

Using Art as Primary Source Documents: Ukiyo-e Examples

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Art appreciated for formal properties like line, color, composition, but reading it as a visual document increases understanding of its context its cultural geography.



***Classic
Landscape***
(1931)
**Charles
Sheeler**

Art is a visual document that creates and sustains culture thru composition, narrative, and context.



Washington Crossing the Delaware (1851) Emanuel Leutze

Ex: Transformation of Early Modern Japan (1600-1868) as recorded in woodblock prints

- 1. Art used by teachers to provide context for the lesson, touching on history, politics, society, culture, etc.**
- 2. Art used by students to increase contextual understanding and extract information to make informed judgments.**
- 3. Art used by teachers and students to think like a historian, seeing change over time and using the past to make sense of the present and benefit the future.**

Thinking-like-a-historian framework which aligns to the Common Core Standards goal of examining and providing evidence, has three key skills: contextualization, sourcing, and corroboration.

***Contextualization* - process whereby primary sources are placed into the temporal and conditional context within which they occurred.**

***Sourcing* - examination of the origin of a text or other primary source to recognize that historical documents are interpretations of events.**

***Corroboration* - process of comparing multiple sources of information in order to determine the reliability or potential bias of a source.**

In [**Examining the Evidence: Seven Strategies for Teaching with Primary Sources**](#) by Hilary MacAustin and Kathleen Thompson (2014), 7 strategies for using primary sources related to this framework and align to Common Core Standards are:

- 1: Decide what you are looking at.***
- 2: Determine the purpose and audience.***
- 3: Look for bias.***
- 4: Examine closely the source itself.***
- 5: Find more information.***
- 6: Consider your own role in the interaction.***
- 7: Compare a variety of sources.***

Lets look at the time Japan was ruled by Tokugawa family of samurai (1600-1868). Their long stay in power allowed culture to flourish

Japan in Ten Minutes by Bill Wertz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh5LY4Mz15o>

Time Periods of Japan

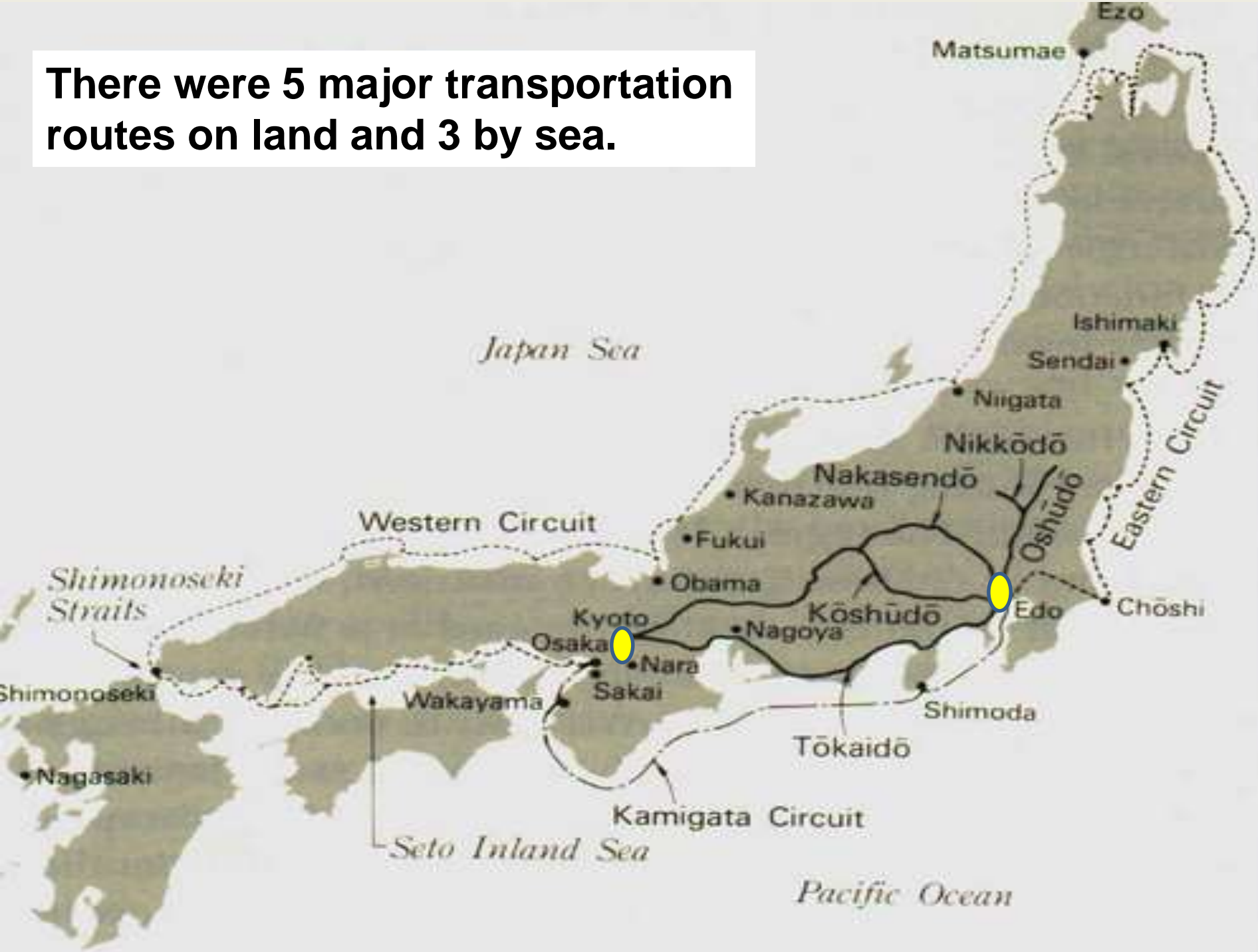
- Jomon (10,000-300 BCE)
- Yayoi (300 BCE-300 CE)
- Kofun (300-710 CE)
- Nara (710-794)
- Heian (794-1185)
- Kamakura (1185-1333)
- Muromachi (1333-1568)
- Momoyama (1568-1600)
- Edo (1600-1868)
- Meiji (1868-1912)
- Taisho (1912-1926)
- Showa (1926-1989)
- Heisei (1989-now)

1600: Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) takes over & stays in power by forcing other warlords to:

- 1. Live where told**
- 2. Turn in all weapons except personal swords**
- 3. Get approval to marry**
- 4. Limit number of castles**
- 5. Make wife and heir live in Edo in a place as nice as at home**
- 6. Visit Edo every other year with many retainers**



There were 5 major transportation routes on land and 3 by sea.



Walking 290 miles from Kyoto to Edo with many retainers took about 10-14 days which cost a lot.



Tokugawa strategies for controlling everyone

- Use informers and *ninja*
- Punish group for individual error
- Enact sumptuary laws and censorship
- Restrict travel internationally
- **Restrict travel nationally and make it costly**
 - Own inns on the major roads
 - Put barrier stations on roads
 - Limit bridges
 - Restrict use of wheels and horses

Ando Hiroshige known for his woodblock prints especially *53 Stages of the Tokaido* (1833-34) *100 Famous Views of Edo* (1856-59)

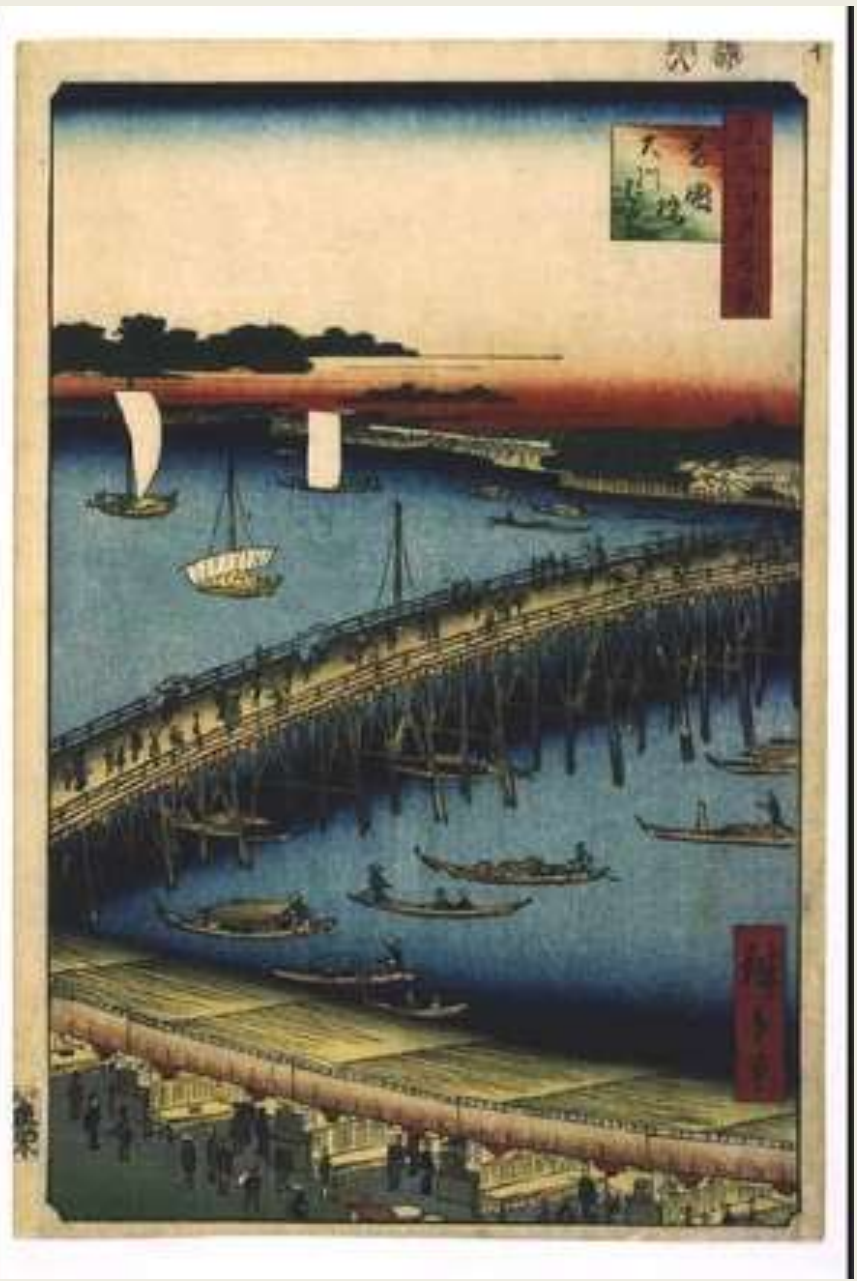


#45 Shono

53 Stations of the Tokaido (road from Edo to Kyoto) is most popular graphic art ever made; 20 editions were issued by different publishers.



Ryogoku Bridge and the Great Riverbank (1856)



Hiroshige traveled the Tokaido in 1831 or 1832 as part of an official mission taking horses from the shogun to the Emperor. The series made him famous.



#46 Kameyama

In addition to the weather, travelers faced many challenges.



#35 Goyu

内以次三拾五道海東

府中
安部川

張
元
新



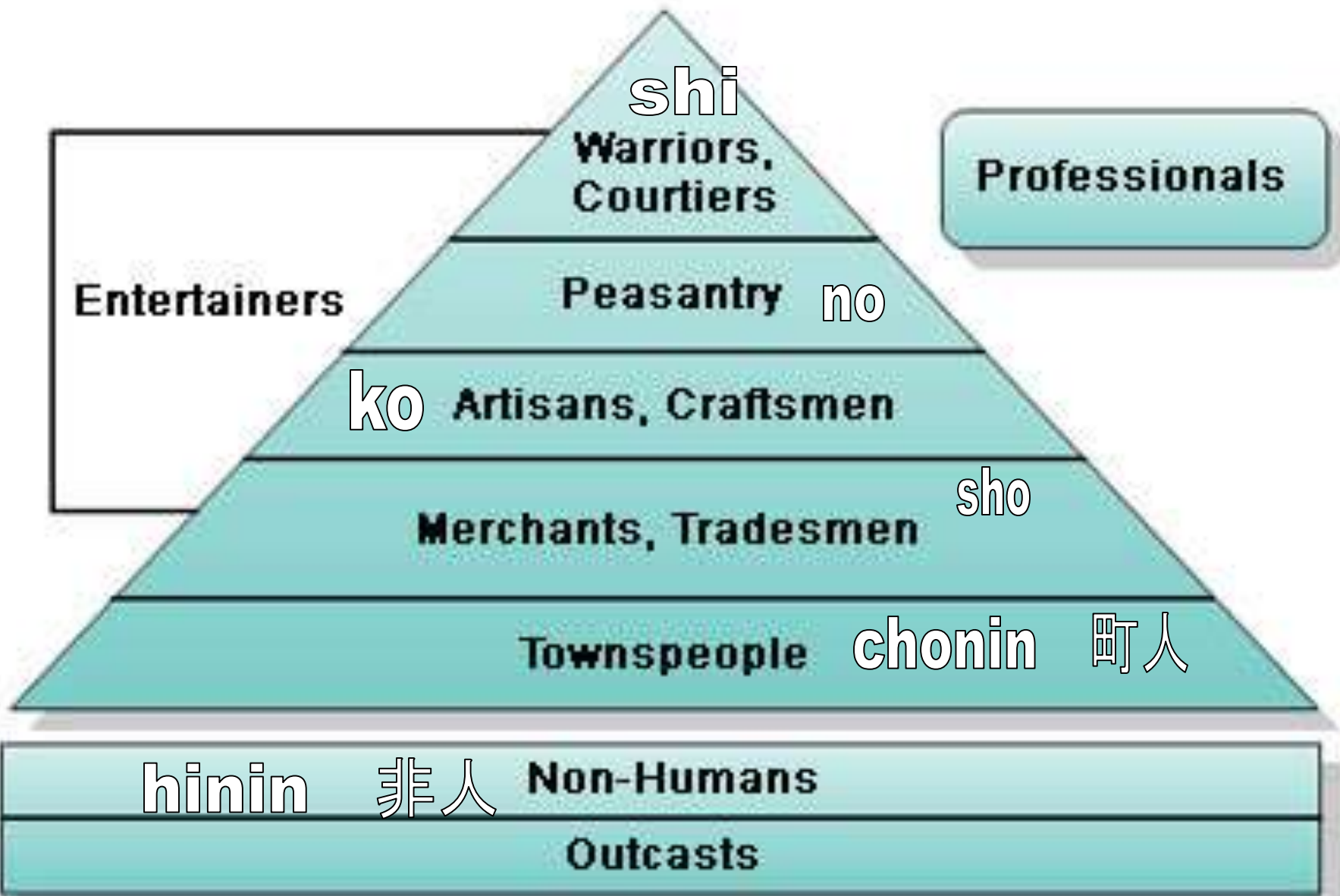
#19 Fuchu

Edo period samurai had the right to chop down anyone who annoyed them.



#37 Fujikawa

The Social Hierarchy of Edo Period Japan



Eta or *hinin* (“non-persons”)

- Occupational outcastes (butchers, tanners, grave diggers) who worked with death.
- Had to live in a special part of town.
- Often became itinerant entertainers.



Peasants were 80+ % of the population.

- **Told to live frugality.**
- **Taxed at 40-50% of their crops.**
- **Forbidden all recreation except local festivals.**
- **Required to labor on public works (building roads, bridges, etc.) upon demand.**
- **Governed by village headman.**



***Chonin* (“town people”) of artisans and merchants**

- **Developed their own culture**
- **Governed by strict sumptuary laws**
- **Had high levels of capital accumulation**





Urban centers developed commercially.

**Osaka known for sake, soy sauce, cloth, iron paper.
Kyoto known for textiles and pottery.**

But Edo (Tokyo) was the center of power and thus wealth.

“Spring” from 100 Famous Views of Edo by Hiroshige

Ukiyo-e (“Floating World pictures”) documented life in Edo during the 17th-19th centuries.



Ex: Fishmarket near Nihonbashi Bridge in Edo from “100 Famous Views of Edo (1856-59) by Ando Hiroshige

Townsmen got economic power because samurai were paid in rice not cash. Government established entertainment areas in major cities where townsmen could spend freely.



***Crowds in the Theater Quarter* from "100 Famous Views of Edo" (1848-58) by Hiroshige**

Top three entertainments were kabuki, sumo and pleasure.



Ichimura-za Theatre (1741-44) by Okamura Masanobu

Prints of kabuki actors advertised famous actors. The *mie* pose struck at moments of heightened tension to capture the audience's attention were among the most popular.



Sumo started in ancient times as fertility rite with the ring representing the female; rules codified during Edo period.



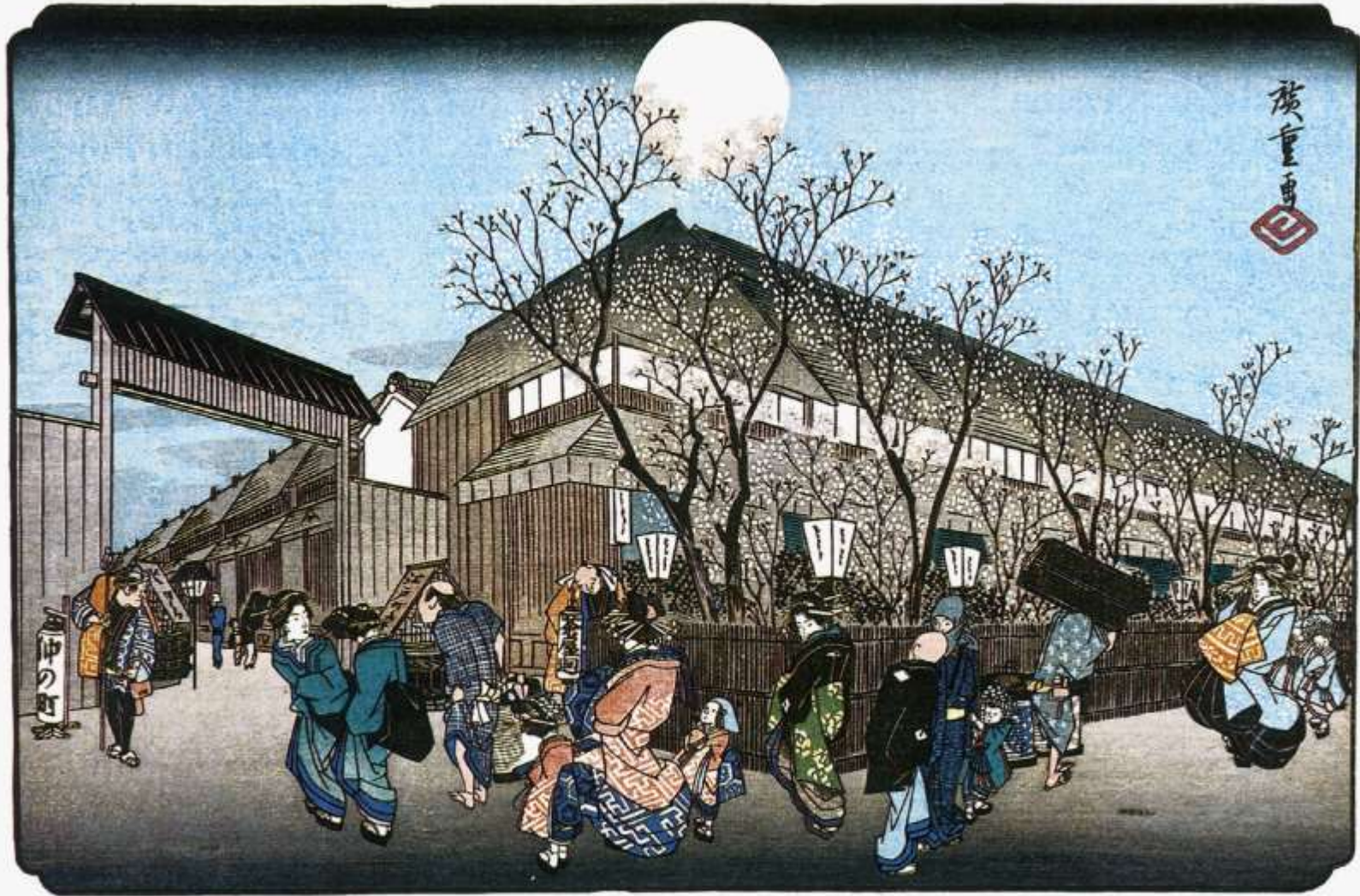
***Sumo Fundraising Tournament* (ca. 1843-7) by Kunisada**

Like kabuki prints, sumo prints advertised famous wrestlers (*rikishi*) and were purchased as souvenirs.

***Sumô Wrestlers Tanikaze
& Daidôzan Bungorô
(1784) by Utagawa
Toyokuni I (1769 -1825)***



But it was the gated entertainment area that generated the most public interest.



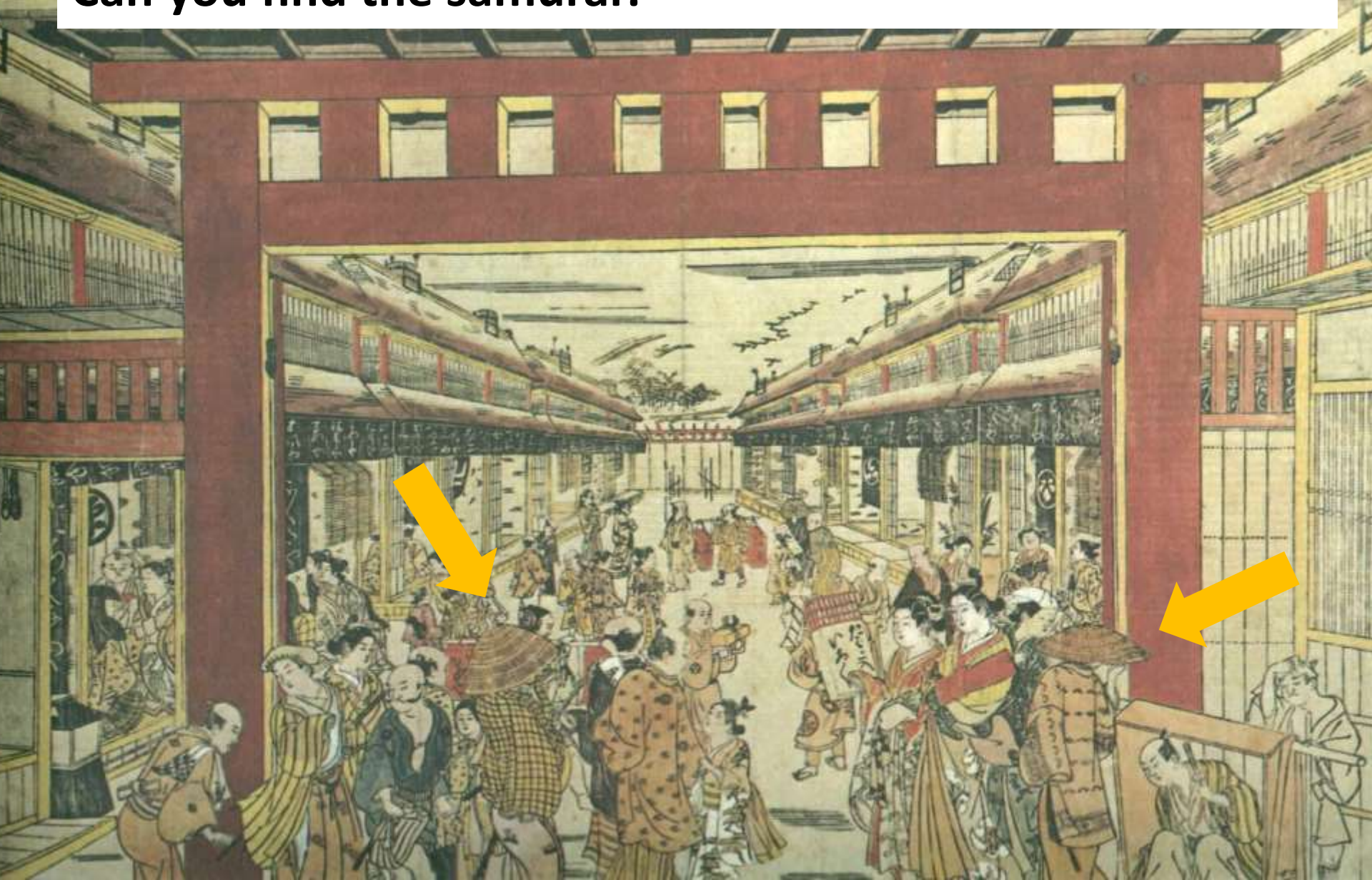
Evening Cherries at Nakanochō in Yoshiwara by Hiroshige

The State supported Neo-Confucianism so samurai were officially forbidden to visit entertainment areas because they were supposed to be role models of virtuous living.

***Samurai and man-servant
at Yoshiwara (1711) by
Okamura Masanobu***



**Yoshiwara in Edo was the largest entertainment area.
Can you find the samurai?**



Guides to entertainment areas appear in handscroll and book formats by 1660s.



***Courtesan and Lover* (ca. 1660) by the “Kanbun Master”**



4th century: Woodblock prints develop in China.

6th century: Introduced to Japan with Buddhism, but few people were literate so printing not used much except for Buddhist-related materials till 17th century.

17th century: Years of warfare end; townsmen get wealthy, become literate and pursue leisure activities like reading.

***Bishamonten*, Buddhist guardian of the north (1162)**

1608: 1st illustrated books of classical fiction made for wealthy merchants in Saga near Kyoto. “Books from Saga” (*sagabon*) conveyed refined culture of past aristocrats.

Text printed on good paper with movable wooden type, a technique newly imported from Korea; images styled after contemporary painting.

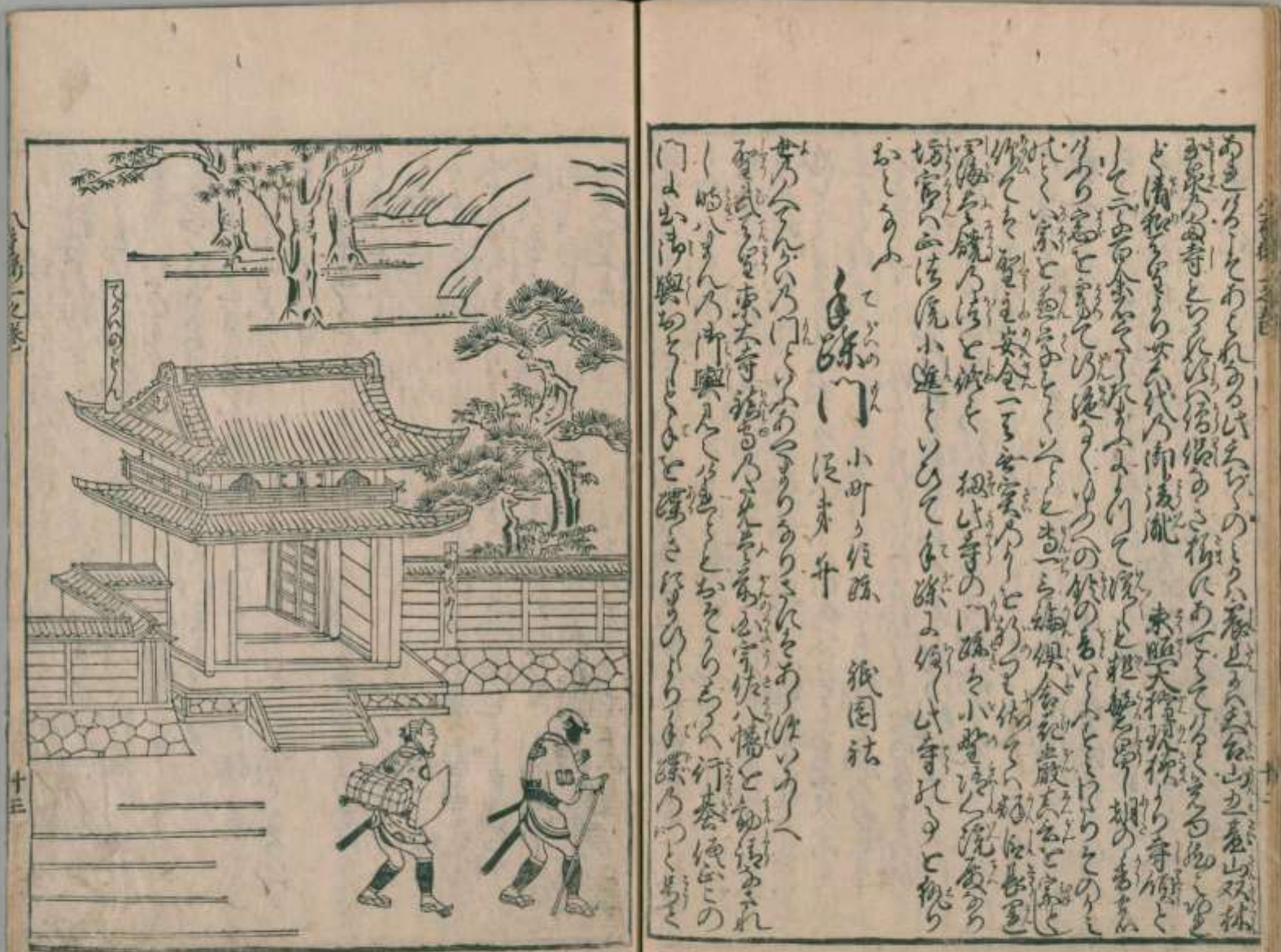


“Tale of Ise” (*Ise Monogatari*) is the earliest.

**1625-1700: Hand-colored “red & green books”
(*tanrokubon*) published for Kyoto’s wealthy
merchants, but simplified with kana text and basic
illustrations like *Legend of Kumano*.**



1640s: Guides to famous places (*meisho-ki*) appear like this illustrated guide to Nara (1678).



After 1675: Famous artists like Moronobu Hishikawa (1618-1694) & Sugimura Jihei (fl: 1681-1703) illustrated guides.



The Months in the Eastern Capital (1691) by Moronobu, hand-colored woodblock

1680s: Moronobu credited with designing first individual print (*ichimae-e*). These came to be known as *ukiyo-e* (“floating world pictures”).



***Viewing Cherry Blossoms in Ueno* by Moronobu (ca.1681-84)**

Guides included entertainment areas and even courtesan critiques (*yujo hyôbanki*)



***Lovers Overseen* (mid- 1680s) by Sugimura
hand-colored sumizuri-e**

Spring pictures (shunga) comprised about 20% of all Early Modern prints



***Amorous Couples Frolicking in Summer Heat* by Sugimura Jihei (c. 1685), Honolulu Museum of Art**

Government permitted ukiyo-e including *shunga* if it didn't threaten or criticize Confucian virtues or samurai prestige.

Ukyo-e styles and themes were periodically censored in order to:

- 1. Promote fiscal austerity**
- 2. Improve morals**
- 3. Prevent criticism of the government**

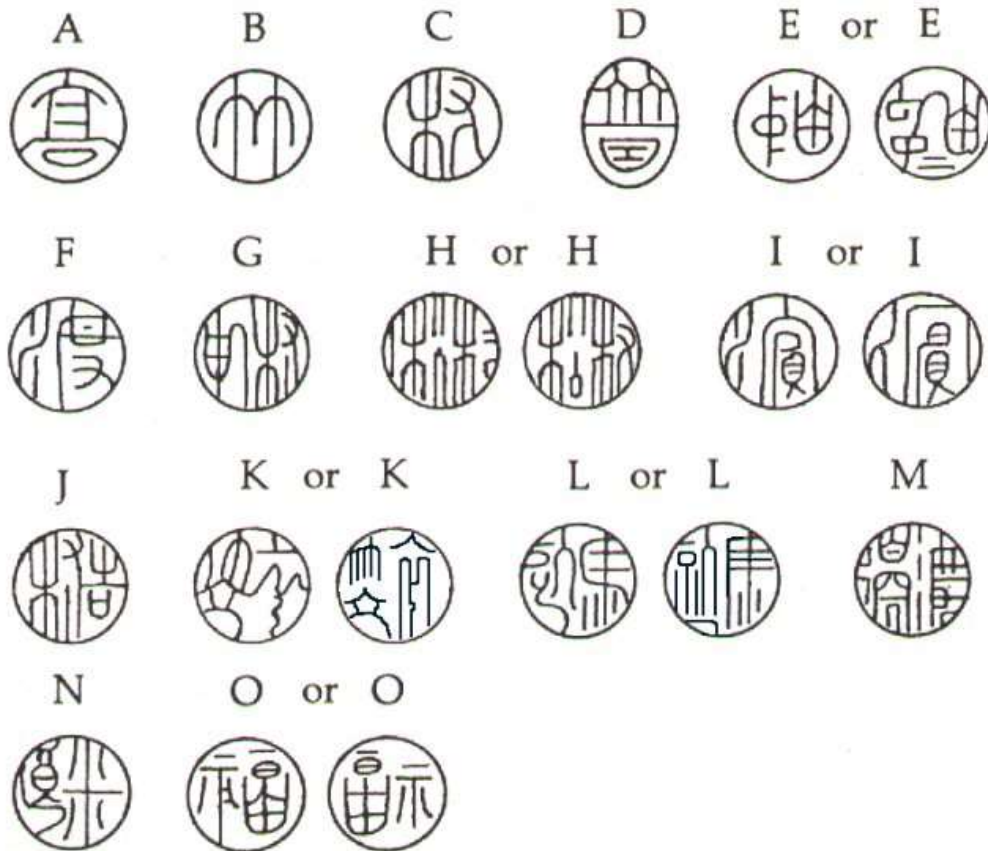
Publishers then looked for creative ways to circumvent these restrictions.

1718-1740s: Restrictions placed on complexity, size, and colors so triptych then issued; each sheet is an independent composition.



Kabuki actors before Asakusa Temple (1813) by Utagawa Toyokuni (1769 -1825)

1790-1875: Censoring required by Kansei Reforms of 1790s. Prints inspected before being published; seals of censors incorporated into the design to show approval.





1842: Tempo economic reforms clamp down on kabuki; images of current actors forbidden so then:

1842-62: Actor's names not printed.

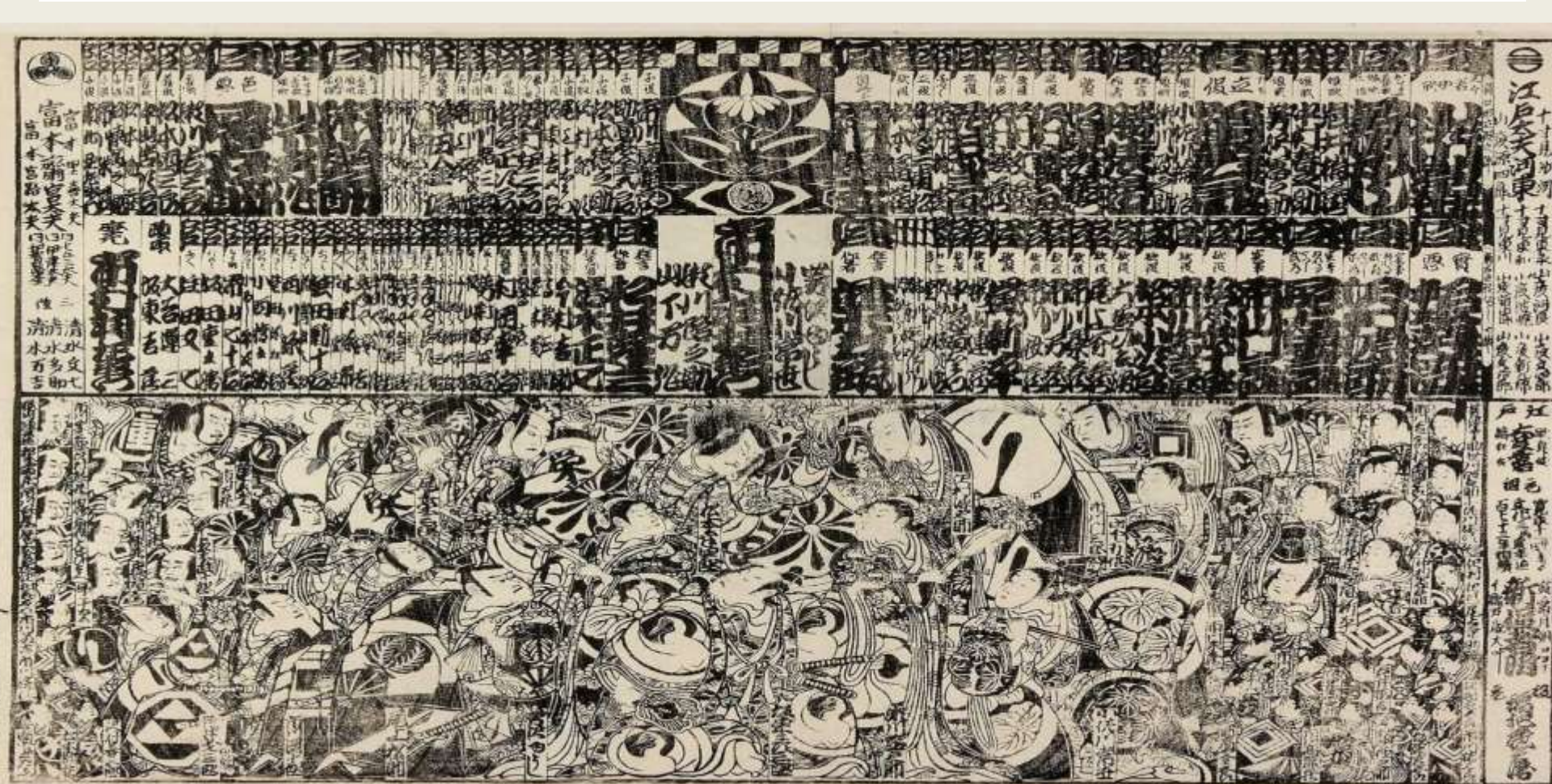
1847: Only images of historical plays published, not contemporary ones.

Ichimura Kakitsu IV as 12th century courier Uzuhei by Kunisada (1786 - 1864)

Development of individual prints (ichimae-e)

1. 1660-1720: *Sumizuri-e* ("ink printed pictures")
2. Late 17th c. to 1st quarter of 18th century: *Tan-e* ("red pictures") - hand colored with orange pigment made of red lead, saltpeter and sulphur
3. 1720s: *Beni-e* ("crimson pictures") – hand-colored in pinks from safflowers accented by green from ground malachite
4. 1716-44: *Urushi-e* ("lacquer pictures") - ink thickened with animal glue (nikawa) to make it shine like lacquer, then hand colored.
5. 1740s: *Benizui-e* ("crimson printed pictures") - printed mainly in pinks from safflower dye and greens
6. 1750s: *Aizuri-e* ("blue printed pictures") - single color used in addition to or instead of black ink
7. 1760s: *Nishiki-e* ("brocade pictures") - full color prints.

Early 17th century: Torii family granted right to produce theatre programs (*banzuke*) and then went on to dominate the print world for 100 years.



Ex: *Theater program (1806)* by Torii Kiyonaga



Kabuki prints among first made in 17th century as *sumizuri-e*, then *tan-e*, then *urushi-e* and *beni-e*.

This subject remained popular till mid-19th century when Western influence enters Japan.

Playbill of Kumazaka
(early 17th century),
sumizuri-e



Torii Kiyomasu (fl. 1690s – 1720s) an early innovator, got his start painting sign boards for theaters. His dramatic forms influenced style of actor prints (*yakusha-e*) for 80 years.

Actors Ichikawa Danzo and Otani Hiro (1717) by Torii Kiyomasu, tan-e



Late 17th century: Prints featuring individual kabuki actors in noted roles (*yakusha-e*) appear; publicized the actors, their theatres, and even their patrons.

The Actors Sanjo Kantaro II as Osome and Ichikawa Monnosuke I as Hisamatsu (1720) by Okumura Toshinobu (act c. 1717–50) hand-colored beni-e

1720s: In *beni-e* ("crimson picture") the red / pinks (*beni*) and greens were added by hand.

Actor Ichikawa Monnosuke as a courtesan holding a wig by Torii Kiyomasu II (1706-1763), *beni-e*



1740s: *Benizuri-e* ("crimson printed picture") issued as a response to government's restriction on number of colors allowed.



Actors Nakamura Shichisaburô II and Sanogawa Ichimatsu by Ishikawa Toyonobu (1740s)

1740s: Western-style perspective prints (*uki-e*) popular for ten years then thought gimmicky



***The Evening Cool by Ryōgoku Bridge* (1745) Okumura Masanobu**

1750s: *Aizuri-e* (“blue printed pictures”) - single color used in addition to or instead of black ink



***Fields in Umezawa, Sagami Province* (ca. 1830-31) from “36 Views of Mt. Fuji” by Hokusai**

1760s: *Surimono*
(“printed things”)
privately-
commissioned high
quality prints with
text; often with
special techniques
like blind printing
(*karazuri*) or gold
and mica metallics.

Distant View of
Enoshima with Mt.
Fuji Behind (1827-
29) by Kuniyoshi





1764-5: *Nishiki-e*
("brocade picture")
typically with 10 colors
on thick *hōsho* (edict
paper) made in runs of
200 for public sale; cost
more than hand-colored
prints at first.

***Courtesan Matsukaze
of the Ogi-ya*** from
"Strange Flowers of
the Floating World"
(1760s) by Harunobu



Harunobu perfected & popularized *nishiki-e*. He was first to depict geisha then replacing *odoriko* & *geiko* (dancing and shamisen playing girls who accompanied an oiran) beginning in the 1750s.

Made 1000+ *ichimae-e* and 25 *ehon* before his sudden death.

Geisha and Assistant in Front of Matsumotoya (1767-68) by Suzuki Harunobu

Shown lives of top courtesans (*oiran*) who studied the arts from ages 7-12, were attendants (*kamouro*) to “older sisters” till age 14-15, then apprentices (*shinzō*, literally “newly launched boats”) hoping for their own patron at age 20 or so.

Oiran Wakoku of Echizen-ya with Shinzo and Kamuro (1776) by Katsukawa Shunchō (act. ca. 1783–95)



Pictures of beautiful women (*bijinga*) also were like fashion magazines



***Oiran Hinazuru of the Chōjiya, attended by her kamuro Yasoji, along with Yasono, Shinzō Orizuru, Kiyotsuru, and Sayotsuru* from “Models for Fashion: New Year Designs as Fresh as Young Leaves” (ca. 1778–1780) by Isoda Kōryūsai. This series of 100+ prints was made especially for Yoshiwara courtesans.**

Print making was a collaborative process as in *Print Studio* from the series "An Up-to-Date Parody of the Four Classes" by Utagawa Kunisada (1786–1865)



Collaborative process also documented by:

1. Title or name of subject on upper left or right
2. Artist's name in lower left or right corner includes:
 - a. Artist's 1st name, chosen personally (*gō*)
 - b. Artist's 2nd name given after entering a studio (ex: **Kunisada** was pupil of Toyok**uni**)
3. Publishers marks generally near artists' name
 - a. In Edo period - simplified form of publisher's personal or shop name given
 - b. In Meiji period - full name and address & date on left or right margin, outside the image was required
4. 1790-1875: Seal of govt. approval required

Ichimura Kakitsu IV as Abe no Yasuna (1861) from the series 'Contemporary Kabuki Actors Likened to 36 Flowers' by Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865)

Top right: Title

Middle left (red): Toyokuni-ga (picture by Toyokuni)

Middle yellow: Osendo Horitake (block carver)

Middle round: Government seal of approval

Bottom left: Yorozu-cho, Hiranoya (publisher by Hiranoya Shinzo in Yorozu-cho)





**Just as in Japanese painting,
a poem by another might be
added. This one by
Karabana Tadayu says:**

***Charms and tea are brimming
over
And neither gets cold!
Let me not wake
From this lucky dream of the
New Year
At the Takashimaya.***

***Ohisa, Daughter of the
Takashima Tea-shop Owner,
(1792-93) by Kitagawa
Utamaro (1753-1806)***



In order to make their images more salable, artists referenced & even parodied famous literary works.

Ex: *A Woman and a Cat* (1793) by Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806) references Nyosan-no-Miya in *Tale of Genji* who was seen when two cats chasing each other accidentally parted the curtain concealing her.

しんやまの日に
海蛇の火の日に



歌麿筆



Artists like Utamaro also used skill in composition to make their images more exciting and increase sales.

Ex: Takashima Ohisa Using Two Mirrors to Observe Her Coiffure (ca. 1795) by Utamaro allows viewer to enjoy the woman from two views.

18th century: Landscape was only a backdrop to courtesans on parade; scenery was rarely identifiable except for Mt. Fuji.



***Flowers in the Wind* by Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769-1825)**

1820s: Government lifts travel restrictions. Prints by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) & Hiroshige (1797-1858) allowed “armchair traveling.”



***Tsuchiyama*, #49 of “53 Stages of the Tokaido” by Hiroshige**

Surging demand for prints leads to sets of 36 and even 100; before 19th century, 10-12 was norm.

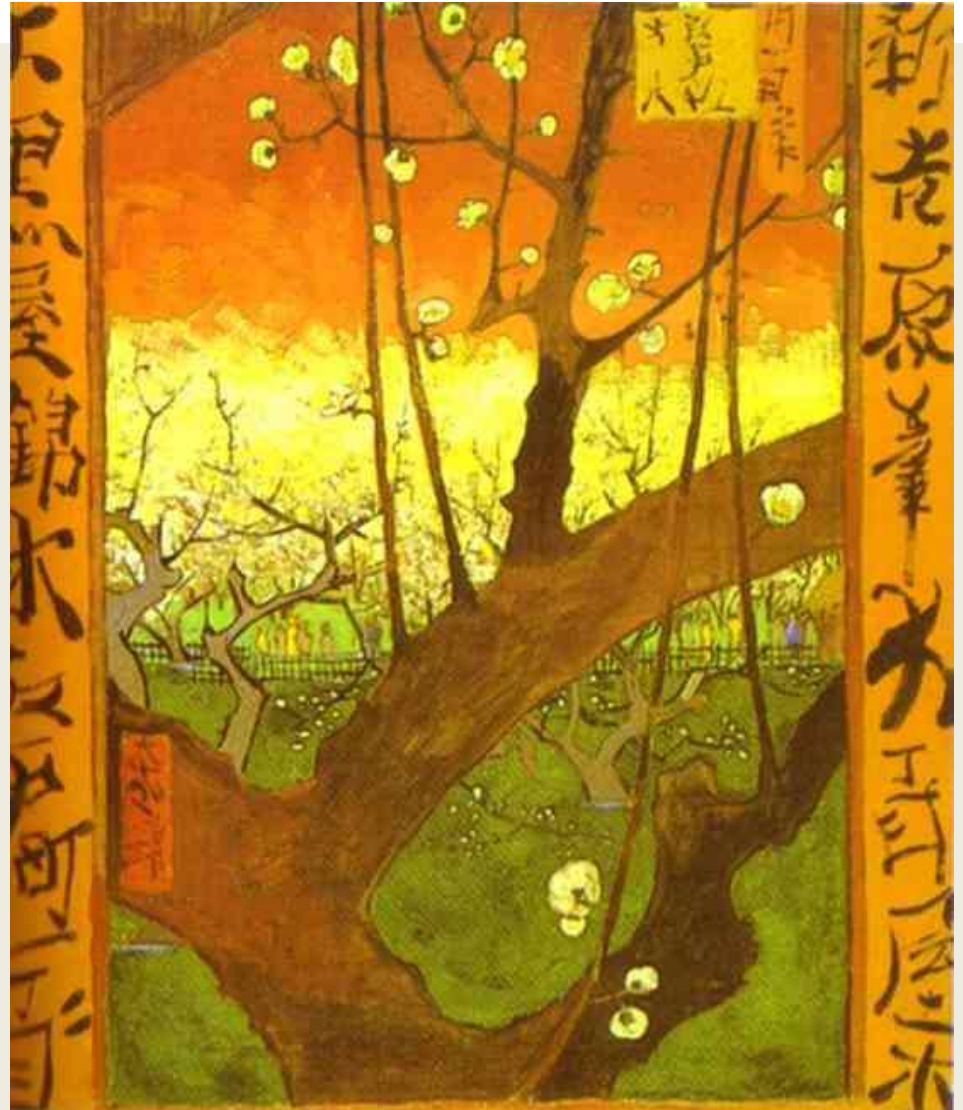


***Rainstorm Beneath the Summit* from *36 Views of Mt. Fuji* (1830-33) by Hokusai (1760-1858)**

***Great Wave off Kanagawa* from *36 Views of Mt. Fuji* (1830-33) by Hokusai broke with tradition to depict looking landward from the sea. It inspired Debussy's *La Mer*.**



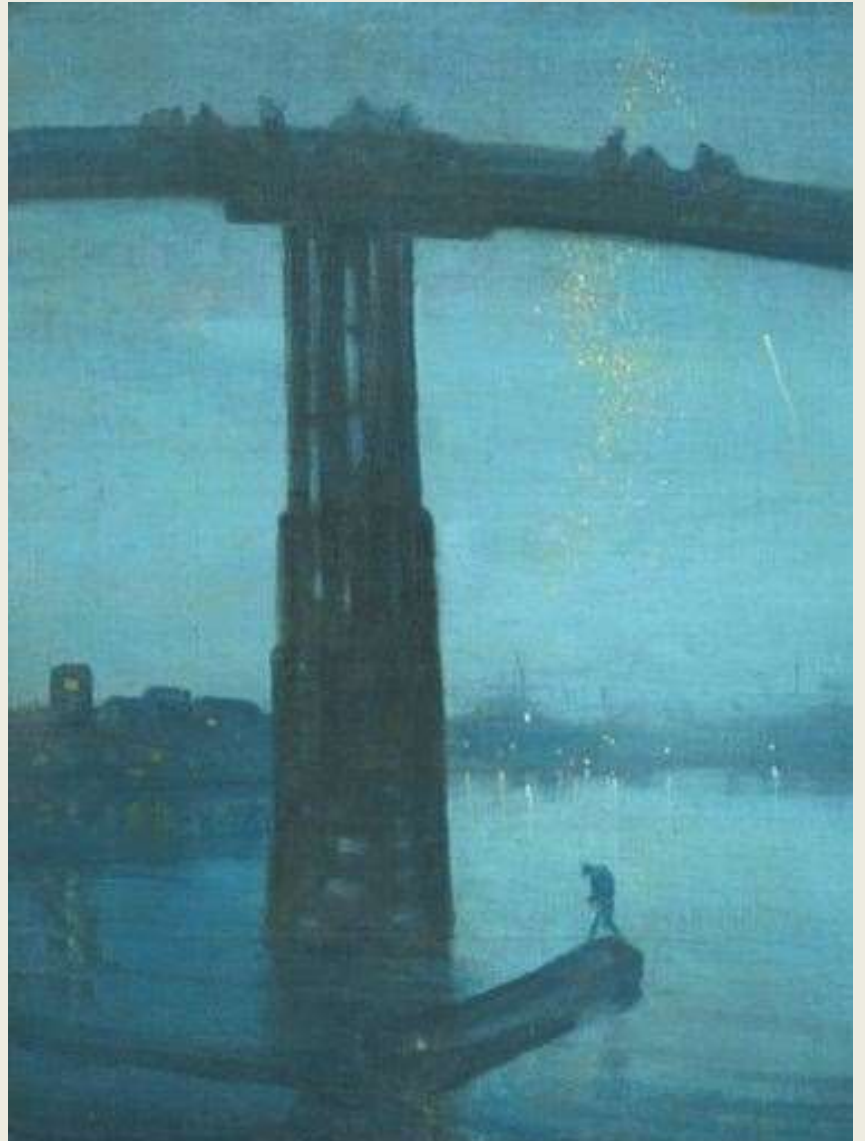
Popularity of landscape wanes after Hiroshige and Hokusai, but influenced western art as Japan opened to the West. Ex: Van Gogh's copy of Hiroshige's *Plum Garden in Kameido*.



Portrait of Pere Tanguay
(1887) by Van Gogh;
background shows ukiyo-
e the artist had collected.



Impressionist painters like Monet and Gauguin collected ukiyo-e. American artists like James McNeill Whistler were influenced too.



Mary Cassette adapted strong colors, patterning, flattened space and outlining from ukiyo-e.



Bath by Cassette (1893)



Mother and Sleepy Child by Utamaro (1790)

***Ballet Rehearsal (1875) by
Edgar Degas (1834-1917)***



***Naito Shijuku Yotsuya, No. 86
from "100 Famous Views of
Edo" (1857) by Hiroshige***



Late 1840s: Historical prints have hidden criticism of the government as the economy contracts.



***Takiyasha the Witch and the Skeleton Specter* (c.1844) by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861)**

1853: Japan “opened” by Commodore Perry.



Samurai for and against Tokugawa government fight Boshin War (1868-69) until Battle of Hakodate in Hokaido.



1868-1911: Meiji period (“enlightened rule”) begins to create a modern nation-state.

The emperor in his new western uniform moves to Edo, now Tokyo (“eastern capital”).

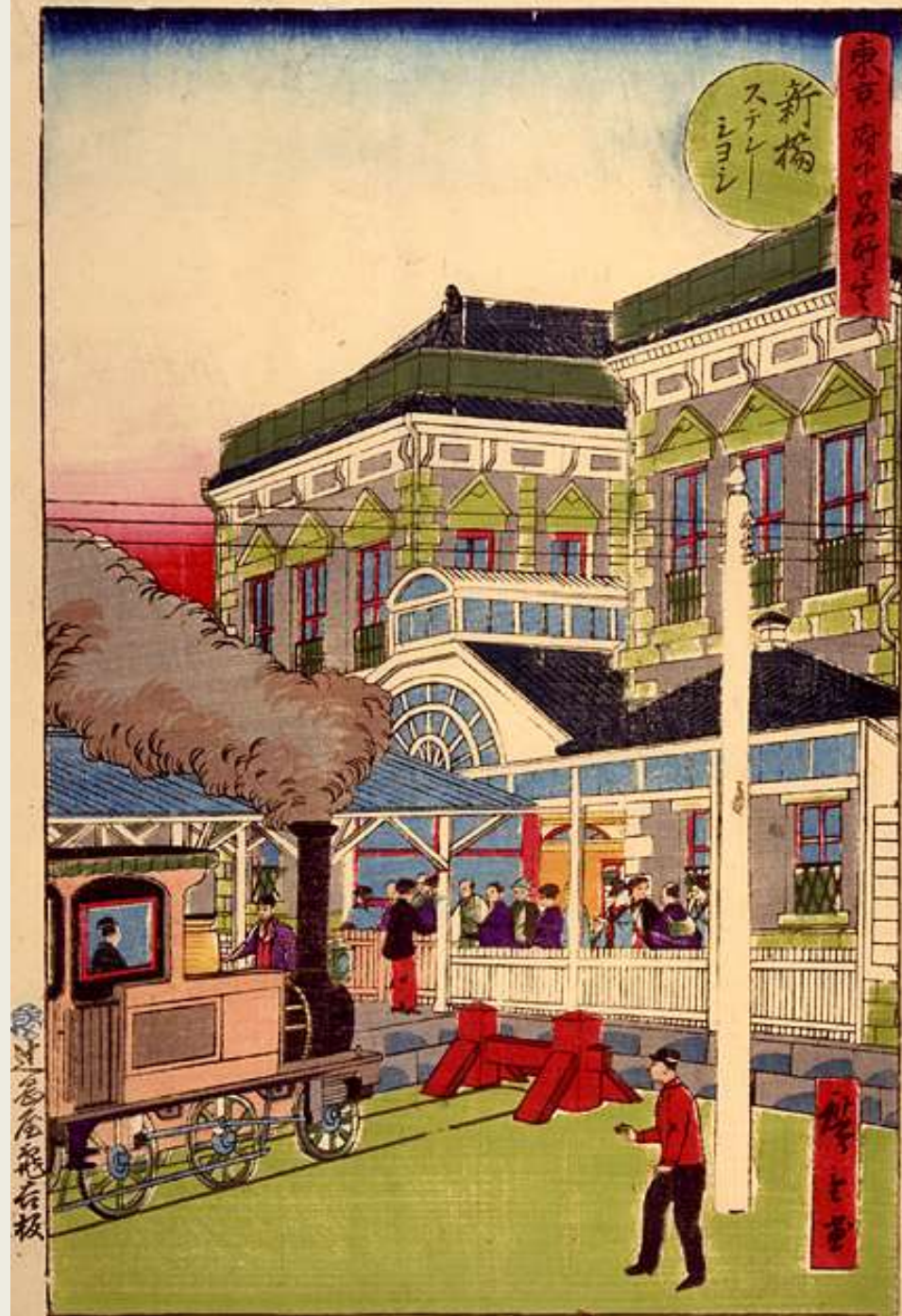
***“A Mirror of Japanese Nobility”* by Toyohara Chikanobu (1887)**



Art becomes a tool for social evolution & visual expression of nation-building.

Themes of Meiji-era prints shift to contemporary subjects like inventions, industry, national pride and military exploits.

***Shimbashi Station*
(1874) by Utagawa Hiroshige III
(1843-94)**



Document analysis is the first step in working with primary sources no matter the kind. Teach your students to think through them following this progression:

1. Meet the document.
2. Observe its parts.
3. Try to make sense of it.
4. Use it as historical evidence.

They can use a worksheet (or not) individually or in groups, vocalizing or writing down these four steps as they go.

Analyze an Artifact or Object



Meet the Artifact.

What do you think it is?

Observe its parts.

What do you think the object is made out of? Circle all that apply.



BONE CERAMIC POTTERY FABRIC GLASS LEATHER METAL PAPER PLASTIC STONE WOOD

How do you think the object feels?
Circle all that apply.



What is the color of the object?

What is the shape of the object?

What size is the object?



What are three words that describe the object?

Try to make sense of it.

What do you think the object was used for?

Who do you think would have used the object?

What does the object tell us about the time period when it was made and used?

Do we still use this object today? If so, how is it different?

Use it as historical evidence.

Where do you think you could find out more information about the object or the people who used it?



Analyze an Artifact or Object (intermediate or secondary)

- 1. Meet the artifact: What material(s) is it made of?**
- 2. Observe its parts. Describe its shape, color, texture, size, weight, age, condition, parts, text, etc.**
- 3. Try to make sense of it. Where and when is it from? Who used it and for what? List reasons you think so. What does this tell you about the people who made and used it? What does it tell you about technology at the time it was made? What is a similar item from today?**
- 4. Use it as historical evidence. What did you find out from this artifact that you might not learn anywhere else? What other documents or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand the event or time in which this artifact was used?**

<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/artifact.html>

Resources for Art as Primary Source Documents

[“Document Analysis Worksheets, from the National Archives”](#)

[“Docs Teach: Online Tools for Teaching with Documents, from the National Archives”](#)

[“Using Primary Sources, from the Library of Congress”](#)

[“Analyzing Photographs and Prints”](#)

[“Artifacts and Analysis: A Teacher’s Guide to Interpreting Objects and Writing History, from the Smithsonian in Washington DC”](#)

[“Fifty-Three Stages of the Tokaido”](#)

[“One Hundred Famous Views of Edo”](#)

[“Google Image Search”](#) and [“Wiki Commons Images”](#)

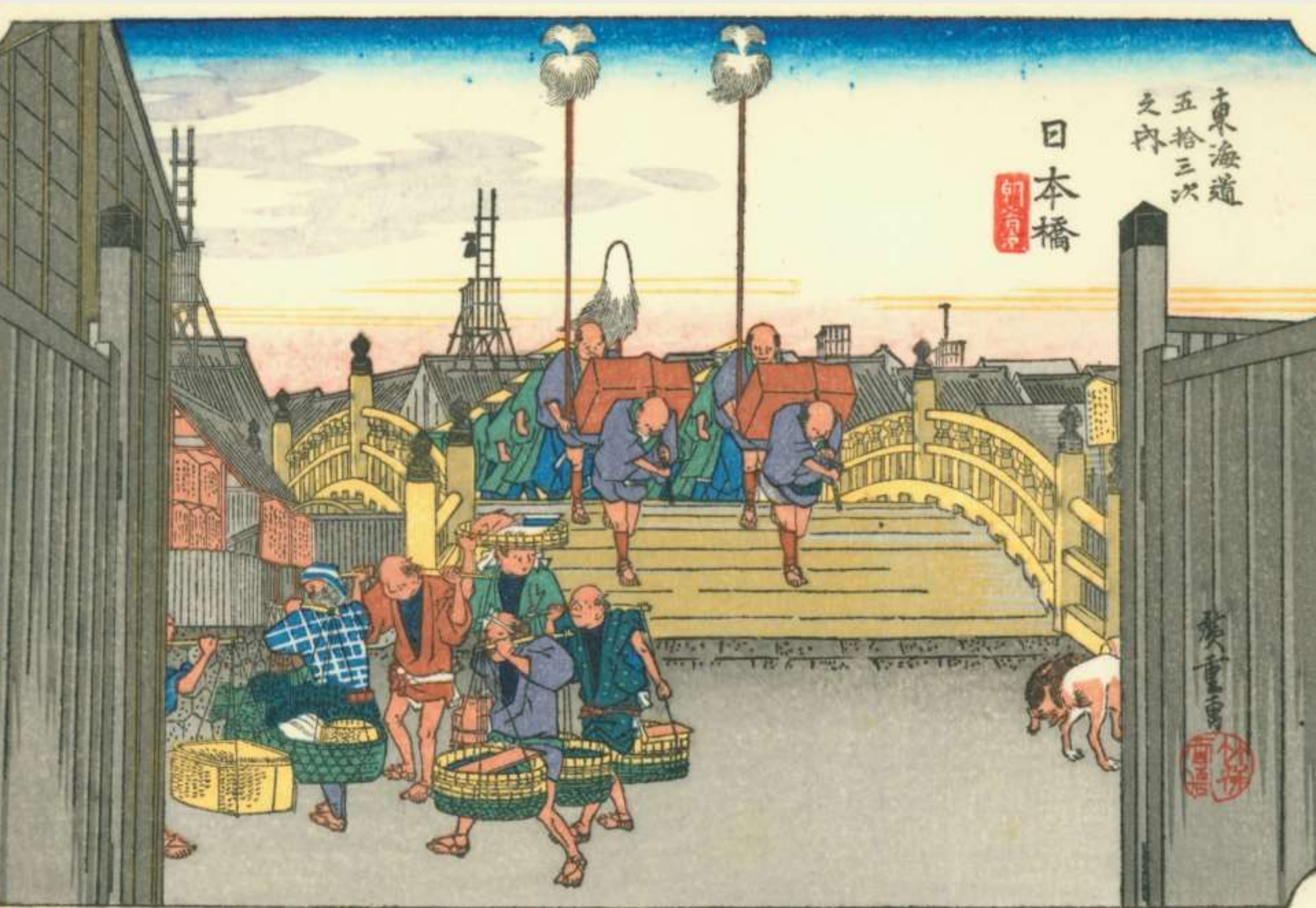
[“Life in the Floating World: Ukiyo-e Prints and the Rise of the Merchant Class in Edo Period Japan”](#) and [“A Case Study of Tokugawa Japan through Art: Views of a Society in Transformation”](#)

[“Examining the Evidence: Seven Strategies for Teaching with Primary Sources”](#)

Help students identify questions for further investigation and develop a research strategy for finding answers.

Extension:

- 1. Beginning: Write your own caption for the image.**
- 2. Intermediate: Predict what will happen one minute, or one hour after the scene shown in the image and explain the reasoning for your predictions.**
- 3. Advanced: Expand or alter textbook or other printed explanations of history based on the images studied.**



Ex: Nihonbashi, 1st of 53 Stages of the Tokaido by Hiroshige

Thank you