

YOKOHAMA BOOMTOWN

Foreigners in Treaty-Port Japan (1859-1872)

by John W. Dower



This window on the imagined life of foreigners in Japan at the dawn of the modern era is based on the catalogue of the 1990 exhibition at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, *Yokohama: Prints from Nineteenth-Century Japan*, by Ann Yonemura.

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Contents

- Chapter One: Introduction
- Chapter Two: Chaos
- Chapter Three: Commerce
- Chapter Four: Boomtown
- Chapter Five: Interactions
- Chapter Six: Internationalism
- Chapter Seven: Sources



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MIT VISUALIZING CULTURES

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Chapter One: Introduction

Japan's emergence as a modern nation can be dated very precisely. It began in 1854.

For over 200 years until that date, the country's samurai leaders had enforced a policy of seclusion from the outside world. With but a few exceptions (Koreans, Chinese, Dutch merchants confined to a man-made island in Nagasaki), no foreigners were permitted to enter Japan. All Japanese were prohibited from leaving. Christianity was proscribed, and "Western learning" was confined largely to a tiny group of samurai in Nagasaki.

This "closed country" (*sakoku*) policy was abandoned only under irresistible pressure from outside, led by the United States. In 1853, four warships commanded by Commodore Matthew Perry appeared unannounced in Edo Bay, close to the capital city of Edo (present-day Tokyo) from which the warrior government ruled Japan. The government, known as the Bakufu, was headed by a hereditary supreme commander (shogun) chosen from the powerful Tokugawa clan. The entire country was divided into close to 250 domains, each headed by a *daimyō* or local lord.

Perry demanded that Japan open relations with America, and informed the Bakufu that he would return the following year for its response.

The commodore's 1853 squadron included two warships of a kind never seen in Japan: fueled by coal and powered by steam-driven paddlewheels. When he returned in 1854, Perry had added a third mechanized warship and more than doubled the overall size of his fleet. On both occasions, he made clear that he would not hesitate to use force if his "pacific overtures" were rebuffed. He spoke of being able to marshal 50 warships, or even a hundred, if need be. He reminded the Japanese of the recent victorious U.S. war against Mexico—which had, indeed, added California to the United States and paved the way for swift passage of American ships across the Pacific Ocean.



*“U.S. JAPAN FLEET. Com. PERRY carrying the ‘GOSPEL of GOD’ to the HEATHEN, 1853”
James G. Evans, oil on canvas*

Chicago Historical Society
[10_010]

The Bakufu had no real choice, and on March 31, 1854, the two sides signed the historic Treaty of Kanagawa. The “closed country” policy associated with over two centuries of isolation and security was dead and gone, replaced by an “open country” (*kaikoku*) policy. However reluctantly, Japan had taken the first step toward joining the quarrelsome and perilous family of nations.

The terms of the Treaty of Kanagawa were, on the surface, very modest. Japan agreed to provide hospitality for shipwrecked sailors (the Americans were most concerned with whalers at this time), and to open two ports for access to supplies. The designated ports were Hakodate and Shimoda—the latter being, as it turned out, an inconvenient location with a poor harbor. As one diplomatic historian (Tyler Dennett) later put it, “the treaty was hardly more than a shipwreck convention, the necessities of distressed mariners being amply provided for.”

Of particularly great consequence, however—although the Japanese hardly realized it at the time—the 1854 treaty also provided for the establishment of a U.S. consulate in Shimoda after 18 months had passed. It was this provision that laid the groundwork for the negotiation of full-scale commercial relations between Japan and the outside world.

The first U.S. consul general, Townsend Harris, arrived in Shimoda in August 1856 and labored painstakingly for almost two years before he succeeded in concluding a commercial treaty with the Bakufu. He spent much of his time trying to persuade the shogun’s reluctant officials that if they did not work things out with the United States, the more aggressive British would soon show up and force more onerous terms upon them—just as they were doing in China. (A Japanese transcript of Harris’s arguments

has him warning that “the English Government hopes to hold the same kind of intercourse with Japan as she holds with other nations, and is ready to make war on Japan.” The American envoy, in this account, went on to talk about British desires to take possession of “Yezo”—present-day Hokkaido—as a buffer against Russia, and also warned of the evils of the opium trade that the British had forced on China.)

The Harris Treaty—formally titled *The United States-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce*—was signed aboard the U.S. warship *Powhatan* (Perry’s flagship in 1854) in Edo Bay on July 29, 1858, and began to come into effect one year later. With this, the country was “opened” to an influx of foreigners and foreign influence that went far beyond anything the Japanese had imagined when they were dealing with Perry. There was no turning back—although it took another decade for dissident samurai furious at the abandonment of the seclusion policy to realize this.



Townsend Harris
portrait by James Bogle, 1855

City College, New York

The Harris Treaty called for the exchange of diplomatic representatives and the opening of five ports to unimpeded trade. American citizens were granted the right to reside in designated areas, and the further right of enjoying “extraterritorial” privileges—meaning they were not subject to Japanese law, and could only be tried in consular courts under the laws of their own nation. The treaty also provided for a low fixed scale of duties on imports—meaning that Japan could not erect high tariff barriers to protect native enterprises. By 1866, duties had become fixed at 5 percent for almost all foreign items, with no clear provisions for when these exceedingly low rates would be terminated.

Additionally, the Harris Treaty incorporated a significant victory over British trade practices in the Far East by explicitly prohibiting commerce in opium. Japan was thus spared the fate of China, which had been forced to accept imports of this terribly debilitating narcotic after the notorious Opium War of 1839 to 1842.

The 1858 treaty also included a partial victory for those who defined the West's objectives in Japan in religious terms. Christianity had entered Japan in the 16th and early-17th century, before being proscribed by the Bakufu. From the outset, many Westerners regarded the "mission" of opening Japan as a literally divine one. Trade, as one U.S. magazine put it on the eve of Perry's departure, was but a vehicle for opening "a highway for the chariot of the Lord Jesus Christ." While Harris failed to persuade the Bakufu to rescind its strict prohibition on the teaching or practice of Christianity among Japanese, the treaty did break the first ground in this direction by allowing the foreigners to practice their own religion in the areas open to them for residence.

The Harris Treaty also contained a provision whereby the Japanese might "purchase or construct in the United States ships of war, steamers, merchant ships, whale ships, cannon, munitions of war, arms of all kinds"—and, additionally, the Bakufu might engage "scientific, naval and military men, artisans of all kinds, and mariners to enter its service." This provision served a double purpose. It was hoped that it would dampen Japanese fears concerning the military superiority of the foreign powers. And, of course, it opened the door to profitable military-related transactions. Under this provision, the Bakufu made its first purchase of three American paddle-wheel warships in 1862.

All this was a bonanza for the foreigner, and within a few months the Netherlands, Russia, England, and France swooped in to extract similar bilateral treaties. In Japanese lingo, these four nationalities along with the Americans became collectively known as "people of the five nations." Prussia joined the treaty game in 1861, but the late-arriving Germans failed to make a strong enough initial impression to cause revision of the popular "five nations" rubric.



*“Picture of the Landing of Foreigners of the Five Nations in Yokohama”
by Yoshikazu, 1861 (detail)*

[Y0092] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

The commercial agreements themselves were widely referred to by Japanese as the “unequal treaty system.” They denied Japan tariff autonomy. They prohibited Japanese authorities from prosecuting foreigners who committed crimes on Japanese soil. And they included a third demeaning stipulation in the form of “most-favored-nation” clauses. Under this last provision, any additional privileges another foreign nation might extract from the harried Japanese government (such as the further reductions of import duties that took place between 1858 and 1866) would also be extended to one’s own nation.

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Chapter Two: Chaos

In retrospect, one of the most remarkable aspects of Commodore Perry's momentous visits to Japan in 1853 and 1854 was that, despite the consternation they caused, no chaos ensued and no one was killed on either side. "Amity" did prevail.

Nothing of the sort can be said about the Harris Treaty and its aftermath. The unequal treaties inflamed patriotic samurai already smoldering with anger over abandonment of the once sacrosanct seclusion policy. And when these treaties actually came into effect beginning in mid 1859, they opened the door to unimagined kinds of chaos.

Traditional domestic markets and distribution routes were disrupted—bringing profit to some native entrepreneurs but economic disaster to a great many more. A skewed international exchange rate involving gold and silver precipitated an enormous drain of gold from Japan—forcing the Bakufu to drastically debase Japanese currency in 1860. (Within Japan, the gold-to-silver exchange rate was 1:5, meaning that one unit of gold could be purchased for five units of silver. The international rate, by contrast, was 1:15—meaning that a unit of Japanese gold would fetch 15 of silver outside Japan, which in turn could be used to purchase three more units of Japanese gold.)

Unemployment rose. Domestic prices soared sky high (conspicuous among them the price of rice and other cereals, silk and silkworms, tea, and sake rice wine). So precipitous was this inflation that in 1862 a city magistrate in Edo reported that living costs had increased by 50 percent. Coincidentally, largely due to disastrous harvests, much of Japan was wracked by famine in the mid 1860s. By 1867, the price of rice—the most basic of staples—had increased twelvefold in some areas.

As if all this were not curse enough, the foreigners also brought cholera with them, in all likelihood picked up in India while en route to Japan. Local reports spoke of tens and even hundreds of thousands of Japanese dying from outbreaks of cholera over the course of the years that followed.

Once they had arrived in the new treaty ports, moreover, more than a few traders and visiting seamen fell short of being exemplary goodwill ambassadors. They behaved, on the contrary, as might be anticipated in any largely male community planted far from its native soil. In Yokohama, as the historian Foster Rhea Dulles has recorded, by 1865 there were "five hotels, twenty-five grog shops, and an unrecorded number of brothels in the foreign settlement." He might also have mentioned a "cow yard" that supplied the foreigners with beef, a horseracing track, gambling dens, and a particularly seedy neighborhood nicknamed "Bloodtown."

Good Christians blanched at the “vice and impurity” young men fell into in Yokohama, where—as a distraught English clergyman put it—corrupt Japanese officials in the customs office helped them “negotiate... the terms of payment and selection of a partner in their dissolute mode of living.” One early foreign diplomat condemned these transplanted foreigners as “the scum of the earth,” while a French traveler lambasted “the insolent arrogance and swagger, the still more insolent familiarity, or the besotted violence, of many a European resident or visitor.”

This swagger took various forms. Most of the earliest foreign residents, for example, came from previous postings in China rather than directly from their home countries. Many brought small horses or ponies with them, as well as firearms, and they quickly turned their new enclave in Yokohama into what one writer on the foreign settlements (Harold Williams) has described as “a fabulous Wild West type of town.” It was not uncommon to see them galloping through the streets firing pistols in the air, or engaging in target practice or even steeplechases in the countryside —indifferent to local people’s alarm. Sightseers barged into rural homes with their boots on. One particularly unrestrained coterie of foreign males went so far as to import a pack of hounds from Shanghai and thunder through the countryside—and rice fields—hunting boar, deer, and particularly foxes.

This was hardly endearing behavior by any standards. In feudal Japan, where public decorum was a virtue (and where only the samurai elite was permitted to ride horses), it fanned the fires of resentment already kindled by the Bakufu’s abandonment of seclusion.

In these unstable circumstances, all hell broke loose socially and politically throughout much of Japan. Peasant uprisings (*hyakushō ikki*) and urban riots (*uchikowashi*) took place with increasing frequency in the 1860s. Rebellious millennial movements (*yonaoshi ikki*) emerged promising “world renewal,” and in



American with Japanese groom.
“Eight Views of Yokohama in Bushū:
Sunset Glow at Noge”
Yoshitora, 1861

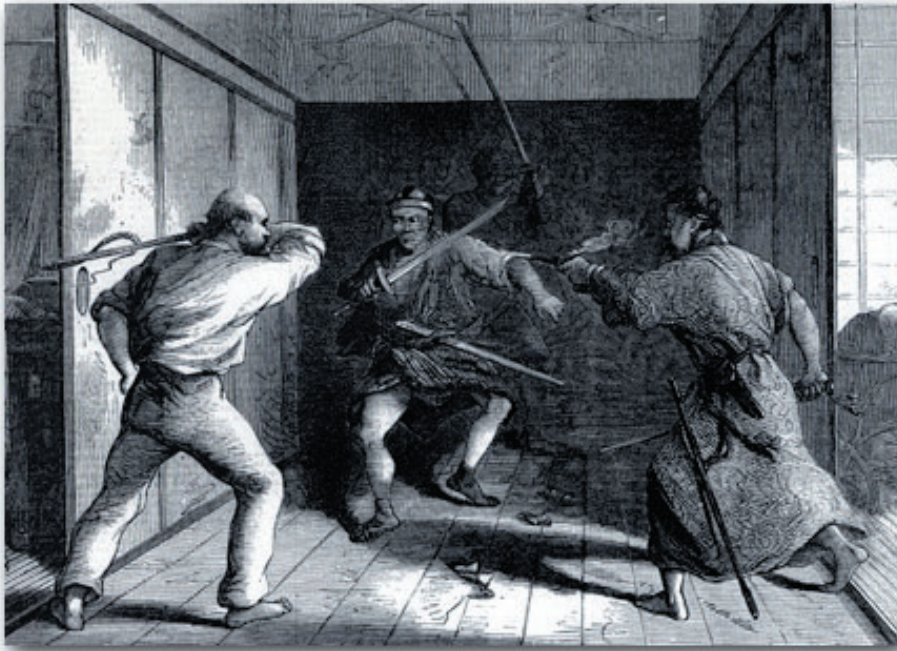
[Y0121] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
 Smithsonian Institution

1867 there was a massive and utterly startling outburst of ecstatic mass hysteria in which ordinary people abandoned their work and daily routines to dance and sing in the streets—sometimes cross-dressing and engaging in lewd behavior, and sometimes breaking into the houses of the wealthy and helping themselves to food and drink. (Participants in the latter outbursts became famous for exclaiming *Eejanaika*, or “Why not, it’s okay!”) Rumors spread like wildfire. And dissident samurai terrorists known as *shishi*—variously translated as “men of high purpose” or “men of spirit”—emerged to challenge the Bakufu and engage in acts of violence against the foreigners.

The *shishi* flourished in the decade that followed the Harris Treaty, and Japan became steeped in blood. There was, of course, a stunning symmetry in this, for it was not Japan alone that was wracked with upheaval in the decade that followed the opening of the treaty ports. Beginning in 1861, the United States also plunged into its own and vastly more murderous Civil War. To a very considerable degree, this turned American eyes away from Japan at the very moment that the handiwork of Perry and Harris had opened up a new world of opportunity.

In Japan, the rebels came almost entirely from the ranks of samurai, and they soon coined a potent slogan. Foreigners would be driven out. The Bakufu that had so cravenly let them in would be overthrown and replaced by a new source of power and legitimacy: the long impotent imperial family tucked away in Kyoto, which traced its lineage back to prehistoric (and, in fact, mythical) times. *Sonnō jōi* became the ubiquitous rallying cry of the *shishi*: “Revere the emperor, expel the barbarians.”

Bakufu officials as well as foreigners were murdered. Ii Naosuke, a high official who played a leading role in the signing of the Harris Treaty, was assassinated in March 1860. In January 1861, unknown swordsmen killed Henry Heusken, the young Dutch secretary and translator for Townsend Harris, in the streets of Edo; he was the seventh foreigner murdered within 18 months. Some months later, *shishi* burst into the British legation in Edo, killing two consular officials with their swords and seriously wounding another. In the sensational Richardson Affair of September 1862, several brash Englishmen rode their horses into the retinue of the lord of Satsuma on the highway near Yokohama. The *daimyō*’s enraged retainers killed one of them, Charles Richardson, and wounded two of his companions. (A fourth person in Richardson’s party, an English woman, escaped unharmed.) In May 1863, arsonists torched the U.S. legation in Edo.



*Japanese terrorists
attack the British
legation in Edo
in 1861. (detail)*

Illustrated London News,
October 12, 1861

In August 1863, in retaliation for the still festering Richardson Affair, a British fleet of seven warships bombarded Kagoshima, the capital "castle town" of Satsuma in the southernmost part of Japan, resulting in the destruction by fire of a large part of that port city.



British fleet bombarding Kagoshima in August 1863. (detail)

Illustrated London News, November 7, 1863

That same summer, a U.S. warship sank two vessels belonging to Chōshū, another powerful *daimyō* domain, after Chōshū had fired on foreign ships passing through the Straits of Shimonoseki in the southwest. A year later, in the summer of 1864, a combined British, French, Dutch, and U.S. fleet—17 warships in all—bombarded Chōshū's defenses at Shimonoseki for four days, routed the domain's forces, and spiked the coastal batteries. Unlike at Kagoshima, however, they spared the city itself.



Felice Beato's well-known photograph of British marines with captured shore batteries at Shimonoseki, September 5, 1864.

Illustrated London News rendering of the captured batteries in Shimonoseki, published in the December 24, 1864 issue.



Through all this, the beleaguered Bakufu was caught between a rock and a hard place—challenged by domestic opponents for failing to keep out the barbarians, and challenged by the foreigners for failing to protect them from these same domestic rebels. It did not help that the foreign powers demanded that the Bakufu publicly execute some of the samurai involved in anti-foreign acts.



Execution of a samurai involved in the 1861 attack on the British legation in Edo. (detail)

Illustrated London News, February 25, 1865.

The foreigners also demanded large indemnities. In 1863, for example, the Bakufu agreed to pay the British 100,000 pounds as compensation for the Richardson Affair. In 1864, it was forced to agree to an indemnity of \$3,000,000 as reimbursement for the expense of the foreign expedition against Shimonoseki. These were huge sums, and served to further deplete not only the government's treasury but also its credibility in the eyes of domestic critics.

*Representatives of Satsuma
fief paying an indemnity to the
British for the Richardson
Affair, following the British
bombardment of Kagoshima.
(detail)*

Illustrated London News
February 20, 1864



Eventually, open warfare erupted between the Bakufu and its internal enemies, with opportunistic Westerners supplying both sides with arms. Woodblock artists wallowed in reportage of mayhem—horsemen burdened with severed heads, gunfire blowing people sky high, defeated samurai committing suicide, landscapes roiled by pitched battles.



The final days of the Bakufu in 1868 as captured in a print by Yoshitoshi done six years later.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Most of the *shishi* terrorists died violently, but they did not die in vain. The Harris Treaty rang the death knell for the Bakufu: less than 10 years later, as 1867 turned into 1868, the shogun's government was overthrown by dissident samurai acting in the name of the emperor—a shadowy presence who had not wielded real power for centuries. This was the famous “Meiji Restoration” that set Japan on a course of pell-mell industrialization and “Westernization.” The radical *shishi* who did survive this decade of fury quickly threw off, not merely terror, but anti-foreign agitation as well. They proved themselves pragmatists—Western-style nation builders—and became the revered founding fathers of modern Japan. History does enjoy its little jokes.

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Chapter Three: Commerce

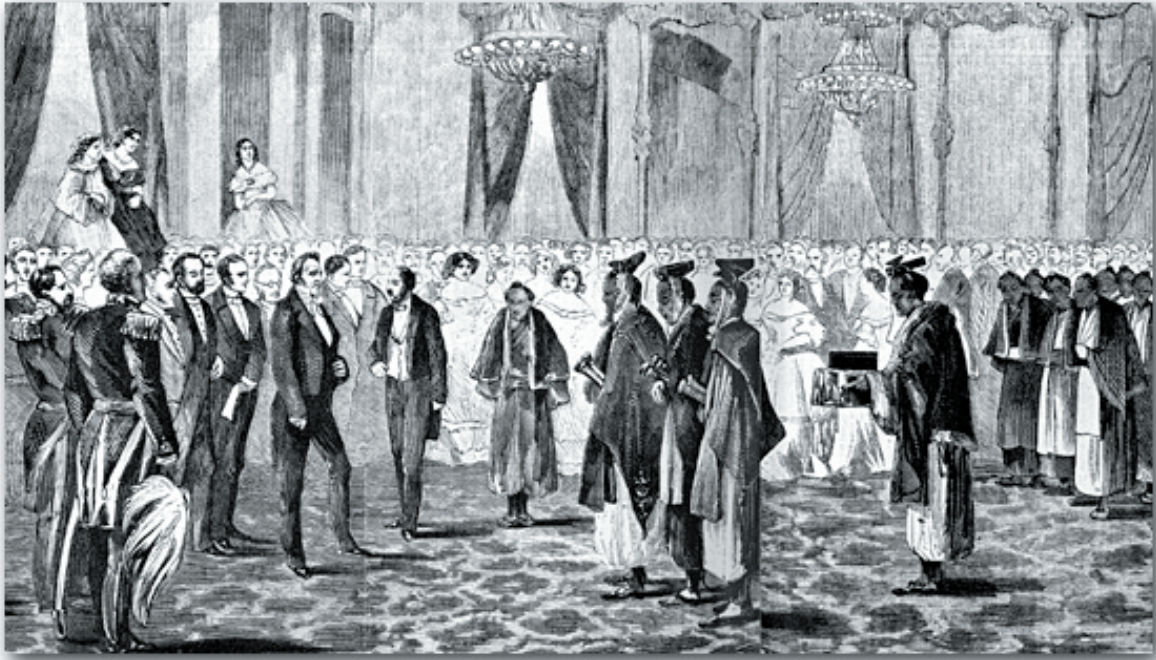
There were other sides to all this tumult, however, that were creative and abounding in good will. In 1860, for example, the Bakufu sent a delegation of 77 officials to the United States to exchange ratifications of the Harris Treaty. This unprecedented mission sailed from Japan on the *Powhatan*, accompanied by a soon famous Dutch-built steamship flying the Japanese flag and manned by a Japanese crew.

The delegation visited San Francisco, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York as well as Washington, and was greeted with parades and elaborate festivities wherever it went. Philadelphia declared the day of the delegation's visit a holiday. New York City celebrated the visit with a gigantic ball featuring five orchestras, as well as a parade that attracted an estimated half-million spectators. The great Walt Whitman was moved to compose a poem titled "The Errand-Bearers" in commemoration of the occasion.



*The 1860 Japanese Mission to the United States.
Photograph by Mathew Brady*

National Archives



Members of the 1860 Japanese mission to exchange ratifications of the Harris Treaty meeting with President Buchanan at a gala celebration in the White House.

Harper's Weekly, May 26, 1860

Equally constructive—albeit of an entirely different order—were developments in the new treaty ports themselves. And none of these locales was more attractive to the foreigners, or to their merchant counterparts on the Japanese side, than Yokohama.

The five ports recognized under the Harris Treaty were Kanagawa (where Perry had signed his treaty in 1854), Nagasaki, Hakodate, Niigata, and Hyōgo (later renamed Kobe). Of these, the key ports were Kanagawa and Nagasaki. For various reasons, delays impeded the opening and development of the other three.

Instead of building facilities at Kanagawa, however, the Bakufu chose to do so at Yokohama on the opposite shore of the harbor. Their rationale was eminently practical. Kanagawa was situated on the great Tōkaidō highway that linked Edo and Kyoto, and the Bakufu feared that placing foreigners in such close proximity to the samurai retinues that were constantly traveling on the Tōkaidō would be an invitation to mischief and murder. Although the Japanese government proceeded to build quarters for the foreigners at the new location without prior consultation with the five nations, causing consternation among the foreign diplomats, the choice was felicitous and pleased the Western merchants. Yokohama was a better anchorage, and soon became a great one. The fact that it was situated only 17 miles from Edo, which had a population of around a million residents at the time, made Yokohama far and away the most attractive of the new ports.



Map of Japan, ca. 1860

When the Harris Treaty was signed in 1858, Yokohama was a small fishing village surrounded by wetlands and tidal creeks. 10 years later, when the Bakufu was overthrown, it was a teeming city with a population of more than a hundred thousand. Telegraph lines were installed in Yokohama and Tokyo (Edo's new name) in 1869, and by 1872 the two cities were connected by Japan's first railway. (The telephone was introduced in 1877.) Yokohama was where "people of the five nations" put in with their great merchant ships, flew their flags, introduced their foods and clothing and languages, displayed (for better or worse) their so-called national characteristics, and operated their trading firms, warehouses, banks, churches, stores, hotels, saloons, and "cow yard."

While Yokohama was where Japanese bumped up against "the West" most intimately in the early 1860s, however, it also quickly became a dream window. It became a place, that is—or, at least, a place-name—where artists and other Japanese chroniclers of the "people of the five nations" did not hesitate to let their imaginations run wild. Almost everything one could show or tell about Westerners and how they lived was imagined as being present in "Yokohama"—even if it was not really there.

As a result, the picture of Yokohama that Japanese artists presented for Japanese consumption was very different from the picture of Yokohama—or of Japan more generally—that Westerners entertained.

Partly, of course, these differences reflected the different mediums through which popular images were conveyed in the mid-19th century—the free-wheeling colored woodblock prints of Japan, as opposed to the black-and-white (or delicately tinted) photographs and etchings of the West. In the wake of the Harris Treaty, Western photographers in Japan produced great numbers of photographs, and travelers and collectors snapped them up. The audience that actually saw these remained limited, however, for the technology for reproducing them in the mass media lay decades in the future.

In the United States and England, the general public thus relied largely on engravings and woodcuts in periodicals such as the *Illustrated London News*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, and *Harper's Weekly* for visual impressions of Japan. Like the photographs on which these illustrations were usually based, this remained a somewhat stiff and formal world, although the detail and “realism” could be fascinating.

Beyond the different modes of expression they relied on, however, Westerners and Japanese also tended to turn their gaze on different things. Since the new treaties restricted where foreigners could travel within Japan, it took a while before they had free access to great urban centers such as Edo or Osaka. Still, they did move about. They threw themselves into sightseeing. And, understandably, they tended to seek out some sort of quintessential “Japan”—scenic views and famous places, for instance, and all manner of social types from the high



The “Great Buddha” at Kamakura was typical of the scenes from Japan depicted in Western publications.

Illustrated London News, February 25, 1865

samurai official down to the shopkeeper, laborer, and courtesan. These were the images they valued as their keepsakes and for their periodicals back home.

For Westerners, the foreign presence in Japan was of comparatively negligible graphic interest apart from skirmishes and incidents like the attacks on foreigners and reprisals that followed. “Westernization” was not the “real” Japan—and thus, in these early years, not deemed to be of particularly great interest beyond an occasional graphic that illustrated the curious spectacle of, say, Japanese samurai in Western dress with their famous two swords still tucked in their belts.



“Westernized” samurai, still wearing their distinctive two swords.

Illustrated London News, April 7, 1866

Even when addressing Yokohama, suddenly the center of Japan’s encounter with the West, magazines like the *Illustrated London News* tended to focus their gaze on the “Japanese-ness” of the place—a lively street scene packed with Japanese alone, for example, or men at work in a trading establishment where the single Caucasian present was barely discernible.

*Street scene in Yokohama.
(detail)*

Illustrated London News
August 10, 1861



*A trading firm in
Yokohama. (detail)*

Illustrated London News,
August 17, 1861

The illustrated Western periodicals did indeed offer their readers panoramic views of a scene that attracted Japanese artists as well: the foreign settlement and great harbor congested with foreign ships. Even here, however, the contrast was striking. The Western engravings, like the photographs on which they were based, kept the viewer at a distance. Here, for example, is a well-known photograph by the pioneer Western photographer in Japan, the Frenchman Felice Beato, together with an engraving of the same scene from the *Illustrated London News*:



*Felice Beato's famous photograph of "Yokohama from the Bluff" (detail).
The fleet in the harbor is the combined foreign naval expedition that
departed from Yokohama to attack Shimonoseki in 1864.*



Panoramic view of Yokohama harbor. (detail)

Illustrated London News, October 29, 1864

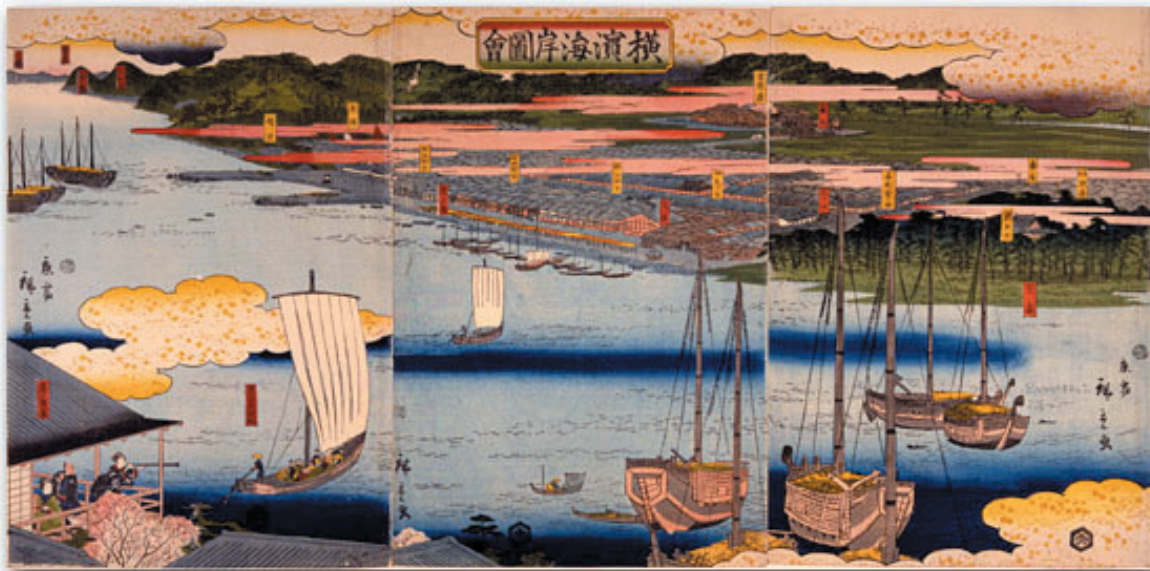
Compare, by contrast, the following panoramic “Yokohama prints” produced for a Japanese audience by the artists Sadahide and Hiroshige II soon after the harbor was opened to trade.



“Complete Picture of the Newly Opened Port of Yokohama” by Sadahide, 1859-60

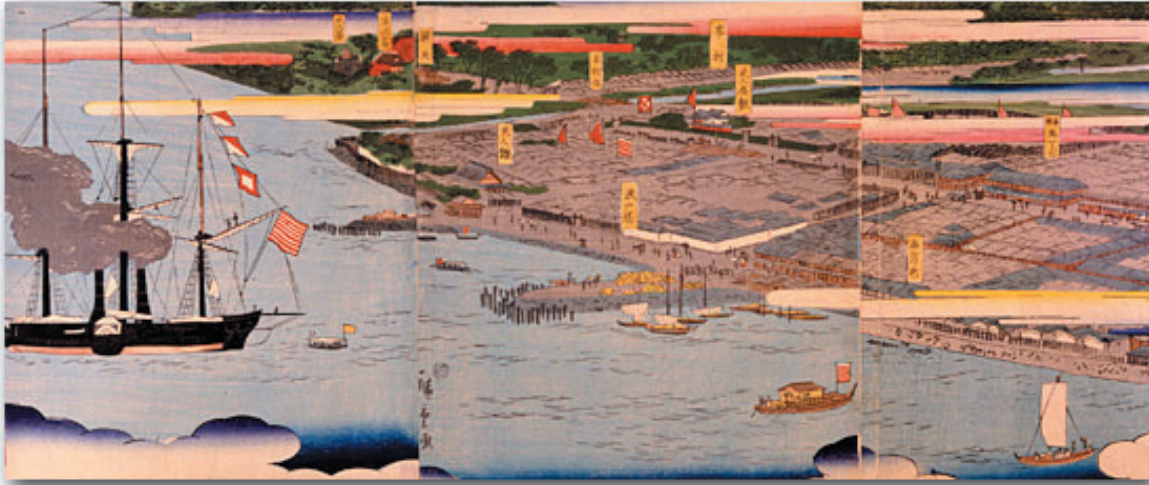
[Y0044] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

The Japanese overviews draw us into scenes of remarkable aesthetic detail. In Hiroshige II’s two ambitious works, for example, we become one with a local woman with a telescope surveying the area with no Western ships yet in sight. (Stylized clouds flecked with gold leaf give this graphic the aura of a traditional painted screen.)



“Picture of the Coast of Yokohama” by Hiroshige II, 1860

[Y0050] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution



"Kanagawa, Noge, and Yokohama"
by Hiroshige II, 1861

[Y0056] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

The “spin” in all this, however—and it is an amusing twist—is that Japanese depictions of “Yokohama” were, in their own way, as selective, incomplete, and misleading as depictions by the foreigners. These panoramic woodblock prints do bring the scene alive in ways photographs and engravings cannot match. Their elegant “realism” would enable a newcomer to the area to find his or her way around without getting lost. Once the artists actually moved on to producing prints of the foreigners and their daily life in Yokohama, however, they did not actually rely so much on first-hand observation. On the contrary, the inspiration for a large portion of their “Yokohama prints” or “Yokohama pictures” was pictures in other sources.

More precisely, they relied on the same popular publications that the Westerners were relying on for a picture of Japan—most notably, the *Illustrated London News* and the American weekly *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, both of which became available in Japan shortly after the ports were opened. These were the artists’ indispensable mirrors on “the West”—the sources in which they could find detailed depictions of Western fashions and domestic scenes and technological marvels like the big ships.

It was the melding of these printed foreign sources with the “real” Yokohama—and with the vibrant colors and conventions of the woodblock-print tradition—that gave ordinary Japanese their first dramatic glimpse of the “people of the five nations.”

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Chapter Four: Boomtown

“Yokohama prints” (variously known in Japanese as *Yokohama-e*, *Yokohama ukiyoe*, and *Yokohama nishikie*) comprise a small and distinctive subset within the great tradition of woodblock artistry that had flourished since the mastery of color-printing techniques in the 1760s, almost exactly a century before the opening of the treaty ports. They were especially popular in the few years immediately following the arrival of the Western merchants and traders. According to one estimate, between 1859 and 1862 some 31 artists produced over 500 different “Yokohama” images, involving more than 50 different publishers in the process, most of them located in Edo. The total print run in this great early burst of interest and energy may have been as high as 250,000 copies. The Yokohama prints are as excellent a source as one can find for gaining insight into the “first impressions” of the foreigners that were made available to ordinary Japanese.



Looking at Woodblock Prints

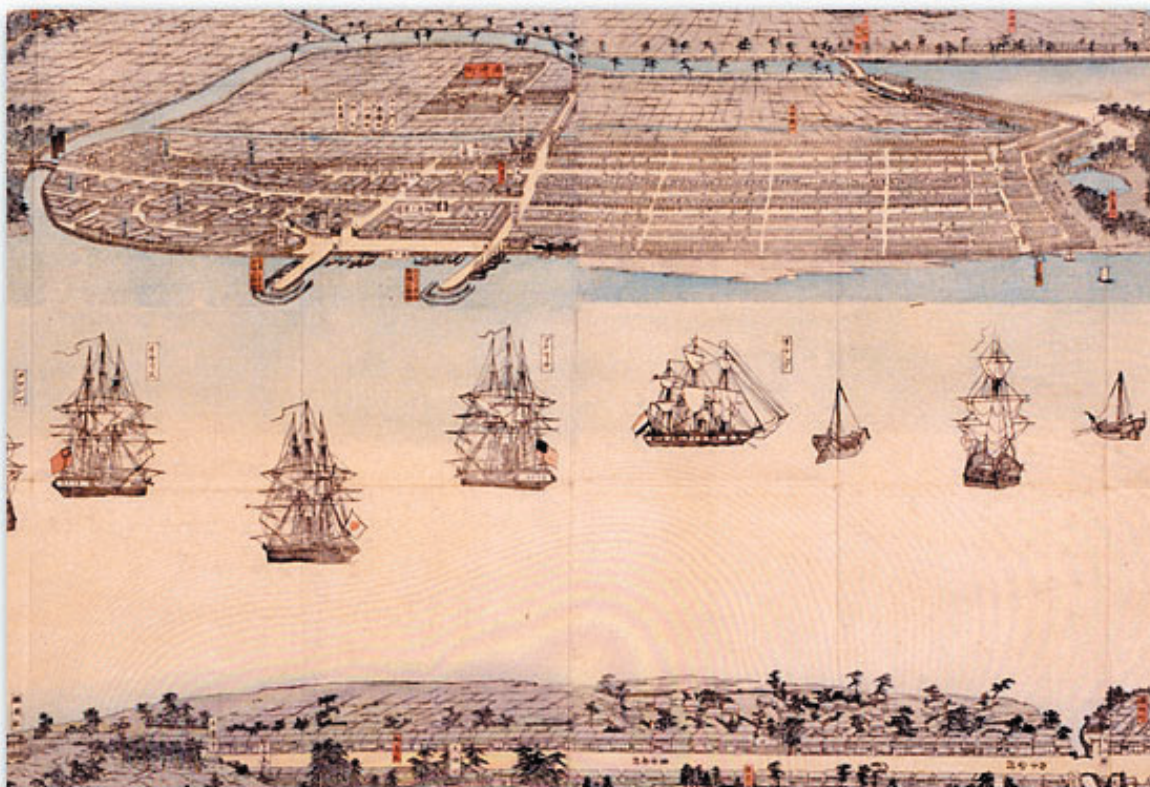
Japanese prints of the 19th century usually have a title block (a), the artist's signature and artistic name (b), and a publisher's seal (c). A censor's mark (d), which indicates that the official government censor had deemed the print acceptable for sale, may also be found.

Gradation of color that resembles watercolor painting (e) is common in Yokohama prints. Precise registration of fine lines and color areas (f) is also characteristic of the best prints, but alignment may be slightly askew on prints that were carelessly produced.

“Eight Views of Yokohama: Sails Returning to the Landing Pier” by Yoshitora, 1861

[Y0119] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

A few artists, led by the brilliant Sadahide (born in 1807), brought exceptional talent and imagination to this enterprise. His panoramic “Complete Picture of the Newly Opened Port of Yokohama” (seen above)—pieced together from eight oversize sheets of paper—is one of the largest composite prints ever issued in Japan. Published shortly after the port opened, it literally served as a map of the entire area. One sees here not merely the foreign settlement and two piers that the Bakufu had built, but also the adjoining Japanese district, the open fields beyond, and—an entirely separate enclave—the entertainment quarters that catered to foreigners as well as Japanese. The entire new city was surrounded by water—harbor in front and canals at the side and back—thus enabling the Bakufu to monitor the movement of people in and out. The artist’s vantage-point was a village near Kanagawa on the opposite shore. The Tōkaidō highway that the Bakufu worried about runs along the bottom of the print.

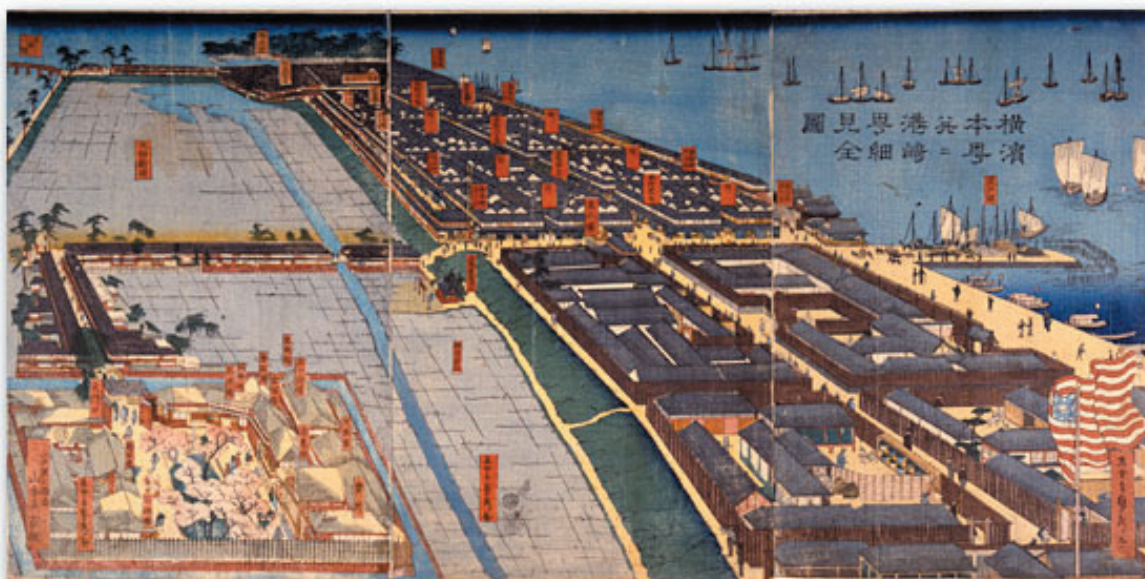


“Complete Picture of the Newly Opened Port of Yokohama” by Sadahide, 1859-60 (detail)

[Y0044] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

In other overviews of the layout of Yokohama, Sadahide offered a closer picture of how thoroughly the Bakufu had prepared the site for the foreigners’ arrival. The angle-of-vision adopted in these prints followed a traditional aesthetic convention known as *fukinuki yatai*—literally, blowing off the roof—offering an angled bird’s-eye view of the scene.

The number of foreigners who took up residence in the first year probably numbered only a hundred or so, rising to around 250 by mid 1861 (of whom 64 were Americans) and to some 400 by 1866. The British accounted for around 80 percent of foreign trade up to the Meiji Restoration, and always comprised the single largest national contingent. Despite these modest initial numbers, as Sadahide's prints reveal, the new city had the look of a substantial planned community from the very beginning. The warehouses and residences of the foreign compound lay to the east, behind walls; alongside this compound, to the west, were the smaller buildings of the larger Japanese commercial district. A road separating the two settlements led through open fields to the Miyozaki entertainment quarter, also enclosed behind walls and, additionally, a small moat.



"Complete Detailed View of Yokohama Honchō and the Miyozaki Quarter"
by Sadahide, 1860

[Y0054] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

From an entirely different angle-of-vision, Sadahide also turned passing attention to "Honchō-dōri," the broad main avenue in the new Japanese commercial quarter. Here—now drawing on European principles of perspective that were occasionally copied in traditional woodblock prints (the secluded Japanese encountered "perspective pictures" through the Dutch)—he succeeded in capturing the commercial dynamism of the late feudal era. By withdrawing into seclusion, Japan had failed to experience the scientific and industrial revolutions that propelled the West to new levels of wealth and power. This material backwardness was what made the demands of the "five nations" irresistible. At the same time, however, Japan had undergone an impressive commercial revolution, accompanied by great urban growth and widespread literacy. As a result, the country was better prepared to engage the West than the foreigners yet realized. Sadahide's "Honchō-dōri" can be seen as a microcosm of this indigenous economic vitality.



*“Picture of Newly Opened Port of Yokohama in Kanagawa” by Sadahide, 1860
Sadahide has portrayed the busy commerce that took place in the main street of
Yokohama’s Japanese business district.*

[Y0085] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Although economic chaos accompanied the opening of the treaty ports (disrupted domestic trade patterns, inflation, the gold drain, enormous expenditures incurred by the Bakufu both in preparing the ports and paying reparations for unpleasant incidents), Yokohama itself quickly emerged as a boomtown. Despite the country’s reluctance to be drawn into the global economy, and despite the fixed tariffs imposed under the unequal treaties, Japan was blessed with two export commodities that enabled it to keep afloat in the rough waters of international trade: raw silk and tea. (Other Japanese exports included marine products, copper, and art objects such as lacquerware, porcelain, and fans. Basic imports from the West included cotton yarn and cloth, woolen fabrics, iron products, sugar, tobacco, clocks and watches, glass, and wines and liquors.) In 1859, the first year of trade, the total value of exports out of Yokohama amounted to \$400,000, while imports were valued at \$150,000. By 1866, the comparable figures for Yokohama had risen to over \$14,000,000 in exports and around \$11,400,000 in imports. (The balance shifted beginning in 1867, but tea and silk remained critical exports until the turn of the century.) When Commodore Perry’s coal-burning, smoke-belching “black ships” arrived in Edo Bay, they had inspired a variety of Japanese prints and paintings. These ranged from cartoon-like monster ships to realistic renderings of an almost diagrammatic nature, almost always depicting the American vessels in perfect profile. With the opening of the treaty ports five years later, great numbers of foreign merchant ships suddenly descended on Japan, operating under both steam and sail—opening up a whole new seafaring world for artists to capture for their curious countrymen in the interior.

Again, it is Sadahide who has left us the single most dramatic impression of the unprecedented bustle in Yokohama harbor. In a masterful print titled “Picture of Western Traders at Yokohama Transporting Merchandise”—made by joining five standard-size wood blocks (for a total width of 50 inches)—Sadahide contrived to introduce almost everything associated with the new era of commerce.

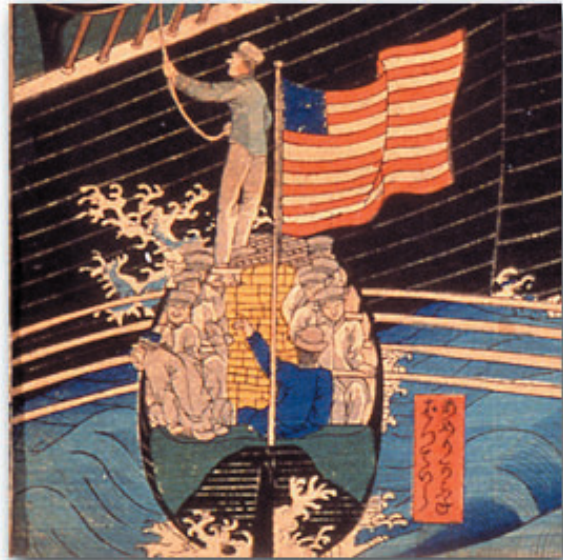


*“Pictures of Western Traders at Yokohama Transporting Merchandise”
by Sadahide, 1861 (details below)*

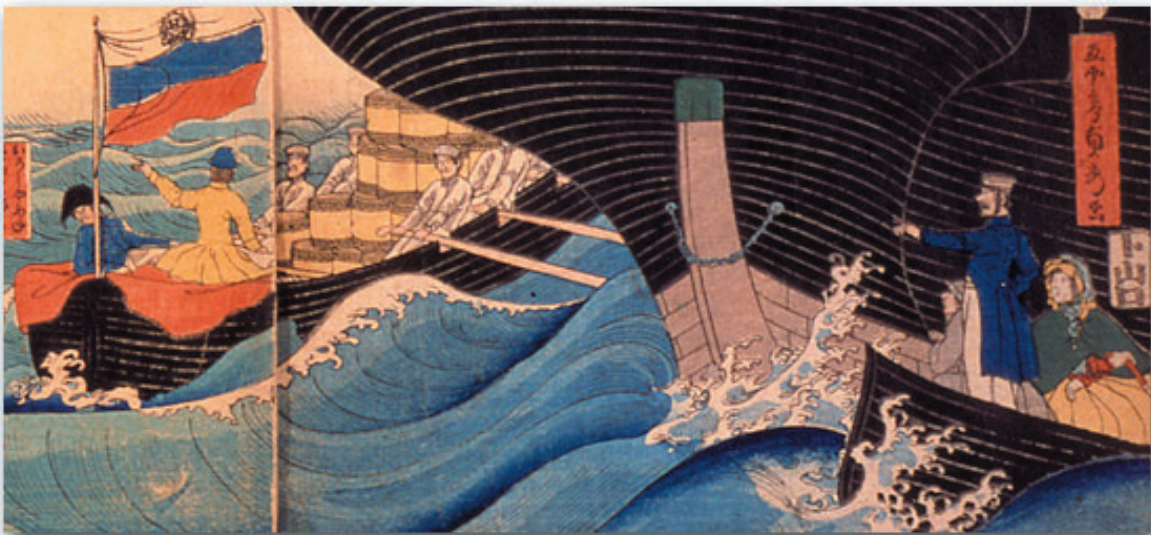
[Y0064] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Five vessels, both steamships and sail ships, represent the five nations; their national flags are clearly displayed. Workers of various nationalities carry merchandise onto the boats; clerks make notes; crewmen climb the riggings; foreign women are as conspicuous as their merchant husbands; there are even tantalizing glimpses through large portholes into a luxurious life inside. At the same time, there is a subtle touch of the ominous: a long row of small cannon runs the length of the American ship.





And there is also a touch of the reassuringly familiar: the rolling waves and elegant splash of whitecaps are pure forms of serene traditional design.



In a charming anecdote, it is said that Sadahide dropped his brush in the water while making preliminary sketches for this print, and had to finish with a pencil borrowed from a foreigner. Certainly no other Yokohama print captures the energy and bustle of the harbor as vividly as this one does. At the same time, however, we can point to a possible model (or inspiration) for the scene in an engraving of a European port scene that appeared in the *Illustrated London News* five months before Sadahide's print was published in April 1861. Even more telling where the departure from strict reality is concerned, however, is the large number of foreign women. Although wives and children did join their merchant husbands in Japan in the course of time, their number was miniscule in 1861.



*Harbor scene at Naples.
(detail)*

[YILN1103]
Illustrated London News,
November 3, 1860

To Sadahide and his artist colleagues, “Yokohama” was essentially synonymous with “the West”—a window looking out of Japan upon the unknown world of foreign nations that lay across the seas. Thus, it was perfectly appropriate to people it with figures who may not have been literally present. It was in this spirit that they imagined the “people of the five nations” parading all together in a marching band.



*“Picture of a Sunday in Yokohama” by Sadahide, 1861
(details below)*

[Y0132] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

They even had them marching in a single grand procession—much like a favorite subject in traditional woodblock prints, the elaborate retinues of the feudal lords who were constantly traveling to and from the shogun’s capital in Edo. One such processional print by Sadahide, issued in 1861, includes over 150 figures and would have amounted to almost the entire foreign community in Yokohama at the time!



*“Picture of People of the Five Nations: Walking in Line”
by Sadahide, 1861 (details below)*

[Y0130] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Despite the pervasive cliché of “people of the five nations,” when depicting crowded scenes the Yokohama artists also commonly took care to include two nationalities that accompanied the Westerners but did not count in the great-power or great-nation game—the Chinese and South Asian Indians. Chinese men served the Westerners as both domestic servants and, more significantly, mercantile assistants or compradors. Already accustomed to working with Americans and Europeans in China, they played an invaluable mediating role in Japan, where they were easily identifiable by their distinctive gowns and long braided queues or pigtails. They were of particular use in handling documents, for although the Chinese and Japanese spoken languages bear no resemblance, the written languages share common ideographs. The Indians, commonly male and always distinguished by their turbans and dark complexions, functioned primarily as domestic servants, particularly for the British.



Chinese and Indians among the “people of the five nations”

Alongside such crowded scenes, the Yokohama artists also created what amounted to a little portrait gallery of representative foreigners. Here, each print featured just a few figures—frequently a married couple—representing a specific nationality. Sometimes these portrait prints also incorporated a brief glossary of words or phrases from the subjects’ native language. None of these were actual posed portraits. Western magazines provided the copybooks for the fashion statements seen here. Among the Yokohama-print artists, a favorite publication in this regard was once again the *Illustrated London News*, which ran a monthly graphic devoted to the latest fashions from Paris.



“The Paris fashions for September”

[YILN0207]
Illustrated London News,
September 1, 1860

Even when presented as national “types,” however, these portraits usually conveyed considerable individual appeal. In one rendering of “the English,” for example, a woman was holding—of all things!—a Yokohama print of two foreigners.

*English couple holding a
Yokohama print (detail)
“English Couple”
by Yoshikazu, 1861*

[Y0079] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution





Another rendering of the English depicted a merchant seated by a large framed portrait of his beautiful absent wife. This was a traditional pictorial convention for suggesting both loneliness and affection—enhanced in this instance by the merchant holding in his lap a piece of dyed fabric he presumably had purchased for his spouse.

"English Man Sorting Fabric for Trade at Yokohama"
by Sadahide, 1861

[Y0100] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution

Other portrait prints depicted a Russian couple dressed in warm clothing, obviously reflecting the cold nature of their place of origin; a French couple drinking wine; and a Dutch couple with a telescope.



“Among the Five Nations: Russians” by Kunihisa, 1861

[Y0111]



“Among the Five Nations: The French” by Kunihisa, 1861

[Y0110]



“People of the Five Nations: Holland” by Sadahide, 1861

[Y0113]

An exceptionally beautiful print by Yoshitora went beyond the conventional “people of the five nations” format to portray two Chinese men under a parasol in the snow. They were returning from the market, carrying a wrapped bottle and package of food.

“Eight Views of Yokohama in Bushū (Modern Musashi Province): Snow on the Morning Market” by Yoshitora, 1861

[Y0123] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution





Representative Americans in the portrait prints often included a woman wearing a feather hat that looked like a pineapple—a bizarre fashion statement that apparently was inspired by a profile on a U.S. coin.

“Among the Five Nations: Americans” by Kuniyoshi, 1861

[Y0109] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Less disconcerting, and certainly more prophetic, was a print by Yoshikazu showing an American woman seated at a Singer sewing machine, while her husband, standing beside her, held up a pocket watch. Inscribed on this print was a long text about “The United States of America” extolling the country’s “large population” and “supreme prosperity and strength.” The text went on to observe that “the people are patriotic and, moreover, quite clever. In the world, they are foremost in science, armaments, and commerce. The women are elegant and beautiful.”

“The United States of North America” by Yoshikazu, 1861

[Y0169] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution





Looking at such sympathetic portrayals, it is difficult to imagine the anti-foreign uproar that was roiling the country elsewhere.

“Americans Strolling About”
by Yoshifuji, 1861

[Y0137] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution

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YOKOHAMA BOOMTOWN

Foreigners in Treaty-Port Japan (1859–1872)

by John W. Dower

Chapter Five: Interactions

The “people of the five nations” brought a babel of different languages to Yokohama that, as can be easily imagined, caused a great deal of confusion. Prior to Perry’s visit, the only European language the Japanese had slight familiarity with was Dutch, which a few officials had picked up through contact with the small Dutch contingent in Nagasaki. In his negotiations with the Japanese, Perry relied on a Dutch interpreter as well as an American missionary versed in reading Chinese and thus capable of recognizing the ideographs that written Japanese and Chinese shared. Townsend Harris commonly relied on the young and ill-fated Dutchman Henry Heusken as a translator.

In Yokohama, verbal communication between Japanese and foreigners was initially carried out in what a British observer in 1862 called “a sort of bastard language” in which Japanese and foreign words were jumbled haphazardly together—all accompanied by gestures and sign language. Where written exchanges were involved, the foreign merchants relied heavily on their Chinese assistants. It was not until 1867 that the American missionary and physician James Hepburn, a Yokohama resident, published the first Japanese-English dictionary. Hepburn devised the system for “romanizing” Japanese—that is, rendering it in Latin letters—that became known as *romaji* in Japanese.

Sadahide captured the liveliness and body language of these complicated communications, and considerably more, in a work titled “Picture of a Salesroom in a Foreign Mercantile Firm in Yokohama.”



*“Picture of a Salesroom in a Foreign Mercantile Firm in Yokohama”
by Sadahide, 1861 (detail below)*

[Y0086] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

One side of this print amounts to a backroom scene of the foreigners’ servants engaged in tasks such as preparing food and doing laundry. One of the servants is identified as a “black laundress.” A turbaned Indian stands beside her plucking a duck. On the other side of this engaging print, Caucasian, Japanese, and Chinese men are absorbed in an animated exchange. Embossed account books and a startling picture of an elephant rest on a shelf behind them.



Even more numerous than prints of the foreigners at work were depictions of them at home or at play. In their renderings of residences and domestic family scenes, the Yokohama artists let their imaginations stray particularly far from reality. Not only was the number of actual families very small, but the life-style of males who did take up residence was usually less sumptuous—and more typical of bachelor life—than what the prints conveyed. Most of these men lived in or above their offices or warehouses, and early Japanese-language directories for the foreign settlement tended to identify the master (*danna-san*) of each “lot” or house number, along with his principal employees, servants (*kozukai*), groom or stableman (*bettō*), and mistress (*musume*—literally “daughter,” but used at the time as argot for a young Japanese woman). In a study of one such directory dating from 1861–1862, the Australian student of the foreign settlements Harold Williams identified “79 *danna-sans*, against which were listed by name 30 *musume*, 79 *kozukai*, and 52 *bettō*.”

A woodblock by Yoshikazu titled “Foreigners Enjoying a Banquet” offers an unusually sharp illustration of the extent to which artists ignored such mundane realities and used “Yokohama” simply as a vehicle for introducing ordinary Japanese to the customs and appearance of foreigners in their native lands. Published in December 1860, the print depicts a small girl dancing with castanets in the midst of a rather stiff group of Caucasian men, women, and children. Ships in the harbor and the exterior of a Japanese-style building are visible through an open window.



“Picture of Foreigners Enjoying a Banquet” by Yoshikazu, December 1860

[Y0142] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

In fact, the model for this scene was an engraving that appeared six months earlier in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, accompanying an article about a children's dance held in Washington in honor of the Japanese officials who had come to exchange ratifications of the Harris Treaty. Yoshikazu simply excised the Japanese figures in the original graphic, replaced them with his own version of Americans, and cut a window in the wall to bring in Yokohama.



*Children dance at the
“May Festival Ball”
given in honor of the
Japanese ambassadors.*

[YFLIN0606] *Frank Leslie's
Illustrated Newspaper*,
June 6, 1860

In a more charming but equally implausible depiction of the Westerners at play in the foreign settlement, Yoshikazu moved directly into the interior of a merchant's private residence. This particular domestic scene actually carries a title calling the residence a *yashiki*—usually used to refer to a *daimyō*'s mansion. Yoshikazu's rendering manages to include harbor, mirror, chandelier, carpet, glass windows, dining-room table laden with food and drink, people seated on chairs, kitchen with a wood-burning stove, and well over a dozen men, women, and children—including a man playing a cello and another getting a shave.



“Picture of a Foreign Residence in Yokohama” by Yoshikazu, 1861

[Y0099] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

These depictions of married couples and mixed gatherings of men and women reveal obvious fascination not merely with “family” (a familiar Japanese preoccupation), but more particularly with Western women. We know from the diaries and journals of members of the 1860 Japanese mission to the United States that the Japanese were shocked (and, in some cases, attracted) by the dress and behavior of American women, and by relations between men and women more generally. The deference generally shown to women was deemed (as one high official wrote) “a most curious custom,” and their inclusion in banquets and public ceremonies caught the Japanese completely by surprise. That a man should stand while a woman sat, or walk hand in hand with his wife in public, or bring a glass of water or wine to her was simply astonishing—to say nothing of ballroom dancing, which made it into one journal as “this extraordinary sight of men and bare-shouldered women hopping about the floor, arm in arm.”

While the bare shoulders rarely made it into the Yokohama prints, the elegantly dressed Caucasian woman with her corseted waist and extraordinary full-skirted crinoline gown was an irresistible subject for the woodblock artists. Indeed, like other pictorial conventions that crept into the “Yokohama prints”—the gold-flecked clouds, majestic Mount Fuji, filigreed splash of water, *daimyō*-like processions of foreigners, blown-away-roof perspective, dramatic sense of urban hustle-bustle in general—“pictures of beauties” (*bijinga*) were well established in the popular culture. (Neither bosom, waist, nor derriere were part of the Japanese canon of feminine beauty, however.) Usually these beauties were women of the pleasure quarters, but the subject might be a shop girl or merchant wife as well.

In the portrait prints of “people of the five nations,” the Yokohama artists were essentially adapting and coloring the “fashion plates” that routinely appeared in illustrated foreign publications. In their more congested and animated depictions of the foreigners at play, however, they often went beyond this and brought Japanese and Western beauties together in the same composition. As usual, Sadahide did this with surpassing skill. In a well-known print that can be seen as the “upstairs” counterpart to his “downstairs” depiction of merchants doing business and servants tending to menial tasks, he imagined a lively mixed party on the open verandah of “a mercantile establishment in Yokohama.”



*“Picture of a Mercantile Establishment in Yokohama”
by Sadahide, 1861 (details below)*

[Y0141] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

All kinds of exotica—Japanese and Western alike—have been gathered here. Red and white stripes of an American flag flutter in the top corner. Trading vessels anchored in the harbor occupy the background. A lavish Western-style dinner party takes place in a back room, under an elaborate chandelier. Paintings on the walls include both Mount Fuji and men riding camels. And a cosmopolitan group holds center stage. An elegant geisha observes one of her courtesan colleagues playing a samisen, while a Caucasian beauty holds and strums a viola in the same manner (Sadahide obviously had never seen how Western stringed instruments were actually played).



Elsewhere on the verandah, a white man dressed in his holiday finest observes an American boy tugging the queue of a Chinese servant, while another Japanese beauty looks on. In the back room, far removed from all this, a second Chinese, clearly of higher status, converses with a Westerner.

Many of the prints depicting entertainment move the foreigners into a pure Japanese milieu, usually involving the Miyozaki entertainment quarters, where a special establishment (named Gankirō) was reserved for foreign patrons. The same Yoshikazu who managed to get cello playing, shaving, wood-burning stoves, and the harbor into a single print also produced a comparably busy "Picture of Foreigners' Revelry at the Gankirō in the Miyozaki Quarter of Yokohama."



*“Picture of Foreigners' Revelry at the Gankirō in the Miyozaki Quarter of Yokohama”
by Yoshikazu, 1861 (details below)*

[Y0148] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

The center of attention is a group of foreign men enjoying a drinking party in the company of female Japanese entertainers, including two geisha playing samisen. Just as Japanese males would do in the same setting, they sit on the floor, pampered and animated. One has taken his coat off and is doing an impromptu dance. It is easy to imagine them tipsy.



Barely visible in the upper righthand corner, foreigners enjoy a Western-style dinner. To their left is one of the Gankirō's most famous attractions, known as the Fan Room from the decorations on its sliding doors.



A Yokohama print by another artist, Yoshiiku, actually enters the Fan Room to reveal an unexpected five-nations-plus scene in which the male and female participants—apart from two high-ranking geisha (*oiran*) and two little Japanese boys affiliated with the Gankirō—carry explicit national labels. They represent, Yoshiiku tells us, an English man and woman, Russian man and woman, American man and woman, Frenchman, and Dutchman (identified as “Red Hair,” a familiar old term attached to the Dutch in Nagasaki). The dancing figure holding center stage is a well-dressed Chinese (called “Nanjing” in the label).



“Picture of Foreigners of the Five Nations Carousing in the Gankirō” by Yoshiiku, 1860

[Y0149] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Imaginary as so much of this may have been, this picture-world of “Yokohama” reflected an animated sense of intermingling rarely found in the cooler and more detached Western illustrations of Japan and the Japanese. While violently anti-Bakufu samurai were clamoring to “expel the barbarians,” the Yokohama artists and their large domestic audience found the foreigners curious, to be sure, but also accessible and even attractive. The very notion of “people of the five nations” introduced to a secluded feudal society not merely the unfamiliar concept of the modern nation-state, but also the spectacle of peoples of different races and cultures interacting as equals—a little showpiece, as it were, of internationalism.

Such generally positive impressions were easily accommodated in the tolerant, affirmative, urbane world of woodblock-print imagery. As Foster Rhea Dulles put it, the Yokohama boomtown “was a little oasis relatively free from violence and providing a showplace of Western civilization.”

The most obvious Western counterpart to the outpouring of Yokohama prints that greeted the opening of the port in 1859 was to be seen in American coverage of the Bakufu’s 1860 mission to the United States. Here, too, the “foreigners” were a sensation. Enthusiastic crowds turned out to see them in every city they visited, and the media was almost unanimous in praising their dignity and decorum. At one point, *Harper’s Weekly* went so far as to comment that “civilized as we boast of being, we can learn much of the Japanese.” Still, in Western eyes they invariably remained a people apart—archaically costumed and, with but a few exceptions within the large visiting delegation, reticent and reserved. Social interaction took place entirely at a formal level. There was little sense of private lives.



“Picture of Foreigners of the Five Nations Carousing in the Gankirō” by Yoshiiku, 1860

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The Yokohama prints, by contrast, celebrated fraternization and even outright sexuality as natural. The entertainment district was, of course, a favorite setting for woodblock artists in general. Now they let the foreigners in, and artists like Yoshitora did not hesitate to go further to depict those erotic encounters between Western men and Japanese women that drove the Western clergymen and other moralists to distraction.

His romantic rendering of a bearded foreigner gazing at the moon with a courtesan in the Miyozaki pleasure quarter captured the more expensive end of such liaisons. In another print, titled "An American Drinking and Carousing," Yoshitora's mixed couple strikes a scarcely disguised phallic pose together.



"Autumn Moon at Miyozaki"
by Yoshitora, 1861

[Y0122] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution



"American Drinking and Carousing"
by Yoshitora, 1861

[Y0145] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution

While Western photographers and illustrators of this early period also found the geisha or courtesan or lowly prostitute an enticing subject, they took care to avoid such open suggestion of interracial intimacy. "Madame Chrysantheme" and "Madame Butterfly" would come decades later.

While the woodblock artists obviously found the people of the five nations fascinating, it was just as natural for them to depict foreigners finding the Japanese fascinating as well. One of Yoshitora's most chaotic prints, for example, amounted to a jumble of "Yokohama" subjects he had treated individually elsewhere. As piled together here, the "amusements" of the foreigners included not only riding on horses or in horse-drawn carriages, or purchasing Japanese goods, but also partying in the Miyozaki (drinking sake and listening to the samisen) and attending a Kabuki performance.



"Picture of Amusements of Foreigners in Yokohama in Bushū" by Yoshitora, 1861

[Y0144] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

In another scene from the entertainment quarter, Yoshitora's colleague Yoshikazu offered a highly original rendering of a dance performed by young girls for the merchants and their wives. In this composition, the scene is depicted from backstage. It is the Japanese performers who are of central interest, the foreigners but their appreciative audience.

*“Picture of a Children's
Dance Performance at
the Gankirō in
Yokohama” by
Yoshikazu, 1861
(detail)*

[Y0146]
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution



YOKOHAMA BOOMTOWN

Foreigners in Treaty-Port Japan (1859-1872)
by John W. Dower

Chapter Six: Internationalism

The little sub-genre of “Yokohama prints” that flourished in the early 1860s was not restricted to just depicting Yokohama and its foreign residents. Illustrations of exotic animals brought in by foreign entrepreneurs—especially elephants, tigers, and camels—also became categorized as Yokohama pictures.

At the same time, the woodblock artists also turned their talents to imagining the far-away places from which the foreigners had come. Here, even more transparently than elsewhere, their observations derived entirely from illustrated Western periodicals. And, here again, some of their representations were imaginative to an extreme.

That scenes of foreign places were included under the “Yokohama” rubric might seem to make little sense at first. This make good sense, however, when we keep in mind that “Yokohama” really operated as a synonym for “the West” in these years.



[Y0155] and [Y0153]
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution





Scenes of Foreign Places

[Y0160] Washington, D.C.

[Y0163] "America" [Y0164] London

[Y0167] French port [Y0166] Holland N.S.W.

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

It is also illuminating to note that much that was associated with the Westerners in Yokohama did not appear in these prints. Perry's visits in 1853 and 1854, for example, had inspired a great range of graphic responses on the part of Japanese artists. "Portraits" of the Americans ranged from fairly realistic renderings to outright cartoons and caricatures that conformed to the old stereotypes of "hairy barbarians." Despite the demonization of foreigners that was taking place throughout much of Japan in the 1860s, virtually none of this seeped into the Yokohama prints themselves.

This may have been commendable, but the obverse side of such generally flattering treatment was romanticization. Here again, Japanese graphics depicting the Perry mission offer a suggestive point of contrast. Particularly during Perry's more extended visit in 1854, many local artists took care to depict the full gamut of "representative" foreigners that had suddenly landed on their shores. As a result, they produced a collective picture that ran from the august commodore down through the ranks to the lowliest seaman.

Although the Yokohama artists did include Chinese assistants and Indian servants, their overall treatment of the "people of the five nations" was highly idealized and homogenized. They focused attention on the merchants and traders, rather than the ordinary seamen who were constantly entering and leaving the treaty port. They averted their eyes from the disorderly riffraff that so appalled that early British diplomat and early French traveler. They did not dwell on the "grog shops" or frequent public drunkenness. There are no firearms in their portraits of the foreigners—although we know from other sources that many of the foreigners kept pistols and rifles close by, day and night, fearful that the anti-foreign agitation wracking the country might at any moment spill into their own sheltered lives..

There are also no suggestions of religion in the "West" that is portrayed in the Yokohama prints—in this case for understandable reasons. Although Christian missionaries entered the treaty ports as soon as they opened, Christianity itself remained proscribed until 1873. The foreigners were not permitted to preach, and the artists would have faced punishment had they included any representation of Christianity. That is why pioneer missionaries like James Hepburn, who compiled the first Japanese-English dictionary, entered the country in capacities other than a

religious one—in his case, as a medical practitioner. But even this points to yet another lacuna in the early prints: just as there are no ship’s crewmen and no saloon keepers, there are also no doctors or other technical specialists.

Western technology was given due recognition in the early prints, but not obsessively. The great foreign ships in the harbor naturally commanded attention, as did technological wonders such as the sewing machine and camera. The fabricated images of foreign countries not only offered renderings of Western architecture, but occasionally also populated the sky with large manned balloons—a spectacle that the 1860 Japanese mission to America had witnessed in Philadelphia.

Horse-drawn carriages also intrigued the artists—as did a conveyance, simple in the extreme, that probably had its genesis in the Yokohama treaty port itself. This was the rickshaw, which appeared on the Yokohama scene in 1867 when an American resident named Jonathan Goble fashioned one of these two-wheel, man-pulled vehicles as a way of conveying his ailing wife. There may have been earlier versions of this outside Japan, and the patent to manufacture the conveyance was obtained by several Japanese entrepreneurs in 1870; but Goble laid claim to the prototype, and the eventual “rickshaw” name came out of the Japanese coinage *jinrikisha*—literally, “person-power-vehicle.” By the end of the century, the rickshaw was ubiquitous throughout Asia—and commonly regarded by Westerners as a uniquely Oriental invention.

As Yokohama expanded and the swampy fields beyond the city’s original layout became filled in, Western-style stone and masonry buildings appeared to capture artists’ eyes—especially after a disastrous fire in 1866 paved the way for wide-scale civic reconstruction.



“America” by Yoshitora, 1867 (detail)

[Y0163]

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution



“Picture of the Prosperity of Mercantile Establishments along Nakadōri on the Yokohama Waterfront” by Kunitaru II, 1870

[Y0090] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

In 1872, four years after the Bakufu had been overthrown, one of Commodore Perry’s most spectacular gifts to the Japanese government in 1854—a quarter-size locomotive with cars and a tiny track—was reborn, full-blown, as a symbol of the new “modern” Japan. Constructed between 1870 and 1872, the first railway in Japan linked Yokohama to Shinagawa in Tokyo, a distance of a little over 17 miles.



Woodblock artists loved the new railway, and their many renderings of it may, perhaps, be seen as bringing the epoch of Yokohama prints full cycle. A charming print from 1872, for example, reproduces the Yokohama-Tokyo train schedule over a scene of a Japanese woman in a rickshaw, with a train crossing a trestle behind her and the great ship-filled harbor behind the train.

“Railway Timetable”
by Yoshitora, 1872

[Y0184] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
Smithsonian Institution

A rather garish print from two years later calls to mind Sadahide's 1861 masterpiece of the bustling, newly opened harbor—full of foreign ships and flags, but this time including not only a huge Western battleship but also a large locomotive belching steam on the shore. Just two decades after Commodore Perry had pried feudal Japan out of centuries-long seclusion, foreigners had become a fixture on the Japanese scene, internationalism was the name of the game, and “Westernization” was all the vogue.



“Picture of a Steam Locomotive along the Yokohama Waterfront” by Hiroshige III, ca. 1874

[Y0182] Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

YOKOHAMA BOOMTOWN

Foreigners in Treaty-Port Japan (1859-1872)

by John W. Dower

Chapter Seven: Sources

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