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HIROSHIGE

Prints and Drawings

with essays by
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Hiroshige in History

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'We are already all Hiroshige', proclaimed the poet Yone Noguchi in 1917 at the ceremony commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of Hiroshige's death, a decisive moment in the early twentieth-century apotheosis of 'the only one native and national artist of Japan'.¹ Noguchi related the epiphany that he had experienced some years earlier, probably in the spring of 1905, shortly after his return from an extended period in America, where he had earned a reputation as an English-language poet.² Anxious 'to get a true sense of perspective toward Nature', Noguchi took a boat trip on the Sumida River to view the cherry blossoms at Mukōjima and discovered that the scene before him appeared exactly as in Hiroshige's many landscape prints of the spot: Nature was imitating art! It is a perfect example of the literal sense of 'picturesque'.

And so, in similar fashion, history has come to imitate art. Most of us today, Japanese and non-Japanese alike, are 'all Hiroshige' when we strive to visualise the landscape of the final decades of the Tokugawa period (1600–1868). For the city of Edo (present-day Tokyo) and the Tōkaidō Road in particular, we inevitably conjure up his prints in our mind's eye, drawing on the memory of countless book illustrations, tourist souvenirs and media recreations of the woodblock originals. If anything, the image has become even stronger in the course of the twentieth century, with continuing proliferation and improvement in the technologies of colour reproduction. For better or for worse, 'traditional Japan' has been envisioned for all posterity by Hiroshige.

In the process, the Japan of Hiroshige's own times has in critical ways been *removed* from history. Or, more precisely, his times have been subsumed into a timeless space of 'Japanese tradition', according to a logic that really began only in the twentieth century. During the first few decades after Hiroshige's death in 1858, his landscape images were consumed habitually in Japan and exotically in the West. In the great wave of Japonisme that swept Europe and then America in the later nineteenth century, it was Hokusai rather than Hiroshige who garnered the most attention, and both were admired not for the descriptive content of their images, but rather for their graphic skills, their composition, line and colour.

It was only after the turn of the century that Hiroshige came into his own, among a generation of romantic and spiritual seekers to whom his work seemed particularly attuned. Of considerable importance was the effusive essay by Mary McNeil Fenollosa, *Hiroshige: The Artist of Mist, Snow and Rain*, published in San Francisco in 1901. She and her husband, Ernest Fenollosa, seem to have developed an enthusiasm for *ukiyo-e* as a genuine art of the Japanese people, overcoming Ernest's own earlier denigration of the

genre as unrefined. Liberated from the sinified art of the aristocracy, *ukiyo-e*, Mary Fenollosa declared, was 'the spontaneous art of a joyous nation' and Hiroshige one of its great practitioners.³ She proceeded to single out Hiroshige's skill in expressing the atmospheric effects of mist, snow and rain as his greatest accomplishment—an opinion that rightly continues to hold sway among connoisseurs today.

The two features of Hiroshige's art emphasised by Mary Fenollosa—his specially 'Japanese' qualities and his skill as an artist of 'Nature' (always with a capital 'N')—became entrenched over the next two to three decades as the inevitable framework for thinking about the artist. In the same memorial ceremony of 1917 at which Yone Noguchi spoke, for example, the budding Hiroshige scholar Uchida Minoru, whose biography *Hiroshige* of 1932 remains the definitive work on the artist, proclaimed that, whereas most of the art of Japan's past was derived from China and hence, by implication, artificial, only Hiroshige was 'absolutely loyal to Nature'. Hiroshige, declared Uchida, was able to transmit 'Nature itself' in his art, so that through his prints the viewer could come into direct contact with Nature as a transcendent religious experience.⁴

Implicit in this highly romantic appreciation of Hiroshige was the notion that he was able to rise above the decadence and frivolity of his own times. Since Nature itself was Hiroshige's true teacher, as Uchida proclaimed, it followed that the artist was not really a part of his own era, but rather subject to the more universal and timeless laws of adherence to Nature itself. It was precisely this affinity for Nature that accounted for Hiroshige's popularity in the West, Uchida observed. Kojima Usui, the banker and pioneer alpinist who wrote the first extended Japanese scholarly study of Hiroshige in 1914, similarly argued that Hiroshige's landscapes offered the sole 'glimmer of revival' in an age of decadence and that his depictions of Nature made him the closest of all traditional artists to twentieth-century man.⁵

This removal of Hiroshige from his historical milieu was achieved, in a sense, by suppressing time and enhancing space, particularly the geographical and climatic space of the Japanese nation. Removal from the historical context was paralleled by an emphasis on the integration of Japanese society and culture into the 'natural' landscape of rivers, coasts, forests and mountains. These natural features of the land, and the urge to celebrate them in art and poetry, were considered to be timeless characteristics of Japan and its people. Such an emphasis was a source of particular consolation to young urban intellectuals in the rapidly industrialising Japan of the early twentieth century, as well as to many Westerners, who observed the process from without, lamenting the destruction of Japanese 'tradition'.

THE BEST OF TIMES, THE WORST OF TIMES

How, then, can we return Hiroshige to his own times, and what new perspectives on his art would this yield? It is no simple matter, since the times in which he actually lived, from his birth in 1797 until his death in 1858 at the age of sixty-two, were both contradictory and constantly changing. As with the England of 1775 with which Dickens

began *A Tale of Two Cities*, 'it was the best of times, it was the worst of times'—depending on which observer, in which year, one chooses to heed.

The 'best of times' perspective is supported by various objective features of the age and by a persistently optimistic tone in many popular writings of the time. It is a view that focuses on the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the central years of the fifty-year reign of the eleventh Tokugawa shogun, Ienari, from 1787 to 1837. Ienari's rule began with the turmoil of the Kansei reforms of the early 1790s and ended, as we shall see, in the famine years of the mid-1830s, but in between, Japan was singularly prosperous and peaceful—at least on the surface. Later historians have singled out the two eras of Bunka (1804–18) and Bunsei (1818–30), often combining the second syllables into the singular 'Kasei'.

The optimistic view of Kasei-era Japan was reflected at the time in a rhetoric that was most conspicuous in the shogun's capital city of Edo, stressing the 'prosperity' (*hanjō*) of the city, which was often referred to in these years as 'Great Edo' (Ō-Edo). This general view has been broadly corroborated by certain historians in recent years, both in Japan and in the West. The so-called 'modernisation' school of American historians, for example, has emphasised certain late Tokugawa trends as instrumental to the success of the rapid industrialisation after 1868, under the new Meiji regime. These include the growth of per capita income, rapid advances in popular education and literacy, increasing knowledge of the outside world and a thriving urban popular culture. Many Japanese as well, particularly in the last two to three decades, have been disposed to take a sanguine view of late Tokugawa 'civilisation' (the preferred term) as a time of peace and growing prosperity.

In general, however, the weight of both elite sentiment in Hiroshige's own time and of modern historiography falls decidedly on the side of 'the worst of times'. The prosperity of Kasei Japan, it is argued, was superficial, masking deep structural contradictions in the socio-political system and in the economy, as well as radical inequities in the distribution of wealth. Most of the critics in Hiroshige's own day were of a traditionalist bent, typically, samurai intellectuals bemoaning the fate of their own elite class under the steady encroachment of a money economy that impoverished the warrior rulers while enriching the merchants, who were officially at the bottom of the status hierarchy. The same critics were also distressed by the spread of popular culture, which was seen as materialistic, coarse and shallow. In the twentieth century, a similar critique was taken up by social and economic historians in the very different language of Marxist argument, but the emphasis on structural contradictions and the decadence of popular culture remained.

What do these two very different perspectives suggest about the art of Hiroshige? If we accept the peace-and-prosperity line, then the untroubled landscapes of the artist appear as a direct reflection of reality. Even the most ardent advocate of the 'best of times', however, is obliged to admit that Hiroshige's image of the country is highly idealised, revealing little of the frequently harsh realities of life in late Tokugawa Japan. By the argument that Mary Elizabeth Berry has advanced in connection with the great screen paintings of the capital Kyoto that appeared in the sixteenth century, landscape

becomes an art of 'consolation' that 'excises the pain' of contemporary reality.⁶ Indeed, precisely the three techniques of consolation specified by Berry are to be found at the core of Hiroshige's appeal: an emphasis on place, presented with integrity; a focus on the cyclical time of the seasons and the ritual calendar; and a preoccupation with people and their everyday customs.

Yet the fact remains that Hiroshige's Edo was far less troubled than war-ridden Kyoto of the sixteenth century, and elements that served as consolation three hundred years earlier had become conventional formulas by Hiroshige's time. And whereas the Kyoto screens were commissioned by the most powerful aristocratic patrons at huge expense, Hiroshige's colour landscape prints could be purchased for not much more than the price of a bowl of noodles. The power of printed reproduction and the sale through a large network of commercial publishers (see fig. 1) had worked to create a far broader base for the consumption of visual images, which now constituted a common culture for the city of Edo and increasingly for much of the rest of Japan, as prints and books were constantly carried back to the provinces as souvenirs of Edo.

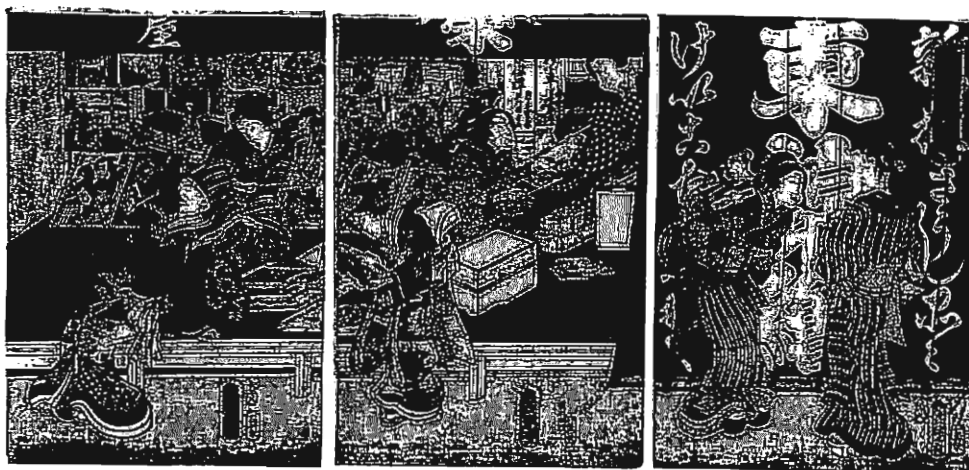
In the end, we cannot grasp the dynamics of Hiroshige's art as it evolved from the 1820s to the 1850s without considering both the best and the worst of his times. It is, in fact, precisely the conjunction of dynamic growth and mounting crisis that helps to relocate his art in history. Contrary to the image propagated by later enthusiasts, Hiroshige was not a genius who transcended his times, but a skilful artist who took advantage of the opportunities offered to him.

BETWEEN SAMURAI AND ARTISAN

The deepest and most ominous crisis of Tokugawa Japan in the era of Hiroshige, both in the view of critics at the time and of historians later, was that within the ruling samurai estate. Accounting for as much as seven per cent of the total population, this hereditary military estate had been almost completely removed from direct control of land and was now concentrated in the cities of the shogun and the provincial *daimyō*, or feudal lords, as administrative and police functionaries. Those at the top of the social pyramid that constituted the estate were very wealthy, sometimes continuing to hold landed fiefs and controlling dozens of sub-retainers and servants. The majority of the estate, however—those typically described as 'lower' samurai—lived on meagre hereditary stipends that, even when supplemented with salaries for specific jobs, were often inadequate to raise a family.

It was into these lower reaches of the samurai estate that Hiroshige was born in 1797. His father had been born into the Tanaka family of retainers of the Tsugaru domain in northern Japan, but had married the daughter of Andō Jūemon, a direct retainer of the Tokugawa shogun in Edo, and became his heir, assuming the Andō family name. Jūemon's status within the shogunal retainer band, which with families and servants accounted for about a quarter of Edo's million-plus population, was that of 'houseman' (*gokenin*), below the élite 'bannermen' (*hatamoto*) class. His particular job was that of fireman of the *dōshin* rank, comparable in status to a non-commissioned officer in a

Fig. 1 The print shop of Uoya Eikichi, publisher of Hiroshige's *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo*, two prints from which are hanging at upper left in the left-hand panel. *Ōban* triptych by Utagawa Kunisada, dated 1857/viii. Baur Collection, Geneva



modern military organisation. Hiroshige himself succeeded to this post at the age of fifteen, when he was orphaned by the successive deaths of his mother and father in 1812.

The only surviving scrap of evidence about Hiroshige's life as a fireman for the shogun is a commendation that he received for his performance at a fire on a winter's night in late 1818 at the age of twenty-one.⁷ At the time, he was already producing book illustrations as an *ukiyo*e artist, essentially an odd job to make ends meet. In this, he was like the majority of the *gokenin* retainers of the shogun, who engaged in a whole range of artisanal pursuits to supplement their stipends. Some took advantage of the space offered by their official residences to raise goldfish and singing insects or to start nurseries for the booming trade in flowering plants. Others manufactured umbrellas, fans, lanterns and lacquerware—all endeavours that involved skill in painting, which was part of samurai training.⁸ Still others, like the roguish Katsu Kokichi, a shogunal retainer of precisely Hiroshige's class and generation who recorded his exploits in an autobiography at the age of forty-two, lived by their wits, engaging in sharp practices and confidence tricks.⁹

Hiroshige thus lived precisely on the border of the samurai elite and the commoner working class of Edo. In his own job as fireman, he was in direct command of a unit of *gaen*, the rowdy men with full-body tattoos who fought fires in nothing but loincloths. Hiroshige was born in the Yayosu barracks of the shogunal firefighting organisation, located in the very heart of the area just east of Edo castle where the most powerful *daimyō* and the greatest shogunal officials had their offices—today the Marunouchi business district. He remained in the barracks until 1842, when, at the age of forty-six, he moved into the centre of the 'downtown' (*shitamachi*) section of commoner Edo about half a mile to the east, remaining there for the rest of his life.¹⁰ To the last, Hiroshige retained a strong consciousness of his status, as indicated by his request, three days before he died, that 'the funeral be in samurai style'.¹¹

Mary Fenollosa was thus misled in her conception of Hiroshige as representative of a native Japanese popular culture set apart from the 'haughty' samurai aristocracy and its

Chinese values. On the contrary, the artist was steeped in the Chinese learning that was basic to samurai education as well as in the refined pursuits of painting and poetry in both the Chinese and Japanese manner. At the same time, his ways of thinking and habits of life were probably not that different from the countless skilled artisans who made up the majority of commoner Edo. It was within this hybrid zone of artisan and samurai that Hiroshige was able to create an art that was at once elevated and deeply rooted in popular culture, both poetic and adept at craft technique.

THE 'CULTURE OF MOVEMENT'

For a persuasive account of the optimistic view of change in late Tokugawa Japan, we may turn to the writings of Nishiyama Matsunosuke and their emphasis on the emergence of a 'culture of movement' (*kōdō bunka*).¹² The term 'kōdō' suggests not just physical movement, but also 'conduct' or 'performance', referring to a wide range of cultural activities that were booming in nineteenth-century Edo and spreading throughout provincial cities and rural Japan as well. Some were private indoor pursuits, such as the practice of tea ceremony or *nō* chanting, but in Nishiyama's conception the 'culture of movement' consisted primarily of outdoor leisure activities, conducted for pleasure and with at least a veneer of religious dedication. Most such activities involved paying money to a variety of purveyors, not the least of them the priests of shrines and temples. In short, it was a thriving culture of commercialised leisure, driven by general economic prosperity.

For a detailed pictorial record of such activities, no better source is available than the landscape prints of Hiroshige, which provide a virtual catalogue of the late Tokugawa 'culture of movement' described by Nishiyama. To the classical 'floating world' (i.e. fleeting) pastimes of the theatre and entertainment at the Yoshiwara brothel are now added a whole array of outdoor activities: flower-viewing and other seasonal pastimes, pilgrimages to temples and shrines, periodic festivals, trips to hot springs and sightseeing. The 'famous places' (*meisho*) were always depicted in Hiroshige's views in conjunction with a particular activity or range of activities. In Edo, Gotenyama and Asukayama would always be shown with picnickers viewing the spring cherries in bloom, while Ryōgoku featured summer sideshows and fireworks, the temple of Kaianji was seen amid maple trees in autumn and the famous Nihon Bridge appeared more often than not under an auspicious covering of New Year's snow.

In all such cases, the emphasis on leisure activities contrasts strikingly with the landscapes of Hokusai, which reflect the workaday world of human labour. People stop and play in the prints of Hokusai, of course, but more as a momentary respite from work; the figures in Hiroshige, on the other hand, seem more bent on relaxation. Whereas the most conspicuous travellers in Hiroshige's prints have their loads (or even themselves) carried by others, those on Hokusai's roads tend to bear their own burdens. We can easily detect the contrast of social origins here between Hokusai, the artisan, and Hiroshige, the man hovering between the world of the artisan and that of the samurai.

Another consequence of Hiroshige's emphasis on the leisure-orientated 'culture of movement' was a heavy stress on the surrounding landscape, which was itself often the focus of the activities, especially in the case of seasonal viewing pleasures. In some instances, of course, the landscape becomes an end in itself, in prints of lonely isolated figures huddled in the rain or snow or beneath a moonlit sky. While the aesthetic achievement of such works is not to be denied, they are in fact exceptional within the totality of Hiroshige's landscape oeuvre, some eighty-five per cent of which depicts busy activity in bright daylight under clear skies. Much of this activity depended on the surrounding landscape for its essential meaning, so that nature and culture were closely interdependent. In the end, Hiroshige was perhaps less an artist of Nature than of the culture of nature.

Although the majority of Hiroshige's landscape prints depicted activities in Edo, he also reached out along the highways of Japan, first in his famous series of the stations of the Tōkaidō Road, then in the stations of the Kisokaidō Road (in the series begun by Keisai Eisen) and, still later, in *Famous Views in the Sixty-odd Provinces*. A perpetual debate among those who have written about Hiroshige revolves around the extent to which he based his views of the highways and provinces on first-hand observation and direct sketching. Later anecdotes about the painter have tended to support the notion that he sketched from nature. There is, for example, the story, told to Matsuki Kihachirō by an old man whose father had allegedly been a close friend of the artist, that Hiroshige in his later years suddenly took off on a trip all the way to the island of Awaji just to sketch the Naruto whirlpools for his famous triptych view of the spot (cat. 119).¹³ Common sense tells us that this is pure legend, but it is a legend that confirms the immediacy of Hiroshige's depictions of place.

Hiroshige did indeed travel from time to time, as did increasing numbers of his countrymen in the late Tokugawa period, and it was such travel that generated the demand for his prints. It is equally clear, however, that the majority of his prints of places outside Edo did not derive from direct observation. Most scholars agree that Hiroshige really did make the trip along the Tōkaidō Road to Kyoto in about 1832, as a member of an annual autumn mission from the shogun in Edo, the seat of actual governance, to the emperor, who resided in Kyoto and retained a strong ceremonial and symbolic role as the legitimator of the Tokugawa regime. This trip presumably served as inspiration for the famous series *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road*, published by Hōeidō, probably in 1833, but Suzuki Jūzō has observed that Hiroshige probably did not rely on actual sketches, at least not for most of the stations more distant from Edo: those up to about Fujisawa (the sixth station from Edo) have a detailed quality of direct observation, but later views are more abstract and, after Okitsu (seventeenth station), he even relied for some views on a published gazeteer.¹⁴ The sources for Hiroshige's Kisokaidō views are unknown, but certainly did not include direct experience, while the majority of his depictions in *Famous Views in the Sixty-odd Provinces* were modelled after illustrations in printed gazeteers.¹⁵

But none of this is of paramount importance: Hiroshige was selling images of places, not documentary photographs. His depictions of many places outside Edo are far more

important in revealing how his work promoted the visualisation of a new national space in the later Tokugawa period. The groundwork was laid first in printed guidebooks and gazeteers, particularly the genre known as *meisho zue* ('views of famous places'), which began in 1780 with *Miyako meisho zue*, illustrating the imperial capital of Kyoto, and continued until 1862 in twenty-five more such works. Of these, ten were organised by specific provinces (mostly in western Japan), two by highways (the same two depicted by Hiroshige) and nine by pilgrimage circuits, while four were devoted to the great cities—three more to Kyoto and one to Edo.¹⁶ This last, *Edo meisho zue*, appeared from 1835 to 1837, at the height of Hiroshige's activity, and was to provide the compositions for some of his own later depictions of Edo.¹⁷

THE TENPŌ CRISIS

The era of peace and prosperity in which Hiroshige matured as an artist came to an end in the mid-1830s with the 'Tenpō crisis' (named after the Tenpō year-period, 1830–44), which is the focus of attention for those historians who take a 'worst of times' approach to late Tokugawa Japan. The Tenpō crisis was actually a succession of two related crises, first a prolonged period of famine, economic distress and political conflict throughout the country from 1832 to 1838 (see fig. 2), followed by a period of controversial political reforms by the Tokugawa government from 1841 to 1843, with the impact of each continuing well beyond the peak years.

On the face of it, the famine years of the 1830s do not seem to have set back Hiroshige as an artist: on the contrary, it was precisely in this period that he was at his creative peak, producing his most widely recognised masterpieces. The change in the weather that would lead to famine began in 1831, approximately the year of his first landscape success, the 'Ichiyūsai'-signed *Famous Views in the Eastern Capital* series (cat. 6, 7), while the Hōeidō *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road* (cat. 17–28, 110–13) is generally acknowledged to have been published in the course of 1833, the first truly disastrous year of crop failures and resultant famine. If we follow the customary dating schemes, these series were followed in the mid-1830s by such acclaimed works as *Famous Views of Kyoto* (cat. 50–3, 125) and *Eight Views in Ōmi Province* (cat. 68–75). Somewhat later, roughly coinciding with the peak of the famine from late 1836 on into 1838, came his lyrical *Eight Views in the Environs of Edo* (cat. 63–7) and his contributions to *The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaidō Road* (cat. 35–40, 115–17). The cynical might suppose that Hiroshige's talent as 'the artist of mist, snow and rain' was nurtured by the excess of precipitation that lay behind most of the crop failures in this period.

A very different relationship between the famine and Hiroshige's art was proposed, however, by Roger Keyes in an essay of 1982.¹⁸ He argued that Hiroshige took over the Kisokaidō series from Eisen shortly after it began in 1835, producing in short order some of his most memorable masterpieces (such as cat. 35, 38, 117). But then, Keyes speculated, from about the winter of 1835–6, the impact of the famine obliged Hiroshige to 'remain inactive as a print designer for two years, or even longer'. Moreover, when he then

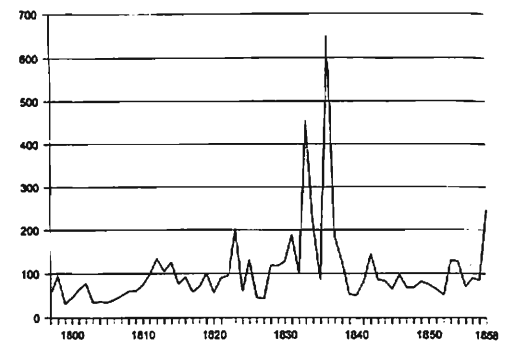


Fig. 2 'Magnitude' of national conflict in Japan during Hiroshige's life, 1800–58. Data courtesy of Professor James W. White, University of North Carolina. 'Magnitude' is an index that scales each recorded conflict according to severity

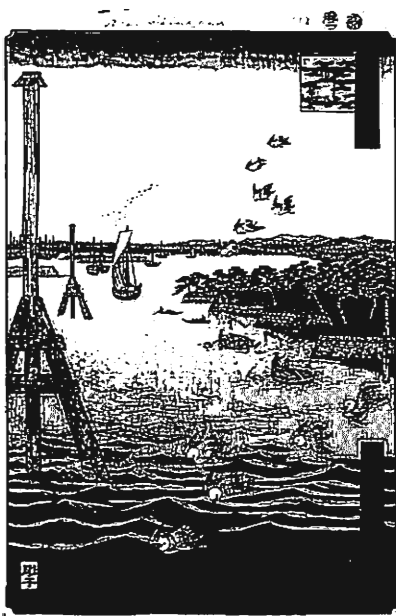


Fig. 3 View of Shiba Coast, from *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo*, dated 1856/X. The small islands in the distance on the left are the 'Odaiba' fortifications erected after Commodore Perry's arrival in Japan in 1853. The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY

resumed activity in about 1838 or 1839, a dramatic change had occurred: his landscapes had lost their 'warmth and poetry' and were now 'flat and dull'. Only with *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo* in 1858 did he 'regain the power of his first vision'.

Putting to one side the problematic matter of dating Hiroshige's work on the *Kisokaidō* series (which most experts put considerably later than required by Keyes's theory), it is worth heeding the notion that the Tenpō famine produced a severe crisis in Japanese publishing. The evidence is mixed, but suggests in the end that the overall impact was modest, although somewhat greater in Osaka than in Edo.¹⁹ The annual number of fiction titles published in Edo, for example, was fairly steady until 1837–8, when there was a decline of about one-third—noticeable but not dramatic.²⁰ Keyes claimed that *surimono* production fell off sharply in Edo after spring 1836, and it is indeed conceivable that the kind of extravagant entertainment for which *surimono* often served as announcements did in fact decline. Such entertainment certainly did not come to a halt, however, as demonstrated by the lavish painting party (*shogakai*) held by the writer Takizawa Bakin in the autumn of 1836, a 'nine-hour extravaganza' attended by over one thousand people.²¹

Andrew Markus comments on contemporary chroniclers' lack of disapproval of the 'contrast of penury and super-abundance' exemplified by such banquets in time of famine.²² We must remember that the Tenpō famine was indeed a disaster of formidable proportions, with deaths numbering in the tens of thousands in parts of Japan. Yet, like most famines, it was a disaster with strongly differential effects by class and region, affecting the poor rather than the rich, the countryside far more than the cities, and certain parts of Japan—especially the Tōhoku region to the north—much more acutely than others. The capital of Edo weathered the crisis fairly well, in spite of acute increases in the price of rice, from two to four times the normal level in the five-year period from spring 1833.²³ The entertainment industry, in particular, suffered, with business falling off sharply in the pleasure quarters. Government authorities in Edo took aggressive and generally successful measures to alleviate the worst effects of the famine, providing free relief rice, selling cheap rice and sheltering the poorest. Hundreds died of famine in the city, but most appear to have been rural refugees who were already sick and starving. Edo was spared the rioting and protest that occurred in so much of rural Japan and in other cities (see fig. 2).

It is difficult to confirm, therefore, that the Tenpō famine had the impact on print production that Keyes claimed and even harder to demonstrate that Hiroshige, in Edo, was himself affected by the famine. It remains plausible, of course, that the crisis took a toll on his spirit, but a more persuasive reason for personal distress, as both Keyes and other scholars have suggested, was his wife's death in 1839/X. Most tend to agree that, sometime in the late 1830s, after Hiroshige had produced his greatest masterpieces, his art lost much of its poetry and inventiveness of design, but it remains a matter of speculation whether this was the result of social change, personal tragedy or simply of overwork.

There is general agreement, however, on the impact on art of the second phase of the Tenpō crisis: the reforms that the government instituted in the autumn of 1841,

largely in response to the economic distress and political ferment occasioned by the famine years, had a major effect on the content of colour prints.²⁴ The brunt of the impact was born by prints of actors and courtesans, which were prohibited outright, and by de luxe prints (mostly of actors) that used large numbers of colour blocks. Hiroshige's landscapes, which already fell within the newly prescribed limits of seven to eight colours per print, could scarcely have been affected, although the restriction of the price for a single-sheet print to 16 copper *mon* may have required some cutting of corners.²⁵

A further provision of the print-related Tenpō edicts, which were issued on three occasions over a year from 1842/vi, may have had a greater impact on Hiroshige's prints. This was the explicit demand, contained in the first reform edict, for prints on themes of 'loyalty, filiality and honour' (*chūkō setsugō*) so as to 'promote virtue for women and children' (*jijō kanzen*) in line with the moralistic emphases of the reforms as a whole. Partly as a result of this encouragement, and possibly also because publishers detected a genuine public interest, prints on historical themes and heroic figures grew in number. It was probably for this reason that the relative importance of figures in Hiroshige's prints showed a clear increase after the reform edicts. His many new Tōkaidō Road series, for example, in a variety of formats, generally featured larger figures than in the original series and also a heavier dose of local customs. In the end, this may all just reflect a growing public taste for images that were descriptive and historical. Judging from the large quantity of Hiroshige's work from the 1840s into the 1850s, it is also conceivable that he was simply too much in demand to pay close attention to quality and innovation.

THE WORLD STOOD ON END

The economic crisis of the Tenpō years relaxed in time, as did the effects of the reforms, which were forgotten within three to four years. Tension continued to mount, however, over the growing Western military presence in East Asian waters, particularly after the defeat of China in the Opium War of 1840–2, an event that deeply troubled Japanese leaders and intellectuals. The arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry's ships just over a decade later, in July 1853, set off a chain of diplomatic and political crises that would culminate in the political revolution of 1867–8, which restored the emperor to direct rule and ended the Tokugawa shogunate. Hiroshige's last years were thus marked by political ferment and also by various natural disasters, such as the great earthquake that struck Edo in the autumn of 1855. Nevertheless, he was spared the worst of this turbulent era, dying in the cholera epidemic in the autumn of 1858, prior to the opening of Yokohama the following year.²⁶ The crises of this new era found only the dimmest of reflections in the prints of Hiroshige. In his last great series, *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo* (cat. 93–106), for example, the only signs of danger are distant views of the fortifications in the Bay of Edo, erected in case of foreign attack (see fig. 3), and a single tiny depiction of Japanese soldiers wearing Western trousers.²⁷

More symbolically, however, we might imagine a special meaning in Hiroshige's sudden turn to a vertical format in his final years, first on a large scale in *Famous Views in*

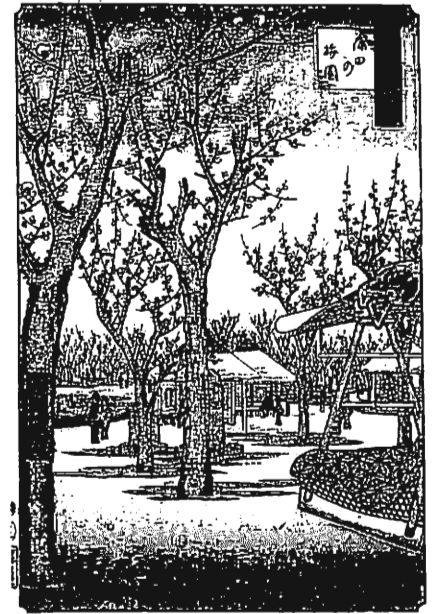
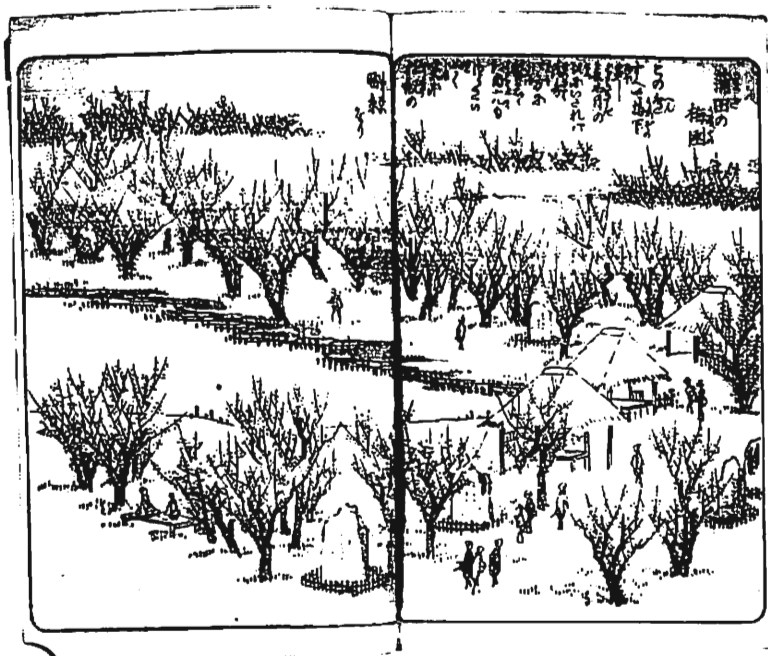


Fig. 4 Plum Garden, Kamata, from *Picture Souvenirs of Edo*, vol. 2 (1850). Columbia University, New York, C. V. Starr East Asian Library

Fig. 5 Plum Garden, Kamata, from *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo*, dated 1857/1. The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY

the Sixty-odd Provinces, a series initiated just one month following Perry's arrival and completed three years later. It seems too simple to argue, as some have done, that Hiroshige was looking for a new selling point and, while I do not posit a causal connection between the political crisis and the pictorial format, there is little doubt that the stable, grounded quality of Hiroshige's classical, horizontal landscapes was now upset—literally stood on end.

This unsettling verticality was particularly evident in an unusual type of composition that is found in about one-third of the 118 prints in Hiroshige's *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo*, in which a dramatic and closely cropped foreground object was set against a distant view. I would argue that these are 'moving pictures', in which the artist effectively 'pans' across the picture surface in the manner of a movie camera.²⁸ Comparison of *Plum Garden, Kamata* (fig. 5), for example, with its model in Hiroshige's earlier *Picture Souvenirs of Edo* (fig. 4), reveals that the artist has deliberately obstructed our view of the three stone markers that had been clearly visible in the early print, impelling us mentally to shift viewpoint (either ours or the picture's) in order to discover the markers and their inscriptions. The strangely suspended palanquin in the foreground at right adds to the unstable tension of the scene, implying a hidden narrative. It is a strikingly cinematic composition, one wholly appropriate to unstable and quickly changing times.

Broadening this observation, we can see that, in fact, all Hiroshige's depictions of place were in a basic sense 'moving pictures'. This is partly a matter of compositional techniques, notably that of cropping objects along either the sides or, most unconventionally, the lower edge of the image (seen as early as the 1831–2 *Famous Views*;

cat. 6, 7). Beyond this, however, Hiroshige's landscapes were produced almost entirely in multiple sets, most commonly of eight, ten and twelve, with some of the best known numbering many more. These series were put on sale over a period of time, so they would be enjoyed in sequence. This is rarely the way in which we view them today, preferring rather to focus on the most lyrical and poetic images and therefore losing the sense of dynamic progression that was as crucial to the prints as it was to the 'culture of movement' that lay behind so much of Hiroshige's work. It is by bringing Hiroshige back into history that we can appreciate anew the elements of change and even instability that underlay so much of his artistic vision.

NOTES

- 1 Noguchi, 1932, English section, p. 4. Although not noted as such, the first twenty pages of this essay are a translation of Noguchi's speech at the 1917 commemoration. For the Japanese original, see 'Hiroshige ni tsuite', in Watanabe Shōzaburō, ed., *Hiroshige: Rokujūkkai tsuizen kinen isaku tenrankai mokuroku*, Tokyo, 1917, pp. 9-18.
- 2 Noguchi referred to the incident as having occurred 'fourteen to fifteen years ago', but it could only have taken place after his return from America in September 1904, thirteen years before.
- 3 Fenollosa, 1901, p. 3.
- 4 Uchida Minoru, 'Hiroshige ga ni tsuite no kansō oyobi sono denki', in Watanabe (note 1), pp. 5-9. Reprinted in *Ukiyoe*, no. 29 (1917), under the title 'Hiroshige no shizenkan to kare no jinkaku', and in Sakai, 1996, pp. 290-2.
- 5 Kojima Usui, *Ukiyoe to fūkeiga*, Tokyo, 1914, reprinted in *Kojima Usui zenshū*, vol. 13,

Tokyo, 1984, pp. 1-369. The quoted phrase appears on p. 4 of the latter.

- 6 M.E. Berry, *The Culture of Civil War in Kyoto*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994, pp. 285-302.
- 7 This is recorded in the history of the Andō family that was compiled in 1866 by the head of the family two generations later than Hiroshige. See Uchida, 1932, p. 83, and Suzuki, 1970, p. 195.
- 8 For details on the various by-employments of *gokenin* in Edo, see Takayanagi Kaneyoshi, *Zusetsu Edo no kakyū bushi*, Tokyo, 1980, pp. 82-8.
- 9 Katsu Kokichi, *Musui's Story: The Autobiography of a Tokugawa Samurai*, trans. Teruko Craig, Tucson, 1988. For all its embroideries, this is a wonderfully revealing account of the plight and courage of lower samurai in late Tokugawa Japan.
- 10 For Hiroshige's residences, see Uchida, 1932, pp. 94-6. The Yayosu barracks were located on the site of what is now the Meiji Life Insurance

Building, on the north-eastern corner of the Babasaki-mon intersection.

- 11 '... sōshiki wa buke no fū ni itasubeshi'. Suzuki, 1970, p. 84.
- 12 Nishiyama Matsunosuke, 'Edo chōnin sōron', in Nishiyama Matsunosuke, ed., *Edo chōnin no kenkyū*, vol. 1, Tokyo, 1972, pp. 33-8. A selection of Nishiyama's writings is newly available in Nishiyama Matsunosuke, *Edo Culture: Daily Life and Diversions in Urban Japan, 1600-1868*, trans. Gerald Groemer, Honolulu, 1997.
- 13 Matsuki Kihachirō, 'Hiroshige no fūkeiga ni okeru shasei yōsu', *Ukiyoe*, no. 29 (1917), as reprinted in Sakai, 1996, p. 292.
- 14 Suzuki, 1970, pp. 34-5. According to Suzuki, Hiroshige consulted the *Tōkaidō meisho zue* of 1797 for six of the fifty-five prints.
- 15 For a complete list of the correspondences, see Suzuki, 1970, pp. 70-1.
- 16 From the list under 'meisho zue' in *Nihon bungaku daijiten*, vol. 7, Tokyo, 1950-2, p. 152.

17 For examples, see Smith and Poster, 1986, pls. 110, 116, 118.

18 R. Keyes, 'Hiroshige's Tōkaidō Prints', in S. Addiss, ed., *Tōkaidō: On the Road—Pilgrimage, Travel, and Culture*, exh. cat., University of Kansas, Spencer Museum of Art, 1982, pp. 55, 64.

19 Keyes claimed that Osaka prints of actors 'stopped for all practical purposes' in the summer of 1836, resuming only in 1839 or 1840, but this does not appear to have been the case; see, for example, D.J. Schwaab, *Osaka Prints*, New York, 1989, in which figs. 178–84 are all datable to 1837–8. Osaka publishing does seem to have been less extensive in these years, however.

20 *Nihon shōsetsu nenpyō*, a list of novels published in Edo, gives the following totals for the years 1831–40: 43, 45, 40, 38, 36, 34, 39, 32, 32, 31, 35. I am grateful to Matthi Forrer for bringing these figures to my attention.

21 Andrew Markus, 'Shogakai: Celebrity Banquets of the Late Edo Period', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 53/1, June 1993, pp. 148–50.

This article gives a fine account of the role of *shogakai* parties in late Edo culture, a number of which Hiroshige is recorded as having attended.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

23 For a year-by-year account of the Tenpō famine's impact on Edo, see Minami Kazuo, 'Tenpō kikin to Edo', in Tokyō hyakunen shi hensan iinkai, ed., *Tōkyō hyakunen shi*, vol. 1, Tokyo, 1973, pp. 1255–65.

24 For the texts and an analysis of the relevant edicts, see Kobori Sakae, 'Tenpō kaikaku to nishiki-e', *Ukiyoe geijutsu*, no. 5 (1932), pp. 40–53. For a good account of the impact of the Tenpō reforms on *uki-yoe*, see S.E. Thompson, 'The Politics of Japanese Prints', in *Undercurrents in the Floating World: Censorship and Japanese Prints*, exh. cat., New York, The Asia Society Galleries, 1991, pp. 72–85.

25 Kojima Usui claims that the price for ordinary prints of the late Tokugawa period, which would presumably include Hiroshige's landscapes, was about 24 *mon*, while 16 *mon* would buy only

a 'cheap' work (*yasumono*). It is doubtful, in any case, whether the limitation of prices was enforced for long. Kojima Usui, 'Edo no nishikie-ten,' *Ukiyoe*, no. 1 (June 1915), as reprinted in *Kojima Usui zenshū*, vol. 13, Tokyo, 1984, p. 416.

26 Although Hiroshige died during the cholera epidemic, Uchida questioned whether he actually died of cholera, claiming that the reported symptoms and the leisure to write three separate wills in the days before his death suggest a different disease. Uchida, 1932, p. 109.

27 See Smith and Poster, 1986, pls. 13, 81, 83, 108.

28 For the idea of a class of 'moving pictures' in European art that in various ways anticipated cinema, see A. Hollander, *Moving Pictures*, Cambridge, Mass., 1991.