Modernity and Ukiyo-e: a manufactured positive modernity depicted on ukiyo-e prints from the Meiji period

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Introduction

The Meiji era is the period from 1868 to 1912 that was kicked off with the Meiji Restoration in 1867. The empire of Japan was shifting from being an isolated feudal society to an industrialized nation-state. With the fall of the Edo period Tokugawa shogunate and the emergence of a government, a new era of Meiji was proclaimed. The newly erected Japanese government felt a need to modernize and Westernize because of pressures from the West. Keeping the emperor in place, the government implemented the Five Quarter Oath in 1868 where the class differences would disappear to unify the country. However, in reality, this would not be easy and there were revolts because of the changes of the Meiji era. Modernity is often characterized as Westernization. This, however, seems different for Japan, which kept a lot of traditional elements during the Meiji era. Japan used the Western powers as an example but did not follow their formula exactly, this was especially true for the later Meiji period. Political changes and policies were also implemented in several facets of society. "…, the 'industrious revolution' of the early modern period was subsumed under a true industrial revolution; and Western education and science, which drove technological advancement, became the norms."[1] This all was in the name of building a nation.

Ukiyo-e is often perceived as an art of the Edo period. However, the art form was a popular medium into the later Meiji era as well. The Meiji period was the last era these prints were prevalent. Prints did not disappear quickly, but modern technology like the photograph was considered the death of ukiyo-e. Even famous ukiyo-e types like actor prints were diminished because the inroads of photography in theater magazines stopped them from becoming long-term projects.[2] "Ukiyo-e was at the centre of this trend and was exported to Europe one after another. Ukiyo-e was not only a valuable export resource for Japan from the Meiji era onwards, but also highly valued in Europe, especially in France, where research into ukiyo-e began earlier than in Japan."[3] There was an attempt to modernize ukiyo-e prints when the Meiji period started, especially for modern inventions like newspapers the medium seemed suited enough, but at the end of the nineteenth century, ukiyo-e seemed to face a certain death as the primary medium.[4] Some exceptions would be the rise of so-called nishiki-e newspapers in 1874 and 1875 that featured the brightly colored ukiyo-e together with news articles or pictures of kabuki.[5] There was a new type of art that was favored in the eyes of the Meiji government and that was Western art. This would mean a split in the arts that would be taught in academia, Western art would be Yōga and Japanese art would be Nihonga. "Art historians still subscribe, in varying degrees, to their premises that (1) Japanese art declined during the waning decades of the Edo era, resulting in a dilution of traditional values and skills, (2) the Meiji government's indiscriminate policies of Westernization and their official espousal of Western art threatened the survival of the traditional arts..."[6] Towards the end of the Meiji period artists of

[1] Walker, Brett L. A concise history of Japan. Cambridge University press, 2015. Page 163.
[2] Rimer, J. Thomas. Since Meiji. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011. Page 376
[3] Sugawara, Mayumi. Merits and Demerits in the Study of Ukiyo-e : Issues Stemming from How Ukiyo-e Is Regarded in Modern Japan. UrbanScope : e-Journal of the Urban-Culture Research Center 13. 2022. Page 1.
[4] Sullivan, Michael. Ontmoetingen van Oosterse en Westerse Kunst van de zestiende eeuw tot heden. A.W. Sijthoff's Uitgeversmaatschappij bv Leiden, 1975. Page 149.
[5] Foxwell, Chelsea. The Art of Reframing the News: Early Meiji Shinbun Nishiki-e in Context. Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 78, no. 1. 2018. Page 47-48.
[6] Rimer. Since Meiji, 2011. Page 42.

ukiyo-e would also transition into different skillsets or professions. There would be a stream of artists going into nihonga, like Kawanabe Kyōsai, "painter in a range of traditional techniques before the rise of the category Nihonga"[7]. He reinvented himself going from ukiyo-e to making political caricatures to making makimono (horizontal handscrolls). Nonetheless, painting would be more associated with those terms and since ukiyo-e would most likely not be regarded as a high form of art (because it was used as such a common medium for all types of subjects), and thus was not preserved as well as Japanese silk painting for example. Considering artists going towards a more modern and suitable profession for their art in the eyes of the new government was perhaps a sign that artists felt that ukiyo-e was fleeting as a daily part of life like it had been in Edo. Ukiyo-e was thus not considered high art for the Japanese themselves but it was a great export for foreign nations that did hold print art to a certain degree of importance. For the Japanese, the prints kept the same function for at least the beginning of the Meiji period. Almost as a sort of social media people kept up with fashion trends, the latest technologies, and news that happened all around. Not every ukiyo-e artist would change everything for the new era. Traditional pictures also would still be a popular choice for publishers. Angry or overwhelmed people liked to revert to the old times of Edo, so there was always a market for bijin, kabuki, or traditional landscape prints. However, for the more curious people, newer subjects sparked their interest. Trains, cars, telegraph poles, brick roads, tall brick buildings, factories, Western-style dress, sports, Western-style schools, war efforts in Western military outfits, just to name a few. Together with the familiar style of ukiyo-e prints and more familiar Japanese-style items, landscapes, and people, this would be a big part of the new rage of the Meiji prints. Even if modernity was scary, it was here to stay and prints showing off new developments were just a confirmation of that. But ukiyo-e stayed for a long period into the Meiji era, this can be addressed to the fact that this type of medium was still preferred by an audience that had limited literacy, newspapers met halfway by including Nishiki-e in their newspapers, elongating the lifespan of ukiyo-e.[8]

Figure 1 is an example of Kyōsai's critique of modernity. Here he was interested in showing the uncanny and scary idea of modernity and even how it affected the divine. The painting shows a phantasmagoric heaven-bound railcar being greeted by divine emissaries.[9] This print was meant to be satirical in the way that this scene is weird, making the train look like a tiny Buddhist altar. In the first chapter, I will explain train prints that were mostly positive representations, but this train picture is a way of Kyōsai showing the uncanny and unknown aspect by making it run next to the gods in the clouds. This told people that if they are not careful technology is going to take over, even the divine gods and spirits.

[7] Clark, John G., Japanese Exchanges in Art 1850s to 1930s with Britain, Continental Europe, and the USA, Power Publications, 2007. Page 284.
[8] Foxwell, The Art of Reframing the News: Early Meiji Shinbun Nishiki-e in Context. 2018. Page 53.
[9] Gleason, Alan. "Chasing the Train: Railroads in Japanese History and Art" DNP Museum Information artscape Japan, DNP Art Communications, 2022, accessed 15-11-2023, https://artscape.jp/artscape/eng/ht/2212.html

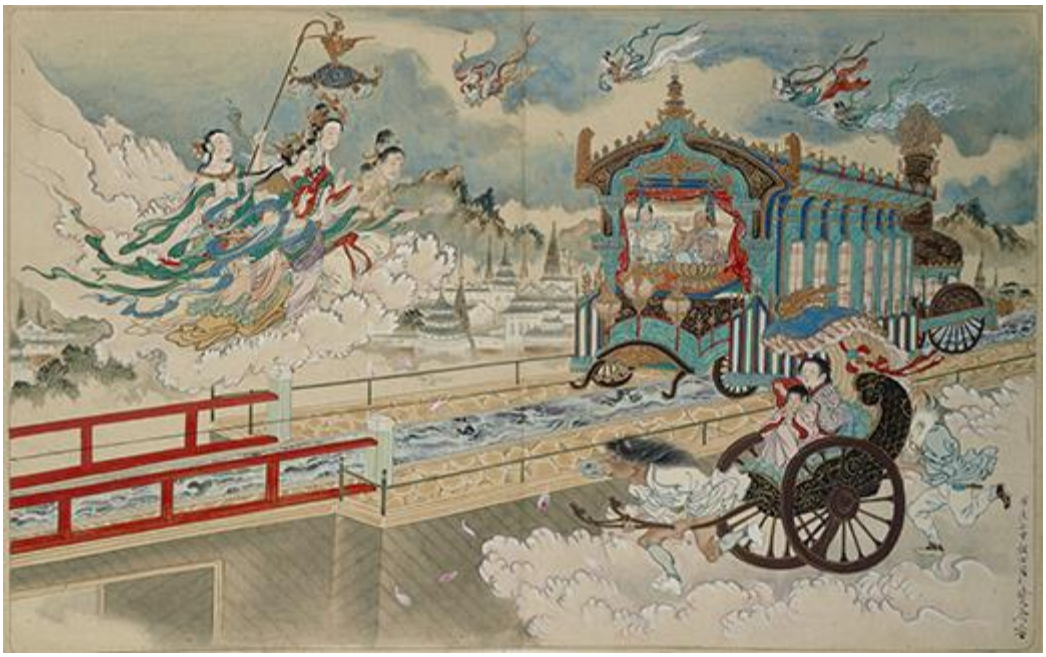

Figure 1. Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831-1889), “A Steam Locomotive Bound for Heaven, from Journey through Heaven and Hell”, 1872, ink on paper.

In this thesis, I will address positivity concerning Meiji era ukiyo-e in a few different forms. I will answer the question: In what way do ukiyo-e prints from the Meiji period portray modernity in a positive light in the key themes of technology, cityscape, and structures of youth? How did the prints fashion modernity in a positive light? Technology, cityscape/infrastructure, and structures of the youth, all of these seem to be the most prevalent forms of modernity that were seen through a positive lens. Since the only focus is on positive aspects, all aspects can be touched upon. Also, with this era being the last era of proper ukiyo-e prints as they were in the Edo period (even though people at the time might have not been aware), I think exploring these themes with this medium of art is essential to knowing how modernity was portrayed through a lens of familiarity. One year would not feel like a big change even now, so seeing these changes slowly progress in a familiar Edoesque way for people at the time is crucial in discovering how people at the time understood modernity. Through pointing out positive aspects in all of these, I will be going through a journey of general landscape changes, to the changes in the cityscape, to a change of the group of people living in these cities that were most vulnerable to all these changes. By discovering all the positive aspects these types of prints had in common, I believe that I can demonstrate the positivity and hope that this era brought with it, even though modernity is much more often associated with stress. Meiji prints had a certain agency in glorifying modernity whilst showing aspects of modernity in a positive light. Based on this, the prints “manufactured” or “fashioned” a positive picture of selected aspects of modernity. For example, prints made use of established iconographies to show prosperity and leisure in meisho (famous places) format, showing bustling street views beneath cherry blossoms. Thus showing a refashioned image of reality was never without an agenda of a certain forced aspect of positivity to influence people. Furthermore, the aspect of censorship of the government wanting a hand in giving a positive view of the Meiji era could also have been important for how Meiji ukiyo-e portrayed modern things. These prints showed positive relations between people living in the new capital of Tokyo and modern things like brick buildings and trains. These things either were depicted

in harmony or they clashed. When they clashed they were made in an interesting way rather than being scary.

Regardless of the way modern aspects made life easier or more interesting. The effects of this rapid modernization continued until modern times making Japan not only withstand colonization attempts from the West but also host the first Olympic games in an Asian country in 1964. Thus positive aspects of modernity were an important part of Japan's successful nation-building. In my opinion, this positivity aspect together with a well-known medium of woodblock prints, I think that it was a way of self-soothing in a public way, as well as a form of curiosity. People living in Tokyo might have been less shocked by all the things modernity brought because there was the opportunity to see it for themselves. But there was a big disconnect for people living in cities and more rural areas at this time. Prints have served a different role in bringing pictures of modernity to these people than they did for people in the capital city. Not only for seeing changes but also the benefits of modernity were felt differently for people in the rural areas. "For many, …, these new relationships ushered in hard times, illustrating the degree to which the benefits of modernity were not evenly spread throughout Japan in the nineteenth and early twentieth century."[10] Knowing this, the positivity aspect would be mostly felt by people living in the city. However, a sense of hope and finding the interesting parts of modernity for themselves outside the city could also be a good function of these prints. That is why finding the positive portrayals of modernity in Meiji ukiyo-e is an adequate way of assessing how the Japanese people at the time viewed themselves in a changing climate of nation-building and Westernization.

[10] Walker. A concise history of Japan. 2015. Page 178.

Chapter 1: Trains on ukiyo-e prints connecting Japan as a modern nation

Modernity meant a lot of physical changes for Japanese people in the Meiji period. Industrialization that took the West decades was done within the span of a few years. This includes infrastructure like buildings and railroads. In the West, trains were instated around the beginning of the 19th century. Commodore Perry brought a miniature steam locomotive to Japan in 1854 and the year before a Russian envoy demonstrated a model train aboard his ship.[11] Trains coming to Japan were considered a modern miracle and a way to connect the country for easier travel. The late 19th century and the early 20th century civilization are characterized by mass transport, standardization, and the loss of individuality.[12] In the later years of the Meiji period, trains were common enough to be used for commuting, in the early Meiji period trains were still new and thus popular for tourists to visit. This was not only for seeing the metal contraptions moving in real life but also for seeing the architecture of stations and platforms were a popular pastime. In 1872 when the first railway opened from Shinbashi and Yokohama, railway companies tried to gather many different types of passengers. Keeping in mind that the trains, railroads, and even the coal were all foreign and had to be imported, the port city of Yokohama was logical as to where the first railroads were built.[13] The first railway, even the third-class fare, was 20 rin per mile, and the fare between Shinbashi in Tokyo and Yokohama (37 sen 5 rin) was more expensive than the steamboat (31 sen 25 rin), for reference to these numbers 1000 rin is 100 sen which is 1 yen.[14] Sometimes these prices would be discounted for students in the summer holidays but in the middle of the Meiji era businessmen and politicians were the railways' main clientele. So even though tourism and people going to station buildings, the greatest source of profits for these railway companies during the Meiji period was transport and thus they concentrated their efforts on thinking about how to increase the number of passengers.[15] "From a wider perspective, the train served to break down regional differences and to drive forward a sense of nationhood."[16] For industry and firms railways were thus a positive way of moving the populations, especially from and to cities like Tokyo and Osaka that were already becoming big centers in Japan's economy. "With a national rail network in place by the turn of the century, the economy could focus on industries that fully exploited the infrastructure and thus better integrate into the international economy."[17] So seeing how trains were becoming more and more important in people's modern way of life, how did ukiyo-e artists portray this new form of transportation positively?

[11] Tang, John P. Railroad Expansion and Industrialization: Evidence from Meiji Japan. The Journal of Economic History 74, no. 3 (2014). Page 863.
[12] Takemura, Tamio. The Time Revolution of the railway in the 1920s: The Impact of the Changeover to Automatic Couplers. Nichibunken Japan Review no. 14, 2002. Page 43
[13] Miller, Alison J., "Stations, Steam, and Speed: Railroads and the Spatial Imaginary in Nineteenth Century Japanese Woodblock Prints", (lecture, Sainsbury Institute, online, 18 May 2023)
[14] Nakamura, Naofumi. Getting on a Train: Railway Passengers and the Growth of Train Travel in Meiji Japan. In The Historical Consumer, 207–34. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012. Page 213
[15] Nakamura, Getting on a Train: Railway Passengers and the Growth of Train Travel in Meiji Japan. 2012. Page 232
[16] Ericson, Steven J. The Transformative Power of Meiji Railroads, In The Sound of the Whistle, 1st ed. Harvard University Asia Center, 1996. Page 92.
[17] Tang. Railroad Expansion and Industrialization: Evidence from Meiji Japan. 2014. Page 884-885.

Train prints

First of all, trains are considered the token of modernity at this time and artists were ready to capitalize on this new thing and the interest people had. Ukiyo-e depicting trains were getting more common and were used as souvenirs. 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.[18] Artists like Hiroshige would make prints from these popular sights and the prints became quite popular. The culture of looking at these new things through the lens of ukiyo-e is unique in itself. This is because the use of ukiyo-e would become obsolete over the next years because of newer platforms of media like newspapers and newer platforms for pictures like photography. However since it was still the beginning of the Meiji era people were still strongly connected with the form of ukiyo-e, which now would be described as an art from the Edo period because that was its peak. The familiarity of the art form might also have been comforting for Japanese people because so many changes were happening in their surroundings that people had to adapt to but the prints stayed the same. Also, the market structure sold these prints to understand steam locomotives, because before Meiji most technology was easy to understand but this was a total change.[19] This modern technology clashed with the usual themes of ukiyo-e. However, when clashing, the prints were not considered scary but much rather interesting. Unlike the modern gunboats that the commodore Perry introduced at the end of the Edo period that were depicted in terrifying ways as demons, the trains are depicted in a peaceful and non-threatening way as either hyperrealism or almost as toys. However, especially in early train prints, the trains were given their unique ukiyo-e style where they harmonized with the scenery.

As soon as plans were announced for the making of the trains in 1869, artists were quick to make these train prints become a reality so they could capitalize on them.[20] Especially since train travel in the early stages was considered a luxury that only upper and middle-class people could afford. This meant that this kind of travel was mostly for special and occasional purposes such as tourism.[21] So prints were also a good way of showing these things to people who could not afford to go on the trains, but also a souvenir for the people who did take the train and wanted to reminisce about their experience. The prices of train tickets later came down and especially the 3rd class tickets were rather cheap, whereas the 1st and 2nd class were still very expensive, this was because the ashes fell in the 3rd class train car and it was more crowded.[22] So these prints would often show people in mostly Western garments (to cater to the modern view of the landscape), of course, a train, and sometimes station buildings and platforms. This was done together with the use of many colors and Western painting perspective. However, the stereotypical ukiyo-e style was still preserved in these prints, thus keeping a Japanese art tradition in showing modernity.

[18] Hinkel, Monika. Envisioning Meiji Modernity: kaika-e. Japan Society Proceedings, 155. 2018. Page 80
[19] Miller, Alison J., "Stations, Steam, and Speed: Railroads and the Spatial Imaginary in Nineteenth Century Japanese Woodblock Prints", (lecture, Sainsbury Institute, online, 18 May 2023)
[20] Hinkel, Envisioning Meiji Modernity: kaika-e, 2018. Page 80-81
[21] Nakamura, Getting on a Train: Railway Passengers and the Growth of Train Travel in Meiji Japan. 2012. Page 207
[22] Miller, Alison J., "Stations, Steam, and Speed: Railroads and the Spatial Imaginary in Nineteenth Century Japanese Woodblock Prints", (lecture, Sainsbury Institute, online, 18 May 2023)

Depictions of landscapes, crowds, and stations

Modernity in Ukiyo-e of the Meiji can be characterized by features such as trains and other advanced modes of transportation but also by the way clothes became different or a more Western mode of perspective. In terms of landscapes, a lot of elements changed, for example, train stations would have a Western look and thus stick out between all the Japanese buildings that were common at the time. Railways were a token of modernity and thus progress. Shimbashi Station is a good example of this, as seen in figure 1, the area around Takanawa became a new Tokyo landmark and many people came to see it.[23] This shows a certain curiosity for modern aspects from people in general and also the artist. A shift in portraying certain themes was also noticeable when looking at prints portraying wars and battles. The Meiji era saw a surge in portraying army men in Western-style clothes to represent that they were indeed more modern, this could be in contrast to enemies looking more "primitive" in more their native garbs, which could represent either rebellion within Japan against modernity because more often than not old samurai would wear these clothes still if they did not align with the current mindset. In the Meiji period, there was less interest in the traditional ukiyo-e from foreigners, yet prints that still did well were those that featured kabuki actors, sceneries, and women's fashions.[24] However, the publisher Akiyama Buemon would often reprint older prints for foreign markets, thus this might not have been too big of an issue. [25]Modern elements could be the change in colors, as was a wide array of reds in fashion for Meiji Ukiyo-e. Pigments in general were changing a lot because more Western pigments were used, these were synthetic and sometimes made the prints look a bit cheaper. Although these elements do not show elements of modernization in the print industry, moreover a deterioration, it did signify newer styles that were used. Changes in style and themes were not only a given for the changing times, but also the upcoming changes made to the genre of printing entirely.

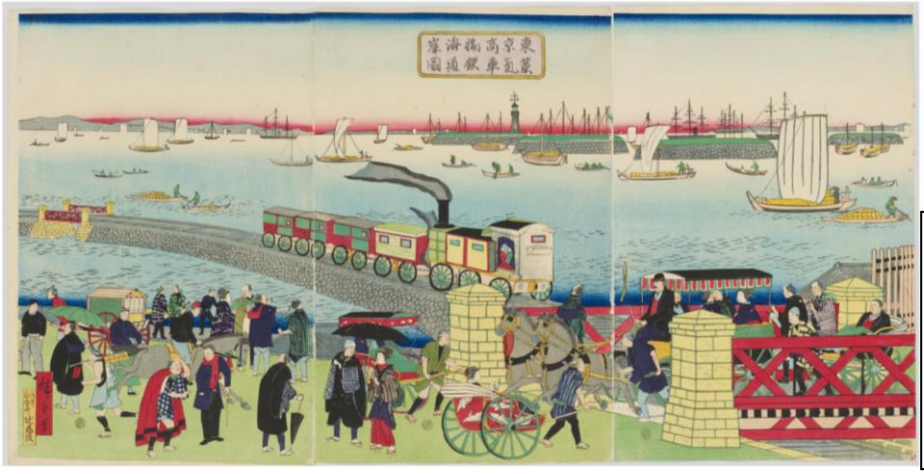

Figure 1. Utagawa Hiroshige III (1842-1894), "Tokyo Takanawa, Seashore Railroad Line", April 1871, ink on paper.

[23] Kawai Masatomo 河合正朝. Ima asayakani yomigaeru meiji: Bon ukiyo-e collection いま鮮やかに甦る明治 : ボン浮世絵コレクション. Keio University press 慶應義塾図書館. 2008. Page 57.
[24] Rimer. Since Meiji. 2011. Page 363.
[25] Marks, Andreas, and Stephen Addiss. Japanese Woodblock Prints : Artists, Publishers and Masterworks, 1680-1900. Tokyo [etc.]: Tuttle, 2010. Page 320.

Kaika-e are prints that portray the Westernization process in Japan throughout the Meiji era. These can be specifically seen in landscape pictures like the one in figure 1. “Even though kaika-e sometimes exaggerated the extent of modernization and idealized certain aspects of the westernization 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 the old and new Japan.”[26] Around the same time as the first railways opened this genre of kaika-e became more prevalent with depicting streets scenes. If these street scenes were completely realistic to the point of places being known could be discussed. Often streets and buildings could be easily recognized as what they looked like at the time but trains sometimes would be designed differently from what they looked like in real life. Painters did not always see trains themselves, especially in the very early Meiji period. “Therefore train prints of the early phase portray trans and tracks not always in a completely realistic manner.”[27] This can be considered one of the problems artists had with these newer subjects. They did not always have access to make something as realistic as possible so they had to refer to guidebooks, magazines, or Western sources that were not always clear to understand for artists at this time. An example of the time is when Utagawa Yoshitora would make a print that looked more like a children’s toy and did not know well how trains work (figure 2). The trains are on the same track and racing towards each other and the other pair of tracks that could be seen as a way to switch the tracks appears useless as it disappears in a small wooden building. This shows that Yoshitora was not aware of trains switching tracks to avoid colliding. The train itself also looks more like a toy than an actual train, almost like a simple wooden train made out of blocks. The composition of the windows and the small engine do not reflect a realistic steam train that would have been used. Thus these have been drawn only with reference images from the West. Yet at this time, this is not strange since trains had not yet been seen in real life in Japan. Only in the spring of 1870 were the first train tracks built and trains would not have been in action until the completion in 1872.[28] Figure 2 also shows people in rickshaws in the background being almost covered by the smoke of the steam train. This can be referring to an awareness that in the zeitgeist they were aware of trains becoming the main way of transporting people and thus overshadowing these older methods of transportation. However, it could also be used as a contrast between the old and the new.

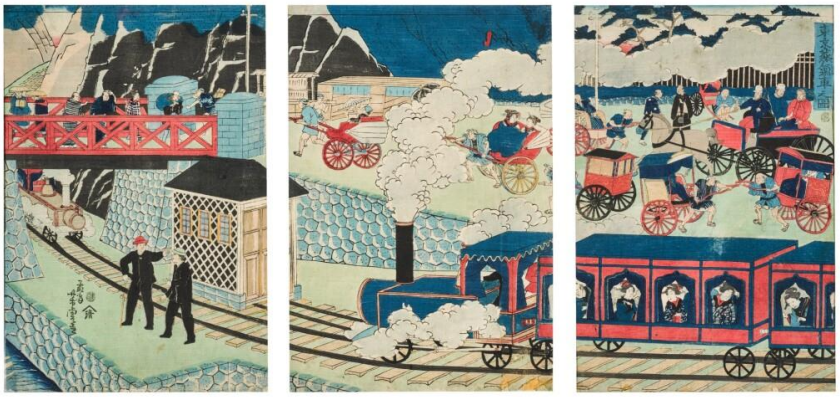

Figure 2. Utagawa Yoshitora (1836-1880), “Picture of a steam train in Tokyo”, circa 1870, ink on paper.

[26] Hinkel, Envisioning Meiji Modernity: kaika-e, page 82
[27] Hinkel, Envisioning Meiji Modernity: kaika-e, page 81
[28] Hinkel, Envisioning Meiji Modernity: kaika-e, page 78-79

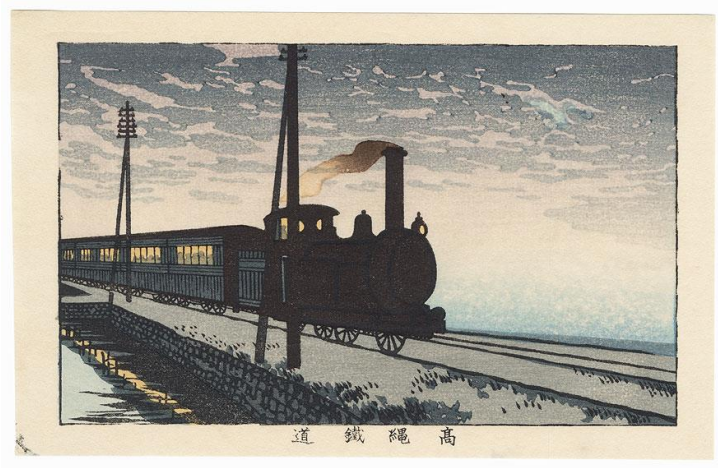

Figure 3. Inoue Yasuji (1864-1889), “The railroad at Takanawa”, True pictures of Famous places in Tokyo series, circa 1884-1889, ink on

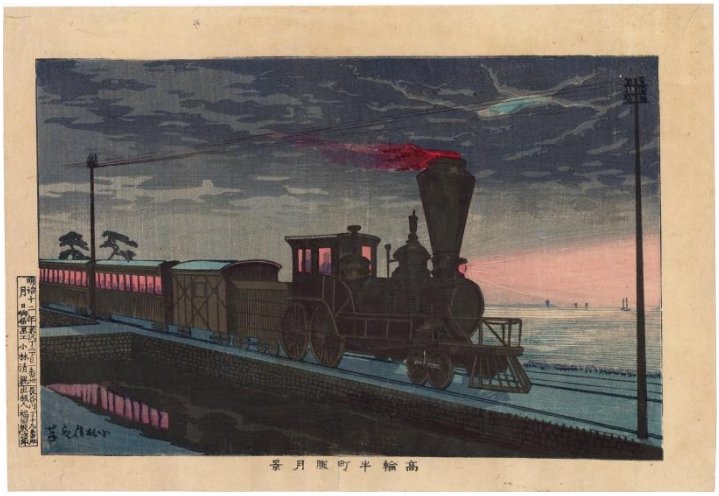

Figure 4. Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847-1915), “Steam Train by Night--View of Ushimachi in Takanawa”, 1879, ink on paper.

Not all artists were indifferent to the reality of the trains. Figures 3 and 4 are made around ten and fifteen years after the first trains were built in Japan. On figure 3 the artist Inoue Yasuji, who was a pupil of Kobayashi Kiyochika, made a picture that was realistic of what trains looked like in Japan. Directly underneath is the print his master made earlier in 1879. Kiyochika had inexplicably appropriated the image of an 1850 vintage American locomotive taken from a book or an American print.[29] Inoue was unhappy with how Kiyochika had inaccurately drawn the picture and thus made a very similar print depicting a locomotive that ran on the Shimbashi line. Trains were imported from both the United States and Britain. American trains had a diamond-shaped chimney and a big cowcatcher up front, British trains had a tubular chimney and did not have a cowcatcher. Inoue saw that the trains were of the British variant and thus disliked that Kiyochika’s print suggested that there were American-type trains on the Shimbashi line thus Inoue corrected his masters’ mistake. Later the train pictures became more accurate and less toy-like than in figures 1 and 2. This realism also can be seen as a spark in the general enthusiasm there was about trains. Artists and people who bought prints alike seemed to be enthused about trains to the degree that they noticed if something was not depicted right. Therefore, where in the early 1870s, people would be satisfied with a misshapen picture of the general idea of a train, in the late 1870s people were craving more realism, and later even pointing out mistakes in design as Inoue did. This more realistic portrayal of ukiyo-e was also something Kiyochika did a lot but this will be touched upon in later chapters.

[29] Free, Dan. Early Japanese Railways 1853-1914 Engineering Triumphs That Transformed Meiji-era Japan, Tuttle Publishing, 2008. Page 55.

So how do these images make for a positive image in the minds of the Japanese people of the time? Of course, these pictures did not portray negative aspects of modernity. They were mostly for people who enjoyed looking at the pretty pictures of the trains and did not feel like these were an infringement of their old way of life, but as a supplement to make their life easier. Trains undoubtedly made travel easier. For example, before trains only carriages were used for travel by land so when trains made this trip from Shinbashi to Yokohama in only 53 minutes instead of multiple hours, people were happy about this.[30] Thus trains are a good example of a positive change in people's lives and ukiyo-e prints do show this. These kaika-e train pictures showing landscapes with trains or station halls are portrayed as places where people came together and reveled in modernity and its benefits. This is very prevalent on the busy streets and station halls where people are seemingly gathering for this modern transport and back then wonder as well.

Chapter conclusion

Trains are one of the more obvious positive changes because they made going from city to city fast and convenient. The technology depicted in prints would thus have been a big hit. Even today, for a lot of people trains are a big hobby (spotting or models) thus collecting train prints could have been a predecessor to that. With trains being a plus in mobility, industry and tourism boosted the economy. Even though this might not have been the main focus when train tracks were just installed. As seen with the early images showing steam locomotives, realism was not that important to artists and buyers alike, just the idea of the innovation was enough to sell prints, but later on, more realistic portrayals were more preferred. This might also be because the Meiji era was a time when more realistic Western art was introduced and thus ukiyo-e took inspiration from that and incorporated realism to look more modern. Whereas, the positivity aspect is seen through the possibilities portrayed. Trains are seen with crowds of people, big plumes of smoke, and full of people (even being able to travel in the dark seen with illuminated windows). However, this forced positive portrayal could have been due to the nation-building efforts of the Meiji government. By showing obvious positive things on ukiyo-e prints, which are famously heavily censored even in the Edo period, people might have been influenced to have a forced positive view of modernity.

[30] Hamada Nobuyoshi 濱田信義. Ukiyoesitachiga kaita meijinofūzoku 浮世絵師たちが描いた明治の風俗. Kawade shobo shinsha publishing 河出書房新社編集部, 2018. Page 38

Chapter 2: Modern cityscape in Meiji Japan seen through gas lights, carriages, and Western style buildings

In Meiji Japan, there was a big shift in city landscaping in big cities like Tokyo. First of all the name of the city changed to a modern version from Edo to Tokyo to symbolize the capital of a modern state. Older forms of a city made way for newer forms. More foreigners came into Japan bringing all types of new technology that the Japanese were interested in. New technologies came in different types, so also types that would help a city launch into modernity. In the West, certain technologies were already implemented in daily life and thus the Japanese government thought it was time to implement them in their cityscape too. In this chapter, I will go into detail about gas streetlights, carriages, and Western-style buildings.

Gas streetlights

Being able to see at night was not a new need that came from modernity. However, innovation for this need was always welcome. In Edo times Japanese streets would have been lit with lanterns, and houses would be lit with oil lamps and candles. These types of lighting would have been around for centuries before this time. Before the Meiji period mainly the pleasure quarters would have been lit up and in a lot of other areas people would have brought their lanterns to see in the dark. “Edo had maintained a “nightlife” as traditional city culture but it was mainly confined to the pleasure quarters.”[31] However, this did not mean street lights as much as the buildings in the pleasure quarters being properly lit and the large quantity of buildings provided a sort of city light for the entire street. However, modernity also brought changes in terms of lights on the street. In 1872 the first gas lamps were lit in Bashamichi/Honcho street by Takashima Kaemon’s “Nippon Gas Company”, thus would be the first gas company in Japan, these lights would have pillars imported from Glasgow and the lamps themselves would have been manufactured by Japanese craftsmen.[32] Around 1874 there was a limited amount of gas-fueled lights in small quantities (around 80 in the neighborhood of the parliament building) and in 1886 electric power became widely available and thus electric lights became more common.[33] On ukiyo-e prints of the time, street lights were mostly portrayed for night scenes, when they were in their useful state. “The gas light came to be a symbol of Japanese modernization as up until that point, there were very few permanent street lamps in Japan.”[34] Figure 1 is such a print showing the Nihon Bridge, or Nihonbashi, where we see street lights lining the sides of the bridge. The human figures and wagons are purposely kept dark to reflect the late hour and darkness of the night. Based on the ukiyo-e prints it is hard to figure out the exact number or even when the streetlights were installed on the bridge. Ukiyo-e is not always the most accurate when portraying the exact amount of things in the area, since it was usually an exaggeration made more beautiful than reality. Since we can assume that the gas distribution system for these streetlights was

[31] Ulak, James T., “Kiyochika’s Tokyo – II: Master of Modern Melancholy (1876-1881)” MiT Visualizing Cultures, 2016, accessed 10-6-2023, https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/kiyochika_tokyo_02/ki_vis_01.html#vis01
[32] Izzard, Tanya. “Gaslight Memorial Yokohama” Public Art Around The World. 2012, accessed 16-6-2023 https://publicartaroundtheworld.com/public-art-japan/public-art-yokohama/gaslight-memorial-yokohama/
[33] Ulak, “Kiyochika’s Tokyo – II: Master of Modern Melancholy (1876-1881)”
[34] Fujiwara Takumi, “The lighting of Japan” Public relations office Government of Japan, 2022, assessed 16-6-2023 https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202207/202207_01_en.html

still fairly new, one could assume that the position of the lights would be at the entrances of the bridge where the pipes were most safe. Therefore we see four gas streetlights at the bases of the bridge on top of sturdy bases that were likely to keep the gas supply safe. More lights can be seen in the windows of the buildings next to the bridge and people still carry their own light source with them like in the Edo period, probably in the form of a lantern. This style of prints was rather characteristic of Kobayashi Kiyochika, it was called *kōsenga* (光線画). This style meant that no outlines and the use of white to depict light or rain. Kiyochika used this style for a part of his career

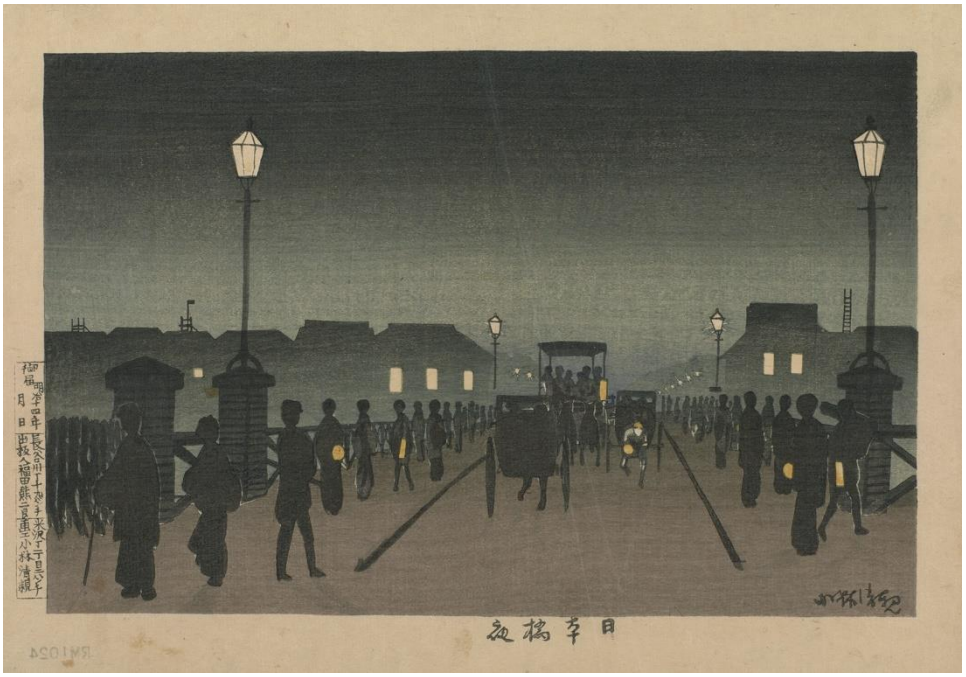

Figure 1. Kobayashi Kiyochika (1870-1917), "Evening at Nihon Bridge", Tokyo Landscapes, Mariashobu publisher (Kyoto), 1880, ink on paper

but he also tried different styles further in his career. You could say that the modernity of this image is portrayed by the usage of the streetlights. However, the print's use of strong perspective and silhouettes of men wearing what appears to be suits are a hint that this print is portraying the Meiji period. People almost look ghost-like in the haze of artificial light and landmark buildings are indistinguishable in the shadows, thus creating a sense of disorientation.[35] However, one could also argue that this light was a newfound freedom for visiting the metropolis at night time. In the Edo period, people could only visit this area with their own source of light at night, which would have been an inconvenience. During the making of this print, people could choose to travel on their own here, without a lantern. This is also portrayed on the since only a handful of people brought their personal light. Kiyochika as an artist has a habit of using darker colors, especially in night scenes. However, this preference for darker colors does not necessarily mean a negative perception of the subject matter. This has to do with the distinct style of *kōsenga.* Thus the ukiyo-e print does show a side of modernity that people were rather fond of. Especially in the early years of streetlights when there were not that many yet people were interested in seeing the lights. Not in a way of making a day trip out of seeing the streetlights but the convenience was more a factor for their positive reception. Kiyochika had an increased demand for his prints in the 1880s and then he turned to

[35] Ulak, "Kiyochika's Tokyo – II: Master of Modern Melancholy (1876-1881)"

comic images for newspapers.[36] He also had several prints depicting the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War but, photographs of the front moreover dominated the market.[37] Modern was better captured with modern means for people at the time, pushing away ukiyo-e printing. Kiyochika saw this too and thus he gave up on prints in his later years and devoted himself to painting in the style of the Shijō School.[38]

With the technology of streetlights there also were new jobs. For example, on figure 2 there is a man lighting the streetlight. The so-called lamplighter is wearing more Japanese-style work clothes whilst there is a horse-drawn carriage and rickshaw behind him on the busy streets of Ginza. In those days there were no automatic ignition devices or timers but there had to be a person who was in charge of turning off the streetlights at a predetermined time. They were generally called "ten-to-fu," and at Tokyo Gas, they were called "tensho-kata. They wore a half-coat that identified them as "tenjo-kata," carried a stick with a spark (initially two sticks, later one), and were in charge of 50 or even 100 gas streetlights.[39] Next to him is a small boy in a kimono that looks up to the lamplighter as if he might be his apprentice or child. The season is spring, which can be concluded by the cherry blossom trees that are in full bloom. The setting seems to be near Western-style buildings so we can assume this was in the Ginza area, which was a place that had a lot of gas lights to show their modernity to foreigners. The government had decided that this area between Shimbashi and Nihombashi was to be the most modern in terms of landscaping. “Thus there appeared for the first time well-ordered streets, a row of trees planted between sidewalk and roadway, gas lamps standing at the important points and a row of brick buildings with colonnades.”[40] In a further section, I will also discuss brick buildings. For now, the gas lights would have been a token of modernity, yet as image 2 shows the portrayal of the job of lighting them is more traditional with more Japanese-style working garments. Figure 2 is made by Utagawa Hiroshige III, he was a student of Utagawa Hiroshige but was not as successful. The scene shows a certain familiarity with a modern scene, thus making the watcher feel security in a mess of modernity in the background. However, the convenience of streetlights would have been something the public was rather content with. However, to Western architecture as a whole, the reactions were mixed. Of course, not everybody agreed with this type of modernity and change in terms of how whole streets looked. “With its paved streets, western-style brick buildings, attractive roadside trees and gas lamps, planners anticipated a space that would satisfy foreigners.”[41] In terms of the street lights, foreigners may see them as luxuries that were taken for granted in their home countries, and having them in Japan too might have taken away the exotic aspect of Japan. This audience might have enjoyed lanterns more. Figure 2 is from the series called Tokyo Meisho zue (illustrated guide to the famous places of Tokyo), this is an Edo period concept where ordinary people are shown enjoying leisure time, rather than work. Ginza is depicted as an attractive site, yet

[36] Meech-Pekarik, Julia. The World of the Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization. Weatherhill. 1986. Page 194

[37] Meech-Pekarik, The World of the Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization. 1986. Page 212.

[38] Ibidem.

[39] Tokyo Gas company, “Kyō wa `nan'nohi'? `Ginza-dōri'-zoi ni gasu-tō tomoru 今日は「何の日」？「銀座通り」沿いにガス灯灯る.” Tokyo Gas, 2020, accessed 16-6-2023 https://www.tokyo-gas.co.jp/letter/2020/12/20201218.html

[40] Abe, K. “Early Western Architecture in Japan’, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 13, No.2 (May 1954), 13-18.” Chapter. In Culture Power & Politics in Treaty Port Japan 1854-1899 Key Papers Press and Contemporary Writings, edited by J. E. Hoare, 93–103. Amsterdam University Press, 2018. Page 100.

[41] Grunow, Tristan R. Pebbles of Progress: Streets and Urban Modernity in Early Meiji Tokyo. Japan Forum (Oxford, England) 34, no. 1 (2022): page 66.

the focus is on the man lighting the streetlight rather than the background figures that would normally be more the focus. However, there are cherry blossoms that were the established way of showing prosperity in famous places of Edo or tourist destinations. Thus this print fuses the old way of portraying the prosperity of a beautiful site and leisure with the modernity of the work environment of Ginza. The background is quite fast-paced, people are rushing along the street, but the focus is on the man lighting the streetlamp slowing down the pace and creating an opportunity for the viewer to take in the scenery. Comparing the reality of Ginza to the manufactured portrayal of it with the medium of photography there was a big difference. Figure 3 shows a similar scene to figure 2 in terms of scene, the gas streetlight with a Western-style building in the background. However, the photograph is eerily quiet and empty compared to the ukiyo-e print. The Ginza Fire of 1872 was to blame for the eruption of the Bricktown. The fire made the area empty for the government to build a Western-style streetview and the government saw it as an opportunity for the modernization of Tokyo. However, as the photograph suggests, the streets were empty. Long exposure does make it harder for photographs at the time to make snapshots, but it was already possible to portray people in these photographs. "Put simply, the local officials and residents of Ginza were none too pleased about central government intrusion into their neighborhood."[42] Normal people had little to no input into how their environment changed and their only way of protest was not moving into the brick buildings.[43] The unpopularity of the neighborhood makes image 2 even more interesting. Ukiyo-e scenes of the same Ginza streets were made flourishing and beautiful. As if the ukiyo-e scenes were to advertise this area with the Meisho zue type of print with almost a festival atmosphere because of the cherry blossoms where the streets are bustling and people are happily working and enjoying themselves on the same print. Meiji prints combined old scenes of Edo period leisure with cherry blossoms and famous places with new subjects. As done before in the Edo period ukiyo-e with the Yoshiwara that was always depicted in spring with cherry blossoms, Meiji prints took this this iconography and adapted it to depict modern buildings in a positive light. Thus refashioning Ginza as a famous place in the style of Edo.

On figure 4, we see the familiar scene but now of Eitaibashi, but there are no city lights. This image is from 1874, which was the very start of the installation of gas streetlights and perhaps one of the last images without a modern light source. The image shows the early evening when it is starting to get dark and in a time just before a reliable light source to navigate outside, it would have been important for people to start heading to their destinations while it was still light enough. However other forms of modern cityscape are already starting to take place in this print like foreigners, people in suits, and carriages with horses.

[42] Grunow, Tristan R. "Ginza Bricktown and the Myth of Meiji Modernization." The Meiji at 150 Digital Teaching Sources, The University of British Columbia, accessed 1-12-2023, https://meijiat150dtr.arts.ubc.ca/essays/grunow

[43] Grunow, "Ginza Bricktown and the Myth of Meiji Modernization."

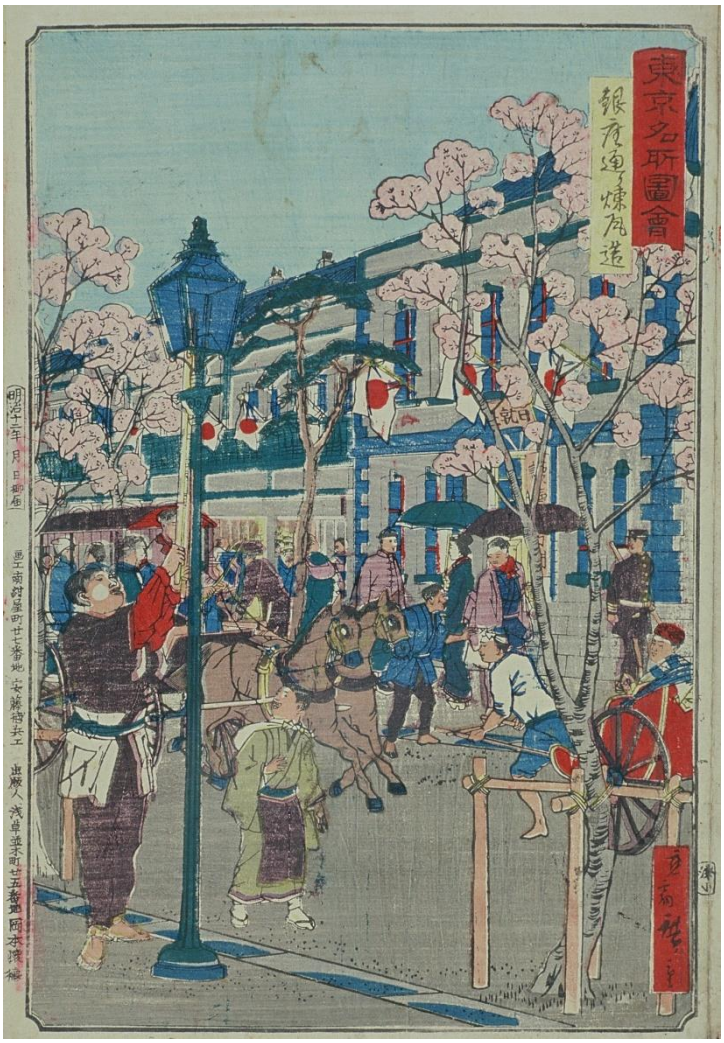

Figure 2: Utagawa Hiroshige III (1842-1894), "Famous Sites in Tokyo: Brick Buildings on the Ginza", 1879, ink on paper

Figure 3. Kenchiku Gakkai. “Ginza” ed. Meiji Taishō Kenchiku Shashin Shūran. Photograph.

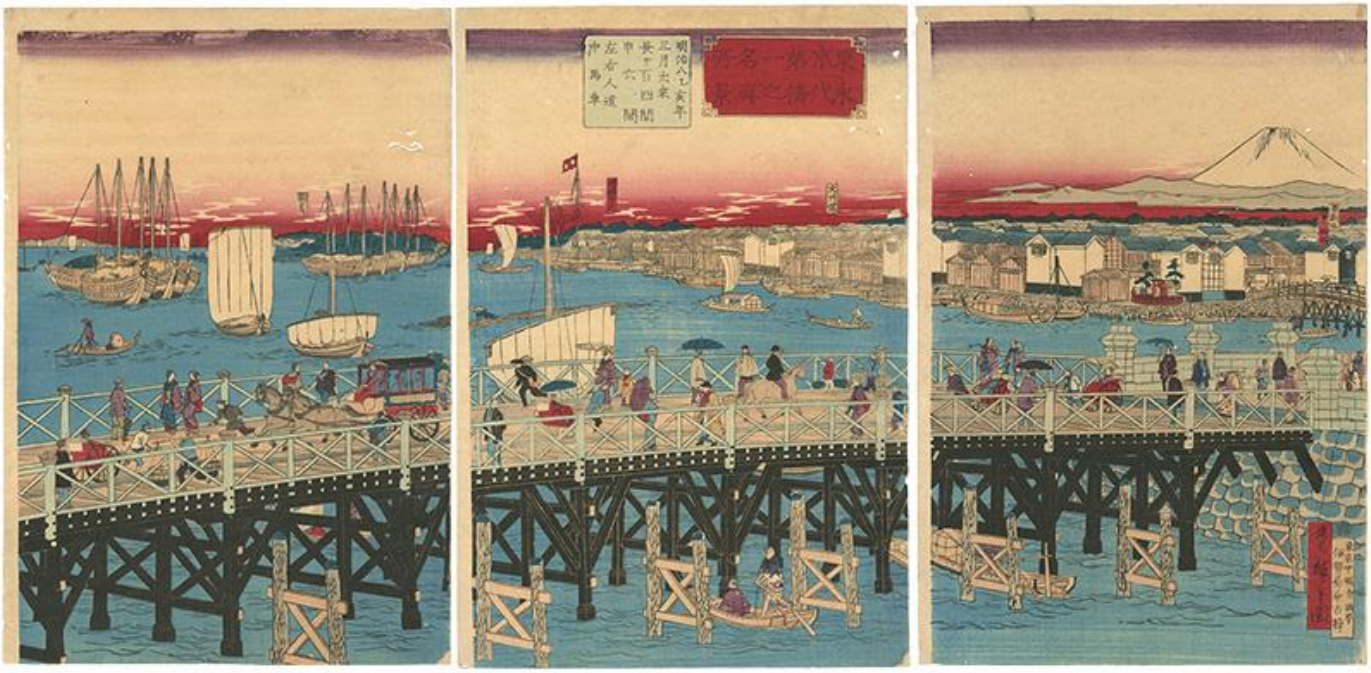

Figure 4. Utagawa Hiroshige III (1842-1894), “Famous places in Tokyo; scenic view of Eitaibashi, 1874, ink on paper

Carriages

When we look back to image 4 we see that the bridge is partly made out of iron. This was also because of the Meiji period; the whole bridge was newly built to modernize. The sides of the bridge are being used by people walking. The middle part of the bridge was used exclusively for horse-drawn carriages thus the bridge was already in place to accommodate the gradually increasing number of horse-drawn carriages.[44] This print is classified as a kaika-e print or enlightenment picture. Although not all the features of modernity are necessarily in the picture that would have been a focus. However, since the print is also one showing famous sights around Tokyo, it also needed to be reminiscent enough for the contemporary viewer to recognize where this is, thus showing a very early stage of modernization of the cityscape.

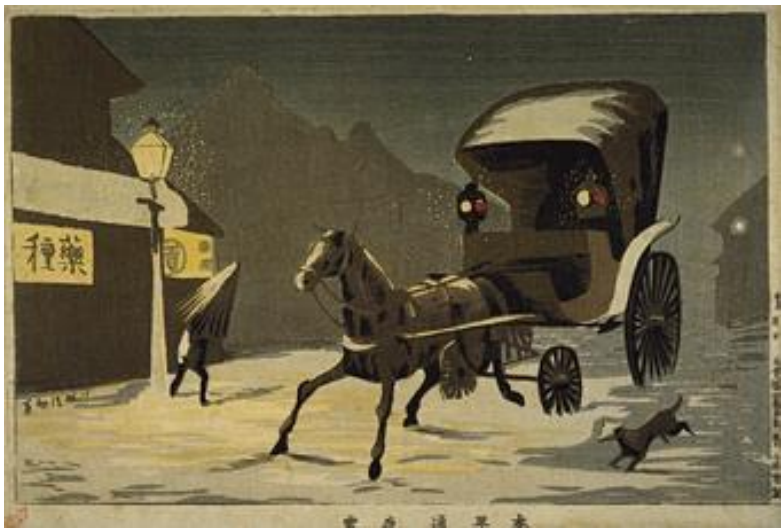

Figure 5. Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847-1915), “Night snow on Honchō Avenue”, Fukuda Kumajirō (Gosokuya) publishing, 1880, ink on paper

[44] Kokuritsu Shiryoukan 国立資料館, Meiji kaikaki no nishikie 明治開化期の錦絵. Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai 東京大学出版会, 1989. Page 109.

Even when looking back at the traffic situation in image 2, there seem to be a lot of people in the streets with lots of different modes of transportation. With many people and faster big carriages on the road, there were more thoughts about the traffic. “That said, planners frequently expressed concern about the traffic hazards posed by large numbers of vehicles and pedestrians crowding streets, especially around Shimbashi Station.”[45] However, when you look at the print, the traffic is almost a coordinated show where people go past each other with no troubles. In real life, the situation was a lot direr. “As if the traffic of carriages and rickshaws ceaselessly enveloping the station day and night – endangering pedestrians and sometimes even leading to injury – was not bad enough, the spectacle was “especially unsightly/indecent for passing foreigners” (teisai yoroshikazu) (National Archives of Japan 1876b, 258–259).”[46] This meant that the Japanese government felt especially to hold up a certain standard of roads and safety to the Western foreigners because, at this time in the Meiji period, the Japanese government believed that the Japanese should act as Western as possible to look modern.

When looking at image 5, you will see a horse-drawn carriage with a barely visible driver making its way through the snow. The type of horse-drawn cab was introduced from the West to Japan in the Meiji era and would have been a more expensive transport than the rickshaw that was man-drawn.[47] Here again, Kobayashi is using the *kōsenga* style, the snow, light, and reflections of this piece are a stark white in contrast to the dark horse, carriage and buildings to highlight how much the lights would have affected the way streetlights would have changed the street scenery. Horses were not new to Japan but carriages as a whole were quite new. If it were not for the Japanese writing on the wall of the building and the man shielding himself from the snow with a Japanese-style umbrella, then the scene could have taken place in any part of the West. The store seems to be a place that sells medical drugs. The rider and passengers of the carriage are too dark to see, even with the light of the streetlight and the tiny lanterns on the sides of the carriage. Since the passenger is invisible we can only see the portrayal of the speed of the horse as the main focus. Mentioning the speed of the horse and the snow, this must have not been like this since speeding up with slippery weather like snow would have resulted in accidents. That is why I think this is an artistic interpretation because in real life Japanese people would have been scared of the risk of accidents with this scene. However, since the idea of the scene is nice, as a print this is a positive ideal of how the carriages would go around town. Kiyochika tended to beautify his prints and make them into scenes that were more idealized than they probably would have been. This might have been a part of the Meiji era censorship, which had gotten even stricter than before. For example, erotic art, which was sporadically approved in the Edo period by the shogunate, in the Meiji era it was completely banned to comply better with Western standards for art. Kiyochika already employed more Western-style geometric perspective, volumetric modeling, and chiaroscuro that had made him stand out in comparison to other ukiyo-e artists[48] and his composition was also photo-like by cutting off edges like a camera would do. Thus, where ukiyo-e was always used to beautify places in the Edo period, one could argue that Kiyochika was beautifying the Meiji cityscape in a way that the government probably found useful showing new technology and architecture. This way modernity was made less

[45] Grunow, Pebbles of Progress: Streets and Urban Modernity in Early Meiji Tokyo. Page 70.
[46] Ibidem Page 70.
[47] Newland, Amy Reigle, Printed and Painted; The Meiji Art of Ogata Gekkō (1859-1920), Hotei Publishing, 2021. Page 133.
[48] Lo, Teresa Wing-Yan. The conundrum of Japan's modernization: an examination of enlightenment prints of the 1870s. University of British Columbia, 1995. Page 9.

scary and maybe even idealized for a general audience. Kiyochika had never produced any erotic art[49], which can be attributed to his time working mostly in the high censorship era of Meiji, but it could also mean that he was in with the government's efforts to expel this. This could mean that he was commissioned to make prints that fitted into the political climate thus making prints that depicted unfamiliar technology idealized to popularize modernity and show it in a positive light.

Western style buildings

Western-style buildings, or just brick buildings, were a huge shift from the wooden buildings that would have been plentiful in Edo Japan. As mentioned before, Ginza was chosen as an area between Shimbashi and Nihombashi to modernize its buildings and entire street view. This was not without a proper reason. In 1872 there was a big fire in the area and since all the buildings had already burned down, replacing them with brick Western houses was a small effort. The reconstruction of Ginza was important because it is seen as the first street improvement in Japan that also popularized new brick constructions of buildings.[50] To rebuild the area, Yuri Kojo, governor of Tokyo at the time, abolished building restrictions, widened the streets, and planned to build a new district with all houses on both sides made of non-combustible bricks instead of wood.[51] When looking back at image 4 we see many buildings but there are no real brick buildings yet at this time, again this shows Japan just before modernizing the cityscape. But when looking at image 2, it shows the scene of 1879 which was years after the neighborhood burned down and has fully established brick buildings with Japanese flags. The buildings have tall ceilings, windows made of glass, and chimneys. This change was also done partly for the foreigners in the area but the foreigners themselves were not satisfied with this Westernized form of modernization that the new street portrayed. "…for other foreign travelers who came to the "Far East" expecting to see exotic Oriental culture, the last thing they wanted was to see was a cityscape that reminded them of home."[52] However, this lukewarm reaction cannot be seen when we look at prints showing these buildings from the Japanese point of view. The fact that prints like figure 2 exist and were popular enough to be spread to the general audience shows that people who might have lived outside these places were at least curious about these subjects. Therefore as a popular way of portrayal, I want to speculate that these prints showing brick buildings were a positive way to gradually increase people's awareness of modernity. The notion of foreigners being less enthusiastic about these buildings and changes reinforces that these prints were mostly for the Japanese people who wanted to see these subjects of modern things and thus ukiyo-e must have been a comforting medium for the Japanese people for whom all these things were mostly alien.

Figure 6 is a triptych showing the bustling streets of the newly rebuilt Ginza area once again. The streets are busy but orderly, the streets are clean, the buildings make a background of bricks and glass windows, trees are neatly lined up next to the road and people seem to be busy with everyday tasks. The scene is an idyllic day in the modern metropolis of Tokyo, giving the viewer a general

[49] Buckland, Rosina. "Shunga in the Meiji Era: The End of a Tradition?". Japan Review (26), 2013. Page 260.
[50] Abe, K. "Early Western Architecture in Japan", page 100
[51] Kurosaki Akira 黒崎昭, Nobuhisa Kaneko 信久金子. ukiyoe-shi-tachi ga kaita Meiji no fūzoku 浮世絵師たちが描いた明治の風俗. kabushikigaisha Kawadeshobōshinsha 株式会社河出書房新社, 2018. Page 64.
[52] Grunow, Pebbles of Progress: Streets and Urban Modernity in Early Meiji Tokyo. Page 66.

impression of how Ginza looked after the renovations. The street almost looks like any other big city at the end of the 19th century, even copying the high entrance with steps to climb up, this could be a way to imitate Dutch canal houses to keep the water out for flooding or American for the use of creating more room for a basement and for the wooden floors to be more off of the floor to prevent moisture coming in the boards. A positive impression for the unknowing viewer. However, as stated before foreigners were not pleased with the Western look of the Ginza area, Japanese people at the time were also not the biggest fans. "Actual residents and storekeepers complained to no end of construction delays, disruptions in business due to street work, and shoddy building materials. As a result, many of the brick buildings sat empty upon completion.."[53] Meaning that the ukiyo-e artists took many artistic liberties with their portrayal of the Ginza district. Especially since the project was only affected in this area because most Japanese people moved out as a result of the unfamiliar and uncomfortable houses.[54] But that was only the case for the houses made of bricks in Western style themselves, the streets were regarded as more positive. Thus the exorbitant portrayals of the Western-style brick houses were in all actuality creative liberty from the ukiyo-e artists themselves. This is the case of a forced positive visual because as seen in Image 6 the houses look like they are being used yet in actuality two years after the completion a lot of these complaints would have been heard already and the scene might have not looked like this in real life.

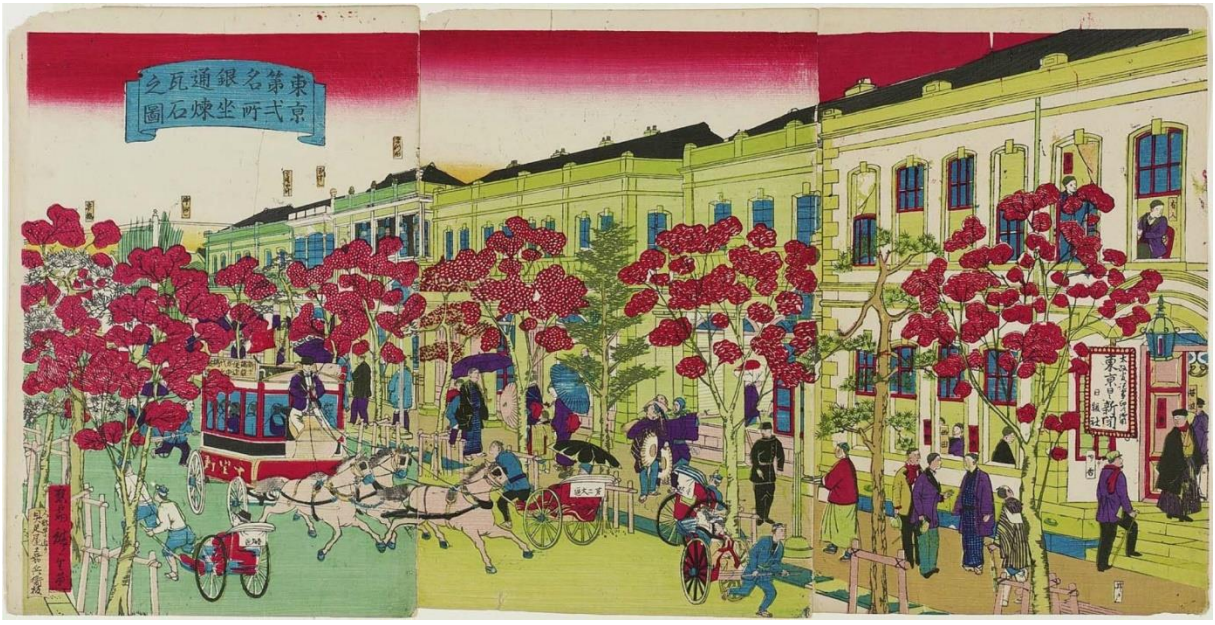

Figure 6. Utagawa Hiroshige III (1842-1894), "The Most Famous View in Tokyo: Brick [Buildings] along the Ginza", 1874, ink on paper.

Chapter Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, in terms of cityscape modernity was not always well received by the general public in Japan, either Japanese people or foreigners. In this case, the prints carried out a sort

[53] Grunow, Pebbles of Progress: Streets and Urban Modernity in Early Meiji Tokyo. Page 66.
[54] Ibidem. Page 66.

of forced positive view to show everything in the print as being good and accepted. However, some modern technology was a great success and this was shown on ukiyo-e prints, and often these aspects were amplified by either being the main focus of a print or things that were considered less attractive being more towards the background. Streetlights were a positive where people did not have a lot of objections, they were useful and did not obstruct people from their older ways. They gave people the chance to go outside in the dark and not have to worry about bringing their own light. Carriages in the streets were considered a positive because, for people who could afford it, it was a comfortable way of getting around. Same for the rickshaws that were a bit more affordable. Streets were starting to be shaped around being able to hold traffic and having people to the side. Even though, there was some pushback in the form of traffic accidents and blockages that the public did not like. However, this is not shown in the prints and only the positive aspects are highlighted making the ukiyo-e prints seem a more positive portrayal of reality so as to not discredit modernity and modern cityscape.

Chapter 3: Youth in the face of modernity portrayed in Meiji ukiyo-e

Youth is the path to the future. In the face of modernity, children also have a changing idea of what their future holds and the new possibilities they get compared to the generation before them. In the Meiji period, there were major changes to how children were raised, educated, and treated. At least, that would be the ideal for the men that were reinventing the country. Even though a taste for traditionalism was savored as a sort of nostalgia for simpler times when it came to showing very small children, for the schoolchildren and older a new type of refinement was seen as a necessity for Japan to go towards a thriving modern future.

Babies and mothers

Children are seen all over the world as something positive and thus presented like so in art. Japan is the same in this regard. The innocence and loveliness of children, unchanged throughout history, remained a favorite theme even in the Meiji era.[55] To go back to Edo period ukiyo-e prints, when looking at these types of prints we see children mostly in settings of domesticity, playing with a group of children, and as babies breastfeeding with a mother. Usually blissful and peaceful images. Children in Edo period prints would also look more like tiny adults with less baby-like features. “In addition to the aforementioned points, the prints also contributed to a growing sense of longing for Edo. A variety of scholars have addressed the “invention of Edo” in the early Meiji period as well as the role women played as a repository of tradition in the modern era.”[56] In Meiji period prints babies would generally have been represented more realistic with bigger heads for example. Like this babies would have a more real and almost picture-style look, as represented in figure 1.[57] Thus a more modern take on portraying babies was a more realistic portrayal, looking less like a small adult and more like an actual infant. In the Meiji period, there was a rise in the portrayal of mothers breastfeeding or cuddling their babies on ukiyo-e prints, which might not be a modern sight since in modernity these types of behaviors might be considered inappropriate[58]. Looking at these examples, babies and children might be seen as something traditional and not something that could be modernized but children were not left out when the changes of the Meiji period came around. Portrayals of babies might have been more traditional in the Edo ukiyo-e style, except for some stylistic changes, yet children faced more changes with education becoming westernized and their environments modernizing rapidly. This is not surprising that the mother was portrayed as more traditional. This is because anxiety about the changes in modernity sought to unify time and space by constructing women as the nostalgic expression of an idealized past.[59] Also, motherhood was seen as

[55] Tōbu Bijutsukan 東武博物館, Ukiyoe no kodomotachi Children depicted in ukiyoe 浮世絵の子どもたち. Kumon Publishing くもん出版. 1994. Page 113.
[56] Ayelet Zohar, Alison J. Miller / Ayelet Zohar, Alison J. Miller. The Visual Culture of Meiji Japan. Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2021. Page 103.
[57] Kamiya Hiroshi 神谷 浩, Saigo no Ukiyo-e Kyoushi Tsukioka Yoshitoshi 最後の浮世絵師 月岡芳年. Seigensha art publishing 株式会社青幻舎, 2021. Page 108.
[58] Kitayama Osamu 北山修, ed. Kyōshiron : boshizō no shinrigaku 共視論：母子像の心理学. Tōkyō: Kōdansha Sensho Métier 講談社選書メチエ, 2005. Page 209.
[59] Karlin, Jason. Gender and Nation in Meiji Japan: Modernity, Loss, and the Doing of History.

something that helped the nation progress, thus portrayals of women with their babies were a sort of nation-building inspiration. Amid the trend towards success in life and national wealth, children were not only the treasure of the family but were also raised as the treasures of the nation.[60] "A similar situation can be detected in early Meiji Japan as well, with women being empowered to think that their education, the education they were to give to their children, the support they were offering to their male relatives, and their employment were important for the development of their nation."[61] This did not only put pressure on women for modernization aspect but also for children themselves being used as a canvas to paint a new type of nation onto. "..women were supposed to be the biological reproducers of the Japanese nation and the transmitters of Japanese culture to their children. Scholars have pointed out that in every culture "the home" and "the family" comprised a fundamental site from which nationalists launched their modernization projects."[62] Thus Japan was not left out of creating this image with their children and producing pictures of mothers with happy children is a sign of a positive side of modernity in the Meiji period. Even though the pictures might not have been too different from pictures in the Edo period with children, the change in intent and style was seen as an important part of nation-building for the Japanese.

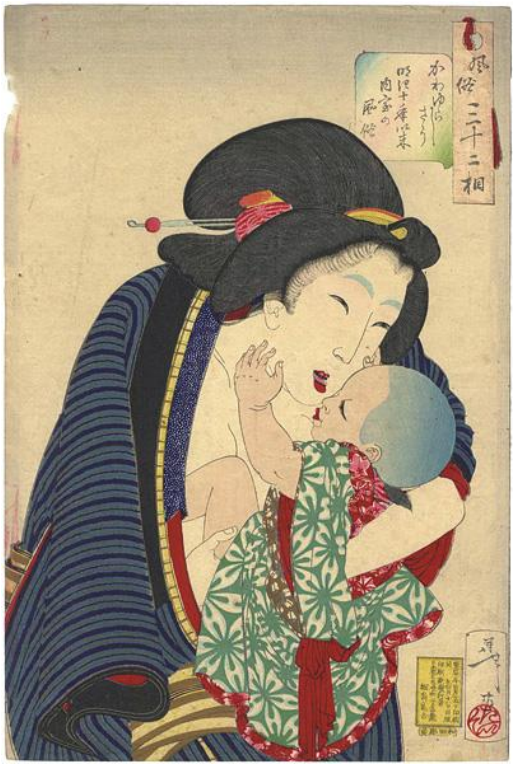

Figure 1. Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839-1892), "Customs and Manners in the household since Meiji year ten", 1888, ink on paper.

Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016. Page 5.

[60] Tōbu Bijutsukan. Ukiyoe no kodomotachi Children depicted in ukiyoe. 1994. Page 113.

[61] Patessio, Mara. Women and Public Life in Early Meiji Japan : The Development of the Feminist Movement. University of Michigan Press, 2020. Page 14.

[62] Patessio. Women and Public Life in Early Meiji Japan : The Development of the Feminist Movement. Page 20.

Education

In figure 2 there is a scene of a school of young children, probably elementary school pupils doing gymnastics in front of the imperial family. The children are dressed in pants and a buttoned-up coat with a cloth belt around their midriff. All the children have short hair and thus I am assuming that with Western standards that were upheld in the Meiji period these might all be boys. The women at the imperial side are wearing hakama with large kimono jackets and the emperor is wearing a Western-style suit and has a modern hairstyle and beard. In the Meiji period, the emperor was often portrayed on ukiyo-e prints wearing this exact black suit with badges and a red sash. However, here the sleeves of his suit are adorned with an orange ribbon pattern, which makes the suit look more kimono-style in design. In the background we also the top half see an older man wearing something that looks like a kimono, this might be a teacher (traditionally clothed in hakama) of the school guiding the boys. Hakama was something teachers wore a lot at this time in history. The cherry blossom trees are blooming making this the springtime, which is when the Japanese academic year starts, which could be making this scene an opening ceremony of some sort, showing off to the emperor that their school is flourishing. This print is meant to portray a hope of the future, showing flourishing children in a nourishing environment. Neatly lined up in beautiful clothes, yet not in a uniform that would be normal in the later school system, yet seeming like a harmony throughout the different colors. The scenery of the print also shows the modernity of the time, in the background, there are several electrical streetlights, brick walls to demarcate the area of the school grounds, the brick building in the background that has multiple stories and glass windows which presumably the school building where these boys have classes. The emperor and his entourage are seated on a stone platform with stone steps. As per tradition, the emperor has to be sitting higher than his subjects. Even though the country and its emperor were modernizing, these beliefs were still important to the Japanese people since the emperor was still considered a god at this point. So whilst showing that children are the future and being blessed by a visit of the Meiji emperor, it still has a lot of traditional elements in it as well. However, I doubt that scenes like this took place because the emperor was not known to be seen this casually by normal people. Also, the act of doing gymnastics had to do with an admiration towards Europe and the West in general and gymnastics was seen as an essential part of the growth of the youth.[63] In 1871 the Minister of Education was established and the education system changed slowly thus there was a school for teachers set up in 1872 where men and women were able to obtain a certificate for teaching at the elementary school level after a few months of training.[64] Thus educating the youth became a priority in Meiji era Japan. Not to say that there were no schools in the Edo period but they were more like private schools and the programs were not as defined as in the Meiji period. The Meiji education also had a focus on courses like English, Japanese classics, mathematics, physics, chemistry, manual arts, history, home economics, geography, gymnastics, and English, with some differences between the education of boys and girls.[65] For adults who would have had their education in the Edo period, these things would have been rather foreign as a concept. That is why prints like figure 2 are so important for them to have an understanding of what the changes in their country were like but also to see what was expected of their children.

[63] Hamada, ukiyoeshitachigakaita meiji no fuzoku, 2018. Page 86.
[64] Patessio. Women and Public Life in Early Meiji Japan : The Development of the Feminist Movement. Page 40-41.
[65] Ibidem.

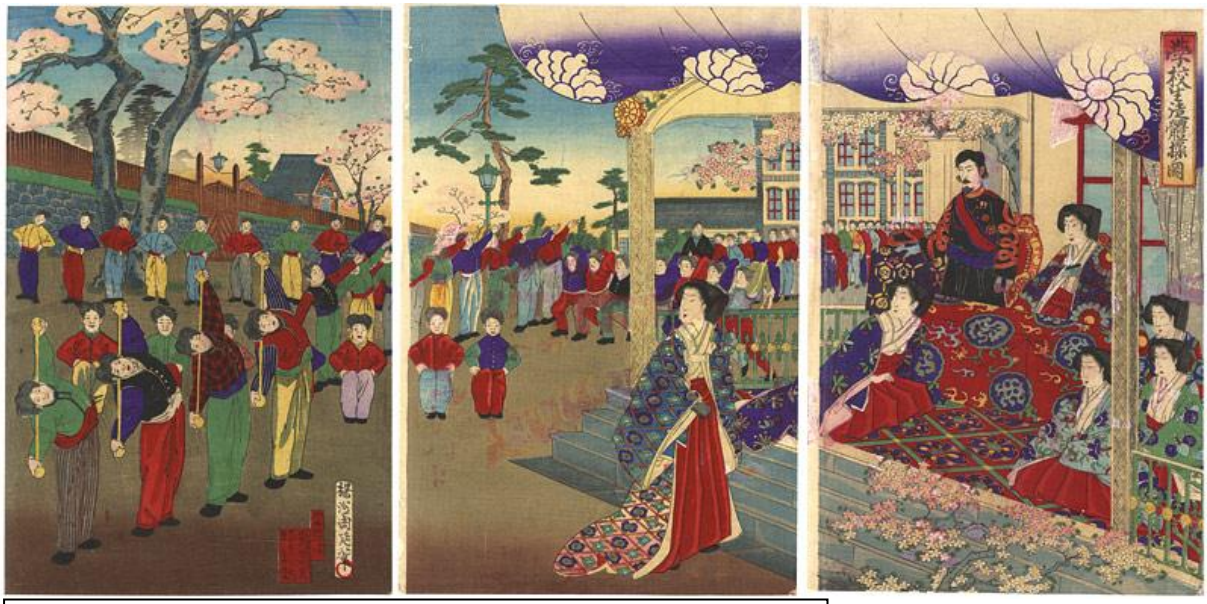

Figure 2. Toyohara Chikanobu (1838-1912), “School Student Gymnastics Picture”, Yokoyama Ryohachi publishing, 1886, ink on paper.

Figure 3 is a game board for a game called sugoroku. This is a game that is similar to the Western game Snakes and Ladders. In the Meiji period, these would have been used as a sort of morality picture game board that would also often feature good and evil spirits to conduct lessons.[66] “This sugoroku would have helped to give children an idea of what to expect at school.”[67] In all the squares we see boys doing exercises and stretches with dumbbells wearing Western clothing. In the middle, there is a row of adults giving the children certificates, probably for completing the exercise course that is shown on the game board. This sugoroku was issued in December but with the plum blossoms adorning the background of the board it was anticipation of the new school year that would start in the spring.[68] Although this is not an ukiyo-e print in the traditional sense, it shows instructions for physical activity that were expected from elementary school boys in the Meiji era. The printing process would approximately be the same. Although the usage would maybe be more focused on children and not on adults playing these types of games mostly. By showing that these were probably made for children themselves, the contents show what to expect of a child in elementary school and make it entertaining by playing it as a game. The fun aspect of this gives the modernity shown on the board a positive spin and thus something exciting for children to play with. The positivity shown made modernity less scary to the people living through the changes at the time.

[66] Davis, Julie Nelson. Partners in Print. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015. Page 183.
[67] Salter, Rebecca. Japanese Popular Prints : from Votive Slips to Playing Cards. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. Page 178.
[68] Salter, Japanese Popular Prints : from Votive Slips to Playing Cards. Page 178.

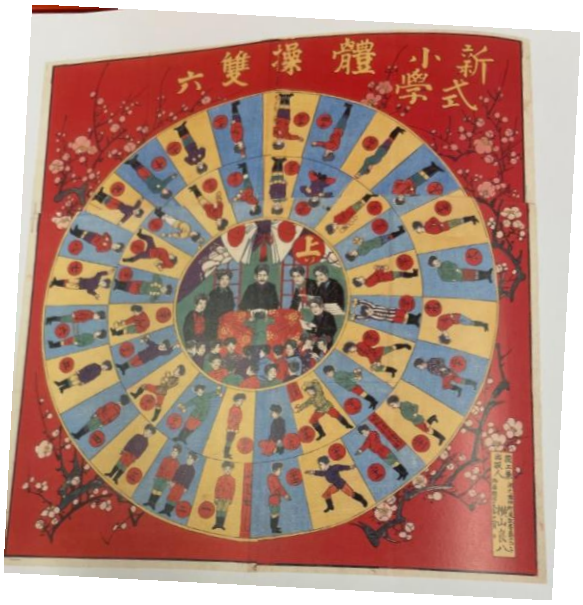

Figure 3. Yokoyama Ryohachi, “New-style Elementary School sugoroku”, 1886, ink on paper.

For older students, education was also turned around. Figure 4 shows a palace-like school that would have been for the children of the Tokyo elite. This triptych was published three years after the Ministry of Education was established and only two years after the 1872 Gakusei which is the first National Order of Education which was there to promote education of Meiji era children. Gakusei was implemented as a way for universal education for the Japanese youth on August 8 1872 and is considered the most significant historical document in the annals of Japanese education to lay a foundation for the First National Plan for Education by Fukuzawa Yukichi as a pioneer of modern Japanese education.[69] The picture shows mostly female educators working with different groups of children. It looks like there might be children of multiple years together in one room but this could also be due to errors in perspective. Furthermore, the children and teachers are dressed in traditional Japanese clothes, most of them wearing hakama. The children are behind desks and on the right side of the triptych the teachers are using posters in their teaching. These were popular in Western-style education to learn letters and thus they were adapted to the Japanese education system. These were usually used to learn words and were called tangozu. The teacher would usually point to a picture and ask questions about it.[70] There are also teachers wearing Chinese-style clothes, this may be because, in the Edo period, traditional basic education was in the Chinese language thus the Chinese instructors still teaching in the first period of the Meiji school system.[71] In the middle part of the triptych the children are reading at their desks with a sitting teacher keeping watch, they are presumably learning foreign languages here.[72] On the left side of the triptych there is another section of children learning from a teacher using a chalkboard and in the garden outside children are playing on swings hanging from trees and on a horse toy. There is a cherry blossom tree blooming in

[69] Duke, Benjamin. "4. The Gakusei: The First National Plan for Education, 1872" In The History of Modern Japanese Education: Constructing the National School System, 1872-1890, 61-76. Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2014. Page 61.
[70] Nakajō Masataka 中城正堯. Ukiyoe ni miru kodomotachi no bunmei kaika : Meiji Ishin kara 150-nen 浮世絵にみる子どもたちの文明開化：明治維新から 150 年. Edited by Kana Murase, Sunao Fukushima, and Hiromi Sone 村瀬可奈、福島直、曽根広美. Tokyo: Mangosteen Inc. マンゴスティン, 2017. Page 62.
[71] Egenolf Gallery Fine art Prints, “Kiyochika: Children's Education: Picture of a Primary School (Sold)”, accessed on 12-10-2023 https://egenolfgallery.com/products/kiyochika-childrens-education-picture-of-a-primary-school?variant=40043930910802
[72] Nakajō, Ukiyoe ni miru kodomotachi no bunmei kaika : Meiji Ishin kara 150-nen, 2017. Page 68.

the garden showing that this is the beginning of the school year. This seems to be a trend since this was also the case in figure 3 and 2. This seems like an idyllic scene where all the different lessons can be taught at the same time as children playing outside. In reality, this would be too noisy of a scene to be realistic to all do together in the same space. The positive aspect here is showing that the new education system could be very good for these children. Showing parents and children alike that these classroom situations were nice, spacious, and organized. All the children wearing the same clothes, like a modern-day seifuku uniform, show the practicality of universal education to the viewer. Since both the Ministry of Education and the Gakusei were both in their infancy, it was nice to see for outsiders of this system what the artists made of a portrayal for the general public. However, since this is a scene with children who come from a privileged background, the general public would not be allowed in a similar scene. However, like a rich private school drama portrayal nowadays, it is interesting to look into a situation that you could never be in the same position as. This is saying that ukiyo-e still had a social media function where a big group of people could see things happening to another group of people via media.

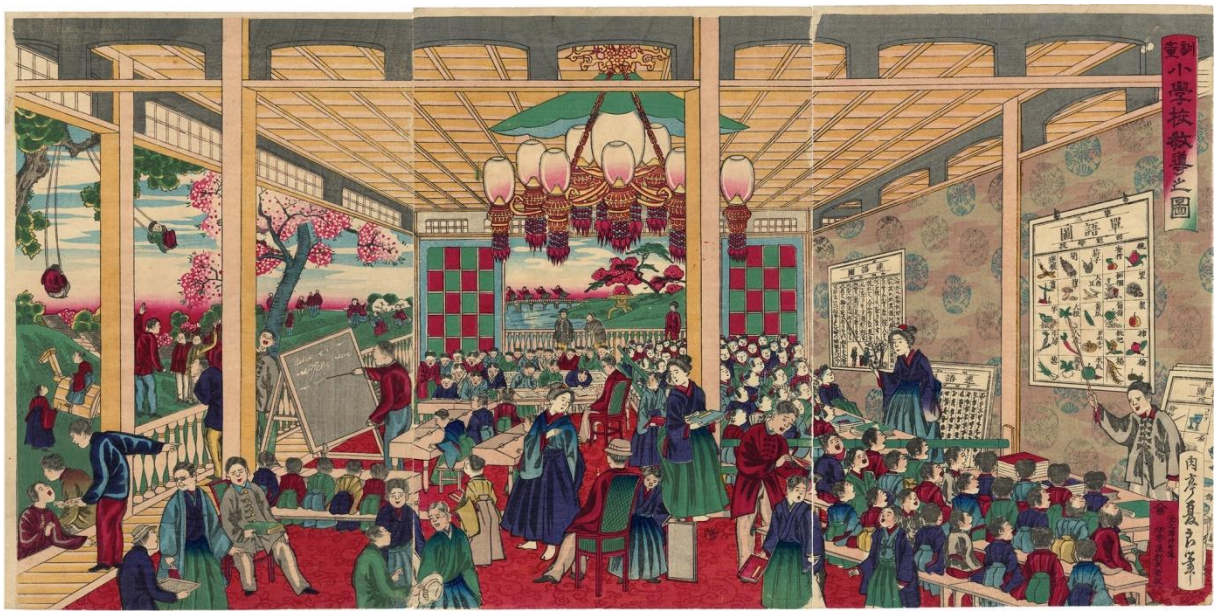

Figure 4. Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847-1915), Children' s Education: Picture of a Primary School (kun-dô: shôgakkô kyôdô no zu), 1874, ink on paper.

Harsh reality

Although these prints show an ideal world for children to live in with education and other modern things, this was only for a certain demographic of children. The situation for children was not always ideal in the Meiji period. Even though the prints will make you believe that children in cities were going to schools and becoming good citizens of Japan, poorer families in the countryside did not have the same advantages. "Rising taxes and tight currency policies sent rice and rea prices plummeting, forcing farmers in all parts of the country to sell off their property to wealthy landlords and sending

children to bed hungry."[73] A lot of Meiji period political policies were great for people living in the cities, but rural populations were not benefitting much or even facing economic struggle because of the changing policies. "Drastic economic policies intended to help urbanities and elites by combating inflation and the spiraling national debt hit rural Japan like a tsunami in the early 1880s."[74] Children also fell victim to this, where children were sent away to work in cities and even overseas to make up for the financial difficulty that these policies made. Scenes showing happy classrooms or classes in schools were mostly for the rich elites and not for poorer children. This made education not as universal, especially in the early Meiji period. That might be why the ukiyo-e prints showing the most vulnerable demographic were shown in such a positive light to distract from the everyday situation that be daunting for children and adults alike.

Chapter conclusion

So when children in the Meiji era were not in such a benevolent situation, why are they still portrayed in such a positive way? In my opinion that would be hope for the future. Children portray innocence and a hope that adults carry for them to have a bright future. Thus showing them in a modern and enlightened way might be a sigh of relief for the parents that buy these prints. Plus parents want the best for their children, thus these prints were mostly very positive too as a means to sell better. Showing the actual hardships of Meiji-era children might not have sold very well. As a rule, we like looking at pictures with children present of them mostly just showing positive situations. However, prints like this would have also been a way of showing Meiji era children what was expected of them when looking at the examples of education and schools. Their parents no longer could fully prepare them for what was awaiting them in terms of behavior in schools, so these prints were also a guide for mostly young boys on what a Westernized and modern school ideal was like in dress and skills needed.

[73] Huffman, James L. Down and Out in Late Meiji Japan. Honolulu University of Hawaii Press. 2018. Page 12
[74] Huffman, James L. Down and Out in Late Meiji Japan. Page 12.

Conclusion

To conclude and to answer the question: In what way do ukiyo-e prints from the Meiji period portray modernity in a positive light in the key themes of technology, cityscape, and structures of youth? How did the prints fashion modernity in a positive light? Prints are a historical record and ukiyo-e tends to make subjects more fantastical. Yet there was always a grain of truth about what the real situation looked like. Meiji ukiyo-e prints show a slow evolution in the way people saw the city around them. In this thesis, I have divided the subject of the city into technology, cityscape, and people, here especially structures of youth because these are the most prominent things that were directly visible to the people living in the cities and would spark interest in their alienness of people living outside them. In terms of the train prints that were mostly used as souvenirs or objects of curiosity are mostly showing all the positive parts of train transportation. There are no people shoving coals or soot coming out of the chimney as well as smoke. The stations and tracks look brand new and people live in harmony with the uncanny iron beasts. But because of the sheer excitement about trains, people overlooked that, and the prints were seen in a positive light and manufacturing a fantastical reality. Then next the streetlights illuminated the country in the dark, this was a huge change from portable lanterns and dim lights from fires inside the house that lit up dark streets and alleyways. Although these do not seem like a big change, because nowadays we take publicly available lights everywhere we go for granted. Gas lights were thus received very well by everyone that lived in the big cities where these lights were illuminating the streets and creating a society that could go on whilst the sun was set. Furthermore, brick buildings did not only look sleek and modern, but they were also more fireproof than the wooden houses before that were in the flammable city of Edo. Prints of Western-style brick buildings thus were a sight to see for people who did not have access to them regularly. As an object of curiosity, these prints were mostly portrayed in the most orderly way, with well-regulated traffic, neatly lined greenery, and people having a pleasant time, just a positive view of a modern cityscape. Although the Japanese were not always fond to live in brick buildings themselves. Coming back to traffic, the scenes of carriages drawn by horses were also a peculiar sight for the average person in the Meiji era. Its predecessor, the rickshaw, was all based on human power and not as fast as the carriage. However, these big contraptions needed traffic to be streamlined to avoid accidents. On prints, this would be seen as the lane of the street view that was especially for carriages. Also, the big animals pulling the carriage would have been a sight to see. Just like today where people like pictures of either horses or the latest vehicles, prints featuring carriages would have a comparable function for the buyers of the prints. These would thus be positively received by the way the horses were majestically depicted or the carriages being portrayed with great detail. Lastly, policies of education were a great innovation for the people of the Meiji era. Babies and children are always a source for adults to seek happiness. In terms of nation-building for the Meiji government, this meant a portrayal of the expectations of the youth. Publishers knew prints featuring babies sold relatively well in every era, thus keeping these mostly traditional, keeping in line with the Edo period. Prints of children going to school or teens and young adults going to university were rare. However, these prints did show what Meiji era children were expected to behave and look like and how schools and classrooms ideally looked according to the education policies the Meiji government set in place. Although there were hardships for poorer children in rural areas, portraying children in those states would probably not sell well. Plus, the Meiji government would probably not like those kinds of images to be spread to Western nations whom they were

trying to impress. only opulence and healthy-looking children would look positive, thus the prints showing education could well be a more forceful example of positivity. Although this was not the reality for every Meiji child.

This could all be seen as an idealization of modernity. Meiji ukiyo-e tells us much about the society in which they were created. The Meiji government did control the printing industry to a certain degree with censorship, prints had to not show critique of the government or eroticism that the Western nations would not approve of. The prints had to show an outwardly good appearance of the government's actions, being through policies or public works. Since the Meiji emperor was also part of the government, this meant that pictures of the emperor also had to adhere to certain standards to not mock or disrespect his authority or the public image of the imperial family as a whole. There were many violent images, humor, and parodies, but as a publisher, you had to be careful about what you were joking about and who you were parodying.[75] There were still people who tried such as Adachi Ginkō who made a parody on a print showing the emperor at the Issuance of the State Constitution in the State Chamber of the New Imperial Palace, making the emperor a skeleton with the caption saying: "Promulgation Ceremony for the Sharpening of the Ready Wit Law".[76] The government did not censor this quickly enough and it got published in a magazine. Ginkō was sent to prison for a year and the publisher Miyatake Gaikotsu for three years.[77] This shows that publishers were considered more in charge of the printing climate but by giving the artist a year in prison they also tried to scare other artists into not even accepting these types of requests in the first place, with the one who put the order in as more at blame. So artists and publishers could have their agenda but to exist in the printing business they had to at least adhere to the government. However, the government did not commission prints as far as we know and the printing business was independent enough to come up with the subjects for the prints that they were selling. Meaning that the positivity of the prints might have been encouraged subjects by the government, the publishers made their own decision on the subjects of modernity and the positive portrayal of them. We can assume that people were thus genuinely entertained by the positive aspect that prints showing modernity brought them. By the independent nature of the print industry, there was therefore an aspect of idealization modernity, but also just keeping in touch with the news that was also a major function of ukiyo-e prints. This political print climate did not disturb objects and themes too much in my opinion since there were also changes happening that people were fond of. Plus traditional subjects of ukiyo-e were also still popular at this time, however, some genres had faced changes such as bijin in modern dress or landscape pictures also having modern elements in them such as telegraph poles. The prints of industry and infrastructures were not just reflective of this time and these policies, but they also worked to create the visual and social milieu in which Meiji citizens were functioning.[78] Refashioning realities is also very common where scenes were far more idyllic than they were in real life, which could be shown by photographs of the same time. The same types of ukiyo-e that were used in the Edo period were now used to make the Meiji prints and therefore realities seem more

[75] Miller, Alison J., "Industry and Institutions: Woodblock Prints and the Meiji Cultural Imagination" (lecture, JASA, online, 9 November 2022)
[76] Marks. Japanese Woodblock Prints : Artists, Publishers and Masterworks, 1680-1900. 2010. Page 174.
[77] Fujitani, Takashi. Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan. University of California Press. 1996. Page 198.
[78] Miller, "Industry and Institutions: Woodblock Prints and the Meiji Cultural Imagination" (lecture, JASA, online, 9 November 2022)

beautiful and prosperous than they would look. This might have been advertisement of areas and places (for tourism purposes). As well as refashioning a new famous place in Tokyo in the style of Edo.

The nation-building and the message sent to the West with Japanese craft were also seen as important, not only for the government but also for trade and a general dislike of being colonized were great influencers in inventing themselves through craftsmanship and art. “Japanese crafts, for their part, had a great deal to offer the world. of particular importance was the respect craftworks commanded in Japan, as expressed by their market value. Such a level of respect seemed to have positively contributed to the image of craft in Western as well as non-Western countries.”[79] International pressures thus would have also been an explanation as to why these prints looked like they had a positive outlook on the modernization process of the Meiji. Also to keep the nationals at ease as to what changes were brought into Japan by these Western concepts and powers. Having ukiyo-e be seen as an art form that was worthy of being put on a wall like a Western-style museum was also something new for the Meiji era. Print shops were the places where these prints were seen together but are now seen as art, also from the West there was respect for the medium but it lost its original purpose as a sort of news outlet or social media. As early as 1889 there were studies from foreigners on the subject of ukiyo-e and its fall from the common public print shops and to the historicism of the museum.[80]

In my opinion, the general statement of modernity is stress is not necessarily true. Modernity is also wonder, convenience, fast-paced, exciting, attention-grabbing, illuminating, safety, innovative, and last but not least positive. Of course, not every aspect, but some aspects are as demonstrated on Meiji ukiyo-e prints. Not only were the subjects on these prints exciting and seen as a positive addition to people’s daily lives but also the depiction is done in an overwhelmingly positive way, not showing the flaws that the subjects did have. The positivity was portrayed by showing the benefits or beauty of a modern object or principle. Although keeping my own bias in mind as a person living in the Netherlands and seeing what modern inventions were beneficial in my own country, we cannot know exactly how people in Japan experienced the modernization process that was more forced and fast-paced than it was in the West. Also with there not being many sources about how people perceived ukiyo-e prints of this time, I will keep in mind that the impact of portraying positivity through Meiji ukiyo-e prints could have been small even though the reach of the prints was fairly widespread even outside of Tokyo. But with the research I have done, I can conclude that modernity was portrayed in a positive light for the interest of the buyers and keeping censorship out. Prints were thus manufactured to portray modernity in a positive light by adding fantastical elements.

[79] Rimer. Since Meiji, 2011. Page 435.
[80] Sugawara, Merits and Demerits in the Study of Ukiyo-e : Issues Stemming from How Ukiyo-e Is Regarded in Modern Japan. 2022. Page 1.

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