenes. The second scroll however, is untitled and not signed, perhaps because of its sexual content (Figure 2). Nonetheless, since the two were kept together and share very similar characteristics, style, size, and state of conservation, this second scroll can be attributed to the same artist.

Few examples of *saya-e* paintings and prints are known today in Japan, and this may be one of the reasons why, despite their popularity during the Edo period, the history of Japanese art has generally ignored the genre.⁹ Among the works known, one of the most outstanding examples is a hand-colored woodblock printed work entitled *Kyōchū zu*, with seven *saya-e* scenes drawn by the Kanō artists Ōneisai 桜寧斎 (Nagoya TV collection) and dated back to the mid-eighteenth century. However, several other interesting examples, some of them with erotic content, are also known. These include the *egoyomi* 絵暦 (picture calendar) signed and dated by Shiba Kōkan 司馬江漢 (1747–1818) in 1783 (National Diet Library, *Tenmei egoyomi* 天明絵暦), an anonymous portrait of a Dutch woman from the early-nineteenth century (Kobe City Museum), and a print entitled *Fūryū saya-e* 風流さや絵 by Utagawa Yoshitora 歌川芳虎 (1848–1854).

The practice of observing images using optical devices such as perspective boxes (based on the use of linear perspective, *trompe l'oeil*, and anamorphosis) was documented from the time of shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu 徳川家光 (1604–1651) after 1647, while, in the more specific case of *saya-e* paintings, these became popular in Japan during the eighteenth century thanks to imports from Europe, and also in China, through Nagasaki, probably beginning in the 1720s.¹⁰ In Europe, anamorphosis was applied, not only in paintings but also, particularly, in the field of printed tradition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the same time, in the early-seventeenth century, catoptric anamorphosis was introduced

⁹ Sakakibara 2003, pp. 125–33; Salter 2006, pp. 87–91; and Inagaki 2013, pp. 55–59, 154.

¹⁰ Screech 2014, p. 16.



Figure 3. *Saya-e* erotic handscroll (section). Mid-eighteenth century. Painting on paper. 37 x 1127.7 cm (full size). Mito Tokugawa private collection.



Figure 4. *Saya-e* erotic handscroll (section). Mid-eighteenth century. Painting on paper. Private collection.

into China by the Jesuits and later was transferred to Japan, probably by both the Dutch and the Chinese. In this context, we can assume that the specific case of the erotic handscroll in the Tokugawa collection was painted in Japan during the mid-eighteenth century based probably on Chinese models.¹¹

The two Mito *saya-e* handscrolls can be dated to around the 1750s. The note written by Tokugawa Nariaki on the lid of the box, stating that the works belonged to Tokugawa Munemoto (*Ryōkō sama* 良公様), suggests that they pre-date the daimyo's premature death in 1766. This would also coincide with the early period of Western studies (*rangaku* 蘭学, literally "Dutch learning"), and the growing fascination with optical effects as applied in art. Further evidence for this dating is the fact that one of the images in the *saya-e* by Ōneisai, dated between 1748 and 1751, can be clearly linked, in terms of both composition and style, to the eighth scene (Figure 3) in the Mito erotic handscroll. However, it is even more striking to see how not only this eighth scene but almost all the Mito's erotic *saya-e* appear minutely copied in another handscroll, with neither signature nor date, now kept in private hands (Figure 4).¹² Dating these works around the mid-eighteenth century would also place them in the period when *saya-e* were most popular in Japan, thereby linking them to commentaries like the one in *Bukō nenpyō* 武江年表 (c. 1789–1801), with its reference to the "games" that this genre of paintings encouraged (*saya-e no tawamure okonawaru* 鞘絵の戯れ行はる).¹³

11 Since we have no examples of Chinese erotic paintings or prints where a woman has uncovered feet, the eighth scene in the Chinese style *saya-e* erotic handscroll helps us to confirm that the painting was indeed produced in eighteenth-century Japan. On the other hand, we should remember that most examples of *saya-e* erotic painting are documented precisely in China during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See some similar Chinese examples in Cheng 1963, pp. 36, 156–59; and Beurdeley 1969, pp. 124 and 131.

12 This second *saya-e shunga* handscroll contains seven scenes, all of them included in the Mito handscroll, which comprises eleven scenes. For this reference, I would like to express my gratitude to Ishigami Aki.

13 Sakakibara 2003, p. 129.

No. 2: Erotic Handscroll by Kanō Eisen'in

Among the erotic artworks in the Mito collection, the most important in artistic terms is the large handscroll signed and sealed by Kanō Eisen'in (Michinobu), painted probably just a few years after the completion of the two *saya-e*. However, while the two *saya-e* are interesting as reflections of artistic and cultural interests at a particular historical moment marked by the first studies of the West, this handscroll sits within a very different context.

Shunga produced in the Edo period tended to repeat a standard format of twelve scenes, featuring a range of different bodily positions, but in this case the handscroll is especially long and includes a total of twenty scenes from the sex lives of the samurai and court classes. Unconnected to each other, the scenes present a rich and diverse repertoire that is representative of the erotic painting of the Japanese upper classes in the sixteenth century. As is usual in erotic paintings from the Muromachi 室町 (1392–1573), Momoyama 桃山 (1573–1600), and early-Edo periods, nineteen of the twenty scenes are without descriptive backgrounds, landscapes, or interiors. The exuberant, colorful, and detailed decoration on the kimonos and the expressions and the sensuality of the faces and the positions of the bodies and the hair combine to make this scroll a work of high artistic value.

It is relatively rare to find the signature and seal of the artists of erotic paintings from the Edo period. In this case Kanō Eisen'in's signature (*Kohōgen zu chūmukyō Hōgen Eisen Fujiwara Michinobu kore o utsusu* 古法眼図中務郷法眼栄川藤原典信寫之) is important because it informs us that the artist had copied an older work, an original sixteenth-century scroll by Kanō Motonobu (identified by the honorific sobriquet *Kohōgen* 古法眼, literally “Old dharmic eye”). In addition to the signature, there are two seals, a circular red seal (*shubun en'in* 朱文円印) and a rectangular seal (*hakubun hōin* 白文方印) with the pseudonym Hakugyokusai 白玉齋.¹⁴ It is, therefore, an important work not only for its size and artistic quality, but also because its signature informs us that this was a copy of a work by one of the most outstanding artists from the early period of the Kanō school (Figure 5).

It seems certain that the original handscroll painted by Motonobu was a truly valued piece among Kanō artists; this would explain why it was meticulously copied on several occasions by painters from that school. At least, this is what we may deduce from the fact that several different copies have survived, one of them signed by Kanō Tōun Masunobu 狩野洞雲益信 (1625–1694) and another by Kanō Eisen'in. In this regard, from 1972 to 1978 Richard Lane published several fragments from a similar handscroll, copied in the sixteenth century by Kanō Tōun (Figure 6).¹⁵ To this should also be added a fragment from another copy, this one anonymous although very similar to Eisen'in's, conserved in the Ofer Shagan collection (Figure 7).¹⁶ Moreover, in addition to the scroll owned by the Tokugawa (Figure 8), there is another complete copy meticulously painted by another Kanō artist during the Edo period, preserved in the Tokyo National Museum and reproduced here also for the first

14 Besides the artist's seal and signature, the box in which it is conserved also bears an inscription by Tokugawa Nariaki headed by the word *higa*, that is to say, “secret images.” The note indicates that the scroll should be opened annually in order to prevent damp and infestation by insects. The scroll has been recently presented in the Eisei Bunko *shunga* exhibition (2015).

15 Two fragments of the scroll, which has eleven erotic scenes, were published in the journal *Kikan ukiyo-e* in 1972 (no. 52, p. 15), 1975 (no. 60, pp. 15–18) and 1978 (no. 72, p. 32). See also the complete series in Lane 1979, scroll XII.

16 The extant fragment of this handscroll in the Shagan collection is formed by the first and the thirteenth scenes of the painting copied by Eisen'in (Shagan 2013, p. 73).



Figure 5. Erotic handscroll by Kanō Motonobu copied by Kanō Eisen'in (section). Second half of the eighteenth century. Painting on paper. 36 x 1893.4 cm (full size). Mito Tokugawa private collection.

time (Figure 9).¹⁷ Bearing in mind that both the painting by Eisen'in kept by the Tokugawa and the copy in the National Museum are complete and almost identical, each accompanied by a note specifying that they are copies of a handscroll by Kanō Motonobu (*Kohōgen*), we can deduce that they are two faithful renderings of Motonobu's original *shunga* work. The incomplete handscroll copied by Tōun features eleven scenes. Four are identical to those that appear in the two complete copies, while the other seven are quite different. That Kanō Tōun's copy differs somewhat from the one in the Tokyo National Museum and the one from the Kanō Eisen'in in the possession of the Tokugawa should not surprise us, given the artistic practice of the time particularly as regards the production of erotic scrolls. In fact, following what was common practice in the early-Edo period, Kanō Tōun took inspiration from Motonobu's work in order to produce a different scroll, probably using one or more additional sources. Just as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century erotic handscrolls regularly depicted figures in scenes and positions that were already known, with minor changes based on a preestablished iconographic tradition, so the erotic scenes copied by Eisen'in based on Motonobu's original can be found repeated in similar ways in other paintings that can be

¹⁷ I would like to thank for his assistance Tim Clark of the British Museum. I am grateful too to Tazawa Hiroyoshi of Tokyo National Museum for permitting me to introduce and reproduce here for the first time one of the valuable *shunga* handscrolls kept at the Tokyo National Museum. The copy kept at the National Museum has the same number of scenes as the Tokugawa one, but the final size is slightly shorter since each scene occupies a shorter sheet of paper. On the other hand, the significant difference is, in some places, the color of the bodies' skin (a fleshy color in the National Museum's copy and a slightly pink and whiter color in some places of the Tokugawa's copy, with chromatic nuances to express corporal volume). Although the scroll kept at the National Museum has never been exhibited or reproduced till now, it was mentioned in 1979 by Richard Lane (Lane 1979, p. 69).



Figure 6. Erotic handscroll by Kanō Motonobu copied during the Edo period by Kanō Tōun (detail). Painting on paper. Private collection. Reproduced from Lane 1979.



Figure 7. Erotic handscroll by Kanō Motonobu copied during the Edo period by an unknown Kanō artist (detail). Painting on paper. 34.3 x 96.6 cm. Shagan collection, Tokyo.



Figure 8. Erotic handscroll by Kanō Motonobu copied during the second half of the eighteenth century by Kanō Eisen'in (detail). Painting on paper. 36 x 1893.4 cm. Mito Tokugawa private collection.



Figure 9. Erotic handscroll by Kanō Motonobu copied during the Edo period by an unknown Kanō artist (detail). Painting on paper. Tokyo National Museum.

stylistically dated to the Momoyama period and the first half of the Edo period.¹⁸ In short, all these copies demonstrate the continued existence of a tradition that, in the case of the Kanō school, remained unchanged until at least the late-eighteenth century.

There is no doubt that the artists of the Kanō school produced magnificent paintings on sexual themes. These include the scroll acquired by the British Museum in 2012 which, for its artistic quality, can be attributed to a painter of the caliber of Kanō Eitoku 狩野永徳 (1543–1590) or his students, and the scroll entitled *Tenki ryōran* 天癸両濫 (1814), signed and sealed by the renowned artist Kanō Akinobu 狩野章信 (1765–1826), now in the Hakutakuan collection.¹⁹ Evidence that erotic art formed part of the repertoire of the school is found in the well-known painting manual *Gasen* 画筌 (1721), written by the Kanō artist Hayashi Moriatsu 林守篤 in 1712 (Moriatsu was active in the early-eighteenth century).²⁰ *Gasen* was written to teach the painting techniques of the Kanō school and included—prior to the censored Meiji period edition—a chapter devoted specifically to representations of the body and erotic images (*makura-e*). Indeed, Box 6 of the Mito collection, discussed below, includes a document referring to a *shunga* painting by Kanō Tan'yū 狩野探幽 (1602–1674) and demonstrates that the Tokugawa family owned at least one of his works in the genre.

From the 1760s, after becoming the sixth generation head of the Kobikichō 木挽町 branch of the Kanō school, Kanō Eisen'in continued this same tradition.²¹ Kanō artists were official shogunal and daimyo painters, and Eisen'in's talent and ambition gained him the support and trust of the shogun Tokugawa Ieharu (1737–1786), to whom he had direct access. This leads us to suggest that the Mito Tokugawa handscroll was painted between the Meiwa 明和 and An'ei 安永 (1764–1781) eras, perhaps for the wedding of Tokugawa Harumori, in 1769. The painting is mounted on a magnificent golden scroll that recalls the previously cited observation by Mitamura Engyo on the common use of such luxurious pieces on the occasion of the marriage of members of daimyo families.²²

No. 3: Chinese Erotic Album

Known posthumously as *Bunkō sama* 文公様 due to his great knowledge and wisdom, Tokugawa Harumori was a lover of art, literature, and history.²³ In those days, Mito was a leading center for Confucian studies, and this interest led Tokugawa Harumori to purchase

18 For example, some of the scenes in Eisen'in's (and Motonobu's original) paintings appear, with few variations, in scrolls VII, VIII, IX, XII, XIX, XXVIII, XXXVI, XXXVII, XLII, and XLIII, catalogued by Richard Lane. Lane 1979.

19 Clark, Gerstle, Ishigami, and Yano 2013, pp. 82–83. Miyake 2015b, pp. 228–31.

20 Hayakawa 2013, p. 43. As a painter, Hayashi Moriatsu was a pupil of Ogata Yūgen (?–1732) who was in turn a pupil of Kanō Tan'yū, a contemporary of Kanō Tōun. Tan'yū was head of the Edo branch of the Kanō school in the service of the shogun, a post that Kanō Eisen'in would occupy a century later.

21 This same tradition, firmly established among the artists of the Kanō school and in the shogunate itself, was later continued by such followers of Eisen'in as Hosoda Eishi 細田榮之 (1756–1829), who produced other outstanding erotic paintings around the 1780s for the Tokugawa house itself. Hosoda Eishi and other eighteenth-century artists received training from masters of the Kanō school before producing paintings on erotic themes.

22 Another extant work that recalls the comment by Engyo is the handscroll painted in the sixteenth century by Tosa Mitsunori 土佐光則 (1583–1638), now in the Shagan collection. Although it cannot be proved, it was said to belong to a daimyo family from Kyūshū (Shagan 2013, pp. 33 and 432).

23 He continued the great historiographic project known as *Dai Nihon shi*, which Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628–1701) had conceived and begun with a view to compiling the history of Japan from its legendary beginnings until the year 1392.



Figure 10. Chinese erotic album. Late-seventeenth century–first half of the eighteenth century. Painting on silk. 25.6 x 22 x 0.8 cm. Mito Tokugawa private collection.

books and works of Chinese art. Among these is an erotic album of paintings on silk (Figure 10) kept together with a note by Tokugawa Nariaki stating the provenance to the daimyo Tokugawa Harumori (*Bunkō sama o shina no yoshi* 文公様お品のよし). With a history going back more than two thousand years, Chinese erotic art (*chūnhuà* 春画) was well-known in Japan, where it had circulated in the form of sex manuals, medical texts, and illustrated handscrolls since the Nara 奈良 and Heian 平安 (710–1185) periods. The impact of these works on Japanese art is evident during the Edo period, which coincides with the late-Ming 明朝 (1368–1644) and early-Qing 清朝 (1644–1912) periods.²⁴

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, trade with China was not as restricted as was the case with the Dutch ships of the VOC (Dutch East India Company). Indeed, this period saw an increase in the arrival of Chinese books and albums destined both for the Tokugawa family and other daimyo such as Maeda Tsunanori 前田綱紀 (1643–1724), Mōri Takasue 毛利高標 (1755–1801), and Ichihashi Nagaaki 市橋長昭 (1773–1814), as well as to non-samurai. This was due to the existence of merchants specializing in imported books from the continent (*tōhon-ya* 唐本屋).²⁵ Chinese *chūnhuà*, namely painted and printed erotic works from the late-Ming and early-Qing periods, also reached Japanese literati at this time. The former collection of the scholar Shibui Kiyoshi 渋井清 (1899–1992) included a copy of the Chinese book of *Fēngliú juéchàng tú* 風流絕暢 (1606), adapted in Japan by Hishikawa Moronobu 菱川師宣 in the mid-1680s as *Fūryū zetchō zu*, and once owned by the sinologue Kimura Kenkadō 木村兼葭堂 (1736–1802), and a copy of the *Huā yíng jīn zhèn* 花營錦陣 (first half of the seventeenth century), mounted as a handscroll with an anonymous handwritten colophon in Japanese dated 1763.²⁶

As in the case of the previously discussed *saya-e*, the Chinese erotic album painted on silk in the Mito Tokugawa collection provides further evidence of the link between

²⁴ Ishigami 2015, pp. 29–89.

²⁵ Marquet 2007, p. 92.

²⁶ Many of the Chinese works are now in the Muban Foundation collection (London). Van Gulik 2004, p. 181; and Edgren 2009, p. 34.

Chinese and Japanese erotic art and the interest expressed by Japanese artists and collectors during the *sakoku* 鎖国 period. The work may have been originally joined, forming a single handscroll painted on silk, and later cut up and converted into a folding album (*orihon* 折本).²⁷ The work is preserved in a wooden box, which includes, as in the case of the *saya-e* handscrolls, the Chinese expression “playful secret pictures.” Indeed, the twelve erotic scenes, divided by vertical black ink lines, demonstrate that the author was familiar with the paintings and prints produced during the late-Ming and early-Qing periods. Although the anonymous painter was not especially skilled, each scene depicts a different sexual encounter, with no apparent relation to any other, emphasizing the original positions for intercourse of nude figures in different settings, most of them located outdoors, swaying on a swing, or hanging onto stalks of bamboo, for example.²⁸ If we also take into consideration that it was acquired most likely by Tokugawa Harumori, the painting could be tentatively dated to the first half of the eighteenth century.

No. 4: Erotic Printed Album by Ike no Taiga

Besides the Tosa and Kanō school painters in the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, and of course ukiyo-e artists in the Edo period, other schools including the *nanga* 南画 artists also produced erotic paintings.²⁹ In fact, erotic art was not only an occasional presence among *nanga* artists, but was also found in literary circles of Confucian scholars and collectors close to the Tokugawa shogunate, such as Sawada Tōyō 澤田東洋 (1804–1847), Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728), Ōta Nanpo, and Yanagisawa Kien 柳澤淇園 (1704–1758). The library of Ōta Nanpo, for example, included a number of erotic paintings and books, both Japanese and Chinese.³⁰

An outstanding *nanga* artist example is a work by Ike no Taiga that is known thanks to several copies and versions. In the 1970s, Ujiie Fuyumi 氏家冬深 published various versions, both painted and printed, of an erotic handscroll allegedly painted by Ike no Taiga entitled *Haru tsurezure* 春徒然 (Figure 11) featuring scenes very similar to those in the book in the Tokugawa collection (Figure 12), though smaller in size (*mamebon* 豆本, literally “bean-sized book”).³¹ According to Ujiie Fuyumi, *Haru tsurezure* was an original work by Taiga, dated, in terms of style, to the 1770s. In 1858, the *nanga* artist Fukuda Hankō 福田半香 (1804–1864) took this work as his inspiration for *Dōbō shun-i* 同房春意, printed in 1866–1867. Several other versions entitled *Daitō keigo* 大東閨語 appeared during the bakumatsu and Meiji periods, such as a painting by Murase Taiitsu 村瀬太乙 (1803–1881) dated to 1867.³²

27 Chinese erotic paintings in this period were mounted either as horizontal handscrolls or folding albums of about 20–25 cm high. It was during the late-Ming period that erotic paintings moved from the handscroll form to a preference for the album format.

28 Several scenes resemble other painted and printed erotic works from the late-Ming period. For an introduction to Chinese erotic art, see the James Cahill (1926–2014) book, *Chinese Erotic Painting*, published online at <http://www.jamescahill.info/illustrated-writings/chinese-erotic-painting> (Accessed 10 August 2015).

29 Examples include Aoki Mokubei 青木木米 (1767–1833), Fukuda Hankō, and Tanomura Chokunyū 田能村直入 (1814–1907) (Lane 1998, pp. 89–90; and Ujiie 1978a, p. 36).

30 Among the Chinese erotic works in the Ōta Nanpo collection, there were Tang dynasty paintings and the erotic book *Fēngliú juéchàng tú* (Jp. *Fūryū zetchō zu*, 1606). Ōta Nanpo is thought to have collaborated on at least three erotic works: *Omeshi narumi zome* 御召名留美楚女 (c. 1821) and *Haru no usuyuki* 春野薄雪 (1822), by Keisai Eisen, and the two volumes of *Higo zuiki* 娼婦嬌嬰 (c. 1822) (Hayakawa 2013, p. 45).

31 Ujiie 1978a.

32 Ujiie 1978b and Ukishima 1980.



Figure 11. Ike no Taiga, *Haru tsurezure*, c. 1770. Private collection. Reproduced from Ujiie 1978a.



Figure 12. Erotic scene reproducing an original painting by Ike no Taiga. 1814. Color woodblock printed book. 15.8 x 10.6 x 0.7 cm. Mito Tokugawa private collection.

The oldest datable version of the *Haru tsurezure* is in the hands of the Mito Tokugawa family, and includes an important preface. The work is a small *orihon* edition of which only two copies are known to us today, and which contains nine double page woodblock printed illustrations based on a painting by Ike no Taiga.³³ The edition includes a preface dated 1814 (*kinoe inu* 甲戌) and signed by one Shimotsuke Ayaru 下野あやる (unidentified). According to this note, the erotic scenes reproduced in the album were copied from an original painting by Ike no Taiga found in the secret collection of a noble house. We do not know, however, whether or not this mention of a “noble house” (*kōki no ie* 高貴の家) refers to a member of the Tokugawa family circle (perhaps someone from Shimotsuke province?). In any case, shortly after its publication in 1814, this work was acquired by the daimyo Tokugawa Narinobu and, later, was kept in a wooden box with a note by Tokugawa Nariaki identifying it as a *shunga* by Ike no Taiga.

The fact that the Mito branch of the Tokugawa family should possess this work is significant because, as we should remember, although erotic painting was never banned, printed books on such themes were censored from the eighteenth century in accordance with reforms implemented during the Kyōhō 享保 (1722) and Kansei 寛政 (1790–1800) eras. The Tokugawa’s possession of this work may be explained by the fact that the book, unlike most *shunpon* that were produced *en masse* during the Edo period, was the printed version of a painting by a prestigious *nanga* artist. The book features sketches of figures brought to life by forceful brushstrokes, and is a significant addition to the oeuvre of Ike no Taiga.

No. 5: Set of Sex Toys

The fifth box in the Tokugawa *shunga* collection, composed of a set of sex toys (Figure 13), is important for two reasons: it is dated, and it adds a sociological interpretation to the collection as a whole. As with the other works, the collection of sex toys is contained in a wooden box dated Tenpō 12 (1841). Inside the first box is a second, smaller case labelled

33 Hillier found another identical copy in the Biedermann Collection. This copy was recently sold in London by the art dealer Richard Kruml (Hillier 1987, vol. 2, pp. 908–909).



Figure 13. Artificial vagina *azumagata*, also known as *gyokumongata*, included in the set of sex toys. First half of the nineteenth century. Mito Tokugawa private collection.

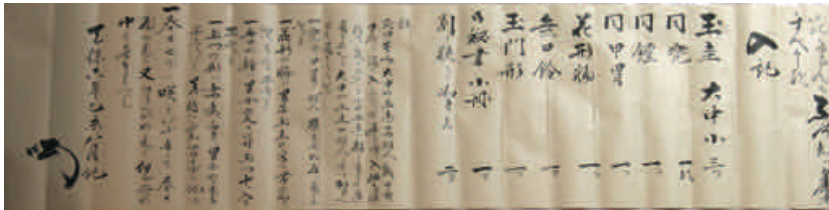


Figure 14. Commentaries on the dildos written by Tokugawa Nariaki in 1835 (section). Mito Tokugawa private collection.

kasugasaki 春日咲 with a set of several dildos (*harigata* 張形) divided into six groups. This collection was accompanied by a long, detailed note signed by Tokugawa Nariaki in the eighth month of Tenpō 6 (1835). In it, the daimyo of Mito provided a description of the characteristics and use of the various pieces (Figure 14).³⁴

The collection, which is now incomplete, is formed today of three accessories for the penis (*goroigata* 鎧形, *kabutogata* 兜形, and *katchūgata* 甲冑形), a ball for vaginal use (*rin no tama* 淋の玉, though Nariaki calls it *mukuchi suzu* 無口鈴), three dildos (which Nariaki names collectively as *gyokkei dai chū shō* 玉圭大中小), a *gyokumongata* 玉門形 artificial vagina (popularly known as an *azumagata* 吾妻形), and a metal surgical tong. The collection

³⁴ The use of these accessories was described and presented in many erotic books from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this sense, the commentaries written by Tokugawa Nariaki coincide with the descriptions habitually provided for *enpon* in the Edo period. For instance, Nariaki noted that the *kabuto* 兜 and the *katchū* 甲冑 were used as sheaths to prevent pregnancy, whilst the *harigata* could be used with the hands, or tied by rope to the waist or legs. Although they were generally known as *warai dōgu* 笑道具 (laughter devices), Nariaki refers to them with the term *kasugasaki*.

is incomplete as, according to the written description, it also originally included a circular piece for the penis known as a *hanagata no rin* 花形の輪, a small written volume referred to as a *gobisho kosatsu* 御秘書古冊 and, finally, a second tong similar to the one conserved and described as *hasami no gotoki mono* 挟ミノ如き者.³⁵ Apart from the ball and the metal tong, the artificial vagina, and the smaller dildo, which was carved in ebony wood, the rest of the instruments were made from tortoiseshell, a luxury material that made these pieces relatively expensive.

This set of accessories to assist the sexual pleasure of both women and men takes on a fuller significance when related to the works catalogued by Tokugawa Nariaki and kept together. It is probable that scrolls like the original of Kanō Eisen'in's copy were commissioned for specific purposes. This may have been, for example, the occasion of a wedding in the family, to instruct a new bride, or to provide practical advice to improve the couple's sex life, whether for reasons of affection or to ensure the continuation of the lineage, essential for the Tokugawa. To such ends, these collections may have been purchased or given as gifts along with enjoyable and instructive illustrated manuals on sexual practices, as Tokugawa Nariaki noted when the series of objects was placed in its final case in 1835.

No. 6: French Lithograph and Japanese Protective Woodblock Printed Wrapper

The last erotic work extant in the Tokugawa collection is not only the most modern, but is probably the most surprising of all: a woodblock printed *shunga* wrapper (*fukuro-e* 袋絵) kept together with an erotic European print.

Written on the outside of the wooden box in which the works are kept are the words *Kômō dōban shunga* 紅毛銅板春画 (Spring pictures. Red-Haired [Western] copper plate prints). Although this makes it clear that the box once contained prints from Europe, on opening the box the first item to emerge was a single, separate sheet, probably placed here at a later date. This handwritten note (Figure 15) refers to a *shunga* work owned by Tokugawa Narinobu found at the bottom of a chest of drawers in the women's inner quarters [of Mito castle?] and which was to be kept with a *shunga* by Kanō Tan'yū (*Aikō o-shina nari. Tan'yū shunga tō to ichidō ni sashioki mōsubeki koto. Oku o-tansu yori ide sōrō* 哀公御品也。探幽春画等と一同ニ指置可申事。奥御簞笥ヨリ出候). Just as the word *Aikō* 哀公 was used as the posthumous name of Tokugawa Narinobu, so the creases on the paper coincide with the size of the erotic book by Ike no Taiga that also included, on the cover, a reference to Aikō. This suggests that the note was written by Tokugawa Nariaki in order to confirm that the book by Ike no Taiga was, in fact, a work owned by Tokugawa Narinobu found in a *tansu* in the inner quarters. Nariaki also noted that the book by Ike no Taiga should be kept together with another *shunga* by Kanō Tan'yū, which unfortunately appears to have been lost. The original painting by Kanō Tan'yū, a work of great value, may have been lost in the time of Tokugawa Nariaki, since it was Nariaki who, at some later date that we cannot ascertain precisely, separated the book by Ike no Taiga from the *shunga* by Kanō Tan'yū, previously kept together, and placed it in the small wooden box where it is conserved today.

35 This clamp would not have formed part of the original *barigata* collection, but of a set of instruments used in abortions. Several surgical kits containing similar tongs are conserved from the mid and late Edo period. They belonged to figures such as Kagawa Genetsu 賀川玄悦 (1700–1777) and Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866). For more details, see Yabuuchi and Sōda 1964, p. 34, fig. 19.

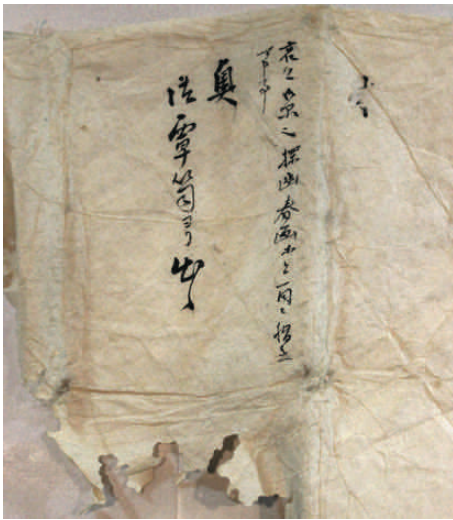


Figure 15. Handwritten note on a *shunga* painted by Kanō Tan'yū and owned by the Mito Tokugawa. First half of the nineteenth century. Mito Tokugawa private collection.

As pointed out earlier, it is not surprising that Kanō Tan'yū—like other leading artists from the Kanō school—should have painted an erotic scroll, particularly since he painted a large number of scrolls for temples, tea houses, and the private residences of merchants and people from the noble classes. However, documentation on this painting provides important information, corroborating the belief that the erotic art collection of the Mito Tokugawa family was larger and more splendid than the works that are conserved today. Furthermore, it also implies that it was not Tokugawa Munemoto who began the collection in the mid-eighteenth century, but rather that the fifth daimyo of Mito continued a family tradition of acquiring erotic paintings that may have gone back to the first half of the seventeenth century, in the time of Kanō Tan'yū and the first Tokugawa daimyos of

Mito, Tokugawa Yorifusa 徳川頼房 (1603–1661), son of Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1543–1616), or Tokugawa Mitsukuni 徳川光圀 (1628–1701).

Besides this sheet with the handwritten note previously mentioned, the final box of *shunga* also contains a woodblock printed sheet, featuring a landscape, to be used as a wrapping or protective cover for an erotic work (Figure 16). The deliberately erotic interpretation of the landscape can be understood by the text to the left of Mount Fuji, which refers metaphorically to a couple making love through the image of two birds. However, although the purpose of the image seems clear, the attribution of this work, which can be dated to the late-Bunsei 文政 or early-Tenpō eras (c. 1830s), is uncertain. The signature (not identified) is accompanied by the seal *Bobosuki* 開好, frequently used by the artist Koikawa Shōzan 恋川笑山 (1821–1907), although both the style and the dating seem to coincide with designs from the earlier Bunsei and Tenpō eras, and with the work of Keisai Eisen 溪斎英泉 (1790–1848) more than with that of Shōzan.³⁶ On the other hand, the title, *Shunkeichō* 春閨帖 (Spring boudoir album), which sits at the center of the composition, provides the key to the erotic interpretation of the print. Shibui Kiyoshi and Hayashi Yoshikazu 林慶和 (1922–1999) documented the existence of a *kappazuri* 合羽摺 (Kamigata stencil print technique) erotic book attributed to the artist Yamaguchi Shigeharu 山口重春 (1803–1853) and entitled *Shunkeichō*.³⁷ This reference leads to the hypothesis that, at some

36 See similar examples in Ozaki 1967, pp. 79 (fig. 25) and 82; and Tokushi 1922, fig. 2.

37 This was a book in the *ōbon* 大本 format, printed in Osaka with an introduction and ten double-page illustrations. It has not been possible to find this work, and only five illustrations from it are known. Shibui Kiyoshi's manuscript documentation is conserved at the Keio University Art Center, and can be viewed online at <http://www.art-c.keio.ac.jp>.



Figure 16. *Shunkeichō* wrapper. c. 1820–1830. Colour woodblock print. 25.5 x 40.5 cm. Mito Tokugawa private collection.

point, the Tokugawa family turned the *fukuro-e* cover from the erotic book *Shunkeichō* attributed to Yamaguchi Shigeharu into the cover for a French erotic print.³⁸

Under the protective paper wrapper is a second wrapper without any design but with the inscription *kōmō dōban-e* 紅毛銅板絵. This wrapper is now used to protect the single colored erotic lithograph entitled *L'odorat*, a print that belongs to an anonymous series entitled *Les 5 Sens*, probably published in Paris around the 1830s (Figure 17).

This colored lithograph formed part of a series of five on the theme of the senses: touch (*le toucher*), sight (*la vue*), taste (*le goût*), hearing (*l'ouïe*), and smell (*l'odorat*). This was a popular theme in European art in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and many masterpieces on the subject have been produced since the fifteenth century. From the sixteenth century on, allegorical representation of the five senses began to be personified in the shape of half-naked women or children, often in images that transmitted sensuality, while in the nineteenth century more clearly erotic versions were produced, including the work acquired by the Tokugawa family that represents the sense of smell.

The sense of smell also began to be represented in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, symbolized by a female character, generally half-naked, smelling a basket or cornucopia of flowers. From the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth, another scene was typically added, one in which the woman offered a rose to her beloved, and sometimes the couple appeared accompanied by one or more small cherubs. The Tokugawa print, *L'odorat*, represents an evolution in the iconography used to create this allegory, in which the sensual and erotic aspects are embodied in a gallant French scene of a couple lying on a sofa. The woman, half-naked, offers a rose from a bouquet of flowers for the man to smell its fragrance. Although this is not an explicit representation of sex, the erotic element

³⁸ Both the wrapper and the French print show some insect holes, which demonstrate that in the past the first was used to protect the Western erotic work.



Figure 17. *L'odorat*, color lithography from a set of five prints entitled *Les 5 Sens*, c. 1830. 27 x 18 cm. Mito Tokugawa private collection.

is obvious as the woman is depicted without undergarments, leaning over the man, who grips her thigh in a clear gesture of desire.

How did this work make its way into the hands of the Tokugawa family? It most likely was acquired through Dejima. There is no doubt that the members of the *go sanke* had easy access both to *rangaku* learning and, more specifically, to European art, since manufactured goods and artistic products also entered Japan in the form of gifts for the shogun or in response to specific orders from Japanese officials.³⁹ Some of the most well-known examples are the paintings of Willem van Royen (1654–1728), taken to Japan by the Dutch in 1726 at the request of the shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune 徳川吉宗 (1684–1751), and the handscroll entitled *Orandajin sesshō zu* 阿蘭陀人殺生図, featuring prints of hunting scenes from the work *Venationes ferarum, avium, piscium* by Jan van der Straet (Stradanus, 1523–1605), owned by the Owari branch of the Tokugawa family

(Tokugawa Art Museum, Nagoya). Moreover, the Tokugawa had access not only to studies that were published about the West and to Japanese individuals who visited Dejima, but also to the Dutch themselves, as they regularly visited the shogun in Edo. In this sense, both the presence of Dutch books at the Shōkōkan 彰考館 in Mito in the late-eighteenth century, the libraries of the so called *ranpeki daimyō* 蘭癖大名 (lit. Europhile daimyo), or even the existence of erotic illustrations of Voltaire's clandestine and satirical poem *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (1755) in the hands of the daimyo of Hirado, Matsura Kiyoshi 松浦清 (1760–1841), make it clear that feudal lords had access to Western publications and even to printed editions of erotic art that reached the country from Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁰

On the other hand, early Russian and American sources indicate that *shunga* were given as gifts for foreigners by samurai officials.⁴¹ Further, Tokugawa Nariaki, an authoritative presence among the Tokugawa in the 1840s and 1850s, treasured a private library of Western studies indicating other channels of access to European erotic art. These channels may also have included gifts presented privately rather than officially, perhaps

39 Chaiklin 2003, pp. 44–46.

40 Matsuda 1998, pp. 348–49; and Screech 2013, p. 392.

41 In May 1805 Admiral Adam Johann Ritter von Krusenstern (1770–1846) and the Russian ambassador to Japan Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov (1764–1807) received in Matsumae (Hokkaido) several “books full containing obscene paintings” (Breton 1818, vol. 4, p. 11). Later, in May 1854, Commodore Matthew Perry (1794–1858) received “a box of obscene paintings of naked men and women, another proof of the lewdness of this exclusive people” (Preble 1962, p. 123).

in informal exchanges, during contacts between Japanese and Westerners. The statesman and naval engineer Katsu Kaishū 勝海舟 (1823–1899), a key figure in the last days of the Tokugawa, noted how sailors in the first Japanese embassy sent by the bakufu to the United States in 1860 took *shunga* as potential gifts for Americans.⁴² It is clear then that erotic art was well established in the nineteenth century as part of the gift culture between Japanese and non-Japanese. However, few other examples have been found, and research into this aspect of *shunga* is still in its infancy.

Conclusions

The Mito Tokugawa family collection of *shunga* helps confirm that the Japanese ruling classes acquired erotic art over many generations. Indeed, the Mito Tokugawa collection was gradually built up through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries until it was finally catalogued by Tokugawa Nariaki, father of the last shogun. This lends further support to the hypothesis that interest in *shunga* was common to all levels of Edo period society, including the very top of the government. From this standpoint, the collection, which unfortunately has not been conserved complete, provides a resource of incalculable value for documenting the private patronage and collection of erotic art among daimyo families, particularly the Tokugawa family, during the Edo period.

Intimations of the existence of copies of the celebrated *Koshibagaki zōshi* and *Fukuro hōshi ekotoba* handscrolls in the collection of the Tokugawa government, the note regarding the existence of a *shunga* by Kanō Tan'yū and the erotic handscroll by Kanō Motonobu copied by Kanō Eisen'in, who were artists at the highest official levels, as well as the *saya-e* painting, all demonstrate that the Tokugawa possessed an important and very valuable collection of erotic art. In this regard, the works preserved show that the Tokugawa owned types of *shunga* different from those that artists from the ukiyo-e school were producing and were acquired *en masse* by the middle and working classes. This essay offers an alternative to the commonly held view even today that *shunga* were only popular among the commoner classes in the Edo period. This case is therefore a clear example of how, in parallel with the expansion of the ukiyo-e industry in large cities, the aristocracy and the social elite kept alive the demand for erotic art documented as early as the Nara period. Furthermore, studied together, the *shunga* acquired by the Mito branch shows the Tokugawa family's interest not only in the native artistic traditions but also in the foreign, whose artistic forms arrived from beyond the borders of isolation established by Tokugawa Iemitsu.

The Mito Tokugawa collection, whose existence is revealed here for the first time, is important and will surely generate further studies which will contribute to a more detailed understanding both of the importance of *shunga* and of intercultural relations in the history of Japanese art. In this regard, it is hoped that this essay, together with the Eisei Bunko Museum *shunga* exhibition (19 September to 23 December 2015), the first of its kind to be held in Japan, will help to dispel the taboo over *shunga* by showing how daimyo families, like the Tokugawa and the Hosokawa, collected erotic art over generations.⁴³ These recent discoveries will hopefully encourage other families, private individuals and

42 Even the *Daily Evening Bulletin* of San Francisco described on 29 March 1860 those books “full of villainous obscene pictures.” Miyoshi 2005, p. 48.

43 This article was submitted on August 2015, prior to the opening of the Eisei Bunko Museum exhibition.

public institutions, museums and universities, to open up their collections for scholarly examination.

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