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Portraits of the Emperor Meiji
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Portraits of the Emperor Meiji

Donald Keene

Portraits of Japanese emperors go back at least as far as the Kamakura period and some, of great artistic value, rank as national treasures. One curious feature of these portraits is that most, if not all, were painted after the death of the emperor portrayed, often by an artist who had never seen his subject. This may be why the portraits tend to reveal very little individuality, tending instead to convey courtly elegance or Buddhist consecration, rather than realistically depict his features.

This remained true of imperial portraits well into the nineteenth century. We know the circumstances of one such portrait: on the 15th day of the 9th month of 1846 Toyooka Harusuke, who had previously painted the posthumous portrait of the Emperor Kōkaku, was commanded to paint a portrait of Kōkaku's successor, the Emperor Ninkō, eight months after the latter's death. The official portrait of Ninkō's son, the Emperor Kōmei (1831–1867), seems also to have been painted posthumously. It shows him seated on a raised tatami, dressed in court costume and wearing the distinctive headgear of an emperor, a hat with a tall, projecting plume-like band of starched brocade (*ei*). His oval face, turned somewhat to the right, is composed and utterly without expression. Nothing (except possibly the angle of the plume) indicates that this portrait was painted in the nineteenth, rather than, say, the fourteenth century, and certainly no attempt was made to suggest in Kōmei's features the anguish he suffered during the course of a reign made turbulent by the intrusion of unruly foreigners from the West. Judging from this portrait, Kōmei differed little from earlier emperors of the Tokugawa period, most of them figureheads who had little to do with their country or people. During their lifetimes the existence of these emperors was unknown to most Japanese; today, even their names are forgotten. But Kōmei's son, the Emperor Meiji, would emerge as the most famous of all the emperors, and his features, rendered by many artists, would become known to every Japanese.

1
Utagawa Hiroshige III, "*Famous Views of Tōkyo: Nakajima Benten Shrine in Shinobazu Pond from Ueno Park*" ('Tōkei meisho Ueno Kōen yori Shinobazu no ike Nakajima Benten no kei'), 1881. Right panel of *ōban nishiki-e* triptych. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Although not so labeled, this was probably intended to depict an imagined outing of the imperial family.

Donald Keene, University Professor Emeritus at Columbia University, has a special interest in Meiji period prints. He gave a talk some years ago to the Ukiyo-e Society of America on prints of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5. He is nearing the completion of a study of the Emperor Meiji.

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MITATE DEPICTIONS OF EMPEROR MEIJI

In 1868, the first year of Meiji's reign, the statesman Ōkubo Toshimichi proposed that the capital be moved from Kyoto to Osaka. Although his proposal was ultimately rejected, Ōkubo's main reason for advocating the change—the need to make the emperor, long hidden behind "jade curtains," into a visible presence—was recognized. Ōkubo believed that visibility was an integral part of the authority of the ruler, and was sure that as long as the emperor remained sequestered in his palace in Kyoto, Japan would never have a modern government.

Ōkubo does not seem to have considered commissioning portraits of the emperor as a means of familiarizing the public with the features of the new emperor. He favored instead imperial progresses throughout the country, in the manner of Louis XIV and other European rulers of the baroque age, though he realized that Japanese traditions of imperial remoteness could not be instantly changed, and that it was unlikely the emperor would wish plebeian spectators to catch so much as a glimpse of his face as his palanquin went by.

Nishiki-e artists, however, were quick to see the commercial possibilities in the stirring events of the new régime. There was a tradition of prints depicting the processions of daimyos on their journeys to and from Edo, and it did not require much ingenuity to modify the details so as to accord with the appearance—real or imagined—of the emperor's retinue. The printmakers could also resort to the familiar device of *mitate*, ostensibly portraying some scene of the distant past but in such a way that the real, contemporary meaning was evident. The print entitled "*Picture of the Coronation of Emperor Jimmu*" ('Jimmu Tennō Go-Sokui') of 1868 by Hasegawa Sadanobu shows a man, considerably older than the sixteen-year-old emperor, seated inside curtains and wearing a small crown on his long locks. The caption of the print describes it as the coronation of the Emperor Jimmu, but the proximity of the publication of the print to the coronation of the Emperor Meiji and the costumes worn by the people in the picture make it clear that the coronation depicted was not of the legendary Jimmu but of the Emperor Meiji.[1] Similarly, his expedition to Osaka in 1868 was depicted in the *nishiki-e* by Hasegawa Konobu titled "*The Emperor Nintoku's Visit to Naniwa*," although the emperor in the picture, unlike the fifth-century Nintoku, is protected by soldiers with guns. The review of warships conducted by Meiji at this time is alluded to by the print of Hasegawa Sadanobu titled "*The Conquest of the Three Han* [*of Korea*] *by the Empress Jingū*."[2] It should be noted that both Sadanobu and Konobu were Osaka artists; the kind of *mitate* they practiced was confined to Osaka prints.

It is not clear why these artists pretended that their prints showed scenes from remote antiquity when in fact they depicted contemporary events. It was probably not because of a fear of the censors. Bakufu censorship of prints in theory still lingered on, even after the fall of the bakufu, but it seems not to have been effective; the much more stringent censorship system of the Meiji government, administered through the Home Ministry, was not estab-

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lished until 1875. Perhaps the publishers of these prints were practicing self-discipline. Or they may have been following the practice of the Edo period of not directly representing the shogun in *nishiki-e*. It was perhaps because of the same tradition of restraint that the emperor is never identified as such in prints of the period; when the Emperor Meiji was portrayed taking part in some event, whether in the palace or at the circus, he was never labeled, even if every other figure in the picture is identified by a red tag. However, it usually does not require much imagination to guess which figure in the picture is supposed to be the emperor.

Needless to say, the *nishiki-e* artists at first had no idea what Meiji really looked like. Only a handful of members of the court would have seen the emperor plainly. Perhaps, ironically, it was because of this ignorance of the printmakers that the *nishiki-e* were not banned, even when censorship became more stringent. As long as a printmaker's depiction of Meiji bore absolutely no resemblance to the original — if the artist did not know even if Meiji was clean-shaven, had a mustache or a full beard — the *nishiki-e* portrayals could not be considered disrespectful or, indeed, taken seriously.

Meiji was not the only celebrated figure of the period whose features were unknown to the print artists: Saigō Takamori, the hero of the Restoration, is portrayed in prints of the Satsuma Rebellion sometimes clean-shaven (as is true also of his statue in Ueno Park), sometimes with a mustache, and sometimes with a bristling beard. There survives not one photograph of Saigō, although he was a prominent member of several cabinets and other cabinet ministers were frequently photographed. It may be a fear that being photographed might shorten his life — not at all unusual at the time — accounts for the lack of photographs of Saigō. The same may also hold true of the Emperor Meiji, though a few photographs, most dating from the beginning of his reign, could have been consulted by *nishiki-e* artists, if they really wanted to know what he looked like.

THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPHS

The earliest photograph of Meiji was taken in the Eleventh Month of 1871, when the emperor visited the Yokosuka Naval Yard. This photograph has not been published, but descriptions by people who have seen it indicate that it shows the emperor and his retinue along with the French director of the Navy Yard. All but three of the twenty Japanese in the picture wear Western clothes, but Meiji is dressed in formal robes and wears a *kinkoji*, a kind of gold-colored skull cap. Probably this photograph was taken as a souvenir of his visit and was not intended for distribution.

The first official photograph, taken by Uchida Kuichi in 1872, shows the young (twenty years old) emperor dressed in imperial robes and headgear (fig. 2). His face shows the prognathism often mentioned by foreign visitors, the only witnesses to record their impressions of his features. The face, also conforming to foreigners' reports, is impassive, utterly without expression. Probably Meiji was extremely reluctant to be photographed and his lack of expression may have been due to tension, but an official photograph of the

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2 (left)
Uchida Kuichi, *Photograph of Emperor Meiji in Court Robes*, 1872. Albumen print. From *Meiji Tennō no Go-Shōzō* (Meiji Jingu, 1998), p. 10.

3 (right)
Uchida Kuichi, *Photograph of Emperor Meiji in Military Uniform*, 1873. Albumen print. Courtesy Charles Schwartz Ltd., New York, N.Y.

emperor was needed by Japanese diplomats abroad for presentation to foreign rulers in return for their photographs. At the first session seventy-two photographs were taken, most subsequently lost or destroyed.

These photographs were taken in response to a request made by the Iwakura Mission. When members of the mission arrived in Washington on the first leg of their round-the-world journey, they realized that they could not do without an official photograph of their sovereign. The photographs were taken after their urgent message reached Tokyo, but even though Ōkubo Toshimichi later returned briefly to Tokyo, he did not take the photographs with him to Washington. It was officially explained that they had not been ready in time. More likely, Ōkubo judged that the emperor in the weird garb he wore in the photographs and with his frozen-faced expression would not look like the ruler of a modern state, and he decided not to present them abroad.

A new set of photographs were taken by Uchida on October 8, 1873. They are distinctly more modern, showing the emperor in the Western military uniform that would henceforth be his customary attire (fig. 3). He sits rather uncomfortably on a chair, his embroidered cocked hat on the table beside him. His hair (cut in March of that year) is parted in the middle, and the mustache and beard familiar from later portraits have begun to make an appearance on his face. His hands are folded on the hilt of a sword. He looks young, but his expression is severe.

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These photographs, contrary to the practice in European countries of the time, were not sold or distributed to the public, to serve as reminders of the ruling monarch. Copies were given to foreign royalty, to foreign employees of the Japanese government as a farewell present when they left Japan, and to certain high-ranking Japanese. The making of unauthorized copies was severely prohibited. In 1874 a man in Tokyo began to sell unauthorized reproductions of the photographs. Uchida Kuichi, apparently envious of the profits, requested permission to sell his negatives, prompting a long debate within the government as to the propriety of selling photographs of the emperor. In the end sale was prohibited, and people who had purchased copies were ordered to surrender them. The photographs of Meiji in Western clothes were mainly distributed abroad. One was used by Giuseppe Ugolini (1826–97), a fashionable Roman portrait painter, as the basis for an oil painting, and other copies were made, but the photographs were not generally available.[3]

THE GOSHIN'EI

The 1873 photographs were the last official photographs ever taken of the Emperor Meiji. A few rather distant snapshots have been preserved showing him riding in a carriage or observing army maneuvers. In one of 1911, he is seen bending over a map; the next year, immediately after his death, this photograph was released, but the posture was altered by ninety degrees to make him stand straight. In profile he looks very old, though he was only sixty.

The best-known portrait of the Emperor Meiji, supposed by almost everyone to be a photograph, was actually a crayon drawing by the Italian artist Edoardo Chiossone, which was itself then photographed for distribution (fig. 4). In 1888 the Minister of the Imperial Household, Hijikata Hisamoto, convinced that a portrait of the emperor more recent than the photographs taken by Uchida Kuichi in 1872 was needed for presentation to foreign royalty and other dignitaries, asked Chiossone, an employee of the Printing Office, to prepare a suitable likeness. The simplest way would have been to take another photograph, but the emperor's dislike of being photographed made this impossible. Itō Hirobumi, his most trusted adviser, had repeatedly begged the emperor to permit a new photograph to be taken, but he was refused each time. Hijikata, realizing that it was unlikely the emperor would change his mind, asked Chiossone to sketch the emperor's features secretly, promising to take full responsibility if anything went amiss.

Hijikata, after first securing the consent of palace officials, waited for a suitable occasion. January 14, 1889 was finally chosen for surreptitious sketching of the emperor's features. On that day the emperor dined at the Yayoi Club in Shiba Park. Chiossone, from his hiding place behind a sliding partition (*fusuma*), observing the emperor, carefully copied the "dragon countenance," the emperor's posture, and the changes of expression as he chatted.

Hijikata was delighted with the finished portrait and showed it to the emperor, first apologizing for not having secured his permission in advance. The emperor, on examining the portrait, said not one word, either of approbation or displeasure. Just at this time a request was received from a

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4
"Goshin'ei" portrait of the Emperor Meiji, 1889. Photograph of crayon drawing by Edoardo Chiossone, 1887. Private collection.

European country for a picture of the emperor. Hijikata asked the emperor to sign for presentation a photograph of Chiossone's portrait. To his great relief, the emperor did so; Hijikata interpreted this as meaning the emperor did not disapprove. From this time on, photographs of Chiossone's etching were widely distributed not only to foreign royalty but to schools throughout Japan, and generations of children bowed before the "Goshin'ei" (Sacred Image), as the portrait was known. There are even stories of school principals who lost their lives in the attempt to save the portrait from a fire.

NISHIKI-E RENDITIONS OF THE EMPEROR

Nobody risked his life to save a *nishiki-e* from the flames. Even when they obviously depicted the emperor, the typical colors — crimson, emerald green and purple — and the festive scenes — horse races, circuses, cherry-blossom viewing and the like — created a pleasant unreality separating the figure in the picture from the awesome emperor. It was also true that the imperial family was treated with much less reverence in Meiji's time than during the

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5
Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–92), "Light of the Lantern: Yanagihara Naruko, Gon no Tenji of the Fifth Rank" ('*Tōdai no hi: Gon no tenji Shō-goi Yanagihara Naruko*'). *Ōban nishiki-e*, December 1878. Private collection.
See also color plate 3 and cover illustration.

reigns of his successors.[4] (It is hard to imagine a print showing Emperor Shōwa at a horse race.) As Taki Kōji put it, Meiji was the "superstar" of *nishiki-e*, and the often crudely drawn representations of the emperor created affection rather than the awe that the Chiossone portrait engendered. At the beginning of his reign the existence of the Emperor Meiji was unknown to most of his subjects, but the *nishiki-e*, showing him amongst scenes that were known to the public at large and revealed the changes that had been brought about during his enlightened reign, endeared him to his subjects at large.

The authorities, seemingly considering the *nishiki-e* beneath their notice, tolerated almost any representation of the emperor in whatever surroundings, but a few subjects aroused their disapproval. In 1878 the ukiyo-e artist Tsukioka Yoshitoshi executed two series of seven prints, each devoted to portraits of the concubines of the emperor. These women, known as *gon no tenji* or *gon no suke*, were women of noble families who shared the emperor's bed. This practice was not necessarily a sign of fickleness in his affections; his consort, the empress, was barren, and it was essential that he beget an heir to the throne. Of his first nine children, born to five *gon no tenji*, all but one died in infancy, and the sole survivor, the future Emperor Taishō, was sickly from birth and seemed unlikely to live to maturity. The emperor urgently needed more children.

Although it was not a disgrace to be a *gon no tenji*, these women were shadowy presences, and there was something clandestine about them. They so seldom left the palace or were exposed to sunlight that their faces were said to have been of a ghastly pallor. It is astonishing that Yoshitoshi should have known the names of these women, who were hardly visible even inside the palace, but he boldly labeled each portrait with the woman's name and rank. One print in the series "Mitate Shichiyōsei" (A *Mitate* of the Seven Stars of the Big Dipper) depicts Yanagihara Naruko (fig. 5, color plate 3), a *gon no tenji* who gave birth to three of the emperor's children, including the Emperor Taishō. Naruko had been known as the most beautiful and intelligent of the *gon no tenji*, but she never forgave herself for having given birth to the sickly Taishō, and never again shared the emperor's bed. In Yoshitoshi's wonderfully evocative print, Naruko is leaning over a standing lantern (*bonbori*), about to extinguish the flame before going to the emperor. In her mouth she holds a pack of bed tissues, another obvious indication of what will follow. This print so strongly suggested a "bedchamber print" that the authorities banned the sale. (It was not reproduced even photographically until the catalogue of the Yoshitoshi exhibition in 1977.)[5] The authorities also forbade any future representation of the emperor in prints. This prohibition did not stick, perhaps because someone decided that the benefits accruing from depictions of the emperor in the *nishiki-e* outweighed the danger of occasional lapses of taste or insufficient reverence.

In any case, despite the ostensible ban, prints depicting the Emperor Meiji continued to be produced at least until 1901 when Chinsai Rosetsu made a print of the scene when the Crown Prince (the future Taishō) and Crown Princess took their first-born child (the future Shōwa) to the palace and presented him to the emperor.[6] The relative scarcity of portraits of Meiji

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in the prints published after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5 was probably not the result of pressure from the authorities; the war represented the apogee of the entire art of the *nishiki-e*, which rapidly lost popularity afterwards, its place taken by lithographs and especially by photographs. But for thirty or more years the Emperor Meiji was the "superstar" of the *nishiki-e*.

THE LOOK OF THE EMPEROR

One curious feature of the representations of Meiji is that the artists never attempted to indicate that he had aged over the years. There was no trace of gray in his hair or beard, features that were themselves depicted inconsistently in *nishiki-e*. A print of 1880 by Hiroshige III, "*View of Higashiyama in the Western Capital*" shows Meiji without facial hair, though it was clear from Uchida Kuichi's photograph of 1873 that he was growing a mustache and beard. In the following year of 1881, Hiroshige III drew the imperial entourage viewing the cherry blossoms at Ueno in which the emperor appears with a mustache but not a beard (fig. 1). And although we know (from the recommendations of his worried physicians that he exercise more) that Meiji was seriously overweight, the *nishiki-e* artists portray him always as tall and slim. The portraits of the Emperor Meiji, especially in later years, were effigies, rather in the manner of those of Elizabeth II, who remains forever a girl of twenty on coins and postage stamps.

Meiji is seldom represented in these prints as *doing* anything. This becomes clear if we compare representations of Meiji with those of Louis XIV, another frequently portrayed monarch. At the age of five or six Louis was already shown sitting on a throne, holding a scepter or baton of command.[7] The sculpture of *Louis XIV Crushing the Fronde* shows the young Louis with his right foot firmly planted on the head of a symbolic rebel, but Meiji was never represented, even fancifully, as trampling on the head of Saigō Takamori, let alone on Chinese or Russians. There is no parallel in the *nishiki-e* to Louis' martial exploits commemorated by engravings showing him in the trenches or proudly riding a horse in his role as conqueror of foreign cities. In part, this resulted from Meiji's lack of contact with warfare, except during the first year of his reign, but the prints do not show him actively engaged in peacetime pursuits either.

Unlike Louis, Meiji was unassuming when he met foreign visitors, and even the most imaginative *nishiki-e* artist would not have depicted him, as Louis was often depicted, in the act of receiving the homage of the world. For that matter, no attempt was made to extol Meiji's encouragement of education or the arts in the manner of the engravings of *Louis XIV Visiting the Academy of Sciences* or *The Visit to the Gobelins*, which show Louis inspiring cultural progress with a noble gesture. In prints that depict, for example, Meiji's visits to the Domestic Expositions, he is no more than an interested observer; there is no suggestion that the wonders of the exposition owe anything to his guidance.

It is true that Meiji, following the suggestion of Ōkubo, made "progresses" to different parts of the country in the manner of Louis XIV, but there is an overwhelming difference between the travels of the two mon-

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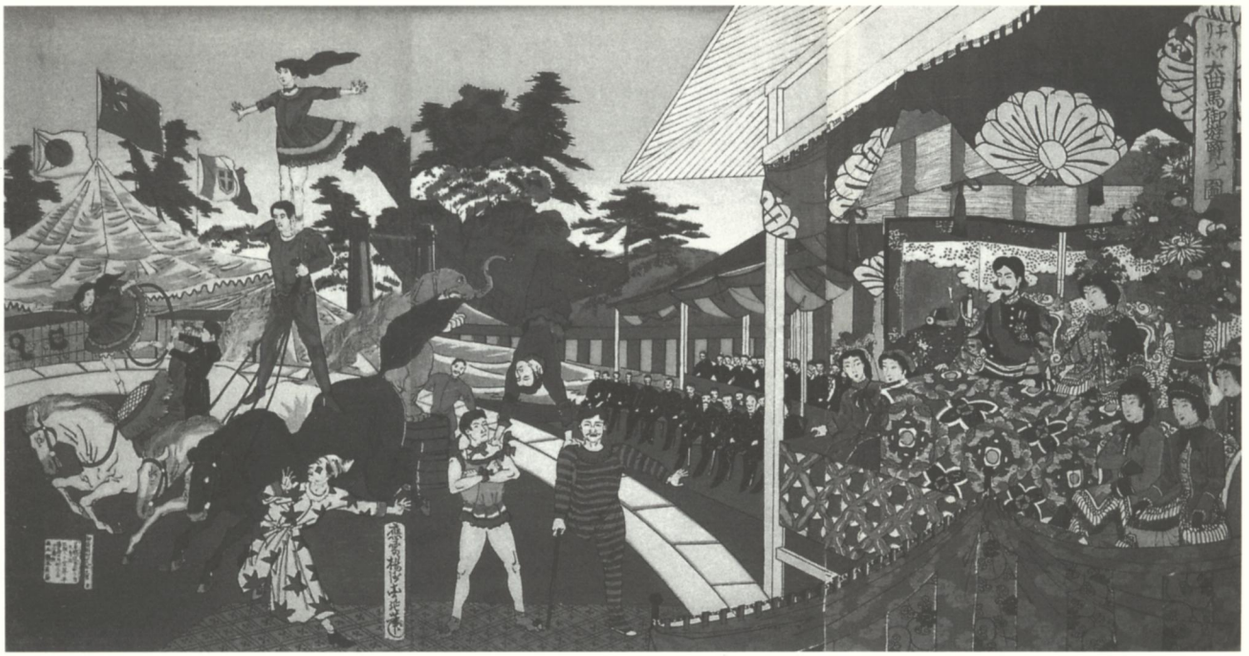

6
Hashimoto Chikanobu, "The Imperial Viewing of Chiarini's Acrobats" ('Charine daikyokuba on-yōran no zu'). *Ōban nishiki-e* triptych, 1886. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

archs. Typical souvenirs of Louis' progresses were the statues of "Louis in the Provinces" showing him seated on a charger. Nearly twenty statues of the king, usually on horseback, were placed in public squares in such provincial towns as Aix, Angers, Arles and so on, to commemorate his visits. Louis XIV travelled in magnificence, stayed at the châteaux of provincial nobles, and was acclaimed by crowds eager for a glimpse of his haughty features.

Meiji's progresses might be described as exercises in torture of the young monarch. Most of the journeys were in a closed palanquin, where he had to sit more or less motionless for hours in formal Japanese style. When at last the emperor's party reached their lodgings for the night, it was usually an elementary school or a temple, where the facilities were primitive, and the emperor was expected to sit erect for several more hours. Travel in the summer was particularly disagreeable. It was stiflingly hot inside the palanquin, and at night he had no protection against mosquitoes or other bugs.

Ōkubo had insisted on these travels to familiarize the Japanese with their emperor, and to a degree the imperial progresses fulfilled this purpose. More important, however, was what Meiji learned about his country and people. His travels would display little of the spectacle that was so important to European progresses; although his retinues were numerous, their numbers and furnishings were by no means comparable to those of the retinues of major daimyos when they travelled. And there never were any statues erected.

In August 1878 the emperor set out on a tour of the Hokuriku and Tōkai regions. The stated purpose of the journey was to familiarize him by personal observation with regions of the country he did not know and with the people living there. He clearly did not expect this would be a pleasure trip, and his object was not primarily to inspire awe or even affection; it was to be

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Interior of the Memorial Picture Gallery (Seitoku Kinen Kaigakan), Meiji Shrine Outer Garden, Tokyo. From *Seitoku Kinen Kaigakan Hekigashū* (Meiji Jingū Hōsankai, 1932).

educational. His first night out of Tokyo was spent in Urawa in Saitama prefecture. The next morning, when he gave an audience to local officials, he was presented not (as one might expect) with documents giving details of the happy lives of the inhabitants, but with a report on the dismal conditions under which people at Nakatsugawa lived. In this remote village of twenty-five houses and a population of 129, people were so poor and backward they had never worn even cotton clothes, and they were all illiterate. When they fell ill, there was no doctor to attend them, and when they died there was no temple where they might be buried. Most of the villagers were unaware that there were such things as schools, pharmacies, liquor stores or fishmongers. The reactions of the emperor are not recorded, but surely it came as a shock that such conditions prevailed in a village less than fifty miles from his palace.

Meiji learned a great deal from his travels. Once, when his chamberlains urged him to retire early into the protection afforded by mosquito netting, he answered, "The whole point of this journey is to observe the suffering of the people. If I myself did not experience their pains, how could I understand their condition?" The emperor's words may sound too Confucian to be true, but it accords with other recorded episodes of his journey and suggests the compassion felt for his people by a man who had previously had little personal experience of suffering. More than anything else, during his journeys he observed his people.

THE EMPEROR IN *NISHIKI-E*

The emperor is also most characteristically shown in *nishiki-e* prints as an observer. Sometimes, he sits in the background, a small figure watching ladies (who seem like giantesses by comparison) attired in elegant European fashions. In one print by Chikanobu, "*Aristocrats Enjoying the Summer Cool*" (color plate 1), the central figure is a woman attired in ravishingly beautiful Western clothes and hat; the emperor sits in the background on a love seat, once again observing. In another Chikanobu print the emperor sits in the grandstand watching acrobats of Chiarini's circus perform (fig. 6). Many prints show him, often a tiny figure in the distance, watching horses race around the Shinobazu Pond at Ueno.

Even in prints where the emperor takes a more active role, as when he arrives at Shimbashi Station after the Sino-Japanese War (color plate 2) or when he proclaims the Meiji constitution, he is not a heroic or allegorical figure. He lent importance to these events not by what he did but by his presence. During the months of discussions over the proposed contents of the constitution, the emperor attended every session, but never said a word (though occasionally he later requested clarification of some detail). In the summer, the room where the discussions took place became unbearably hot, but Meiji, unperturbed, listened tirelessly, imparting dignity to the proceedings.

Judging from the *nishiki-e*, the emperor might be said to have been the prime witness of the changes that occurred during his reign. He was interested in everything; he not only took part in the traditional pleasures of the court—admiring plum blossoms, cherry blossoms, peonies, chrysan-

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8
Yūki Somei (1875–1957), "Imperial Visit to the First Domestic Industrial Exposition, 1877" (Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai gyokōkei). Colors on paper (Nihonga), completed 1936. Memorial Picture Gallery, Tokyo. From *Seitoku Kinen Kaigakan Hekigashū* (Meiji Jingū Hōsankai, 1932), pl. 38.

themums and autumn leaves — but watched maneuvers of troops of the new army, attended Nō and Kabuki performances, observed displays of horsemanship, children performing Swedish calisthenics, a torpedo exploding in the Sumida River, a polo match, sumo wrestling, graduation exercises at the Peers' School, and the ceremonies welcoming President Grant. The Emperor, as depicted in the *nishiki-e*, was no snob, but shared even the humblest of the pleasures of his subjects.

This special quality of the *nishiki-e* portraits of the emperor is most easily appreciated in comparison with the eighty paintings depicting events of his life in the Memorial Picture Gallery (Seitoku Kinen Kaigakan) of the Meiji Shrine. The building was completed in 1926 (fig. 7), and the paintings were executed by outstanding Nihonga and Yōga artists between 1926 and 1936. Not all the paintings contain representations of the Emperor — a fair number are devoted to the Empress, and he does not appear in scenes of battle — but wherever he is depicted, he is the center of attention. The painting by Yūki Somei of the emperor's visit to the First Domestic Industrial Exposition (Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai) in 1877 (fig. 8) has for its central figure

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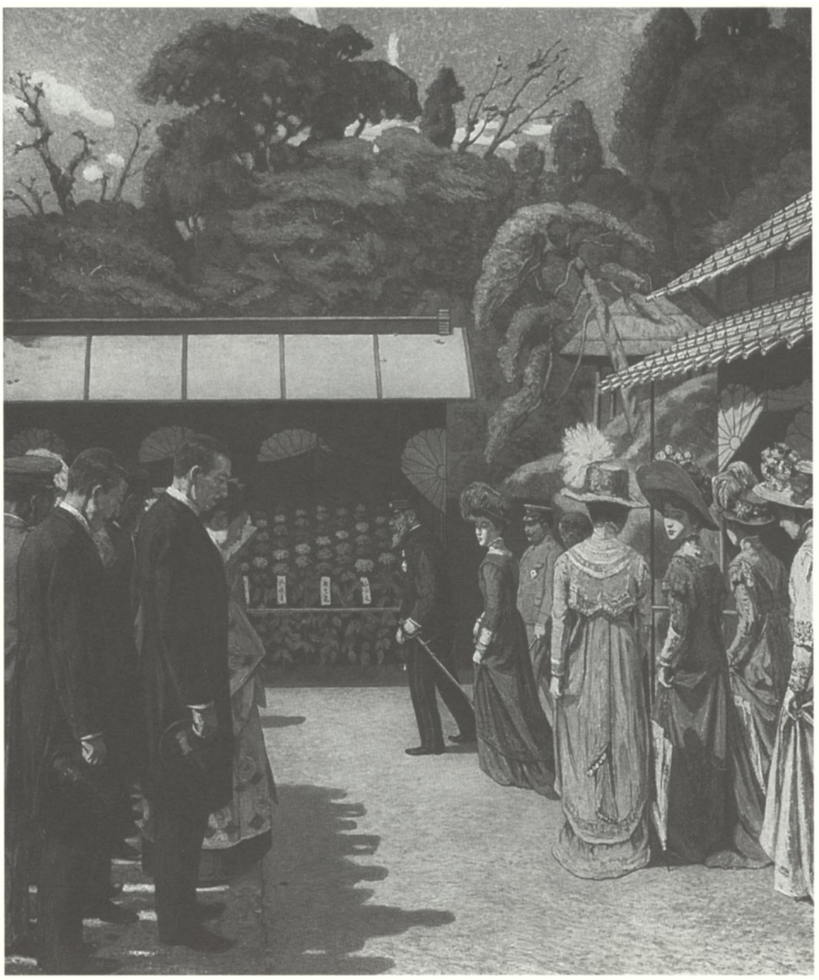

9
Nakazawa Hiromitsu (1874–1964), "*Chrysanthemum Garden Party*" ('Kangikukai'). Oil painting (Yōga), 1931. Memorial Picture Gallery, Tokyo. From *Seitoku Kinen Kaigakan Hekigashū* (Meiji Jingū Hōsankai, 1932), pl. 76.

the young Meiji, resplendent in a jacket that is covered with gold lace, frogs, medals and epaulets, and carrying a gold-mounted sword. He has just entered the rather bleak picture gallery of the exhibition where he is greeted by Ōkubo Toshimichi. The empress follows at a respectful distance, and behind her are the figures of ladies and gentlemen of the court. Nothing could be further removed from the festive atmosphere evoked by the *nishiki-e* showing the emperor's visit to the exhibition, with its strings of colored lanterns, fluttering flags, ladies in dresses of bright hues, and cherry blossoms. The painting of the emperor is certainly more realistic than the oddly wooden figure in the *nishiki-e*, but the features are not necessarily more accurately depicted: it is unlikely that Yūki or any other painter had actually seen the emperor. That may be why the various portraits in the gallery do not much resemble one another except for the inevitable mustache and beard.

There is also another kind of realism in the paintings of the emperor. Kosugi Misei's portrait of the emperor opening the first session of the Imperial Diet in 1890 shows him as a portly man; and in Yoshida Shigeru's

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depiction of the emperor at the cabinet meeting in February 1904 when war was declared on Russia, he looks distinctly corpulent. Finally, the last portrait of the emperor in the gallery, Nakazawa Hiromitsu's rendition of the Chrysanthemum Garden Party of 1909, shows him as a stooped old man with a gray beard (fig. 9).

Unlike the *nishiki-e*, these paintings had a political purpose: they were painted as acts of glorification of the Emperor Meiji. They were apparently successful in this aim, especially during the 1930s, but they contain nothing of the charm and verve of the brave new world of Meiji Japan depicted in the *nishiki-e*. They are of little interest today, though far more distinguished artistically than the hastily executed prints, which retain their appeal. They leave an impression less of the Emperor Meiji or his time than of the piety of a later age; but the *nishiki-e*, childish as many are, preserve the freshness of Japan in the spring of its modern age.

Notes

1 See Taki Kōji, *Tennō no shōzō* (Iwanami Shoten, 1988), p. 11. A detail of the print is given on p. 13. The entire print is reproduced in Konishi Shirō, *Nishiki-e Bakumatsu Meiji no rekishi*, 12 vols. (Kōdansha, 1977), vol. 5, pp. 2–3. I owe much to Taki's study of the subject.

2 These two prints are reproduced in Konishi, vol. 4, pp. 22–25.

3 Ugolini's painting is reproduced in *Meiji Tennō no Go-Shōzō: Gokajō no Go-Seimon happu hyakusanjū kinen ten* (Portraits of the Emperor Meiji: 130th Anniversary Exhibition of the Charter Oath), exhibition catalog, Meiji Jingū Treasure Museum (1998), p. 44 (cat. 55).

4 The gossip about Palace affairs that was printed in newspapers of the time is interestingly discussed in the chapter "Mutsuhito tennō no kōi," in Morita Seigō, *Meijijin monogatari* (Iwanami Shoten, 1998), pp. 8–54.

5 The show, *Tsukioka Yoshitoshi no zenbō ten*, was organized by Segi Shin'ichi for the Seibu Bijutsukan in Tokyo, and included the prints of Yanagihara Naruko and the other six *gon no tenji*. Yoshitoshi in the same year made another set of the same subjects called "*Bijin Shichiyōka*" (Beautiful Women: Seven Bright Flowers). Many of the prints in the exhibition, including five from this series, may be found in Segi Shin'ichi, ed., *Tsukioka Yoshitoshi gashū* (Kōdansha, 1978).

6 This print is reproduced in *Meiji Tennō no Go-Shōzō*, p. 67. An anonymous *nishiki-e* dated 1911 showing Meiji, Taishō, their wives and children in a "happy family" pose is reproduced on p. 72 of this book. It is unlike most other *nishiki-e* in that it is not linked to any specific occasion.

7 See Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (Yale University Press, 1992), p. 39. My other examples of representations of Louis XIV are all drawn from this book.

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