Japan, Old and New:

(Re) Framing the Visual Culture of the Bakumatsu-Meiji Periods

Gregory ROHE

Abstract

Since the mid-19th century, the popular imagination regarding Japan abroad has entertained two distinct yet contradictory images: one of "Old Japan"—traditional, tranquil and unchanging—juxtaposed against its contemporary counterpart, "New Japan"—technologically advanced, fast-paced and futuristic. This dichotomy, of course, still exists today, with both perspectives being characterized by evocative visual cultures, and both functioning as potent lures within the tourist trade. During the earliest years of foreign tourism to Japan, however, this was not the case. Indeed, many foreign nationals expressed concern that in its efforts of modernize at the most frantic possible pace, the "New" Japan would eventually consume and eradicate the "Old." This paper will consider the visual culture of this early period of cross-cultural contact in Japan. A particular focus will be on the camera and the woodblock, two of the most common technologies employed to produce images during the Bakumatsu-Meiji periods. The intriguing and ironic aspect of this era in the history of visual culture was that it was the older, more traditional process of the woodblock print that was used (by Japanese artists) to document the hectic race of the "New Japan" to Westernize, while it was the newly imported technology of photography that was used (by Western or Western-trained photographers) to depict what many believed to be the vanishing traditions of the "Old Japan."

Introduction

An English-language promotional brochure recently produced by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) features helpful explanations of such phenomena as "cosplay," or where to find authentic "maid café" in Tokyo and around Japan. The accompanying text of the "Japan Anime Map," asserts that,

> Japanese manga, anime, and games have evolved in many different ways and become a proud part of Japanese culture. The word "otaku" is now a global phenomenon, and is commonly understood by people around the world. (JNTO, *Anime Map*)

This focus on the vibrant aspects of popular culture is perhaps unsurprising when it comes from an organization promoting tourism, but Japanese popular culture has also infiltrated other forms of discourse as well. A recent publication titled *Japanese Visual Culture* (MacWilliams 2008) from a major academic press has chapters devoted solely to Japanese *anime* and *manga*. What is surprising here is that other, older aspects of Japanese visual culture play little or no part in this discourse.

Perhaps more so than any country in the world, Japan evokes visual images that are at once antique yet avant-garde, quietly traditional yet frantically modern. Clearly, this dichotomy is nothing new. Since Perry first serenaded a wary "hermit" nation with his "pacific overtures," the concept of an "Old Japan" existing as a contrast and foil to an emergent "New Japan" has been

an important touchstone when describing the country or explaining about dominant features of its culture. Unlike today, however, the old and the new were not equally valued, or rather they were valued differently depending on the group looking at them. During the Bakumatsu period, from Perry's first visit to Japan to the fall of the Shogunate (1853–68), and then through the Meiji period (1868–1912) many foreign travelers came to the country in search of the "Old Japan," a concept that many Japanese were ready to cast off in favor of the good fortune and prosperity that were certain to come with modernization.

The imagery associated with these two opposing ideals, and the fact that this imagery was largely produced using two different forms of media, make the visual culture of the Bakumatsu-Meiji periods particularly fascinating. One of the barrage of new technologies that flooded into Japan at the time, photography was employed, to an overwhelming degree and by predominantly foreign practitioners, to produce images that would satisfy the foreign tourists' longing for the "Old Japan." At the same time, it was the Edo period woodblock process that was deployed by Japanese artists to capture the "New Japan," in an attempt to satisfy a Japanese public that clamored for the latest news about the momentous changes that their country was experiencing.

The Invention of Japan, Old and New

Prior to 1853, the image of Japan in English-speaking countries, if not the world, was one that had changed relatively little over the previous two and a half centuries. This static popular image was based almost entirely on the repetition of a small number of English-language sources: William Adams' letters from Japan, found in *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes, contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells, by Englishmen and others* published in London in 1625 (later revised and reprinted by the Hakluytus Society in 1850); Engelbert Kaempfer's *History of Japan*, published in English in 1727; and the work of Karl Peter Thunberg, published by the Royal Society in 1780, and then in a more readily available edition in 1796. In the first half of the 19th century, some fresh material was added to this list (e.g. Wasily Mikhailowich Golownin's *Narrative of My Captivity in Japan during the Years 1811, 1812 and 1813* published in English in 1818; and the work of Philipp Franz von Siebold, whose work wasn't available in English until 1841 [Yokoyama 1987, pp. 2–8]). Nonetheless, popular interest in Japan in the years leading up to Perry's mission could only be satisfied by reshuffling, repackaging and reprinting this primary information. With the opening of Japan came a wave of foreign travelers intent on testing the veracity of their long-held impressions regarding Japan. What they found was a country that, after over two centuries of isolation, was struggling to maintain its cultural and national identity within a new and aggressive international context. The internal debate over how best to deal with this unprecedented situation, whether once again to expel foreigners and return to the traditions of the Edo period, or embrace foreign technology and rapidly modernize was largely resolved with the restoration of the Emperor Meiji to a position of (at least nominal) national power and influence. To foreigners in Japan, many of whom came to Japan in search of the tranquil beauty and refinement they had read about in Kaempfer, the path the country had chosen was clear, and they could only witness, albeit first-hand, the often dizzying modernization, industrialization and militarization that characterized the Meiji period.

The extraordinary social, cultural and economic changes that Japan experienced in the later half of the 19th century left many foreign observers astonished. When Rutherford Alcock, the first British Minister to Japan, and later author of *The Capital of the Tycoon*, looked back at the opening decade of the Meiji period, he had trouble deciding whether the country had suddenly leapt five centuries or ten in its race to modernize. The

change nonetheless left him unsettled about the future, and concerned about the wisdom of the adopting at too frenzied a pace foreign institutions at the expense of native ones. Alcock evoked the metaphor of the garden:

> These institutions, which it has taken European nations many centuries to work out and establish, cannot, without great danger, be suddenly transplanted in their full exotic growth to the soil of Japan. (qtd. in Yokoyama 1987, p. 146)

Certainly, as a diplomat, Alcock was no mere observer to the scene he described, nor could any member of the foreign community claim to be so. They were active participants, if not the actual instigators, of the changes that they could witness around them daily. Any thoughtful observer would have to ask whether their influence was a positive one. Algernon Bertram Freeman-Mitford, or A. B. Mitford as he came to be known through his writing on Japan, was unequivocal: “Strange as it seems,” Mitford claimed, “our contact all over the East has an evil effect on upon the natives.” (Mitford 1871, p. 22)

The effect Mitford’s *Tales of Old Japan* had on popular imagination was profound and long-lasting. As the title suggests, it was concerned with presenting the Japan of a bygone era, the “Old Japan,” in a manner that evolved into a paean to its traditions, manners and morality. The anthology of over twenty stories and accounts of traditional Japanese rituals and customs, some of which Mitford had witnessed first-hand, presented a Japan untouched by foreign influence. The tales abound with geisha and samurai, country folk and townspeople plying traditional trades. Honor, courage and loyalty are dominant themes and characteristic traits. *Chushingura*, or “The Tale of the 47 Ronin,” here told for the first time in English, was a typical example of these traditional values. Mitford saw his task as a salvation effort, one that couldn’t ensure the continuation of the “Old Japan” and its way of life, but one that could at least help to preserve its memory. As Mitford observed in his preface to *Tales of Old Japan*, the Meiji Restoration

> …has wrought changes social as well as political; and it may be that when, in addition to the advance which has already been made, railways and telegraphs shall have connected the principal points of the Land of Sunrise the old Japanese, such as he was and had been for centuries when we found him eleven short years ago, will have become extinct. (Mitford 1871, p. 2)

Well into the 20th century, travelers coming to Japan to find the “Old Japan” had Mitford as their guide. The earliest guidebooks in turn suggested *Tales…* as a guidebook. William Eliot Griffis, in his *Tokio Guide* (1873) advised that his readers “…will do well to read Mr. Mitford’s *Tales of Old Japan* (2 vols.) or at least the notes preceding or subjoining to each story.” (qtd. in Guth 2004, p. 32) Griffis’ guide was available to travelers who were still restricted to travel in areas that were open to them by treaty agreements, but guidebooks continued to quote from *Tales…* even after travel restrictions had been loosened. Chamberlain and Mason’s *Handbook for Travellers in Japan* (published by the venerated firm of John Murray, a pioneer in the field of guides for tourists) refers to *Tales of Old Japan* three separate times, twice quoting from it extensively. (Chamberlain & Mason 1894, pp. 95, 98, 185) Perhaps it is little wonder that travelers came away from their experience in Japan sharing with Mitford the same sort of anxiety about the fate of more traditional aspects of the culture. The lament could be summed up in the question posed by world traveler David Wedderburn in 1878. “Will not the distinctive charms of Japanese life and manners,” he asked, “within a few short years disappear for ever beneath the monotonous surface of modern civilization?” (qtd. in Yokoyama 1987, p. 150)

Early Photography in Japan

Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry brought with him the most cutting-edge technology to

document his mission to Japan. A mere decade and a half after Louis Daguerre's introduction, in 1839, of his eponymous process for the capture and securing of images, daguerreotypes had already documented visual information around the world. Eliphalet Brown, Jr., an accomplished daguerreotypist, became the official photographer of the Perry's mission. During his stay, Brown created over 400 daguerreotypes in Japan, twenty of these being used as sources for the lithographs illustrating *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan*, Francis L. Hawks' 1856 account of the mission. (Hawkes 1856) Most of Brown's original images were lost in a fire at the printing house where the lithographs were being made, an unfortunate event that points to one crucial drawback of the daguerreotype process: While crisply luminous and detailed, the daguerreotype is nonetheless unique and, at the time at least, impossible to reproduce. A lost image was gone forever. There is some evidence that Brown was also aware of the calotype process, William Henry Fox Talbot's 1844 process that produced a negative which in turn would allow duplication, but if collotypes had been made in Japan during Perry's visit, no known copies survive. (Bennett 2006, pp. 27–28)

The one of the most influential early photographers to come to Japan was undoubtedly Felice Beato, who had established himself as a professional photographer during the Crimean War, and subsequently won official commissions from the British military to document its further campaigns in the East. While in China, Beato met Charles Wirgman, an artist and reporter for the *Illustrated London News* (ILN),which then billed itself as the world's first illustrated newspaper. (Bennett 2006 [ILN], p. vii) When Wirgman's duties with the *ILN* took him to Japan, he invited Beato, who arrived in 1863. The two went into business together providing illustrated commentaries about life in Japan, a country that until only a decade earlier had been more or less an enigma, closed to large-scale foreign traffic and trade. Although the paper specifically accredited "Signor Beato" for providing the photographs that served as the originals for published engravings, it is doubtful that a photographer could have earned a living at the time as a correspondent alone, and Beato set up his studio in Yokohama serving the foreign community of residents and travelers. (Lacoste 2010, p. 54)

Beato pioneered a template for the presentation of his photographs that was afterward widely imitated by other studios serving the burgeoning foreign market. His album, titled *Photographic Views of Japan with Historical and Descriptive Notes, Compiled from Authentic Sources, and Personal Observation During a Residence of Several Years*, contained close to 200 photographs, divided into two broad categories, either landscapes or staged images involving Japanese people. (Guth 2004, p. 59) The landscapes, which Beato called "views," often depicted natural scenes or well-known architectural sites easily accessible to foreign travelers because they were within or near the confines of treaty ports . These contrasted in the album with portraits that Beato termed "costumes." Although in some respects meant to give the impression of having caught local people going about their everyday lives, these were fabricated images, often shot either in a studio or in open-air sites. The term "costumes" seems to plainly acknowledge their theatrical quality.

In another innovation, Beato also invited customers to create their own customized albums that would feature photographs which they had selected themselves, and which his studio would bind into a personalized, commemorative albums. This option allowed customers to document their stay in Japan by selecting photographs of places to which they had been, and then order them sequentially according to the route they had taken. (Hockley 2010)

"Views"

A closer look at Beato's *oevre* reveals the

extent to which his photographs in subject, composition and selection influenced the commercial photographic output not only of his contemporaries, but also of generations of photographers operating in Japan long after he left. (Beato operated his studio from 1863–1872. He finally left Japan in 1873 for Burma, where he opened another studio in the foreign settlement there. [Lacoste 2010, p. 23]) The fact that he was limited to treaty port cities and their surroundings was in fact not a severe constraint. The region around Yokohama provided access to temples and shrines, as well as a number of stops along the heavily traversed Tokaido. Restrictions on foreign travel soon loosened, allowing some areas within Tokyo, such as Asakusa, to be added to the itineraries of foreign "globetrotters"—a term that arguably originated in the early years of Yokohama's history. What is important to remember here is that Beato, though an intrepid traveler, was not braving unbeaten paths in Japan. The Edo period saw a large-scale boom in travel and tourism. It was made possible by a sophisticated and interlocking series of paths and roads, and was advertised by artists such as Katsushika Hokusai and Ando Hiroshige, whose compilations of pictures of "famous places" around the country were wildly successful domestically (and for that matter, abroad as well, although much later in the century). Perhaps it is little wonder that Beato's photographic landscapes of country roads, temples and shrines, gardens and well-known spots of scenic beauty were places whose renown had been established centuries before, and were therefore firmly fixed within the category of "Old Japan."

Murray's *Handbook to Japan* urged travelers to leave the city if they wanted to see the "Old Japan:"

> As for what is called "seeing Japanese life," the best plan is to avoid the Foreign Settlements in the Open Ports. You will see theatres, wrestling, dancing-girls, and the new Japan of European uniforms, political lectures, clubs, colleges, hospitals, and Methodist chapels, in the big cities. The old peasant life still continues almost unchanged in the districts not opened up by railways. (Chamberlain & Mason 1894, p. 12)

The countryside surrounding Yokohama provided Beato with ample material in which to explore and document the "Old Japan" that he believed would appeal to his foreign clientele. His "View at Eiyama," for example, shows a rural crossroad framed by two large, thatched, typically Japanese structures. The road closest to the picture plane, on which the viewer can image to be traveling, is actually the lesser of the two dirt roads. It nonetheless dominates the lower-right frame, bringing the viewer across a rustic wooden bridge overgrown with vegetation before it crosses the main road, quickly narrows to little more than an earthen path, then rises up to another structure visible only as a gentle gabled roof as it eventually, presumably, leads the viewer on a ascent of the distant mountains. In the accompanying caption, as in many other captions as well, Beato heralded Japan for what he called its "picturesque" beauty.

An integral part of Beato's albums was the juxtaposition of a descriptive caption on the page opposite each photograph. Captions usually ran no more than 500 words, and normally provided historical information about famous sites, or cultural information about Japanese manners, customs or occupations. Beato often described the scenes he depicted as being "picturesque," anchoring him in a well-established pictorial tradition in Western representation. The picturesque tradition not only provided the Western viewer with an aesthetically satisfying image of a distant locale, but also evoked the possibility of extending their visual journey further, to other, hidden places beyond the boundaries of the frame. Moreover, as Hockley notes in his thoughtfully assiduous examination of one of Beato's albums now held in the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College

(available online), the term picturesque had "… come to define an aesthetic associated with pastoral landscapes. Its use evoked a nostalgia for a rural lifestyle that was rapidly disappearing with the industrial revolution." (Hockley 2010) The road that stretches back into our past is, after all, barred to us. This is what brings about the longing and anguish that the Greeks associated with the original meaning of the word *nostalgia*. It is also central to the yearning for "Old Japan," and the element that gives Beato's countryside landscapes much of their poignancy.

"Costumes"

It has been argued that the "portraits" Beato produced were not really portraits at all, but could more appropriately be termed *tableaux vivant* because the actual people depicted are less important than the roles they play. (Hight 2011) They are like actors, which is perhaps why Beato chose the term "costumes" to call attention to their functional theatricality. They represented an array subjects from a variety of social classes, practicing a number of traditional trades. The album recreated, for example, the type of scenes one might encounter outside a busy temple: the divination vendors, the artisans, the blind masseurs. These were the native types and shops that foreigners often commented on in their journals. The entertainers of "Old Japan" are also present: the acrobats and lion dancers, and the practitioners of more traditional performing arts like Noh and Kabuki are also on hand. (Banta 1988, p. 30)

Women play an essential role in Beato's photographs. His "moos'mie" (*musume*, or young girl), while fully clothed, are nonetheless often depicted in vaguely eroticized poses—returning from the bath, dressing or asleep. "Sleeping Beauties," for example, shows two young women, one with her arm draped languidly over the other, resting under a quilted bedcover. Part of the romance of Japan, at least for the male traveler (and traveling during the Bakumatsu period in particular was a predominantly male domain due to its inherent danger), was the allure of Japanese women. Ernest Satow, who was with the British diplomatic mission to Bakumatsu Japan, reminisced much later about what motivated his sudden urge to come to the country:

> …the interesting account of Lord Elgin's Mission to China and Japan by Laurence Oliphant … inflamed my imagination with pictures verbal and coloured of a country where the sky was always blue, where the sun shone perpetually, and where the whole duty of man seemed to consist in lying on a matted floor with the windows open to the ground towards a miniature rock garden, in the company of rosy-lipped black-eyed and attentive damsels—in short, a realized fairyland. (Satow 1921, p. 8)

As Hight (2002) has pointed out, however, many of the Japanese "damsels" in the "fairyland" depicted by Beato were most likely prostitutes serving the foreign community of the treaty ports. Their plight was understandably harsh, not only because of their profession, but because of the added stigma as *rashamen*, or "Western sheep" inextricably sullied because of their contact with the "Western barbarian."

The warrior class is prominently featured in Beato's work. Although he began working in Japan at a time before the daimyo and samurai had been officially eradicated as a class and their distinctive double swords had been outlawed, later photographers would retain the samurai as a subject well after they were no longer visible on the streets of the city. Beato also portrayed samurai rituals, knowing that they intrigued his foreign audience. One of these customs alluded to is the suicide ritual known as *suppuku*. Those travelers who were not familiar with Mitford's *Tales of Old Japan* in its entirety could nonetheless read the famous excerpt depicting an actual ritual suicide in a number of guidebooks well into the 20th century. Mitford described his reactions in a lengthy passage recounting the *seppuku* he had

witnessed:

> While profoundly impressed by the terrible scene, it was impossible at the same time not to be filled with admiration of the firm and manly bearing of the sufferer, and the nerve with which the kaishaku performed his last duty to his master. Nothing could more strongly show the force of education. The samurai, or gentlemen of the military class, from his earliest years learns to look upon hara-kiri as a ceremony in which some day he may be called upon to play a part as a principle or second. (Mitford 1871, pp. 64–5)

Even in death the samurai's moral code fascinated many foreign tourists, and Beato was ready with lucrative images to sell, not only of "costumes" including swords and armor, but also with depictions of a samurai's final moments.

Later Photographers

Baron Raimund von Stillfried-Ratenicz was an Austrian-born aristocrat, artist, soldier, diplomat and quintessential globe-trotter. Before settling in Japan for an extended stay as a commercial photographer, he had been in China and the United States, as well as involved in Maximilian's ill-fated sojourn as Emperor of Mexico. There is little evidence that Stillfried had practiced photography before he came to Japan; it is believed that he learned the skill and trade under his mentor Beato in Yokohama prior to opening his own commercial studio under the name Stillfried & Company in 1871. His business success coincided with a boom in foreign tourism in that city, and a larger commercial interest followed in 1873: the Japan Photographic Association. After having taken on a partner to handle the financial aspects of his business, Stillfried & Andersen was formed, and in 1877, Stillfied bought out Beato's photographic stock and moved into his former teacher's studio on the Bund in Yokohama, a lucrative location next to the Grand Hotel, the primary destination for wealthier tourists. (Gartlan 2004, 15)

After learning about photography from Beato, Stillfried in turn taught a new generation of Japanese photographers the trade. By the early 1880s, he employed a staff of 38 full-time Japanese assistants. In an interview later in his career, Stillfried claimed that

> ...nine tenth of the Japanese photographers [have] been, at one time or another, assistants to Baron Von Stillfried. As soon as one of these assistants imagined himself to have learned enough to have worked independently, he ordinarily left and established himself on his own account. (qtd. in Rousmaniere 2004, p. 48)

By far the most influential of Stillfried's protégés was his assistant Kusakabe Kimpei who ran his own studio until 1912. When Stillfied's own business closed, Kusakabe was the main beneficiary of the negatives. The remainder went to Adolfo Farsari who had a successful studio, also in Yokohama. This brings up the difficult issue of attribution. As was the case with Beato's stock, which was acquired by Stillfried and then subsequently passed on to either Kusakabe or Farsari, many negatives were picked up by other studios which, in turn, marketed them as their own. A number of photographs that bear the "A. Farsari" name, for example, are known to be images originally produced by Beato. (Bennett 2006, p. 221)

Woodblock Prints

While the photographers of the Bakumatsu-Meiji periods were busy documenting and romanticizing what they knew would soon be a bygone era, Japan was also busy developing into a world power. Clearly, the years of the last half of the 19th century were ones of unprecedented growth and change. As we have seen, it was a change that alarmed and worried many foreign observers, but it was one that was largely ignored by the commercial photographers of the day. Browsing through the stock on offer at a Yokohama photographic studio, a traveler

to Meiji period Japan would be provided with few images, and given almost no inkling of, the phenomenal transformations going on outside.

To see the visual culture of the "New Japan"—the trains, telegraph wires, and technology that propelled Japan into the 20th century—one has to put down the photo album and turn to an older process, a process that had been developed in the early Edo period, reached it's peak of prestige over a century earlier, and one that was, ironically, in the twilight of its popular consumption: the woodblock print.

Interestingly, though the artists producing woodblock prints were focused on documenting the same general themes as the commercial photographers of the day, their perspective was entirely reversed. While the photographers were interested in the natural landscape, the woodblock print artists turned their gaze to the city, documenting the pell-mell bustle of the transforming urban scene. When photographers were busy staging tableaux involving geisha and samurai, woodblock print artists were hurriedly trying to capture what to them was an equally exotic and baffling creature: the foreigner.

Cityscapes

The opening of the treaty port of Yokohama in July of 1859 spawned a new genre of woodblock prints (or *nishiki-e* as they are often called in Japanese): prints depicting the new town and its inhabitants. These y*okohama-e*, as they came to be known, enjoyed a brief but considerable popularity involving over 30 different artists and over 50 publishers. (Yonemura 1990, p. 19)

Whereas Beato, for example, had depicted the sort of tranquil natural landscape that beckoned to the foreign imagination, the *yokohama-e* are boisterous with the hubbub and activity of the city. Often the recurring theme in these cityscapes is one of mobility. Ships, trains and carriages dominate. Occasionally, the port is visible in the background, juxtaposing older Japanese coastal junks with the massive steam ships bringing foreigners and their goods into Japan. In one print a steam ship is depicted with its import items assiduously labeled (Asian Art Museum of San Francisco [AAMSF], pp. 34–35). On land, a variety of wheeled vehicles jostle for right-of-way. We can see the native *jinrikisha*, and also foreign imports like the horse-drawn carriage. In Takeda Ikumaru's "Various Types of New Vehicles" (*Shinban Kurumazukushi*, n.d., AAMSF, pp. 28–29), we can see in the foreground a helter-skelter of eleven wheeled vehicles, from carriages and carts to even a small tricycle, each being marshaled in a different direction. In the background two ships proudly bearing the *hinomaru*—the official flag of naval and merchant ships from 1870, and the unofficial flag of the nation itself—patrol the harbor. Peeking over the horizon, echoing the flags, and rising on this boisterous "New Japan," is the morning sun. Finally, cutting between land and sea is a single steam locomotive, playfully bearing not the national flag, but a pinwheel.

Clearly, though the y*okohama-e* artists were obsessed with motion and mobility in general, they reserved a special fondness for the steam engine. These prints recall the fascination with this aspect of modern urban life—the railroads, cast-iron bridges, cavernous train stations and billowing steam—that we find in the contemporaneous work of the Impressionists in France. When Monet and Renoir met at Argenteuil in the summer after the first Impressionist Exhibition of 1874, the two paintings they produced were of the same subject and bear the same title: "Railroad Bridge, Argenteuil." At about the same time, Edouard Manet, who by that point in his career could have afforded practically any studio in Paris, chose one overlooking the Gare Saint-Lazare. His "Railway" (*Chemin de Fer*, 1873) features his wife and daughter engulfed in the steam rising above the station. Finally, it was Monet's *Gare Saint-Lazarre* (1877) that prompted Emile Zola to muse:

You can hear the trains rumble in, see the

> smoke billow up under the huge roofs … that is where painting is today… our artists have to find the poetry in train stations, the way their fathers found poetry in the forests and rivers. (National Gallery of Art)

In "Steam Engine in Tokyo" (*Tokyo joukisha no zu*, 1871, Yonemura 1990, pp. 24–5), passengers aboard a steam-powered train gaze at the bustling city outside with fascination and awe as another locomotive hurtles directly towards them on the same track. Whether the artist, Utagawa Yoshitora, meant the impending disaster to be a satirical warning against the dangers of rushing forward too recklessly into modernization, or whether it was simple meant to be yet another diversion in the happy hullaballoo of urban life, is unclear. Whatever the case, the artists specializing in *yokohama-e* obviously found their poetry in the life of the city. In this manner, they were in many ways more modern, more forward thinking and more cosmopolitan than their foreign contemporaries, like Beato, who employed the latest technology to produce images with a decidedly nostalgic perspective on their surroundings.

Foreign Types

The woodblock print artists were just as attuned to their own audience's interest in "the other" as the commercial photographers of the time, which is why the y*okohama-e* are filled with foreigners immersed in the unusual activities and surrounded by the exotic goods associated with them. These foreign residents and travelers become representative "types" or visual synecdoche for the five nations that enjoyed trade agreements with Japan: France, Great Britain, The Netherland, Russia and the United States. Subjects from China, Prussia and Portugal also figure prominently.

Utagawa Sadahide gained popularity with his numerous studies of the residents and topography of Yokohama. A talented draughtsman, his detailed birds-eye views of the new city provided Japanese with an introduction to Yokohama rooted in the familiar pictorial conventions of the woodblock print. It is in his depictions of human subjects, however, that Sadahide reveals his exuberant creativity and lively interest in the newest visitors to the country. His "Picture of People of the Five Nations Walking in Line" (*Gokakoku jinbutsu gyouho no zu*, 1861) is a master's *tour de force* presenting over 150 figures marching in a serpentine procession that winds across three panels of an *oban* (36.3 x 73.9 cm) triptych. The number of figures on parade would actually have roughly matched the foreign population of Yokohama at the time. (Yonekura 1990, pp. 130–131) Clearly it would be a mistake to assume that any of these characters were meant to be portraits of actual people, though. They are merely foreign types: men are in military uniforms or formal attire, women in colorful dresses, shawls and hats, and even a small number of children. In order to assist the viewer in understanding the country of origin of each figure, Sadahide has flag-bearers holding aloft the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack, the Tricolour and other flags of the Five Nations. This fascination with foreign vexillology appears throughout the y*okohama-e*. Flags, bunting or simply national colors often act as a visual reminder of the nationality being observed. In one delightful illustration by Utagawa Kunisada II for a biography of Ulysses S. Grant to commemorate his visit to Japan in 1879, the general peers out of a cartouche in the upper right-hand corner, while his wife gazes in his direction from the upper left. Underneath them five Japanese women dance across the page in *kimono* emblazoned with red, white and blue stars and stripes. (Guth 2004, p. 27)

Sadahide's parade of foreigners reveals another enthusiasm that y*okohama-e* artists shared with their contemporaries in the field of photography: foreign women. At least a third of the people in the procession described above are female. Their presence in the prints is thoroughly

disproportionate to their actual number in the early years of Yokohama. Still, we can find them strolling through the streets, immersed in domestic chores, or simply posing to flaunt their clothing, hairstyles, or jewelry, all of which many Japanese found new and fascinating, and all which the y*okohama-e* artists depicted in luxurious detail. Kunihisa adds another element in the print presenting America in his series "Among the Five Nations" (*Gokakoku no uchi*, 1861, Yonemura 1990, pp. 108–109). We see an American woman riding a horse (in itself a curiosity to a Japanese audience), and above her head we can find a rudimentary Japanese-English phonetic glossary. The English for *ten* (or "heaven") is transcribed as "hebun;" *chi*, or "earth" is "eruzutsu;" *geisha* becomes "shinjinku uwomen" or "singing woman," and so on. The print reminds us that international relations and cross-cultural exchange sometimes begins with the simplest words.

Conclusion

At a remove of over 150 years it is perhaps difficult for us today to imagine a time when cameras were not readily available and the woodblock print was a dominant visual medium in the dissemination of news. The phenomenal development of photographic technology and its subsequent ubiquity can only be contrasted with the decline in popularity of the woodblock print. Both the camera and the woodblock would document the major events of the second half of the 19th century: Japan's rapid westernization, as well as the exploits of the Imperial army as it quashed rebellion at home, then began to make its first steps into what would become its new Asian empire. By the 20th century, however, the lack of interest in the woodblock could only be matched by the growing Japanese fondness for the camera. Through these two staples of the 19th century, nonetheless, the visual culture of the 20th and 21st centuries has been born. Just as our *anime* today can find its roots in the early cameras, *manga* is also a child of the woodblock. Therefore it is important as we begin this new century to look again at that early period in the cross-cultural history of Japan, and reconsider the potent visual culture created by both Japanese and westerners alike as they tried to document and comprehend a place that was to them at once eternal and startlingly new.

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