

Great Pleasures for Women and Their Treasure Boxes and Chinese Medical Books

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Chinese Medical Books and *Kōso myōron*

How can we live a long and healthy life? What should we not do to maintain our health? From ancient times in both the East and West, numerous medical treatises have attempted to promote both the practice and theory of a healthy life. Among the mental and physical aspects of health care, it is only natural that there are sections on sexuality. In particular, Chinese medical texts that included ‘manuals for the bedroom’ greatly influenced Japanese *shunga* works from early on.

Among the many manuals on sex produced in China, the one which was most influential on Japanese *shunga* was the Ming text *Sunu miaolun* (Jp. *Sojo myōron*; Marvelous Discourses of the Maiden) published in 1536. However, the impact of this work on *shunga* was primarily through the Japanese translation *Kōso myōron* (Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden) written in the 16th century.

Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden is a dialogue between the Yellow Emperor and an Immortal Maiden on the secrets of sex and longevity. Matsunaga Danjō Hisahide (1510?–1577) asked the doctor Manase Dōsan (1507–1594) to translate the Chinese text.¹ Though born during a period of civil war in Japan, the book was soon circulating in manuscript form among the court aristocracy.

The first dialogue of the Yellow Emperor and the Immortal Maiden (天真論), is followed by the Dialogue on “Sexual Relations” (交合和違) and then a series of sections on techniques, aphrodisiacs, and what to avoid.² Here we learn not only about the nature of sexual relations between men and women, but also about postures, comportment in the bedroom, which days of the year to avoid having sex, how to prepare aphrodisiacs, etc. all practical and in considerable detail. It is said that Dōsan was aware of Hisahide’s active sexual life not only with his official wife but also with many other women.³ *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*, therefore, was written particularly for Matsunaga Hisahide, but later circulated widely as a manuscript or printed copy.⁴

Nagasawa Kikuya notes that there were five versions of this text published from the beginning of the Edo period till the very end.⁵ I have been able to find one more edition.⁶ It is clear that this book was widely circulated and read during the Edo period.

From early in the Edo period *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* circulated widely not only as a published book, but also selections from it were incorporated into *shunga* books.⁷ An

1 There are manuscripts and published texts with colophon date of 1543, but there are also records stating the date of 1578. The exact date is uncertain.

2 「九勢之要術」, 「浅深利害損益之弁」, 「八深六浅一深之論」, 「五傷之法」, 「淫情十動之候」, 「時節善惡之弁」, 「交所吉凶之弁」, 「房中之藥術」, 「道三之跋」.

3 Machi Senjurō 町泉寿郎, “Manase Dōsan to *Kōso myōron*” 曲直瀬道三と『黄素妙論』 in *Manase Dōsan to Kinsei Nihon iryō shakai* 曲直瀬道三と近世日本医療社会 (Tokyo: Takeda Kagaku Shinkō Zaidan, 2015), pp. 406–408.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 404–408.

5 Nagasawa Kikuya 長澤規矩也, *Toshogaku sankō zuroku* 図書学参考図録, pt. 2: *Kaisetsu* 解説 (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 1979), pp. 5–6.

6 Ishigami Aki, *Nihon no shunga, ehon kenkyū* 日本の春画・艶本研究 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2015), pp. 55–89.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 66–84. Further, in the book referenced in note 6 above, I said that I had not yet myself seen copies of *Kōso myōron yōjōkun*, but recently two copies have come to light and were announced by Nagatsuka Kenji in his presentation ‘On *Kōso myōron yōjōkun*’ at

early example is *Ningen rakuji* (On Human Happiness). Ryūtei Tanehiko (1783–1842) in his *Kōshokubon mokuroku* (Catalogue of Erotic Books) named this the first printed *shunga* book.

Ningen rakuji must be the first published erotic picture book (*shunga kokubon*) [in Japan]. Begins with ‘Secrets of the Bedroom’ and ‘Beauty Tips for Women,’ followed by *shunga* which are reprints of the Chinese edition.⁸

We can confirm two extant copies of books with this title, one at the library of the International Research Center of Japanese Studies, Kyoto⁹ and the other in the Ukiyo-e Museum. Although the content of the two books overlap, they are different editions in terms of size, printing, color and images. Hanasaki Kazuo introduced the 1655 Ukiyo-e Museum edition of *On Human Happiness* as: ‘the first half consists of Chinese *chunhua* (as Tanehiko noted), with Tosa-style Japanese *shunga* in the second half.’¹⁰ One section of text is borrowed from *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* under the *hiragana* subtitle, ‘Kōso no myōron.’ If, as it seems, the published version of *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* was considered an erotic book, then the ‘first published erotic picture book’ in Japan would not have been *On Human Happiness* but rather this earlier title. Be that as it may, it is certain that the first *shunpon* were closely connected with sex manuals.

What were readers looking for in printed books? With the spread of commercial printing in the 17th century, people were able to get knowledge, information as well as entertainment, and within this environment they also sought traditional Chinese works on the arts of the bedchamber, as well as erotic illustrations. This trend of explaining technique accompanied by illustrations continued in the development of Edo-period *shunga*.

***Kōso myōron* and Kyoto-Osaka *shunga* books**

Over time, elements of *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* and other such health texts came to be incorporated into a variety of Japanese books. This is evident in the latter part of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries. Research thus far, shows that encyclopedias on sexuality as well as erotic fiction of the *ukiyo-zōshi* genre, both published in the Kyoto-Osaka area, in particular, tended to include elements relating to sexual health. The influence of *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* is the most prominent, although the works tend to borrow only general principles to fit the erotic texts. *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* was a convenient source for ideas about sexuality for authors of erotic books.

In the 1760s–70s, excerpts from *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* appear in a variety of *shunga* parodies of didactic books, which were published in the Kyoto-Osaka area.

The work *Hyakunyū isshu shokushi-bako* (A box full of tissues for a hundred emissions/sessions), published around 1766 in Kyoto, as its title suggests, parodies the famous *Hundred Famous Poems* collection found in educational books. It includes examples of love letters and advice about homosexual relations among a wide range of discourses on sexuality. We see the influence of *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* in the last page in the section “On When Intercourse should be Avoided,” certain

the 119th annual meeting of the Nihon Ishishi Gakkai Sōkai (Japanese Society for the History of Medicine) on 2 June 2018.

8 Ichijima Kenkichi, ed., *Shin gunsho ruijū* 新群書類従, vol. 7: *Shomoku* 書目 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1906), p. 151.

9 Catalogue no.: KC/172/Sh. I plan to write in more detail on this in another article.

10 Hanasaki Kazuo 花咲一男, “Tanrokubon Ningen rakuji” 丹緑本人間楽事, in *Saku ya kono hana* 咲くやこの花 (Tokyo: Taihei Sho’oku, 1999), pp. 291–294.

days and places are recommended to be avoided. The content, however, does not mirror exactly quotations from *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*, but rather seems to be taking bits from earlier *shunga* books and health manuals, and not necessarily from *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*.

On the other hand, the works of Tsukioka Settei often follow closely the original text of *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*. About this time, Settei was a prominent producer of *shunga* books in Kyoto-Osaka. There was a burst of erotic parodies of didactic books almost entirely produced by Settei and those around him. In these works, we find clear traces of *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*.

One of these is *Onna shimegawa oeshi-bumi* (Love Letters and a River of Erect Precepts for Women, circa 1768), thought to be by Tsukioka Settei. It is a parody of the didactic women's conduct book, *Onna imagawa oshie-bumi* (The Imagawa Admonitions for Women and Letters for Teaching, 1768).¹¹ The *Love Letters* parodies in detail the text and images of the original. *The Imagawa Admonitions for Women* is aimed at a female readership and includes advice curing sickness. The section in the original on medicine (「女妙薬療治手箱庭」) becomes in the parody advice for preparing aphrodisiacs to aid sexual intercourse. Among these, the potion for increasing the size of the penis, *saibatan* is taken exactly from *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*.¹² *Love Letters*, incorporates several aspects on sexual health and pleasure from *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*.

In the same way, Settei incorporates such ideas on sexual health into the work *Onna teikin gesho bunko* (Library of Womanly Virtue for the Vulva, c. 1768), which is a parody of *Onna teikin gosho bunko* (Library of Courtly Women's Virtue, 1767). The section “Kōgō goshō no koto” 交合五傷之事 on avoiding harm during intercourse is based directly on passages in *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*.¹³

Medical Textbooks and *Onna dairaku takarabeki*

Onna dairaku takarabeki (Great Pleasures for Women and their Treasure Boxes, c. 1755–57) was published before the *shunga* works mentioned above. Although we cannot find any exact quotations from *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*, there is evidence of influence on relations between men and women.

In what respect were the affairs between a man and a woman considered important for good health? To questions from the Yellow Emperor, the Maiden replies as follows:

The Yellow Emperor asked: ‘What is the cause of harmony and disagreement in relations between a man and a woman?’

The Maiden replied: ‘Yin-yang intercourse between heaven and earth brings into being all things in the universe. The lack of yin-yang relations between a man and a woman results in ruin. By the same account, if there were no yin-yang relations between heaven and earth, the four seasons would not exist and nothing in the universe would come into being. The absence of yin-yang between a man and a woman destroys human relations and tends toward ruin. The human race would disappear; we'd have

11 C. Andrew Gerstle and Hayakawa Monta, eds., *Tsukioka Settei* 月岡雪鼎, 1: *Onna shimegawa oeshi-bumi* 女令川おへし文, vol. 4 of *Kinsei enpon shiryō shūsei* 近世艶本資料集成 (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2007).

12 *Onna shimegawa oeshi-bumi* can be found in the Honolulu Art Museum, no. 2008. 0413.

13 International Research Center for Japanese Studies Library (KC/172/Ts).

no descendants.’¹⁴

The text equates the relations between heaven and earth that give rise to all things with sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, in the absence of which human relations are destroyed. The idea that man is yang or heaven and woman is yin or earth derives from yin-yang Five Phases theory, the fundamental theory underlying ancient Chinese sexual teachings.¹⁵

Similar to this is the opening of *Great Pleasures for Women*, set in a farming context:

From ages long ago till today, there has been nothing more important, for both procreation and pleasure, than the way of love-making. Originally the way of carnal love was thought to be the same as farming, where man is the heaven and woman the earth. The man sows his seed and the woman as earth brings forth a child. Thus, when heaven and earth are in harmony, their warmth and fluids nurture the growth of children, just like the maturing of the five grains.

The relating of human intercourse with that of Heaven and Earth is similar to that in *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*. However, the idea that in this world nothing is more important than the ‘way of love-making’, is an attitude of Settei and Japanese *shunga* in general.

We do not know if Settei had read *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* before creating *Great Pleasures for Women and their Treasure Boxes*. Since in two later works, *Love Letters and a River of Erect Precepts for Women* and *Library of Womanly Virtue for the Vulva*, he seems to have directly quoted *Marvelous Discourses*, we can surmise that Settei most likely knew the book *Marvelous Discourses*.

Settei often in his *shunga* mentions works that he had consulted in preparation. The painted scroll entitled *Shunshō higizu* contains a list of classical Chinese and Japanese texts that relate to *shunga*, such as the Chinese work *Mi lou ji* (Jp. *Meirōki*) and the Japanese work *Kokon chomonjū*, a collection of essays.¹⁶ Yamamoto Yukari has noted that these works all have something relating to *shunga* in them.¹⁷ She argues that Settei researched the history of *shunga*, its purpose and how it was composed, in order to show that his work was in this orthodox or classical lineage.

It is clear that Settei in creating *shunga* books was not just parodying educational texts, but was also researching a wide range of Chinese and Japanese sources, including Chinese works on the arts of the bed-chamber, which likely included *Marvelous Discourses*. Settei was meticulous in following the format, styles and illustrations of the works he parodied and transformed into *shunga* books, and further it is clear that he researched widely and deeply into sources, including medical ones. Since his method was to read widely in preparing his *shunga*, we can be fairly certain that his reading included *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden*.

For Settei, who is known in general for his scholarly research, we can surmise that Manase Dōsan’s translation *Marvelous Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Maiden* was an important source for understanding Chinese writings on sexuality.

(Trans. by C. Andrew Gerstle)

14 Citing the example in the collection of Tenri Central Library (499-i-13).

15 Liu Dalin 劉達臨, *Chūgoku sei-ai bunka* 中国性愛文化, (trans.) Suzuki Hiroshi (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2002), pp. 507–508.

16 Other works noted are: 『俗考』, 『癸辛雜識』, 『丹鉛總錄』, 『清河書畫舫』, 『留青日札』, 『路史』, 『五雜俎』, 『寄園寄所寄』, 『大中よしのふ集』, 『源氏うき舟乃卷』, 『玄旨衆妙集』.

17 Yamamoto Yukari 山本ゆかり, *Kamigata fūzokuga no kenkyū: Nishikawa Sukenobu, Tsukioka Settei o chūshin ni* 上方風俗画の研究 (Hiroshima: Geika Shoin, 2010), p. 173.