

Friends of the Connecticut College Library
Friends of the Library Occasional Publications

Connecticut College

Year 2008

Bridging East and West: The Search for
Japan in the Midst of Modernization

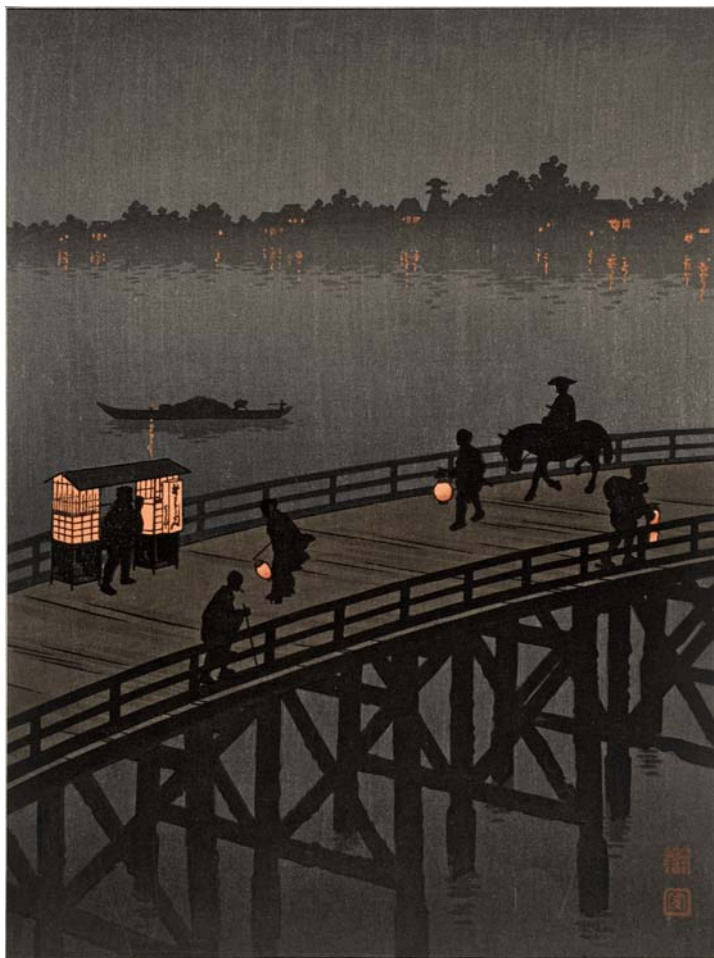
Sydney L. LaLonde
Connecticut College, sydney.lalonde@conncoll.edu

This paper is posted at [DigitalCommons@Connecticut College](https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu).

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

<http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/folpub/2>

Bridging East and West
The Search for Japan in the Midst of Modernization



An exhibition in the Charles E. Shain Library
January 21-February 14, 2008
by Sydney LaLonde '08

Cover image:

Great Bridge (Ōhashi) at Atake
by Shōda Kōhō (1875-1946)
Shain Library Collection

**The printing of this catalogue has been paid for by
The Friends of the Connecticut College Library**

Bridging East and West: The Search for Japan in the Midst of Modernization

Japanese woodblock printing experienced a resurgence and transformation in the wake of Japan's modernization. After the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate that indicated the end of the Edo period in 1868, Japan opened to the West and the country enthusiastically embraced Western ideas, institutions, and technology. Japan's rush to modernize caused traditional Japanese culture, including conventional Japanese art forms such as *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, to recede from the public eye as Japan became enamored with new Western ideas and goods. The sudden transformation of Japanese society led to a simultaneous longing for the past and uneasy desire for a modern future.

The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) prominently displayed the fruits of Japanese efforts to Westernize. Japan's unexpected victory over Russia surprised the world and established Japan as a pseudo-imperial force on the international stage. The victory realized Japan's desire to be considered equal with Western powers; however, it also symbolized the crumbling of traditional Japanese culture and for the families of the many fallen soldiers, the pain of Western warfare. In less than fifty years, Japan transformed from an isolated feudal society into a modern imperial state through industrialization and assimilation of Western ideologies. Consequently, longing for the past emerged alongside progressive attitudes. The nostalgia that seeped into the rapidly changing culture is evident in *shin-hanga*, the new style of woodblock prints that developed following Japan's Westernization and that captured the market from traditional *ukiyo-e* prints.

Between the 17th and 19th centuries, traditional woodblock prints called *ukiyo-e* experienced vibrant cultural production. Translated as "images of the floating world," *ukiyo-e* prints became popular as the rise of the merchant class increased the market for affordable, popular art. The subject matter often consisted of theatrical kabuki actors, beautiful geishas, or well-known Japanese landscapes. Katsushika Hokusai and Andō Hiroshige are among the most celebrated *ukiyo-e* artists due to their masterfully composed scenes.

Once Japan opened to the West in 1868, however, the woodblock print industry was transformed as the Western market challenged the traditional art form by bringing in novel competing genres, while creating commercial opportunities for those who could exploit them. A new type of woodblock print, called *shin-hanga*, emerged as a result of Japan's increased contact with the West. *Shin-hanga* literally translates as "new print." The subject matter did not differ substantially from *ukiyo-e* prints, but it was stylistically more affected by Western techniques and it often reflected the changes occurring in Japanese society due to Westernization.

Some *shin-hanga* targeted Western audiences by portraying stereotypical, oriental images of Japanese culture. Watanabe Shōzaburō (1885-1962), a prominent woodblock print publisher, essentially created the *shin-hanga* print movement because he recognized that Western buyers wanted Japanese prints that reflected their pre-conceived notions of the Orient. He established a publishing empire by recruiting talented artists to design woodblock prints specifically for the Western market. Many Western buyers may have naively believed they were purchasing prints that reflected authentic Japanese culture. The prints were, however, essentially romanticized visions of a Japan that was, in fact, rapidly modernizing along Western lines. *Shin-hanga* prints thus represent the paradoxical and ironic relationship between Japan and the West's perception of Japan during this tumultuous period.

While the desires of American and European audiences influenced the creation of the *shin-hanga*, the influx of Western artistic ideas also greatly contributed to this new woodblock print movement. Exposure to Western techniques, such as perspective and impressionistic depiction of light, inspired Japanese artists and allowed for new styles to emerge within Japanese prints. The new visual language of *shin-hanga* represented a departure from the traditional *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, whose characteristic lack of perspective and strong blocks of color were often replaced by Western artistic methods in *shin-hanga*. Ironically, Japanese woodblock print designers of the Edo period had in previous generations influenced prominent European artists. Japonisme, a term originally coined by the French, refers to the stylistic influences of Japanese prints on Western art. Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Vincent Van Gogh all incorporated common Japanese artistic techniques, such as including broad color planes and flattening the space on the canvas.

In the *shin-hanga* tradition of the modern era, Japanese print designers Kobayashi Kiyochika, Shōda Kohō, Ōhara Koson, Shiro Kasamatsu, and Kawase Hasui were all influenced by Western techniques. Even though they created prints in the *shin-hanga* style, each artist infused his prints with personal experience, past training, and individual passion. Watanabe Shōzaburō pushed many of these artists to design prints of a romanticized Japan in order to appeal to the Western eye. However, the prints should not be construed as completely artificial because many of the artists, working in a medium with a long history, no doubt felt ambivalent about the "development" of Japan. The resulting nostalgic images of Japanese culture show how *shin-hanga* prints channel both the modern world and the traditional world, the West and the East.

Shin-hanga prints are important cultural artifacts because they embody this tumultuous and ambivalent period of Japanese history. The images demonstrate how, as in many developing nations, Japan simultaneously desired to modernize along Western lines, yet also longed for the past and its cultural roots. It could be said that, ultimately, *shin-hanga* prints epitomize Japan's capitulation to Western ideologies because the prints were stylistically created to appeal to Western buyers. However, in extolling

and profitably marketing its cultural traditions to the United States and Europe, the artists and publishers of *shin-hanga* successfully navigated the treacherous waters of globalization, reawaking the Japanese themselves to the appeal of their native land and traditions. In this respect, the *shin-hanga*, while sometimes criticized in scholarly circles as being trite and sentimental, contains valuable lessons for contemporary society.

Prominent Western print collectors include Louis Black, a Boston attorney who donated many of the prints in the Black Collection. Caroline Black, a professor of botany at the college and probably a relation to Louis Black, also donated prints to the Black Collection. Several individuals and anonymous donors contributed to the prints in the College's Shain Library Collection. The prints on view in this exhibition represent both the Black and the Shain Collections.

Notes and Acknowledgements:

Family names come before given names in Japanese practice. Artists are also usually referred to by their given names and not by their family names as in Western artists. I follow these Japanese conventions in this exhibition.

This exhibition is indebted to Laurie Deredita, Mark Braunstein, and particularly Takeshi Watanabe. I am very grateful for Professor Watanabe's help and guidance throughout this project.

Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

Artist: Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

Title: "Reflection in Lake Misaka, Kai Province," *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*

Date: 20th century reproduction, originally published in the early 1830s
24 x 36 cm.

Louis Black Collection

Artist: Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

Title: "The Great Wave off Kanagawa," *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*

Date: 20th century reproduction, originally published in the early 1830s
24 x 36 cm.

Shain Library Collection

Katsushika Hokusai was one of Japan's most prolific artists of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. Born in 1760 during the heart of the Edo Period (1600-1867), Hokusai produced a wide variety of prints, but panoramas of famous landscapes occupy a conspicuous fraction. Throughout his life, the artist moved ninety-three times; perhaps his enormous output was a product of his restlessness. An avid traveler, Hokusai directly observed many of the landscapes he illustrated. His series portraying well-known waterfalls, as well as his series titled *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (of which the first prints were issued in 1832), became extremely popular. The latter series actually contains forty-six prints instead of thirty-six, and the series afforded Hokusai great fame in Japan and overseas. *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* includes "The Great Wave off Kanagawa", a universally recognized print that received much praise and recognition, particularly from abroad. Some scholars deem "The Great Wave" the single most famous Japanese print in the West.¹

While the image of the powerful wave seems to have nothing to do with Mount Fuji at first glance, upon closer inspection, the illustrious mountain becomes evident on the horizon. In this image, Hokusai plays with perception and attempts to evoke a sense of perspective by placing the huge, looming wave over the diminutive Mount Fuji, normally the largest and most eye-catching subject in a print of this theme. The juxtaposition of the wave in the foreground and the iconic mountain in the background forces the viewer to see the wave as an over-powering force of nature. Perhaps Hokusai's use of a miniature Mount Fuji was the only image that could truly demonstrate the greatness of the wave.

¹ Earle, Joe. [An Introduction to Japanese Prints](#). Owings Mills, MD: Stemmer House Publishers, Inc., 1982.

Despite Japan's formal policy of isolation (with limited foreign contacts) during the Edo Period, Hokusai learned about Western artistic techniques that filtered through Dutch traders at Nagasaki. Western artists influenced Hiroshige (and later *shin-hanga* print designers to a much greater degree), while *ukiyo-e* artists inspired prominent French painters such as Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Cezanne. In particular, Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* can be likened to Cezanne's *Mont Sainte Victoire* paintings, completed around the turn of the 19th century.² Both series feature the prominent mountains captured from different angles and with various atmospheric effects. Hokusai often attempted to capture a subject repeatedly in different moods, as did Impressionist painters.

Finally, these particular prints, as well as the Hiroshige prints, presumably date from the early 20th century. The fountainhead of the *shin-hanga* movement, the publisher Watanabe Shozaburo, initially began his career selling such reproductions, produced by artists using the traditional methods of woodblock printing. Because of the manufacturing technique, artists published *ukiyo-e* in mass numbers, so one should not apply Western notions about authenticity to this Japanese genre. Their reproduction in the traditional manner ensures a more natural work that shows qualities of the original craftsmanship than what mere copying would imply.

² Tanaka, Hidemichi. *Cezanne and "Japonisme."* Artibus et Historiae Vol. 22, No. 44 (2001).

Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō, Andō Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Artist: Andō Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Title: “Hakone,” *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō* (plate 11)

Date: 20th century reproduction, originally published 1833-34
23 x 35 cm.

Louis Black Collection

Artist: Andō Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Title: “Nihonbashi, Edo,” *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō* (plate 1)

Date: 20th century reproduction, originally published 1833-34
23 x 35 cm.

Louis Black Collection

Hiroshige’s travels along the Tōkaidō Road, the highway between the capital Edo (now Tokyo) and the former imperial seat of Kyoto, inspired him to create the series *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, issued in multiple editions from the 1830s. The road runs between the two cities along the eastern coast of Japan, offering beautiful seascapes, landscapes, and panoramas along the way. Struck by the overwhelming natural beauty he witnessed while traveling the Tōkaidō, Hiroshige produced an image for each of the fifty-three stations along the road. These stations were essentially rest-stops or checkpoints, and Hiroshige illustrated scenes from around the area of each station.

Perhaps the domestic travel boom occurring in Japan in the mid nineteenth century also prompted Hiroshige to create *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō*. The prints depicting scenes of Japan’s idyllic countryside essentially served as souvenirs for travelers to remember the scenery they had traversed. Until the Edo period, Japanese national identity was still nebulous, centered more or less on one’s province, referred to as the “country” (*kuni*) of one’s origin. With the unification of Japan under the Tokugawa shogun, people now lived under one ruler in one land. The peace that ensued during this period certainly encouraged travel, but it also allowed for the sense of national identity underlying these prints, which satisfied the curiosity of people about their nation.

Utawaga Hiroshige and Katsushika Hokusai share the title of the leading Japanese landscape artist, but the two *ukiyo-e* print designers approached nature differently. While Hokusai intended to illustrate the awesome power of the natural world, Hiroshige aspired to humanize the natural environment. He often included people, either travelers or workers, in his scenes depicting the beauty of the Tōkaidō road. In some prints, such as in “Hakone,” the people are hardly visible. At first glance, the figures’ straw hats seem to blend into the rocky terrain of the overhanging cliff. The tiny figures add to the awesome sensation of the lake and cliff. Furthermore, the white

peak of Mt. Fuji demands attention, although Hiroshige has positioned it in the background.

Hiroshige's other prints portray human activity in a more evident manner. In "Nihonbashi," the first plate of the series, numerous figures dominate the lively scene filled with commerce and trade. Edo was considered the first station along the Tokaido road, and this urban scene depicts a well-known bridge in the capital city, from which officials calculated distances away from Edo. The print on view is Hiroshige's second variation of "Nihonbashi;" the first variation contained far less people and included clouds in the sky. The composition of this version, however, includes an abundance of travelers, vendors, and peasants. This print shows the amount of cultural interaction and commercial activity occurring in Edo at that time.

One-Hundred Views of Edo, Ando Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Artist: Andō Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Title: “Scattered Pines Beside the Tone River,” *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (plate 61)

Date: 20th century reproduction, originally published in 1856
34 x 22 cm.

Louis Black Collection

Artist: Andō Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Title: “Foxfires at a Nettle Tree,” *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (plate 118)

Date: 20th century reproduction, originally published in 1857
35 x 22 cm.

Shain Library Collection

Artist: Andō Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Title: “Sudden Shower at Great Bridge (Ōhashi), Atake,” *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (plate 52)

Date: 20th century reproduction, originally published in 1857
35 x 22 cm.

Shain Library Collection

The market for woodblock prints increasingly thrived throughout Utagawa Hiroshige’s lifetime. Viewing Hokusai’s *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* greatly inspired Hiroshige to devote his life to art. The two *ukiyo-e* artists dominated the Japanese woodblock print market for decades. In particular, their landscapes were extremely popular. While *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* secured Hiroshige’s prominence as one of the foremost Japanese artists, *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* furthered his popularity. The massive series contains one hundred nineteen prints, and Hiroshige considered this set of prints his masterpiece.

Japan was officially closed to the West until 1868, yet Hiroshige managed to incorporate certain Western artistic techniques into *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (completed in the 1850s) that are not present in *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* (the first editions of which were completed in the 1830s). Hiroshige’s sense of perspective is more artistically Western in the three prints from *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, as is evident in how he portrays depth by varying the size of figures in the foreground and background. In contrast, his sense of perspective is not as realistic in the older *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, because he utilized the traditional Japanese artistic technique of layering to show depth. In the twenty years between the two series, Hiroshige no doubt learned more about Western

artistic methods and applied his newfound knowledge to the later series. While Hiroshige adapted certain Western techniques, he also influenced prominent Western painters such as Claude Monet and Vincent Van Gogh, who copied several of Hiroshige's famous prints of this series, such as "Storm on the Great Bridge."

Hiroshige designed many prints with rain scenes, including "Storm on the Great Bridge." The most renowned print from the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, this image shows Hiroshige's masterful ability to depict precipitation.³ The concentrated thin black lines falling from the sky truly portray the sensation of a sudden downpour, as do the forms of the figures dashing across the bridge attempting to find shelter. At first glance the lone man on the raft appears to float mid-image, but his small size and location between the bridge in the foreground and the riverbank in the background give the viewer a sense of depth.

In "Scattered Pines Beside the Tone River," Hiroshige portrays depth through the size of the boats and vegetation. The plants in the water located in the immediate foreground juxtaposed against the concentrated wall of greenery in the background show perspective, as well as the receding sizes of the pine trees and yellow roofs in the distance. Hiroshige occasionally used unusual vantage points, which is evident in this print. The fishing net covering the right side of the image invites the viewer into the scene: the net has just been cast off from a boat upon which the viewer stands. While "Storm on the Great Bridge" is one of Hiroshige's most celebrated prints, "Scattered Pines Beside the Tone River" is one of his least-known.

"Foxfires at a Nettle Tree" is, however, a very famous print Hiroshige designed. In this image, Hiroshige expresses a sense of nostalgia by illustrating a common story from Japanese folklore. Once a year on New Year's Eve, foxes in the Edo region assemble around an old tree in the suburb of the capital and breathe out fire under a starry night. Hiroshige manages to convey the magical and mysterious beauty of nature that has been told in countless Japanese legends, though, like the stars in the sky, one increasingly invisible in the glare of urban life. By allowing us to connect with such scenes beyond our modern perceptions, this print continues to appeal to our memories of folktales and spirits inhabiting the natural land.

³ Earle, Joe. [An Introduction to Japanese Prints](#). Owings Mills, MD: Stemmer House Publishers, Inc., 1982.

Kasamatsu Shirō (1898-1991)

Artist: Kasamatsu Shirō (1898-1991)

Title: *Evening at Edge of Shinobazu Pond* at Ueno Park, Tokyo

Date: 1932

36 x 24 cm.

Louis Black Collection

After seeing Kasamatsu Shirō's landscape paintings at significant exhibitions, publisher and *shin-hanga* advocate Watanabe Shōzaburō approached the artist with the intention of recruiting him as a designer for woodblock prints. Due to his extensive artistic training, Shirō became known for his ability to capture masterfully atmospheric effects in his prints.⁴ He frequently incorporates lanterns and misty rain in order to portray the effects of light on the atmosphere, and the wistful scenes became extremely popular with Western collectors.

In *Evening at Edge of Shinobazu Pond*, the brushstrokes Shiro utilizes to depict the water are reminiscent of the broken brushstrokes made famous by the French Impressionists. However, the brushwork in the rest of the image is too precise to be considered impressionistic. The highly developed sense of perspective can also be attributed to Western artistic influences. Visible through the tree in the immediate foreground, the pathway leads the eye through the image to the stairway leading even further into the background. The electric lanterns lining the path are another, more concrete manifestation of Japan's Westernization, as is the location of the image itself: Ueno Park in Tokyo. Designed in imitation of the Western concept of a public park with museums and grand promenades, the park exemplifies Japanese appropriation of architectural, as well as ideological appropriations of Western imperialism. The collaboration between Shirō and Watanabe continued for a few decades, but after World War II, Shirō abandoned Watanabe in order to produce his own prints.

⁴ Merritt, Helen. Modern Japanese Woodblock Prints: The Early Years. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.

Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847-1915)

Artist: Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847-1915)

Title: *Rainy night at Kudan Hill*

Date: early 20th century

Shain Library Collection

During the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-5), Kiyochika remained one of the most prolific woodblock-print designers due to his popular, nationalistic prints from the warfront. By the end of the war, however, he was out of work, and he became involved in the rising *shin-hanga* woodblock-print genre. Kiyochika became known for implementing numerous Western techniques, including engraving and lithography. Dramatic lighting effects characterize his well-recognized prints, as seen in *Rainy Night at Kudan Hill*. The reflections of the lanterns and the shadows of the figures on the slick earth suggest Impressionist techniques. Accordingly, it is assumed that Kiyochika had knowledge of Impressionist painting and adopted some of their technical elements.⁵

His unique sense of perspective is created by the sloping hillside and receding fence, leading the eye downward toward cut-off figures in the distance. The black silhouettes add to the modern aesthetic of the print. The open spaces and wide streets reflect the new imperial cityscape and exemplify the changing environment of urban life in Japan. The juxtaposition between conventional lanterns and artificial light reflects the ambivalent relationship between Japan's traditional past and its embrace of modern Western phenomena.

⁵ Merritt, Helen. Modern Japanese Woodblock Prints: The Early Years. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.

Kawase Hasui (1883-1957)

Artist: Kawase Hasui (1883-1957)
Title: *Kintai Bridge on Spring Evening*
Date: first half of the 20th century
36 x 24 cm.
Louis Black Collection

Artist: Kawase Hasui (1883-1957)
Title: *Snowstorm at Kiba*
Date: first half of the 20th century
25 x 35 cm.
Shain Library Collection

As a relatively inexperienced print designer, Hasui showed his sketches to the prominent publisher, Watanabe Shōzaburō. Impressed by Hasui's natural talent, Watanabe encouraged the artist to concentrate on landscapes, particularly traditional scenes of Japan. Hasui's extensive travels to remote parts of the country allowed him to create the tranquil and partly idealized landscapes for which he became well known.⁶ The prints produced out of Hasui and Watanabe's collaboration captured the Western eye because they provided foreign buyers with the fantasy of an exotic, still feudal Japan.

Indigenous to Japan, cherry blossoms add to the traditional nature of most *shin-hanga* prints. In *Kintai Bridge on Spring Evening*, Hasui forces the viewer to observe the print through a sea of pink cherry blossoms. What might otherwise be a stereotypical image of either a Japanese bridge or cherry blossoms, the bridge set against the iconic flowers, boldly depicted in the foreground, infuse the scene with energy, color, and perspective. While the cherry blossom may simply seem like a beautiful flower to Westerners, it holds special meaning in Japan. Called *sakura*, the cherry blossom often symbolizes life, death, and rebirth. Cherry blossoms are particularly poignant during times of war due to their nationalistic symbolism. While many Western buyers may have simply liked the beauty of the idyllic cherry, in reality, *sakura* infused prints of this period with a strong patriotic sentiment.

While cherry blossoms veil the scene in *Kintai Bridge on Spring Evening*, snowflakes cover the image of Hasui's *Snowstorm at Kiba*. The most valuable print in the Shain Collection, *Snowstorm at Kiba* is just one example of the numerous snowscapes Hasui designed. His snow scenes often have the same distinct color palette, which includes indigo blue water set against gray clouds. Snow was Hasui's favorite subject, yet he captured the atmospheric

⁶ Merritt, Helen. Modern Japanese Woodblock Prints: The Early Years. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.

effect in two distinct ways. He either portrayed falling snow as white dots veiling the image (a traditional Japanese technique), or he used numerous white oblique lines to infuse the print with a more realistic effect.⁷

⁷ Brown, Kendall H. Visions of Japan: Kawase Hasui's Masterpieces.
(Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2004).

Ōhara Koson (1877-1945)

Artist: Ōhara Koson (1877-1945)
Title: *Monkey Reaching for the Moon*
Date: c. 1910
34 x 18 cm.
Louis Black Collection

Artist: Ōhara Koson (1877-1945)
Title: *untitled (Five White Egrets)*
Date: c. 1927
36 x 24 cm.
Louis Black Collection

Originally a trained painter, Koson began designing woodblock prints during his tenure at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Due to his collaboration with the established print publisher Watanabe Shozaburo starting in the mid 1920's, Koson's prints became highly successful. During this time, the artist changed his name to Shoson, possibly at the urging of Watanabe. Koson became well recognized for his idyllic flora and fauna prints; it is unknown if the artist felt a particular connection to the natural world or if Watanabe pushed Koson to design flower and animal prints in order to capitalize on yet another genre of the *shin hanga*.⁸ Indeed, the prominent publisher sent the majority of Koson's nature-oriented prints to Western countries where they became immensely popular.

As seen in *Five White Egrets* and *Monkey Reaching for the Moon*, Koson's prints often incorporate traditional Japanese artistic techniques such as flat planes of color and a lack of perspective. Koson illustrated exotic animals, as seen in *Monkey Reaching for the Moon*, as well as more common animals, as seen in *Five White Egrets*. Exotic animals appealed to Western audiences since they were unfamiliar and they supported the West's romanticized notion of the Orient. More common animals appealed to Western buyers simply because the subject matter was easy to understand. Generally speaking, Koson's animal scenes are more accessible to Western audiences because they do not refer to Japanese customs, society or history in any way.

⁸ Newland, Amy R., Jan Perree, and Robert Schaap. Crows, Cranes, and Camellias: The Natural World of Ohara Koson. Leiden, Hoteli Publishing, 2001.

Hasegawa Night Scene Series

Shoda Koho, Utagawa Yoshimune II, Eijirō Kobayashi

Artist: Shōda Kōhō (1875-1946)
Title: *Great Bridge (Ōhashi) at Atake*
Date: early 20th century
24 x 18 cm.
Shain Library Collection

Artist: Shōda Kōhō (1875-1946)
Title: *Starry Night, Lake Biwa*
Date: early 20th century
25 x 18 cm.
Shain Library Collection

Artist: Shōda Kōhō (1875-1946)
Title: *Starry night, Lake Biwa*
Date: early 20th century
25 x 18 cm.
Shain Library Collection

Artist: Utagawa Yoshimune II (1863-1941)
Title: *Cormorant Fishing Under a Bridge*
Date: early 20th century
25.5 x 19 cm.
Shain Library Collection

Artist: Kobayashi Eijirō (1870-1946)
Title: *Moonlight Bridge over the Sumida River, Tokyo*
Date: c. 1910-1920
24 x 18 cm.
Shain Library Collection

Artist: unknown
Title: *Lady in Twilight*
Date: 20th century
25 x 18 cm.
Shain Library Collection

Hasegawa Takejiro founded the Hasegawa Publishing Company in 1885. Perhaps the most famous set of woodblock prints published by Hasegawa is the series titled *Night Scenes*, of which Connecticut College owns six out of twenty-six prints. In this series of *shin-hanga*, Hasegawa

incorporated the works of many different artists including Shōda Kōhō, Utagawa Yoshimune II, and Kobayashi Eijirō. Like all *shin-hanga* prints, this series appealed to the Western eye and was marketed abroad. In order to attract more buyers, some of the prints were deviously stamped with Hiroshige's seal because of his popularity and recognition.

The prints in *Night Scenes* were issued in various colors, but particularly in sepia and blue tones in order to evoke a sense of darkness. Print designer Shōda Kōhō created "Starry Night at Lake Biwa," a print in both sepia and blue versions. Specifically in the blue-hued night scenes, lanterns and lights were highlighted in orange tones, producing an aesthetically pleasing color palette because blue and orange are opposite each other on the color wheel. Furthermore, the reflection of light in the water was reminiscent of Impressionism's characteristic short and quick brushstroke. Through a process that involves many stages, woodblock prints are produced by transferring an image carved into the surface of a wooden block to a sheet of paper. Consequently, the same image can be printed in various colors, as seen in Kōhō's "Starry Night at Lake Biwa."

Kōhō's "Great Bridge at Atake" depicts the same bridge found in Hiroshige's famous print from the *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. In his choice of subject, Kōhō might have consciously been paying homage to the great Hiroshige. Or he may have subconsciously been revealing the debt of *shin-hanga* to its traditional roots in Edo Japan for its inspiration. At the same time, we see that their treatment differs considerably. While both are concerned with capturing ephemeral moments, Kōhō's obsession with twilight evokes the wistful nostalgia that permeates so much of Meiji art and its representations. For even then, people sensed the transience of their age, a world that hovered between East and West, a veritable bridge between time and space.

Bibliography

- Brown, Kendall H. Visions of Japan: Kawase Hasui's Masterpieces. Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2004.
- Brown, Kendall H., and Hollis Goodall-Cristante. Shin-Hanga: New Prints in Modern Japan. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1996.
- Earle, Joe. An Introduction to Japanese Prints. Owings Mills, MD: Stemmer House Publishers, Inc., 1982.
- Keene, Donald, Anne Nishimura Morse, and Frederic A. Sharf. Japan at the Dawn of the Modern Age: Woodblock Prints from the Meiji Era. Boston, MA: MFA Publications, 2001.
- Meech-Pekarik, Julia. The World of the Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization. New York, NY: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1986.
- Merritt, Helen. Modern Japanese Woodblock Prints: The Early Years. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.
- Newland, Amy R., Jan Perree, and Robert Schaap. Crows, Cranes, and Camellias: The Natural World of Ohara Koson. Leiden, Hotei Publishing, 2001.
- Newland, Amy R., ed. Printed to Perfection: Twentieth-century Japanese Prints from the Robert O. Muller Collection. Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2004.
- Stewart, Basil. A Guide to Japanese Prints and Their Subject Matter. New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.
- Tanaka, Hidemichi. *Cezanne and "Japonisme."* Artibus et Historiae Vol. 22, No. 44 (2001).
- Williams, Marjorie L. Japanese Prints: Realities of the Floating World. Cleveland, OH: Indiana University Press, 1983.