

Envisioning Meiji Modernity: *kaika-e*'

Monika Hinkel

Japanese woodblock prints played an important role to communicate the modernisation process during the early Meiji period. In particular so-called *kaika-e*, prints of enlightenment, visualised Japan's transformation from the 1870s. The term *kaika* derives from the political slogan *bunmei kaika*, meaning civilisation and enlightenment, associated with the progressive values of Western civilisation and the European enlightenment. *Kaika-e* were a new genre of woodblock prints that appeared from 1868 into the 1890s, particularly in triptych format. *Kaika-e* became a popular vehicle to introduce specific symbols of modernisation and scenes of the changing Meiji civilisation and cityscape, albeit sometimes in an idealised version. The issuing of *kaika-e* by print publishers was encouraged by the Meiji government, which also published *kaika-e*, through the Ministry of Education, instructing in proper "enlightened" behaviour and appearance.

By the time of the Meiji Restoration, woodblock prints had been flourishing for over 250 years, with Tokyo being the major production centre. At the height of their popularity in the 1850s the total annual output of prints was perhaps as high as four to five million sheets. Over 150 publishers of woodblock prints are known to have been active at the start of the Meiji era, although that number declined rapidly around 1900 due to the impact of newer technologies such as photography and lithography. One important characteristic of Meiji prints was the use of imported aniline colours, in particular the intense use of red. I would like to focus on three major themes of *kaika-e*: displaying new architecture; changes in clothing and hair fashion; and new modes of transport.

Changing Cityscape - New Architecture

From 1873-74 onwards, street scenes became popular as topics of *kaika* prints. A frequently illustrated subject was the newly erected Western-style architecture. At first the Meiji government employed Westerners to build European-style structures. However, Japanese architects, with the successful implementation of Western technology and engagement of Japanese craftsmen, soon created a pseudo-Western or hybrid

architectural style, unique to the early Meiji era.

One of the best known examples is the bank building for the powerful Mitsui family, Mitsui House, designed and constructed by Shimizu Kiusuke II, founder of the construction company Shimizu. The building, completed in June 1872, shows a typical hybrid design of Eastern and Western architectural elements, called *gi-yōfū* (lit. quasi-Western-style). The actual structure was built using traditional Edo period construction methods and features from Japanese temples and castles, while the exterior adopted Western architectural design, with French windows, balconies and classic columns. Shimizu studied Western architecture while participating in the construction of Western-style buildings at the foreign settlement in Yokohama and at the Tokyo Tsukiji Hotel (1870), the first Western-style hotel in Japan. Shimizu is seen as the pioneer of modern Japanese architecture. In August 1873 the Mitsui building became Japan's First National Bank (*Nihon Daiichi Ginkō*), as depicted by the artist Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847-1915) in a winter scene titled *Kaiun Bridge - Snowfall at the First National Bank*, from around 1876. Buildings like this immediately became tourist attractions, largely due to their depiction in woodblock prints. But in later years this type of building became a public embarrassment and they were subsequently demolished.



Fig. 1 *Kaiun Bridge - Snowfall at the First National Bank*
Woodblock print by Kobayashi Kiyochika, Tokyo, 1876
Photograph © British Museum

Furthermore newly constructed iron bridges were also typical motifs of the new townscape, like the Azuma bridge, built in 1885. It was the first metal bridge (4 metres wide and 145 metres long) to span the Sumida River in Tokyo. The print artist Inoue Tankei or Inoue Yasuji (1864–89) produced some of the most iconic designs of this bridge.

One reason for the speed of Japan's modernisation was the employment of foreign experts, called *oyatoi gaikokujin*, or hired foreigners, in a variety of fields. One of these experts was the Irish architect Thomas James Waters (1842-98), who was contracted by the Meiji government to rebuild the Ginza district, after a fire in February 1872 levelled the old Ginza quarter. Waters designed a large number of Georgian-style fire-proof brick buildings, two to three stories high, which transformed Ginza into a model district for the modern nation-state, home to the first westernised buildings that came to be known as 'Bricktown'. The main street, Ginza-dōri (literally Silver Seat Street), with its widened road and pavements was completed in 1873. The first gas street lights in Japan were installed here in 1874, and later Japan's first electric street lights were also introduced along Ginza-dōri. Ginza Bricktown was completed in 1875, but it took several more years for Tokyo city dwellers to get used to the rather damp buildings that were not quite suited to the Japanese climate. Eventually three newly established newspapers had their headquarters in Ginza, but only a small number of Japanese residents decided to actually live here. However, as a result of numerous newspaper articles and the production of vast numbers of woodblock prints depicting the Ginza district, the people's views changed and transformed the quarter into a tourist attraction, and the area flourished as a symbol of "civilisation and enlightenment". In particular print artists of the Utagawa school, like Hiroshige III (1842-94) and Kunitaru II (1830-74), designed many prints, mostly in triptych format, showing idealised scenes of this quarter. Hiroshige's print *The Most Famous View in Tokyo: Brick [Buildings] along the Ginza*, depicts the main Ginza Street, conveying the bustling atmosphere of a new age and cityscape with a wide road and pavements framed by brick buildings, swarmed with people who are partly dressed in Western attire, and a mixture of new modes of transportation, like horse-drawn carriages and rickshaws. Frequently incorporated into these urban

scenes of modernity are blossoming cherry trees, to give these scenes a more familiar, native touch. Both Hiroshige III and Kunitaru II created scenes about the changing cityscape in a variety of triptychs as well as in print sets, like *Famous Sites in Tokyo* (1880) by Hiroshige III and *Famous Sports of Tokyo* (1882) by Kunitaru II.

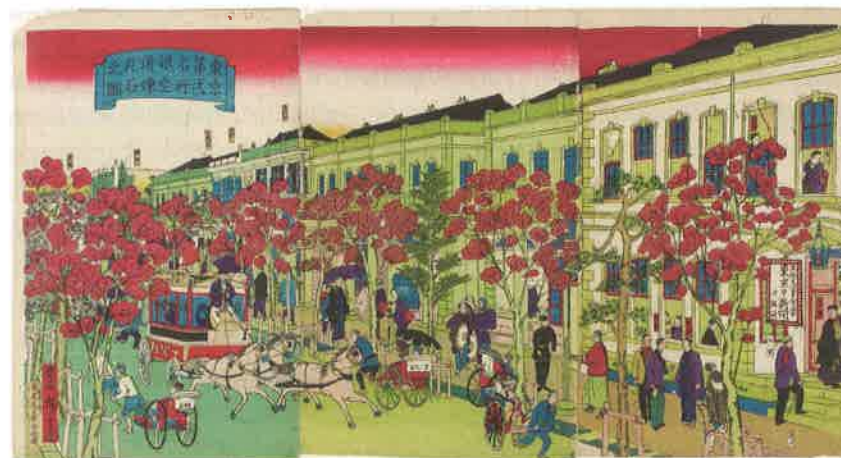


Fig. 2 *The Most Famous View in Tokyo: Brick [Buildings] along the Ginza*

Woodblock print by Utagawa Hiroshige III, 1874

Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Another site in Tokyo that became a popular landmark and appeared in commercial prints was the *Ryōunkaku* (Cloud-Surpassing Pavilion) or *Asakusa Jū-ni-kai* (Asakusa Twelve-Storey Tower) building, designed by the Briton William Burton (1856-99) in the Asakusa district. The octagonal building, 225 feet or 60 metres high and completed in 1890, was a wooden construction covered with red brick up to the tenth floor, and the eleventh and twelfth floors were completely constructed out of wood. The tower housed Japan's first elevator that reached up to the eighth floor and had electric lights on every floor, including an additional row of lights above the outdoor roof observation deck. The eleventh and the twelfth floors were even equipped with telescopes. The panoramic view from the top, which enabled unobstructed views of the Tokyo cityscape, the Kantō plain and even Mount Fuji on a clear day, became a major attraction. The construction featured in numerous

woodblock prints by a variety of print designers, and as a motif in the popular board game *sugoroku*. Unfortunately the tower was destroyed in the Great Kantō earthquake of 1923.

An important part of the modernisation process was the organisation of domestic industrial exhibitions. Such fairs followed European and American examples, where manufacturers from Japan and abroad could display and demonstrate their newest products and technologies. The First National Industrial Exhibition was held in 1877 and attracted nearly half a million visitors. The Second National Industrial Exhibition was even more popular and opened to the public on 1 March 1881. The second fair was held in Ueno Park in Tokyo in a newly constructed monumental building. A printed guide for the 1881 exhibition described the building as follows:

The art gallery is the brick building standing in the centre of the grounds behind the middle gate. This structure was built to the design of a professor at the Imperial College of Engineering, the Englishman Mr. Conder. The solidity of this building is for sure matched by no other in Japan.

After the exhibition the building became the permanent home of the national museum collection, a forerunner of today's Tokyo National Museum. The British architect Josiah Conder (1852-90) designed the site in the British Imperial tradition combined with a classical greco-roman style, displaying a prime example of the successful application of European technology and employment of Japanese craftsmen. It was severely damaged in the Great Kantō earthquake of 1923 and eventually torn down.

Another building designed by Conder in Tokyo was the so-called *Rokumeikan* (Deer Cry Pavillion), commissioned by the Japanese Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru (1836-1915), and completed in November 1883. The building had a dual diplomatic and socio-cultural function, on one hand to accommodate foreign guests and on the other to introduce Western customs to its Japanese guests. Therefore the Rokumeikan hosted lavish Western-style banquets, receptions and balls. Even though Conder intended to incorporate Japanese elements into the design of

the building, Minister Inoue, a strong supporter of Japan's modernisation process, insisted that the structure should be completely Western-style. So the two-story building was erected by Conder in a French *renaissance* style, with a mansard roof and an arched portico with columns, with only the garden created in a Japanese style. Print designers again provided the public a glimpse, sometimes an imaginary one, into the world of the Rokumeikan, with renderings of its modern architecture as well as its guests at formal functions and events. As envisaged by the artist Chikanobu Toyoharu (1838-1912), also known as Yōshū Chikanobu, the print *Ballroom Dancing at the Rokumeikan* (1888) provides a view of an interior scene at the Rokumeikan, with Japanese guests clad in Western-style garments ballroom dancing, accompanied by music played on Western musical instruments. These kind of events were a vital part of Rokumeikan's cultural programme in the phase of *bunmei kaika*. Because the whole concept of the Rokumeikan drew quite a lot of criticism, the enthusiasm for westernisation diminished from the late 1880s, and after the opening of the Imperial Hotel nearby in 1890, the hall's necessity decreased. The building was demolished in 1941. The depiction of Japanese in Western clothing in Chikanobu's work brings me to my next *kaika-e* topic of new clothing and hairdos.



Fig. 3 A Glimpse of Dignitaries Dancing

Woodblock print by Toyohara (Yōshū) Chikanobu, 1888

Ink on Paper, 13 3/4 in. x 27 3/4 in. (34.93 cm x 70.49 cm)

Scripps College, Claremont, California, USA. Purchase by the Aoki Endowment for Japanese Arts and Cultures. Photo by Susan Einstein

Evolving Fashion - New Clothing and hairdos

Next to showing Western-inspired architecture, *kaika-e* also documented the influence of Western manners and customs on a more personal level, illustrating Japanese individuals who adopted a Western-style of living, clothing, food and education. From the 1870s into the 1890s, to be counted as high society in Japan was virtually synonymous with being seen as highly westernised. Woodblock-print artists dwelled on this, often placing fashionable gentlemen and ladies in scenes that included the appreciation of Western music and dance in Western-style interiors, as seen in Chikanobu's print of the Rokumeikan.

Prints by artists like Toyohara Kunichika (1835-1900) and his pupil Toyohara Chikanobu (1838-1912) portrayed the Meiji Emperor and the Empress as enlightened role models who led Japan on the path of westernisation, depicting them in Western-style attire surrounded by European-style interiors. The Meiji Empress composed many enlightenment poems choosing as their subject matter innovations such as bicycles, photographs, the postal service, perfume, or Western dresses and shoes. But despite the empress' declaration, and the enforcement by the mid-1880s for government employees to wear Western dress, the craze for Western clothing did not spread and began to taper off by the late 1890s. Mainly because it was complicated to sew Parisian or Victorian-style dresses at home, and it was expensive to buy imported clothes or Western-style clothes designed by domestic tailors at shops around Yokohama and Tokyo. Western clothes generally came to be used just among the Imperial family, the nobility and the affluent. Even though *kaika* customs were fashionable and Western-style clothes were in vogue, ordinary people still wore traditional Japanese garments:

Next to attire the modernisation process had an impact on hairstyles too. Until Meiji a man's position in life was displayed by his hairdo, for example by the way his head was shaved, by the length of his hair and by the method of knotting it. With the abolition of certain social distinctions, ordinary close-cropped hair (*zangiri*) became the hair fashion for all men, as illustrated in Chikanobu's Rokumeikan print. Following the issuance of the Haircut Order Edict (*danpatsurei*) in 1871, and the cutting off of the Emperor's topknot (*chonmage*) in 1873, men quickly took to Western hairstyles, though women lagged behind in

adopting new hairstyles. At the beginning, female Western haircuts were considered unattractive and in 1872 a decree was even issued which forbade women to cut their hair. However in 1885 the Society for Western hairdos (*Fujin sokuhatsu kai*) was established, promoting Western hairstyles for women. The movement argued that traditional hairstyles were inconvenient and that the hair oil used to shape the coiffure was unhygienic. The founding of this society prompted the design of instructional prints showing Western-style coiffures. The print by Adachi Ginkō (active 1873-1912) *Illustrated Explanation of Women's Hairstyles of Imperial Japan* (*Dai Nihon fujin sokuhatsu zukai*, 1885) depicts two Japanese ladies in traditional dress, one is dressing the other's hair in a new, modern style. They are surrounded by photographs of modern hairstyles, captured from various angles. In the cartouche above the scene precise instructions are given on how to achieve these new hairstyles and the benefits of these new trends are promoted.



Fig. 4 *Illustrated Explanation of Women's Hairstyles of Imperial Japan*

Woodblock print by Adachi Ginkō, 1885

Photograph © British Museum

Moving City - New Modes of Transport

Another highly popular motif within the *kaika-e* genre were the various new modes of transportation that appeared on the streets, like rickshaws, bicycles and horse-drawn carriages, as already seen in the

aforementioned print of Ginza by Hiroshige III, or as depicted in the print by Kuniteru II in *View of Nihonbashi in Tokyo* from 1870. Encouraged by the print publishers, print designers would frequently present a wide range of different vehicles, often in triptych format, to introduce and celebrate these motifs of modernisation. Each vehicle in the Kuniteru print is identified by a red cartouche. Horse-drawn carriages for example were not indigenous to Japan and their arrival was a major innovation, offering travel at greater speed and comfort. Horse-drawn double decker streetcars became one of the sights of Tokyo during the *bunmei kaika* phase. The immense popularity of this topic created a boom in vehicle prints, and saw them produced in a variety of formats, as triptychs, as single sheets, as part of a series or as toy prints for children.



Fig. 5 *View of Nihonbashi in Tokyo*

Woodblock print by Utagawa Kuniteru II, 1870

Photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum, Bequeathed by Paul Shelving

One of the most celebrated symbols of modernisation was the railway (*densha*). In 1869 the Meiji government decided to build a railroad and hired in spring 1870 the British engineer Edmund Morell (1841-71) to outline and supervise the construction of a railway line. Even though Morell died shortly after his arrival, the further planning, building and completion of the railroad was overseen by British engineers. All rail tracks, locomotives and carriages were imported from Britain. The

engineers deferred a route from Tokyo to Kyoto for a more practical 18 mile line from Tokyo to Yokohama. Beginning in 1870 in Yokohama, the builders laid a single track northward, reaching Kanagawa later that year, Shinagawa by August 1872 and in September 1872 the line had reached its terminus at Shinbashi Shiodome. On 14 October 1872, the railway was inaugurated with great ceremony by the Emperor, who took the first official ride from Shinbashi. Interest in the railway was so extensive that tens of thousands of spectators attended the opening. Print designers produced large quantities of train prints, many of them created slightly ahead of the inauguration as advertisements.

The new railroad reduced travelling time between the two cities significantly. On foot it usually took between 10 to 12 hours, a horse ride around four hours, but the train ride only took 53 minutes. The new line, that ran nine trips per day between Tokyo and Yokohama, was predominantly for the transportation of people rather than freight. The fares for the 18 mile journey were relatively high for the ordinary Japanese traveller, therefore the route was initially enjoyed mostly by the foreign community, enabling them to travel between the capital Tokyo and the port of Yokohama. The fare (for every section of the line) for first class was 1 yen, 12 sen, 5 ri, the fare for second class was 75 sen and the lower class was 37 sen, 5 ri. Even a lower class ticket was quite a sum, being enough to buy around 10 kilograms of rice at the time in Tokyo. But a year after its inauguration, the railway turned a profit and became a commercial success, with an average number of over 4000 passengers per day, and by 1875 it attracted over 1.5 million passengers. With the growing popularity of the railway, rail lines were constructed across the country, connecting Osaka to Kobe and also Hokkaido. The example of a train print by Hiroshige III, *Picture of the Railway at Shinagawa*, from the series *A Mirror of the Pride of Tokyo Prefecture* published in May 1874, presents a typical scene of a steam train at Shinagawa with rail workers in Western uniforms in the foreground, and a newly constructed stone and iron bridge crossing over the railway line in the middle ground. Again, for a native Japanese touch, a blossoming cherry tree is incorporated into the design.

Both station termini in Shinbashi Shiodome and Yokohama were designed by the American architect Richard P. Bridgens (1819-91) who

had come to Japan from San Francisco. Bridgens was active as an architect in Yokohama and Tokyo and designed many other buildings that played an important role, and had great impact on Western architecture in both cities during the Meiji era. Shinbashi Shiodome Station, in the style of the Gare de L'Est in Paris, is illustrated by Hiroshige III in the print *Shinbashi Railway Station* from the series *Illustrations of Famous Places in Modern Tokyo* (1875). Hiroshige rendered the architectural elements in a fairly realistic way, as can be verified with contemporary photographs of the station. The station building was destroyed in the 1923 Kantō earthquake, but was reconstructed and opened as a museum in 2003.



Fig. 6 *Picture of the Railway at Shinagawa*
Woodblock print by Utagawa Hiroshige III,
1874

Photograph © British Museum



Fig. 7 *Shinbashi Railway Station*
Woodblock print by Utagawa Hiroshige III,
1870s

Photograph © British Museum

The production and publishing of train prints contributed to the fact that the station buildings, the railroad and trains became famous sightseeing spots and popular tourist attractions. Eager to capitalise on the new subject matter, publishers had artists design train prints as soon

as the plans were announced in 1869. Print designers had to work from train models and illustrations in Western books or from imagination. Therefore train prints of the early phase portray trains and tracks not always in a completely realistic manner. In a print by Utagawa Yoshitora (active 1836-82) called *Steam Train in Tokyo* from the year 1870 for example, two trains are positioned on the same track heading towards each other or, like in the two train prints by Hiroshige III, the actual rendering of the trains looks rather toy like.

Next to transportation, communication was vital to the development of a modern state, and as depicted by Hiroshige in *Picture of the Railway at Shinagawa* from May 1874, next to the new railway track at Shinagawa, telegraph lines and poles are visible, which also became important examples of imported technology and conspicuous symbols of enlightenment.

I would like to end this paper with a brief discussion of the series *Famous Places of Tokyo: Past and Present (Kōkon Tokyo meisho)* by Utagawa Hiroshige III, published in 1884 by the publisher Tsujioka Bunsuke (c. 1814-94). This series comprises of around 20 *ōban*-size (large-size) sheets that present two contrasting scenes, as the title implicates, one past or old scene, and one present or new scene. The two scenes are paired on a vertical *ōban* sheet and are printed as horizontal *chūban*-format (mid-size) motifs, at the top the old Edo period scene is shown and in the lower half of the sheet the modern scene of Meiji period Tokyo is positioned. With the selected Edo period views Hiroshige III very much pays homage to Hiroshige I (1797-1858), the dominant master of *Famous Views (meisho)* during the late Edo period. Many of the vistas are similar to those found in Hiroshige's *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (Meisho Edo hyakkei)*, published between 1856-58), or other scenes depicted in many of Hiroshige I's *Edo meisho* sets that he designed during his lifetime. This series by Hiroshige III, with its juxtaposition of old and new views, demonstrates exceptionally well the changes that occurred from Edo to Meiji within the townscape of Tokyo, and brings the discussed subject matter of this talk together. In the, so far known, twenty views of the set, Hiroshige III revisits well known sights of the city, like bridges (Nihonbashi, Edobashi or Tokiwabashi), popular spots for outings (Takanawa, Shinobazu pond or Asukayama), business quarters (Owarichō

and Surugachō), sightseeing spots (Ryōgoku hanabi and Kaminarimon Kinryūsan), or pleasure quarters (Saruwakachō and Yoshiwara). The first pair of scenes for example depict the bridge Nihonbashi. The Edo scene is titled *The Ebisuya and Hōteiya Dry-Goods Store in Owari-chō* and the Meiji era motif *Nippōsha Nichinichi Shinbun in Owari-chō, Suruga-chō*. The Edo view presents the intersection of Ginza-dōri and Miyuki-dōri in the Owari-chō district, lined with dry-goods stores, including the famous Ebisuya and the Hōteiya stores, which sold kimonos among other items. The Meiji view depicts the offices of the Nippōsha publishing company, the publisher of the Tokyo daily newspaper the *Nichinichi Shinbun*. The newspaper in general became also an important manifestation of Western influence and Japan's modernisation.

Conclusion

Kaika-e continued a traditional print genre, the depiction of famous or scenic views, *meisho-e*. With the transitions of the Meiji period, new famous views appeared, depicting novel buildings and inventions of the modernisation process. These prints served as an important visual source for information about the latest changes in the public domain, as well as the transformation of customs and lifestyles. In terms of conveying the social situation of the Meiji period before the proliferation of photography, it can be said that there is no better material than these prints that depict aspects of socio-cultural enlightenment. *Kaika-e* were a niche market of the early Meiji period, a result of official necessity and public interest in novel innovations imported from the West. They served as a form of pictorial journalism and are important documents of Meiji social history. But they not only satisfied public curiosity, they were also instruments of official propaganda and instruction for producing a new, modern Japanese nation state. Even though *kaika-e* sometimes exaggerated the extent of modernisation and idealised certain aspects of the westernisation process, almost creating a myth around Meiji modernity, they provide a fascinating juxtaposition of tradition and modernity that display the prevalent hybrid culture of this period at the intersection of old and new Japan.

Notes

- 1 This article is based on a talk I gave at the seminar 'Meiji at 150: Meiji Japan and Victorian Britain in Dialogue', organised by The Japan Society and The Victorian Society on 27 January 2018. I would like to thank especially Heidi Potter and Alejandra Armendariz-Hernandez from the Japan Society, for inviting me to the event and for their support regarding this article.



We are most grateful to Clifford Chance for its sponsorship of the Japan Society Proceedings. Without their support we would have found maintenance of the current high standard of the publication increasingly difficult. Clifford Chance shares the aims of the Society in wishing to develop close relationships and a better understanding between the UK and Japan.

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C L I F F O R D
C H A N C E

NUMBER 155 2018

Proceedings is published by
The Japan Society
13/14 Cornwall Terrace
London
NW1 4QP

Tel: 020 7935 0475
Email: info@japansociety.org.uk
Website: www.japansociety.org.uk

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ISSN 0952 – 2050

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