SUMMARY

The “Aesthetic” Development of Otsu-e:
From Karakuri Puppets to Shunga

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This paper examines how Otsu-e, a provincial style of painting that emerged in the Edo period, came to have influence as an “aesthetic form” in Tokugawa theater and performing arts, and the process through which the themes of Otsu-e were thereby popularized.

The first half of the paper examines the process of transition in the themes depicted in Otsu-e against the background of Genroku culture (the culture of the early Edo period, especially the Genroku era, 1688-1704), and clarifies differences in expressivity and function between “Buddhist” and “secular” Otsu-e. The historical circumstances of the spread of Otsu-e, particularly the interaction between “secular” Otsu-e and Genroku culture, will also be discussed, with particular reference to the Joruri puppet plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon that served as an underpinning of Genroku culture.

The latter half of the paper demonstrates how the themes of (secular) Otsu-e, which had gradually penetrated and spread in this context, came to function actively as an “aesthetic trend” in other genres such as ukiyoe and shunga. Particular attention will be given to examples illustrating the use of Otsu-e themes in shrine festival floats and karakuri (mechanical doll) puppet plays as well as asobi-e (playful pictures) and shunga. It will further be shown that, through the Tokugawa festival and amusement culture, themes found in Otsu-e transcended the category of provincial painting and were very close to the daily lives of the common people.