

Japan on a Glass Plate

The Adventure of Photography in Yokohama and Beyond, 1853–1912

SEBASTIAN DOBSON

Vanaf het midden van de negentiende eeuw ontwikkelde Japan zich razendsnel van een gesloten, feodale samenleving tot een moderne, geïndustrialiseerde natie. In die periode was fotografie een uniek middel om die fenomenale transformatie vast te leggen. Het fototoestel, dat bij de openstelling van Japan in 1853 nog een nieuwheid was, werd al snel een ingeburgerde getuige van het dagelijks leven.

Vanuit de nieuwe Verdragshavens – zoals die van Yokohama – zetten de eerste fotografen een precair handeltje in foto's van Japan op. Zo legden ze de basis voor wat een competitieve industrie met een wereldwijd bereik zou worden. De foto's, vaak verpakt in prachtige albums, werden gekoesterd als souvenirs uit een exotisch land of gebruikt als visuele documenten van een snel veranderende samenleving. Ze genoten een brede verspreiding in het buitenland en speelden een belangrijke rol bij de beïnvloeding van de Westerse beeldvorming van Japan, tot in de vroege twintigste eeuw.

Dit boek bevat een unieke selectie negentiende-eeuwse foto's van Japan met uiteenlopende thema's, gaande van landschappen en stadsbeelden, tot foto's van vrouwen en plaatselijke gebruiken. De foto's komen uit een uitgebreide privécollectie en het grootste deel wordt in dit boek voor het eerst gepubliceerd.



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Ludion

Between the twilight years of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867) and the end of the Meiji era (1868–1912), photography offered a unique insight into the rapid transformation of Japan from an isolated feudal society to a modern industrialised state. In the four decades that followed the opening of the country in 1853, the camera evolved from an imported novelty into a familiar witness of Japanese daily life.

Operating from the treaty port of Yokohama and elsewhere, the early practitioners of photography, both Japanese and foreign, plied an often precarious trade while laying the foundations of what would become a highly competitive industry with a global reach. Whether cherished as souvenirs of an exotic land of fond imagination or curated as visual documents of a fast-changing society, these images, often packaged in exquisitely produced albums, enjoyed a wide circulation abroad and played an important role in influencing perceptions of Japan in the West into the early twentieth century.

Drawing from an extensive private collection assembled over many years, this book presents a unique selection of nineteenth-century photographs of Japan, many of them published here for the first time.



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27

Felice Beato
View of Kanagawa

The coastal post station of Kanagawa was originally designated as one of the three ports open to foreign trade (the others were Nagasaki and Hakodate) in 1858, but the nearby village of Yokohama was successfully developed as an alternative location for foreign trade and settlement. Kanagawa remained an important administrative centre for the

Japanese authorities and continued to benefit from its location on the Tōkaidō highway. This view shows Kanagawa as a traveller from Edo would have seen it, with a checkpoint (kanmon) on the right-hand side overlooking the town gate, while off camera the sea would have been visible on the left.



Attributable to Felice Beato
or William Saunders
Panoramic view of Osaka Castle
1872

Osaka Castle was built between 1583 and 1597 by the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi and was the last stronghold of resistance to Tokugawa Iyeyasu's assumption of the shogunate in 1603. Under Iyeyasu's successors, the castle was consolidated as the seat of shogunal authority in the Kansai region, but fell into gradual decline after it was twice struck by

lightning in 1660 and 1665 and repairs were only resumed belatedly in 1845. Osaka Castle briefly served as the headquarters of the last Tokugawa shogun until it was seized by imperial forces in 1868 and reduced to ruins. In 1871, it came under the control of the Imperial Army and was converted into an arsenal.



54

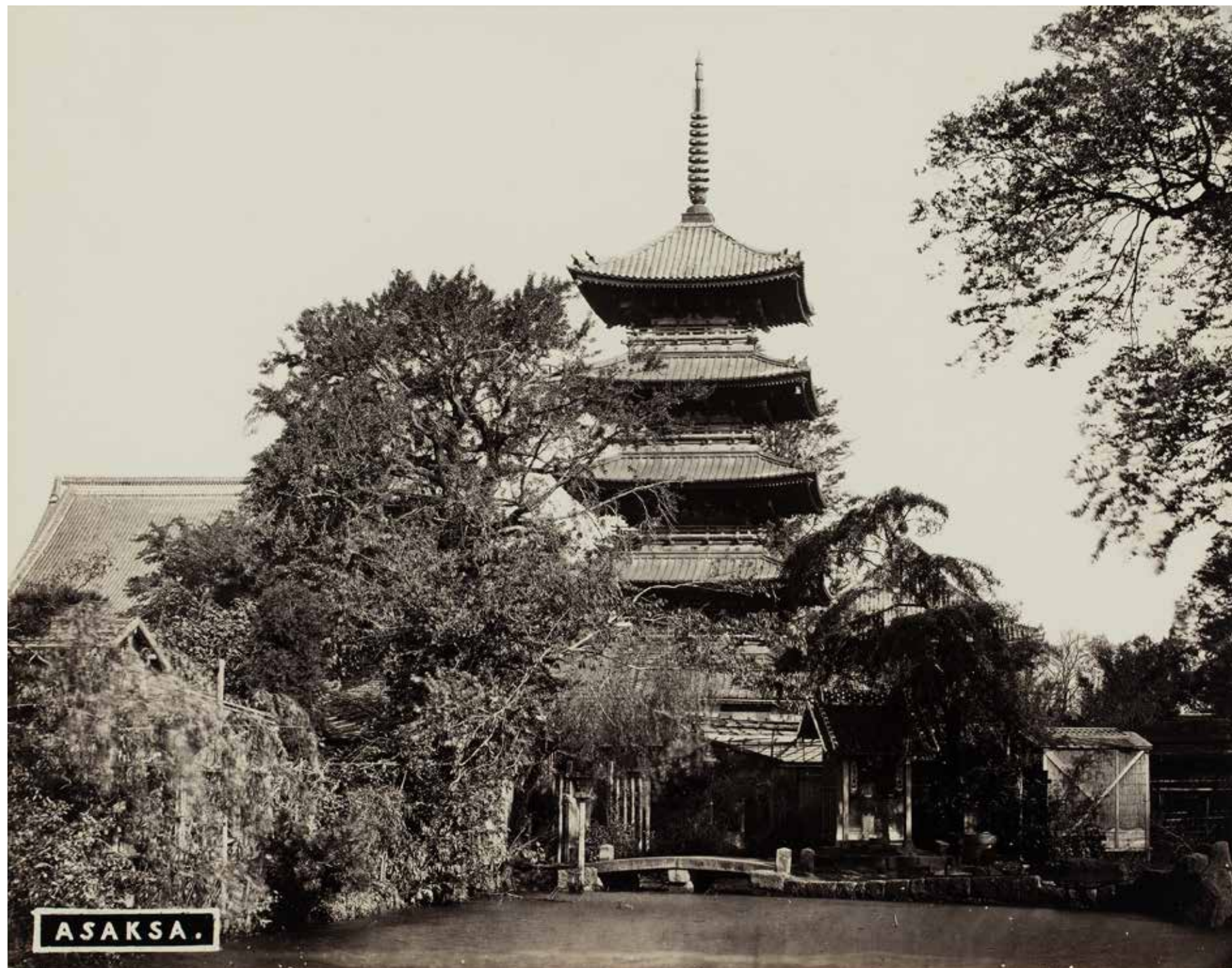
Baron Raimund von Stillfried
View of Sensōji Temple,
Asakusa, Tokyo
1871

Inscribed 'Asaksa' in the negative.

Kinryūzan Sensōji was and still is the oldest and best-known Buddhist temple in Tokyo. According to legend, a statue of the goddess Kannon was found in the Sumida River in 628 by two fishermen and a temple was built nearby to house it. The temple enjoyed the patronage of the Tokugawa shoguns and is still a

celebrated cultural hub of the so-called 'Low Town', or Shitamachi, which was the traditional preserve of the lower classes of Edo. This print, incorporating a distinctive black-and-white caption added to the negative, is a good example of the first state in which Stillfried issued his landscape photographs. By 1874,

he would create second-state prints with the caption removed from the negative, and two years later, a third in which his negatives were trimmed down, thereby producing a more generic portfolio of views lacking any textual information.



55

Baron Raimund von Stillfried
View of Zōjōji, Tokyo
1871

Inscribed 'Shiba' in the negative.

Together with Kaneiji in the northeast of Edo, the grand temple complex of Zōjōji in the Shiba district was dedicated to the Tokugawa shoguns. Its main feature was the mausoleum of Taitoku-in, which was built in 1632 and by the end of the Edo era housed the tombs of

six shoguns and their consorts. With the overthrow of the shogunate in 1868, Zōjōji lost its sole source of patronage and its grounds were converted into a public park in 1877 and the temple itself survived as a popular tourist attraction.



Usui Shūzaburō
Tattooed labourer
 c.1880

Inscribed '198' in kanji and Arabic numerals in the negative.

This arrangement of the subject with his back to the viewer not only displays his tattoos to maximum effect, but also recalls the setting under which many tourists would have first seen a tattooed Japanese body at close quarters. A journey in a rickshaw, an essential part of the tourist's experience of Japan, often provided an opportunity to admire both the physique and the body art of the jinrikisha puller as he performed his task oblivious to the gaze of the passenger behind him. Many globetrotters recorded their impressions in accounts of their travels, among them Lady Brassey who appreciatively described the bodies of the men she and her husband hired for an outing to Enoshima in 1877 'Some of them were beautifully tattooed. My wheeler had the root of a tree depicted on one foot, from which sprang the trunk and branches, spreading gradually, until on his back and chest they bore fruit and flowers, amongst which birds were perched.'

5 Mrs. A. Brassey, *A Voyage in the "Sunbeam"*, London Longmans, Green & Co., 1878, quoted in Luke Gartlan, "'Bronzed and Muscular Bodies' Jinrikishas, Tattooed Coolies and Yokohama Tourist Photography.' In *Transculturation in British Art, 1770-1930*, ed. Julie E. Codell, Aldershot Ashgate, 2012, 93-110.



Usui Shūzaburō
Two women posing with
Western-style armchair
 c.1800

Inscribed '324' in kanji in the negative.

While foreign-run studios in Yokohama tended to eschew Western-style props, such as carpets, columns and chairs, in their genre studies of Japanese subjects, home-grown photographers such as Usui were less restrained in their use and even, as this photograph suggests, used them as a compositional device. The easy interplay in this photograph between the sitters in their traditional dress and the foreign furnishings of Usui's studio was an accurate reflection of everyday life in Yokohama, where traditional and imported modes of representation coexisted.



Adolfo Farsari
'120 Voluntary Hara-Kiri'

In this companion piece to his scene of judicial seppuku, or harakiri, (see 29 TBC) Farsari presents a reenactment of the voluntary form of ritual suicide. To judge from the costume of the subject, this scene is also intended as a reconstruction of pre-modern Japan. However, in contrast to his elaborate staging of 'Judicial Hara-Kiri', Farsari has created a more visceral scene in which the sitter, possibly portraying a samurai fallen on

hard times, is shown disembowelling himself with a long sword, or tachi, and without a kaishakunin on hand to administer the coup de grâce. It was with this photograph in mind that Rudyard Kipling pronounced that 'hara-kiri is hara-kiri and the private performance is even more ghastly than the official one. It is curious to think that any one of those dapper little men with top-hats and reticules who have a Con-

stitution of their own, may, in time of mental stress, strip to the waist, shake their hair over their brows and, after prayer, rip themselves open'.⁷

The hairstyle of the model is unusual, and it is possible that Farsari recruited his colourist Suzuki Shōsaku, known as 'the long-haired artist', to help stage this dramatic scene.

⁷ Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, 286

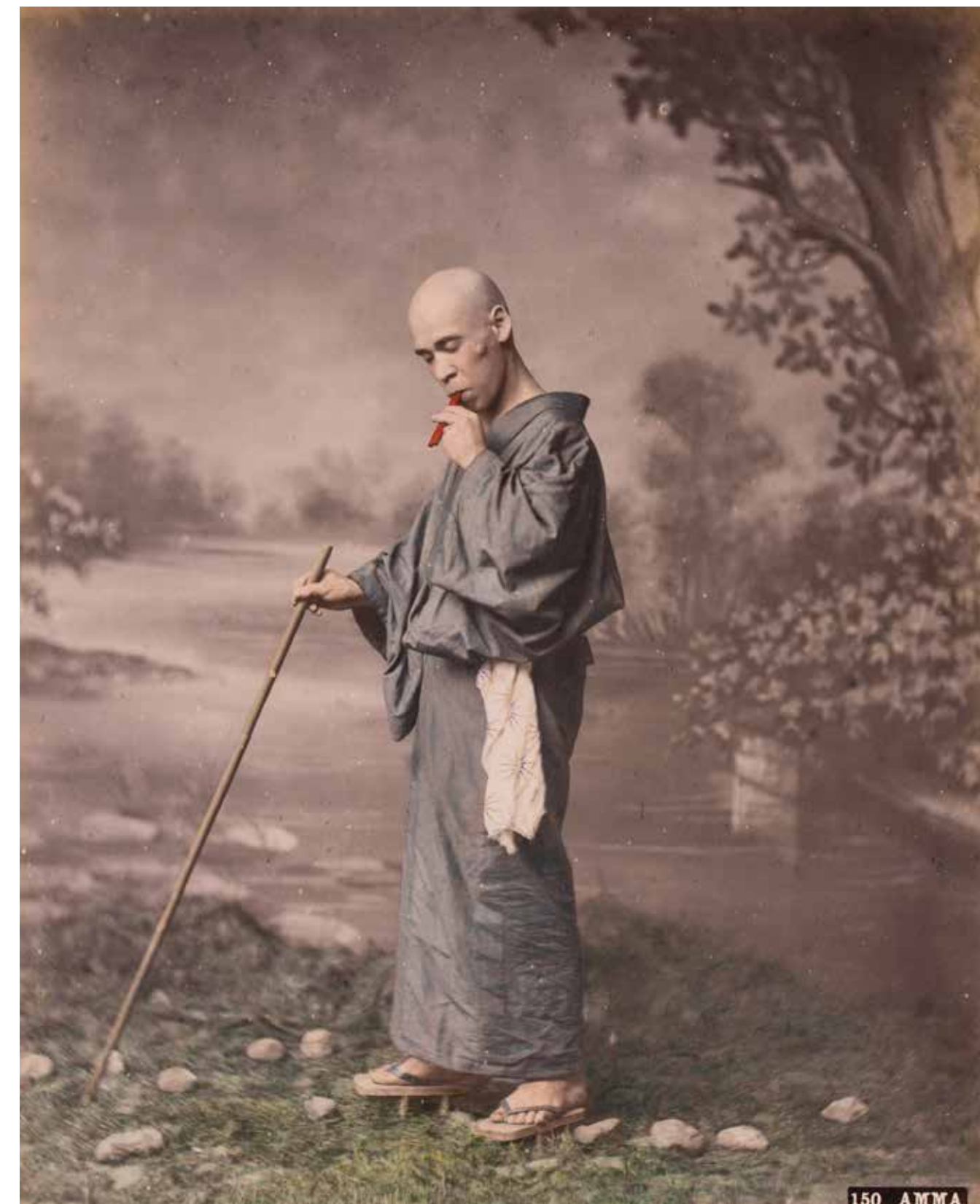


120 VOLUNTARY HARA-KIRI

Adolfo Farsari
Masseur
 c.1885-90

Inscribed '150 Amma' in the negative.

Anma refers to both the practice and the practitioners of traditional massage techniques. The image of the 'blind shampooer' became permanently fixed in Japanese popular culture during the Edo period, especially after the shogunate issued a series of edicts prohibiting all but blind people from practicing anma. Its practitioners, easily identifiable by their trademark cane and whistle, were often itinerant, and the plaintive sound of the anma's whistle, accompanied by lugubrious street-cries such as 'anma - kamishimo - jūsen' ('massage - up and down - 10 sen'), remained part of the nocturnal soundscape of Japan until well into the Meiji era.



150 ANMA

Mount Fuji viewed from the Kandagawa near ōmiya. The village of ōmiya was frequently visited by pilgrims taking one of the mountain roads to Mount Fuji, and, after the opening of Japan, by foreign tourists, the first of whom was the British envoy Sir Rutherford Alcock who made an expedition to the mountain in 1860.



106

**Kajima Seibei
or Kusakabe Kimbei**
*View of Mount Fuji from
Tagonoura*
c.1895

Attributing the larger-format work of Kusakabe Kimbei and Kajima Seibei is problematic, since both photographers included mammoth-plate prints in their portfolios (17 x 22 inches, or 43 x 56 cm, in the case of the former and 17 x 24 inches, or 43 x 61 cm, in the case of the latter), and both listed views of Mount Fuji from this particular spot in their catalogues.

Tagonoura was celebrated in a famous verse by the eighth-century poet Yamabe no Akahito as he contemplated Mount Fuji and the location provided inspiration for numerous artists, and, in the nineteenth century, photographers. Many used the same vantage point of where the Numa River flows into the bay, employing the wooden bridge and its reflection in the foreground as a compositional element.



107

**Kajima Seibei
or Kusakabe Kimbei**
View of Mount Fuji from ōmiya
c.1895.

Mount Fuji was a popular subject of souvenir photography and, possibly in order to distinguish themselves from the competition, more enterprising photographers such as Kusakabe Kimbei and Kajima Seibei memorialised it in this larger format of the 17 x 22 inch (approximately 43 x 56 cm) print. Since the operation required so-called zenshi or 'mammoth plate' glass negatives of the same size and a camera big enough to accommodate

them (not to mention chemicals and a portable darkroom), a photographic expedition to Mount Fuji was a major undertaking for any photographer. Even this was not enough for Kajima, who produced not only mammoth-plate-size prints from his 1894 tour to the mountain but also an enlargement measuring 1.5 x 2.7 metres which he later presented to the Emperor Meiji to mark the imperial couple's silver wedding anniversary.

This view shows the village of ōmiya at the foot of Mount Fuji on the banks of the Kanda-gawa River. The river itself flows from its source inside the precincts of the shrine of Fujisan Hongū Sengen Taisha which served as the centre of a cult worshipping the mountain, and ōmiya served as a popular resting place for pilgrims.



112

Kusakabe Kimbei
View of Kurodani Temple, Kyoto
c.1890

Inscribed '1316. Kurodani Graveyard at Kioto' in the negative.

The Konkaikōmyō-ji, also known as the Kurodani Temple, was established in 1175 and remains one of the head temples of the Jōdō (Pure Land) sect of Buddhism. The stairway leading through the temple cemetery to the three-storey Monjutō pagoda was a popular subject for early photographers.



1316 KURODANI GRAVEYARD AT KIOTO.

113

Kusakabe Kimbei
View of Sanjūsangendō, Kyoto
c.1886

Inscribed '1364. Sanju Sangendo Images at Kioto' in the negative.

The Buddhist temple of Sanjūsangen-dō is famed for its long hall, which, since its foundation in the twelfth century, has housed a vast collection of sculptures, including 1001 effigies of the goddess Kannon. Throughout the Edo era, the hall was also famous as the archery tournament hosted within the temple precincts, in which contestants shot arrows along the 60-metre length of the veranda.



1364. SANJU SANGENDO IMAGES AT KIOTO.

120

Kusakabe Kimbei
Tea Processing Factory
c.1890

Inscribed '397. Firing Tea' in the negative.

The processing of tea for the growing export trade involved blending, drying and even colouring to make it acceptable to foreign buyers. Until the late 1880s, this work was done by a female workforce in factories in Yokohama; thereafter, machines took over the basic tasks of drying, rolling and steaming the freshly harvested tea.



121

Kusakabe Kimbei
Woman and kago bearers
c.1890

Inscribed '8' in the negative.

The traditional palanquin, or kago, was the main human-powered mode of transportation in Japan and, despite the widespread adoption of the rickshaw in the Meiji era, it remained in use in mountainous areas. In the Edo era, kago bearers were recruited on the

basis not only of physical strength but also of height, with taller kagomono commanding higher fares. Each man carries the distinctive ikizue ('breath stick') which was used to regulate breathing and set the pace when carrying the kago.



124

Attributable to Kusakabe Kimbei
Woman in Winter Dress
c.1890
Inscribed '57' in the negative.



125

Kusakabe Kimbei
Woman in Summer Dress
c.1890
Inscribed '170' in the negative.



126

Kusakabe Kimbei
Women bathing
c.1890

Inscribed '67 Home Bathing'
in the negative

Bathing scenes packaged as scenes from daily life offered a legitimate excuse for photographers to introduce eroticised subject matter into their portfolio (and for their customers to buy them). Here Kusakabe has expertly staged three female bathers in poses which artfully avoid any explicit display of nudity.



127

Attributable to Tamamura
Kōzaburō
Scene of Rice Planting
c.1890

Inscribed '1525. Planting Rice' in the negative.

In what would otherwise be a timeless scene of rice cultivation, lines of telegraph cables supported by poles running the length of the road in the middle distance reveal that, by the late Meiji era, modernity was inescapable even in rural Japan.



142

Unidentified Photographer
View of Obama
c.1890

Inscribed '260 Obama' in the negative.

Located east of Nagasaki at the foot of Mount Unzen, Obama was famed for its volcanic hot springs and the village itself consisted mainly of traditional inns built on an embankment overhanging the shore. On the rocky beach, a bath house is visible from which some bathers gaze towards the camera with evident curiosity.



143

Unidentified Photographer
View of Hakone Detached Palace
c.1890

Inscribed 'A. 296 Mikado's Palace, Hakone'

In 1886, a detached palace was constructed in Hakone on the shore of Lake Ashinoko to enable the Imperial family to escape both the summer heat of Tokyo and the occasional epidemics that hit the capital. Consisting of a two-storey Western style building and a Japanese-style building, both constructed from wood, the palace served as both a summer

retreat and a place to host visiting foreign dignitaries. After suffering damage in the earthquakes that hit the Kanto region and Northern Izu in 1923 and 1930 respectively, the palace was scaled down and in 1946 the entire estate was donated to the local prefectural government and opened to the public.



178

Unidentified Photographer
Woman in bath robe
c.1890

The subject holds an oval fan (uchiwa), seemingly to cool herself off after an evening bath, thereby providing a pretext for her state of undress.



179

Unidentified Photographer
Woman at her toilet
c.1890

The application of make-up was a frequent trope in the portrayal of Japanese women in souvenir photography. Most maintained a voyeuristic element by depicting their subjects in decorous semi-nudity seemingly unaware of being observed here, however, the subject, with her pendulous breasts left uncovered, unabashedly returns the viewer's gaze.

