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**A Solution to “The Woman Question”:
Envisioning the Japanese Woman in the *Bijin-ga* of
Japan’s Modern Print Designers**

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Art History Honors Project

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INTRODUCTION

After the “opening of Japan” in 1853,¹ Japan hurried to modernize in order to make up for over two hundred years of cultural and political isolation. This effort to “catch up” began with a blind emulation and imitation of Western infrastructure that many Japanese saw as the source of Western global and imperial power. The influx of foreign political, economic, and social systems spurred the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which reinstated the emperor from his previous status as figurehead to a position of true power. By the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 and the start of the Taishô Period (1912-1926), however, an anxiety over the loss of “Japaneseness” emerged.² During the early twentieth century, Japanese artists joined intellectuals and politicians in their endeavor to articulate a vision of a distinctly *Japanese* modernity, outside the realm of Westernization. Artists appropriated the image of the Japanese woman to represent the Japanese nation, yet almost entirely within the *bijin-ga*, or “pictures of beautiful women” (美人画), genre.³ Their adoption of this traditional *bijin-ga* trope, however, conflicted with the modern society that had grown out of these changes, undermining the “modernity” of their vision.

Shin-hanga, or “New Prints” (新版画), represented one such effort to establish a Japanese modernity. This Tokyo-based print movement aimed to construct a woodblock print genre that drew from Japan’s own artistic heritage rather than from Western sources. The dominant source of domestic inspiration to which *Shin-hanga* artists turned was

¹ For over two hundred years prior to this date, Japan had maintained an economic, political, and cultural self-imposed isolation, with the exception of limited trade with China and the Netherlands.

² Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 107.

³ Where “*bijin*” means “beautiful woman” and the suffix “-ga” denotes “pictures of.”

ukiyo-e, or “pictures of the floating world” (浮世絵), the woodblock prints from the Edo Period (1603-1868) that embodied native Japanese aesthetics. The publisher Watanabe Shôzaburô pioneered the *Shin-hanga* movement, collaborating with several artists of the *Nihonga* (“Japanese painting,” 日本画) movement and sharing its proposed agenda of creating a modern yet “Japanese” national aesthetic. The *Shin-hanga* color woodblock prints, created from about 1910 until the early 1960s and patronized by predominantly (Japanese and American) male consumers, presented a romanticized image of pre-modern Japan that was slipping away during the decades after the 1868 Meiji Restoration. *Shin-hanga* artists like Itô Shinsui (伊東深水、1898-1972), Hashiguchi Gôyô (1880-1921), Torii Kotondo (1900-1976), Yoshida Hiroshi (1876-1950), Natori Shunsen (1886-1960), and Kaburagi Kiyokata (1878-1972) may have borrowed select visual techniques from European artistic traditions, but the content of their prints was exclusively Japanese in origin: *yakusha-e* (役者絵、*kabuki* actor prints), *meisho-e* (名所絵、 “pictures of famous places”), and *bijin-ga*. *Shin-hanga* did not seek to restore what had been, however, but also attempted to fashion previous aesthetics to suit the modern era.

One painter Watanabe approached was Itô Shinsui, who is remembered today not for his paintings but for his prints, particularly his *bijin-ga*. These “pictures of beautiful women,” such as his *After the Bath* of 1917 [Image #1], established Shinsui’s canonical status in the Japanese woodblock tradition almost overnight. *Bijin-ga* as a genre has an illustrious lineage, stretching back to the seventeenth century, and the languid beauties of Shinsui’s prints are idealized versions of their pre-modern predecessors: meek, idle, and highly eroticized types. Although Shinsui modernized the visual techniques of *bijin-ga*,

incorporating Western techniques such as modeling and foreshortening, his continuation of the pre-modern *bijin* subject matter problematizes the modernity of his designs. These alluring but tame women immortalized in his prints constitute a psychological anchor against the revolutionary transformations within Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishô societies—particularly those that involved women.

Artists of *Shin-hanga*'s counterpart movement, *Sôsaku-hanga* ("Creative Prints," 創作版画), embraced similar goals. The movement was ideologically and aesthetically opposed to *Shin-hanga*, however, particularly in terms of their relationships to their Edo Period woodblock print heritage. Onchi Kôshirô (恩地孝四郎、1891-1955), considered the father of the *Sôsaku-hanga* group, instigated what he considered a "full-scale rebellion" against the traditions of *ukiyo-e*.⁴ *Sôsaku-hanga* stressed the artist's control over each aspect of the production of a print, from design to carving to printing. This emphasis signified a break from *Shin-hanga*'s inherited workshop division of labor. "Creative Prints" revealed the tastes of the individual artist, who drew primarily from Western artistic sources such as Expressionism and abstract art. Print designer Takehisa Yumeji (竹久夢二、1884-1934) subscribed to neither *Shin-* nor *Sôsaku-hanga* aesthetic choices, but he also embraced the *bijin-ga* repertoire in confronting the changes in Japanese society.

Concurrent with the endeavor to modernize Japanese art was a reinterpretation of the role of women in Japanese society. Many Japanese engaged in a series of debates on what came to be known as "the woman question" (*fujin mondai*), which attempted to define the role of women in the private and public spheres in the context of an

⁴ Oliver Statler, *Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn* (Rutland, VT and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1956), 24.

increasingly modern and urban society. This paper explores how print designers of *bijin-ga* of the early twentieth century contributed to the re-presentation, re-definition, and re-creation of the Japanese woman, broadcast as an emblem of the modern nation both domestically and abroad. The *After the Bath* trope is exemplified in Shinsui's 1917 print as well as in Kôshirô Onchi's *Woman After the Bath* (1930) [Image #4] and in *Frog* (published posthumously in 1935) by Yumeji [Image #5], though the three images embrace diverging conceptions of what constituted a "modern" aesthetic (Onchi's is the most radical departure from traditional Japanese standards, while Shinsui's remained more faithful and Yumeji attempted to balance the two). Despite these artists' professed determination to modernize the woodblock print, each chose the *bijin* as their subject matter, proving his loyalty to the conventional iconography of their Edo Period forebears, particularly the *bijin-ga* of Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806) [Images #2 and #3].

In spite of the commercial popularity of *Shin-hanga*, the movement has not received much analytical attention. *Shin-hanga* exhibition catalogues tend to present historical overviews of the movement and its key players, rather than a critical exploration of its significance. Dorothy Blair introduced *Shin-hanga* to American audiences in her *Modern Japanese Prints* catalogue of the 1930s exhibitions at the Toledo Museum of Art; more recent publications include the Sackler Gallery's *Printed to Perfection: Twentieth-Century Japanese Prints from the Robert O. Muller Collection* (2004). Helen Merritt, in her *Modern Japanese Woodblock Prints: The Early Years* of 1990, presented a biographical account of the movement, and several exhibitions of modern Japanese art included *Shin-hanga* in their catalogues. The Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, for example, published a comprehensive catalogue in

1998 titled *Modern Boy Modern Girl: Modernity in Japanese Art, 1910-1935*, which addressed issues of modernity and Japanese femininity, but not in relation to *Shin-hanga*.

Most English-language publications on *Shin-hanga* are divorced from dialogues about women and treat the genre as little more than “neo-*ukiyo-e*.”⁵ This simplifying denomination has persisted since the movement’s inception at the beginning of the twentieth century; it belittles *Shin-hanga* as “a bloodless revival of Edo prints”⁶ unworthy of scholarly attention. Until recently, Western scholars have focused on *Sōsaku-hanga* (Oliver Statler’s *Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn* from 1959 remains a canonical presentation of the movement). The aesthetic diversity of *Sōsaku-hanga* and its declared commitment to Western-inspired artistic ideals (such as individualism) attract greater interest than its counterpart, as evidenced by Alicia Volk’s 2005 *Made in Japan: The Postwar Creative Print Movement*. *Shin-hanga*, however, continues to be considered merely expressive of a passive “yearning for cultural identity and nostalgia for the encompassing communities of times past” and has subsequently been ignored or downplayed.⁷

Lawrence Smith has written extensively on both *Shin-* and *Sōsaku-hanga*. In his *The Japanese Print Since 1900: Old Dreams and New Visions* (1983), Smith recounts a comprehensive overview of the genre, while exemplifying the predominant, trivializing attitude towards *Shin-hanga*. He details the history of the movement and romanticizes the images, highlighting the “fresh, youthful eroticism,” and the “[e]motional force” of

⁵ Kendall H. Brown, “Modernity and Memory: Shin-Hanga and Taisho Culture,” Kendall H. Brown and Hollis Goodall-Cristante, *Shin-Hanga: New Prints in Modern Japan* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1996), 35-89, 36. Art historian Richard Lane termed Shin-hanga “neo-*ukiyo-e*” in 1978.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hollis Goodall-Cristante, “Shin-Hanga: Traditional Prints in a New World,” Kendall H. Brown and Hollis Goodall-Cristante, *Shin-Hanga: New Prints in Modern Japan*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1996) 11-35, 15.

Shinsui's prints without deeper analysis.⁸ His chapter "A Lost Dream Briefly Restored: The Neo-*Ukiyoe* Movement Between the Wars..." introduces the key players in *Shin-hanga* and their accomplishments, constituting one of the most thorough presentations of the movement in English at the time; but Smith reduces the movement to a commercially-driven effort to revive an art form that had been lost in the shuffle of the Meiji-era Westernization hype.

Yet *Shin-hanga* artists, like *ukiyo-e* artists before them, reacted to their cultural milieu and expressed the social and political urges that spurred the movement's conception *then*, in the Taishô Period. If it had simply been a matter of supplying the market for Japanese prints, Watanabe need not have expanded his business from reproducing Edo Period *ukiyo-e* to publishing new designs. There was certainly an insatiable demand for prints of the *ukiyo-e* "masters," particularly Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) and Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), but the work of Watanabe's shop, rather than being merely derivative of a previous movement, expressed a fundamental sentiment permeating the early twentieth century in Japan: anxiety. This anxiety—and the desire to create a solution—is apparent in not only *Shin-hanga bijin-ga* but in twentieth century *bijin-ga* as a whole, evidenced by the prints of both Onchi (a *Shin-hanga* "rival" in *Sôzaku-hanga*) and Yumeji (who belonged to neither school). Crafting the *bijin* thus became a vehicle for shaping the modern-day Japanese woman, a cause for which both "conservative" (Shinsui) and "progressive" (Onchi) artists rallied.⁹ The era of "Taishô

⁸ Lawrence Smith, *The Japanese Print Since 1900: Old Dreams and New Visions* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983) 18.

⁹ Scholars such as Amy Reigle Newland and Kendall H. Brown have labeled *Shin-hanga* artists as "conservative." (See Newland, "Shin-hanga: Innovation from Tradition" in *Printed to Perfection: Twentieth-century Japanese Prints from the Robert O. Muller Collection* from 2004; Brown "Modernity and Memory: Shin-Hanga and Taishô Culture" in *Shin-Hanga: New Prints in Modern Japan* from 1996.)

liberalism” (ca. 1905-1932) had begun, and more threatening than these “formerly parochial, apolitical people...anxious to voice their political opinions...and insistent that they be represented” were the *women* who were discarding traditional roles to involve themselves in these struggles.¹⁰

The question of how to define, illustrate, and politicize the modern Japanese woman had plagued both the Japanese artist and the intellectual from the very beginning of the Meiji era. Although the Japanese woman remained unchanged according to the woodblock print, her role in society and in the home began to rapidly transform. Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901)¹¹ was one of the first to address the “woman question” in his *On Japanese Women (Onna no Nihonjinron)* from 1885. In this essay, Fukuzawa argued that the education of women was necessary to prepare them to educate their (male) children in turn.¹² Furthermore, many Japanese at this time became aware that the previous treatment of women in Japan (in which even talkativeness could be grounds for divorce)¹³ was considered barbaric in the West. Knowing that the nation’s transition into a powerful modern state depended on Western acceptance, Japan reconsidered the status of women. Some progressives even argued that “[w]omen should rebel against despotic fathers and husbands”¹⁴—though the majority favored a less radical upheaval of gender roles, merely advocating to outlaw concubinage.

¹⁰ Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991) 17.

¹¹ Fukuzawa was a member of the “Meirokeisha”, or “The Meiji Six,” a society promoting Western learning in order to correct what they considered the “backward,” and ‘uncivilized’ customs, ideas, and behavior in Japan. (Duus, Peter. *Modern Japan*. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 100.)

¹² Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan*, Ed. Ray Chow, H. D. Harootunian, and Masao Miyoshi (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003) 19.

¹³ Duus, *Modern Japan*, 15.

¹⁴ Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, Marxist Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, quoted pp. 22.

Women, too, were engaged in these debates, demanding a more public role in society from the beginning of the Meiji Period. In 1884, only thirty years after the abolition of the trade restrictions that had “opened” Japan, twenty-year-old Kishida Toshiko addressed a community group: “Young women...were now needed to face challenges too large to be faced by men alone; old barriers and conventions must no longer be permitted to stifle women’s minds and voices.”¹⁵ Dissatisfied with Meiji concessions, the Taishō era witnessed an unprecedented number of women engaging in politics, socialism, literature, and activism. The so-called “New Woman” (*Atarashii onna*), exemplified by Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971), Yosano Akiko (1878-1942) and their fellow contributors to the feminist periodical *Seitō* (*Bluestockings*), fought with newfound determination for equal rights in the home, the workplace, and the political sphere. Particularly important to them was the status of the Japanese housewife; though the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 placed utmost importance on the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*) ideology. The difficulties of divorce and the presence of concubines threatened the reality of women’s ability to raise the next generation of Japanese patriots.

The *moga* or *modaan gaaru* (“modern girl”) of the Taisho Period, on the other hand, became a media phenomenon [Image #8]. Her new bobbed haircut, adoption of Western clothing, and flaunted sexuality created a commotion in contemporary Japanese media and culture; the *moga* was a public, decidedly *undomestic* figure. Her very existence threatened the family order and stability the government strove to preserve. Tanizaki Jun’ichiro’s controversial 1927 novel *Naomi*¹⁶ portrays a quintessential *moga*:

¹⁵ Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983) xi.

¹⁶ The Japanese title is *Chijin no ai*, literally, “A Fool’s Love.”

the heroine refused to cook, manipulated and cheated on her husband, and generally wreaked havoc on marital and domestic order.

Shin-hanga bijin-ga first appeared on the market when the rise of the *Atarashii onna* and the *moga* after the Russo-Japanese War revealed the failure of the government's measures to inspire women to remain in the home. The meek and gentle beauties featured in the *Shin-hanga bijin-ga* of Shinsui (and non-*Shin-hanga* artists Onchi and Yumeji) promoted a visual ideal, one based on a conception of the traditional Japanese woman whose existence was disappearing as bobbed haircuts and women's literary journals became more prevalent. Though repeatedly labeled "nostalgic," the degree to which *Shin-hanga* produced a means of escape from widespread social changes while simultaneously providing a coping mechanism has not yet been addressed.

With only a few exceptions, neither the New Woman nor the Modern Girl appeared within the "pictures of beautiful women" in the era of so-called "Taishô liberalism" (which spanned roughly 1905-1932). Shinsui depicted women who are passive and erotic: his figures absentmindedly comb their hair, apply makeup or dry themselves off after a bath and are decorated with beautifully patterned kimono and classic hairstyles.¹⁷ Onchi, who typically favored abstract compositions, deferred to the *bijin* trope when depicting women, and Yumeji, like Shinsui, established his artistic career through such images. The women immortalized in their prints represented an idealized type, with little resemblance to daily reality. In delineating the new Japan, these print designers actively denied the changes in the Japanese woman. Instead they upheld the ideal of a docile beauty, ignorant of politics and activism. In the face of widespread

¹⁷ Shinsui's *bijin-ga* constitute an overwhelming majority of his oeuvre; works of note include: *Before the Mirror* (1916), *Rouge* (1922), *Early Summer Bath* (1922), *Eye-brow Pencil* (1928), *Snowstorm* (1932), *Hair* (mid-20th c.), and another version of *After the Bath* from 1929.

progressivism and self-awareness, these artists cemented this idealized and traditional woman as an emblem of the modern Japanese nation in their prints, what Sharon Sievers has called a psychological anchor through which women become “repositories of the past [and...] of traditional values.”¹⁸ Despite the incorporation of innovative modern techniques and aesthetics, in their adoption of the convention of the woman after the bath early twentieth century print designers ironically crafted an image of the Japanese woman that was atavistic, not modern.

¹⁸ Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 15.

MODERNIZATION IN MEIJI: WESTERNIZATION AND BACKLASH

In 1853, after over two hundred years of self-imposed political, economic, and cultural isolation, Japan faced a new, and very real, threat to its system. Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States had arrived in Edo Bay (soon to be renamed Tokyo Bay), demanding that Japan open to foreign trade. The samurai, long idle and impoverished due to the “Pax Tokugawa” era during which their skills as warriors were superfluous, would have been defenseless against the advanced weapons and infamous black ships of the Americans. A year later, the shogun (military ruler) agreed to Perry’s demands and the shogunal government system that had been in place since 1192 deteriorated. In 1868, the restoration of the emperor to a position of true power ushered in the Meiji Era, a period of unprecedented change.

The nation subsequently developed a severe inferiority complex. The decline of the Qing Dynasty in China as a result of the Opium Wars (though conflated due to rumor and misinformation received while still officially isolated)¹⁹ served as a dire warning to Japan. Fearing a similar unequal situation, the Meiji government instigated a series of reforms, focusing particularly on politics, the economy, and the military, in order to “catch up” to the civilizations of the United States and Western Europe. The reforms of the Meiji leaders worked to quench the “desire to acquire as quickly as possible the foreign learning that (the Japanese believed) accounted for the predominance of the West. The new cry was *bunmei kaika*, ‘civilization and enlightenment...’ and the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a rapid transformation of the Japanese nation in pursuit of

¹⁹ John W. Dower, “The Opium War in Japanese Eyes: An Illustrated 1849 ‘Story from Overseas,’” *MIT Visualizing Cultures*, 2010, accessed April 18 2011, http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/opium_wars_japan/oje_essay01.html “New Stories from Overseas: *Kaigai Shinwa*,” Paragraph 4.

these two goals.²⁰ The government abolished the rigid class structure, which had placed samurai at the highest rung of society and merchants (the producers and consumers of Edo woodblock prints) at the lowest, in favor of a meritocracy. Various educational reforms followed, and Japan had a constitution by 1890. In a symbolic effort to persuade the Europeans and Americans of Japan's development, the Meiji Emperor set the example for his people by shaving his topknot and dressing in Western clothing. During the Iwakura Mission of 1871-73, scholars were sent abroad on a "shopping spree in the mall of Western institutions," studying everything from prisons to factories and postal systems of Western countries.²¹

Japanese artists, too, traveled abroad. Media such as oil painting and techniques such as foreshortening and perspective soon dominated the Japanese art world, as its artists set up studios in Paris and learned to emulate the Impressionists (an ironic twist, as the French Impressionists had drawn inspiration from the spatial planarity of Edo Period woodblock prints). The Western-style painter Kuroda Seiki (1860-1924) gained renown and in 1896 became the director of the Western Painting Section of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. The Japanese government realized that its national artistic canon could be as powerful an indicator of its "advancement" as its military, and the government initiated the annual Ministry of Education Art Exhibition (*Monbushô bijutsu tenrankai*, or *bunten* for short) in 1907, following the example of "the international fairs that served in much of the period as a potent means to illustrate the progress of various nations around the

²⁰ Donald Keene, "The Reign of Emperor Meiji," in Keene, Donald, Anne Nishimura Morse and Frederic A. Sharf, *Japan at the Dawn of the Modern Age: Woodblock Prints from the Meiji Era, 1868-1912; Selections from the Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001) 23-29, 23.

²¹ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 73.

world.”²² *Yōga*, or “Western-style painting” (洋画), had been born, and for the first half of the Meiji Period had answered Japan’s call to modernization.

In the twentieth century, *Sōsaku-hanga* was to the woodblock print what *Yōga* was to painting. Onchi and his colleagues embraced abstract art, a style that they believed ought to be “the main way of art” and was particularly suited to the print medium.²³ But *Shin-hanga*, too, included Western visual techniques, creating a hybrid of sorts. The increased predisposition for naturalism revealed itself in the subtle modeling of figures in *Shin-hanga* prints, as well as in a greater understanding and inclusion of foreshortening and perspective. Moreover, most Japanese artists—from any movement—of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who received academic training would have certainly received instruction in Western techniques. Gōyō, for example, accomplished what has been termed the “first successful nude in the Japanese print” after studying human anatomy from Western methods (although this training instilled in him such a sense of independence that the established publisher-artist relationship felt restrictive to him and his collaboration with Watanabe ended in 1918 after just three years).²⁴

Despite domestic Japanese pride in their mastery of Western visual techniques, particularly among *Shin-hanga* artists who considered their designs a successful blend of the two traditions, most Westerners initially—and patronizingly—lamented the changes to the traditional Japanese aesthetic. Several newspaper reviews of *Shin-hanga* exhibitions in American galleries deplore the loss of the esteemed “composition, the

²² J. Thomas Rimer, “Tokyo in Paris/Paris in Tokyo,” in *Paris in Japan: The Japanese Encounter with European Painting*, Takashina, Shûji and J. Thomas Rimer, with Gerald D. Bolas (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, and St. Louis: Washington University, 1987) 33-80, 40.

²³ Oliver Statler, “An Introduction,” in *Kōshirō Onchi, 1891-1955: Woodcuts, July 11-September 20, 1964* (San Francisco: Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, 1964) 3.

²⁴ Smith, *The Japanese Print Since 1900*, 17. The nude Smith refers to is: *Woman After the Bath* (1920), no. 26 in the catalogue.

economy of line and the suave delicacy”²⁵ Westerners so admired in Edo-period prints, though accepting this sacrifice for the greater good of the woodblock print, announcing “Art of Print Making Not Dead in Japan.”²⁶ Though one critic regrets that “[n]o longer do the mere slits that used to suffice as eyes in a Utamaro portrait of a great belle content the progressive Far Eastern connoisseur,” he continues to acquiesce: “It is enough that these new men, in hitching their steeds to the ancient tradition, should run the race with a few innovations in the stride...[But] Shinsui...another name that, I presume [*sic*], we shall have to learn...has unquestionable skill.”²⁷ Despite these early misgivings, however, Western consumers quickly developed a taste for *Shin-hanga* prints. The exact Western techniques they deplored became instead the source of admiration and esteem: the increased naturalism of the human figure, for example, would certainly have contributed to the sex appeal inherent to *bijin-ga*.

Watanabe capitalized on this Western appetite for *ukiyo-e* prints in his publishing business. Realizing the growing appeal of Edo Period woodblock prints abroad, he produced new printings from old woodblocks, creating “original first-edition prints that [he claimed were] free of any defects.”²⁸ Because he despaired of the contemporary shortage of woodblock prints of high quality, Watanabe began collaborating with artists to produce new “art prints.”²⁹ The publisher was instrumental in the development and success of *Shin-hanga*: his mission and dedication ensured the differentiation of *Shin-*

²⁵ Charles Messer Stow, “Art of People Exemplified in Japan’s Prints: Exhibition at Yamanaka’s Includes Earliest and Modern Forms,” *The New York Sun*, 11 June 1938, 10.

²⁶ “Art of Print Making Not Dead in Japan,” *The Art Digest*, 1 Feb. 1930.

²⁷ Henry McBride, “Modern Japanese Prints: New Masters Contrasted with the Old; Display at Yamanaka’s,” *The New York Sun*, 18 May 1935.

²⁸ Amy Reigle Newland, “*Shin-hanga*: Innovation from Tradition,” in *Printed to Perfection: Twentieth-century Japanese Prints from the Robert O. Muller Collection* (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2004) 19-31, Watanabe, quoted p. 21.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 22.

hanga from their Edo Period predecessors and from paintings. Eventually the inclusion of select Western visual techniques in *Shin-hanga* gained acceptance and Watanabe was celebrated (both domestically and internationally) for the innovations in the woodblock printmaking movement he initiated.

In spite of the “progress” the widespread adoption of such Western systems invited, a pervasive fear engulfed Meiji intellectuals towards the end of the nineteenth century. An anxiety for the endurance of their own culture, their own heritage, and the individual character of their own nation surfaced, initiating an ideological tension that would escalate throughout the Meiji and into the Taishô Periods. Premier novelist and intellectual Natsume Sôseki (1876-1916) celebrated the introduction of certain Western philosophies (his “My Individualism” of 1914 supports individual over absolutist solutions),³⁰ but he lamented the extent of the permeation of Western civilization: a “desperate situation” that endangered the survival of Japan’s own civilization.³¹

Additionally, the Japanese victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 gave birth to a newfound confidence. In fact, this national pride “...seem[ed] to have gone to the heads of some Japanese intellectuals who now asserted that Japan had nothing more to learn from the West and who decried the compromises that had been made to win Western approval.”³² The Japanese people had even become disenchanted with the Western nations they had previously emulated so blindly, to the extent that “the West was seen as a potential source

³⁰ Jay Rubin and Natsume Sôseki, “Soseki on Individualism; ‘Watakushi no Kojinshugi,’” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring, 1979), pp. 21-48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2384280>, accessed April 18, 2011, 24.

³¹ Natsume Sôseki, “Civilization of Modern-Day Japan,” *Kokoro: A Novel, and Selected Essays*, trans. Edward McClellan and Jay Rubin (Lanham, New York, and London: Madison Books, 1992) 257-284, 282-283.

³² Keene “The Reign of Emperor Meiji,” 28.

of social anarchy. This was often described with reference to...the casual intimacy of men and women, and the unpleasant boldness of the latter.”³³ The Meiji government scrambled to prevent the realization of this fear that Japanese women would learn from their Western counterparts. Short hair for women was outlawed in 1872 and the Meiji Empress was made a public example in 1873, when she indicated the proper female appearance: though she no longer blackened her teeth nor shaved her eyebrows according to previous standards of beauty, she kept her hair long and arranged in the traditional style.

A more concrete attempt to curb the insubordination of women was the aforementioned establishment of the *ryōsai kenbo*, or “good wife, wise mother” ideology. Many Meiji politicians agreed that the status of women in Edo Period Japan was “barbaric and inhumane,” acknowledging the necessity of reconstructing the role of Japanese women in society.³⁴ Yet in order to control the changes to this role, Meiji leader Nakamura Masanao (1832-1891) articulated and glorified a strictly domestic role in his essay “Creating Good Mothers” from the *Mei roku zasshi* magazine (March 1875); he declared: “Women...should provide the religious and moral foundations of the home, educating their children and acting as the ‘better half’ to their husbands...[T]hey were now to inherit a ‘sphere’ in which to exercise the powers to which all women seemed best suited.”³⁵ Such a system would ensure the success of future generations of Japanese citizens; these educated mothers would nurture the growth and development of the future (male) leaders of Japan. The enlightened Meiji bureaucrats, however, made sure to maintain the distinction between *fūfu dōken* (equal rights for husbands and wives) and

³³ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 73.

³⁴ Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 18. Sievers refers to Mori Arinori, Nakamura Masanao, and Fukuzawa Yukichi.

³⁵ Ibid. 22-23.

danjo dôken (equal rights for men and women). As Barbara Sato has expressed: “...Japanese-style Confucian ethics contained the prescription for the ‘good wife and wise mother’ philosophy...With male education the priority and women’s education an afterthought, gender divisions evolved in accordance with plans for the nation-state.”³⁶ The *ryôsai kenbo* philosophy therefore achieved a dual purpose: to restrain the progressivism of Japanese women by confining her to the home—safely out of the way of politics and the burgeoning Popular Rights Movement—and to promote the interests of the fledgling Japanese nation on the global stage.

A corresponding struggle to preserve the artistic traditions of Japan also occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century, in reaction to the Meiji government’s promotion of *bunmei kaika* (“civilization and enlightenment”). This phrase inspired the rush towards Westernization across all spectrums of Japanese society, politics, and art; through it, “[t]raditional Japanese values were challenged, and Western art was upheld as the definitive model.”³⁷ The damaging effects on the Japanese artistic heritage of the Impressionistic oil paintings of Kuroda Seiki and the sentiments of Shiba Kôkan (1747?-1818), who asserted that: “It is impossible to depict reality using Chinese and Japanese drawing techniques,”³⁸ inspired fear in many Japanese intellectuals. Two such intellectuals, Okakura Kakuzô (1862-1913) and like-minded Bostonian Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), responded by establishing the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1889. *Yôga* was

³⁶ Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 20.

³⁷ Shûji Takashina, “Eastern and Western Dynamics in the Development of Western-Style Oil Painting During the Meiji Era” in *Paris in Japan: The Japanese Encounter with European Painting*, Takashina, Shûji and J. Thomas Rimer, with Gerald D. Bolas (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, and St. Louis: Washington University, 1987) 21-32, 22.

³⁸ Quoted Ibid. 24. Though Shiba Kôkan was an Edo Period Japanese painter, he studied Western visual techniques from imported Dutch lithographs, which constituted the first exposure to Western developments such as perspective. Japanese artists often experimented with these techniques during the late Edo Period, though they did not predominate until the Meiji Period.

not included in its curriculum; instead, they promoted the rival and younger *Nihonga* (“Japanese-style painting,” 日本画) genre, which built upon Japanese traditions. Fenollosa and Okakura, through the Tokyo School of Fine Arts,³⁹ helped to formulate a canon of Japanese painting and sculpture (though *ukiyo-e* prints remained in the realm of “low art” until Taishō Period print designers elevated it to the status of “high art,” to be discussed later), which consisted of an “art...[that] was not only of individual concern but amounted to a social movement...urging the members to subordinate individual preferences to the advantage of the entirety of Japanese painting.”⁴⁰ Therefore art—like the good wife, wise mother—became a means of promoting the interests of the nation as a whole.

Nihonga as a movement, then, reacted to “the modern encounter [with foreign influences that] was too immediate, too rapid, and too profound,”⁴¹ and constituted a “search for individual expression and a sense of cultural distinctiveness.”⁴² It is precisely this quest for cultural distinctiveness that inspired *Nihonga* artists to engage with past artistic traditions, in order to differentiate their own artistic canon (increasingly dominated by *Yōga* paintings) from the Western canon. Kawabata Ryūshi, a *Nihonga* painter, describes his awakening to Japanese art while in Boston as almost a moment of conversion:

³⁹ Though the Tokyo School of Fine Arts initially excluded *Yōga*, the school eventually gave into pressure from its supporters and began to offer courses on Western-style techniques. (See Shūji Takashina, “Eastern and Western Dynamics in the Development of Western-Style Oil Painting During the Meiji Era.” Takashina, Shūji and J. Thomas Rimer with Gerald D. Bolas. *Paris in Japan: The Japanese Encounter with European Painting*. Tokyo: The Japan Foundation and St. Louis: Washington University, 1987. 21-32.)

⁴⁰ Doris Croissant, “Icons of Femininity: Japanese National Painting and the Paradox of Modernity,” *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, Ed. Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003) 119-140, 129.

⁴¹ Ellen P. Conant, “Introduction,” in Conant, Ellen P. with Steven D. Owyong and J. Thomas Rimer, *Nihonga: Transcending the Past: Japanese-Style Painting, 1868-1968* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1995) 12-14, 12.

⁴² Ibid. 13.

...I had for a long period of time paid no attention whatsoever to the classical art of Japan or to the traditions of Asian art. Indeed, my point of view was as one who was not even Japanese. And so it was that only after leaving my own culture, when I caught a glimpse of the art bequeathed to us by our predecessors, that I came to respond with admiration, and in us the same fashion that Western viewer might, to the beauties of Japanese art. And when I took consciousness in turn of the fact that I myself was from the nation that had created such splendid art, I soon felt something welling up in my heart...As I looked at the Scrolls of Events of the Heiji Period, I came, without explicitly acknowledging the fact, to embrace this "Japan."⁴³

The newfound sense of belonging and heritage expressed by Kawabata but not unique to him, propelled the conservative nature of the *Nihonga* movement and its manifestation in prints as *Shin-hanga*. *Nihonga* propagated the "growing sense of national identity"⁴⁴ that "encouraged [artists] to go forward by looking backward."⁴⁵ *Nihonga* and *Shin-hanga* artists desired to protect the indigenous artistic traditions they witnessed declining from the preference for Western-style art. This preservative tendency, however, incorporated not only artistic but also social conservation, particularly regarding the risks to traditional femininity that escalated during the Taishô years.

⁴³ J. Thomas Rimer, "'Teiten' and After, 1919-1935," in Conant, Ellen P. with Steven D. Owyong and J. Thomas Rimer, *Nihonga: Transcending the Past: Japanese-Style Painting, 1868-1968* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1995), 44-56, quoted pp. 53.

⁴⁴ Ellen P. Conant, "Tradition in Transition, 1868-1890," in Conant, Ellen P. with Steven D. Owyong and J. Thomas Rimer, *Nihonga: Transcending the Past: Japanese-Style Painting, 1868-1968* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1995) 15-24, 23.

⁴⁵ Ellen P. Conant, "The Tokyo School of Fine Arts and the Development of *Nihonga*, 1889-1906," in Conant, Ellen P. with Steven D. Owyong and J. Thomas Rimer, *Nihonga: Transcending the Past: Japanese-Style Painting, 1868-1968* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1995) 25-35, 25.

CREATING A NEW MODERNITY IN TAISHO

The concept of “fine art” as such was an imported construct introduced during the Meiji era. The word *bijutsu*, “美術, fine art,” did not enter the Japanese language until the Vienna International Exposition of 1873, when officials coined a direct translation of the German *schöne kunst* or “fine art.”⁴⁶ By 1907 with the establishment of the *Bunten* (the Ministry of Education Art Exhibition), the concept of fine art was firmly established, as was its importance to the development of a national identity and an international presence. With the introduction of the ideology of “fine art,” then, came the notion of the “artist,” as distinct from the artisan.

Persisting alongside and often conflicting with the desire to preserve national traditions was the Japanese individual’s drive for innovation and progress. Alicia Volk describes two examples of the new “types” that had emerged during the Taishō years, as an answer to the much-discussed topic of “the nature of the self”: one, the “revolutionary artist,” positioned himself within the dialogues of *Yōga*, *Nihonga*, *Shin-hanga*, and *Sōsaku-hanga*, while the other was the so-called *Atarashii onna* who rebelled against established gender roles. Volk continues: “The revolutionary artist was lauded for his sincerity and truth to personal vision, the new woman for her resistance to the rigid (and gendered) social structure of modern Japanese society.”⁴⁷ Although *Shin-hanga* artists may not have earned the description of “revolutionary” to the extent of their *Sōsaku-hanga* counterparts, the impulse for individuality permeated art circles of all types.

⁴⁶ Chiaki Ajioki, and John Clark, “The New Mainstream,” in *Modern Boy Modern Girl: Modernity in Japanese Art, 1910-1935*, ed. Jackie Menzies (Sydney, Australia: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1998) 55-80, 55.

⁴⁷ Alicia Volk, *In Pursuit of Universalism: Yorozu Tetsugorō and Japanese Modern Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2010) 79.

For the everyday Japanese citizen during the Taishō Period, the doctrine of *shūyō*, or “self-cultivation,” became a personal goal. Barbara Sato describes *shūyō* as a natural progression from the Meiji Period, when: “social mobility increased and the desire to ‘rise in the world’ (*risshin shusse*) presented a viable option for privileged men [and] self-cultivation came to be seen as key to man’s personal success.”⁴⁸ She continues to describe how women, too, strove for *shūyō*, as their “yearning for self-cultivation was rooted in common dreams about who they could become—hopes that beckoned just as strongly as those of their male counterparts.”⁴⁹ One key development from “pre-modern” to “modern” Japan was the dissolution of the rigid, Confucian-based class structure and the establishment of universal and compulsory elementary education in 1872. Social mobility was now an option for the Japanese; this included not only moving between classes but also the potential to physically move to the city (the Tokugawa regime had extremely strict regulations on travel during the Edo Period).

Mass women’s magazines became the forum for discussion and even pursuit of *shūyō* for the average Japanese woman starting in the early twentieth century. These magazines made public the otherwise private domestic sphere to which women were restricted and they were particularly empowering for the Japanese housewife. Although for the male editors of these magazines “the prime significance of self-cultivation was for women to discover the ‘essence’ of womanhood,”⁵⁰ and thereby promote their ideal femininity based in domesticity, “...judging from the women who seized the chance to

⁴⁸ Barbara Sato, “Commodifying and Engendering Morality: Self-Cultivation and the Construction of the ‘Ideal Woman’ in 1920s Mass Women’s Magazines.” *Gendering Modern Japanese History*. Ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005. 99-130. 102-103.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 105.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 113. Sato specifically refers to the editor Masuda Giichi of the magazine *Fujin sekai*.

assert their will through reader participation, mass women's magazines were sites for a partial redefinition of femininity.”⁵¹ In particular, mass women's magazines reconstructed ideals of beauty; advertisements often in Art Deco and Art Nouveau styles featured images of Western women (flappers and Greek goddesses), of the *Atarashii onna* and the *moga*, as well as of working women and women engaged in sports. Gennifer Weisenfeld writes: “Unhindered by restrictions of history, [the magazine] Shiseido could bring Marie Antoinette and the chic, kimono-clad modern Japanese ‘New Woman’ (*atarashii onna*) into conversation...”⁵² and by extension initiating a conversation of sorts between the reader and these kinds of women. These magazines enabled women—including ordinary housewives—to cultivate public personas and to interact with fellow Japanese women in spite of distance or household duties, widening the reach of and giving birth to more *Atarashii onna*.

In addition to the mass magazines targeted towards women with a definite consumer angle (consumption became a means of fulfilling national duty by supporting the burgeoning Japanese economy, according to Barbara Hartley⁵³), early twentieth century Japanese women began organizing and contributing to their own periodicals. The most famous of these was a literary and political journal titled *Seitô*, or *Bluestockings*,⁵⁴ founded in 1911. Though initially a purely literary endeavor, the periodical rose to the

⁵¹ Sato, Barbara, *The New Japanese Woman*, 89.

⁵² Gennifer Weisenfeld, “Selling Shiseido: Cosmetics Advertising & Design in Early 20th Century Japan,” *MIT Visualizing Cultures*, 2010, accessed April 17 2011, http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/shiseido_01/sh_essay01.html “Cosmopolitan Glamour,” paragraph 16.

⁵³ Barbara Hartley, “Performing Nation: Magazine Images of Women and Girls in the Illustrations of Takabatake Kashô, 1925-1937,” *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, Issue 16, March 2008, accessed April 18 2011 <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue16/hartley.htm> Paragraph 6.

⁵⁴ The title *Seitô* referenced a mid-eighteenth century group of English feminists who wore blue stockings (as opposed to the customary black) and gathered to discuss art and science. Though “Bluestockings” became a derogatory way of describing unfeminine women with novel behavior, Raichô and her peers reappropriated these implications with pride. (See Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2007. 3-4.)

forefront of the early feminist movement in Japan. In the words of its founder, celebrated feminist Hiratsuka Raichô (1886-1971): "...I was calling out to women to demonstrate their hidden talents through literature and to cast off the shackles of oppression. In short, I was saying that each and every one of us was a genius."⁵⁵ In issues of *Seitô*, contributors openly discussed taboo subjects such as free love, divorce, same-sex love, abortions and the radical notion that "We are women of the human species. We are not a species called woman."⁵⁶ Because of these articles and of their commitment to women's rights, which drove them to explore the Yoshiwara (the licensed prostitution district of Tokyo where no "respectable" woman dared venture and the subject of most Edo Period woodblock prints), the women of *Seitô* earned "notoriety as the 'training school' for 'New Women' or 'made-in-Japan Noras.'"⁵⁷ The latter pejorative referred to the controversial Henrik Ibsen play, *A Doll's House* (1879), in which the protagonist Nora "portended the changes that were soon to affect intellectual women in far-reaching parts of the world"; the dissatisfaction with the proscribed gender roles that defined and ultimately destroyed Nora's marriage resonated with the burgeoning feminist movement in Japan.⁵⁸ These so-called Japanese Noras of *Seitô*, who rejected their duties, embodied the antithesis of the *bijin*. The beauties that abound in Shinsui's prints and in those of his contemporaries convey an idleness and submission the *Atarashii onna* abhorred.

⁵⁵ Hiratsuka Raichô, *In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, trans. Teruko Craig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) 144. Raichô's oft-cited phrase, "In the beginning, Woman was the Sun," refers to the Shinto goddess Amaterasu, from whom the Japanese imperial line is allegedly descended. Raichô lamented the decline in status of the Japanese woman, from the position as god to one of subservience and confinement.

⁵⁶ Kiyoko Iwano, "Men and Women Are Equal as Members of the Human Race," in *Seitô*. 3.1 (January 1913), Bardsley, Jan, *The Bluestockings of Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2007) 160-163, 163.

⁵⁷ Teruko Craig, "Introduction," in Raichô, Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, trans. Teruko Craig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) vii-xiii, x.

⁵⁸ Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 14.

Mass media also fueled the concern for the fate of the Japanese woman by promoting the *moga* hype. The “modern girls” became immortalized in fashion magazines [Image #9] as well as in prints like Kobayakawa Kiyoshi’s *Tipsy* (1930) [Image #6]. Though he is considered a *Shin-hanga* artist, Kobayakawa’s work is conspicuous among the *Shin-hanga bijin-ga*. Unlike the women in Shinsui’s prints, the woman in *Tipsy* looks directly at the viewer, unembarrassed. Her lips are painted red and are parted, and her slightly closed eyelids convey an alluring look, one that is intentionally sexual unlike the almost accidental appeal of the more traditional *bijin* (perhaps a result of the voyeuristic view of these women, who seem unaware of any gaze). The figure’s bobbed hair is swept up with a comb, but a few strands escape and she wears a Western-style dress complete with pearls, a black bracelet, and a green ring on her left hand. She holds a lit cigarette in her right hand, and on the Art-Deco style bar counter in front of her rests a martini, the olive within it echoing the round polka dots on her dress. The background of the print is the same vivid red as that of her lipstick, a color often considered erotic; together with the explicit sexuality of the *moga* in popular imagination render Kobayakawa’s image risqué, though more blatantly than the subtle seduction of Shinsui’s *bijin*.

The abundance of images of bobbed haircuts, Western dress, and the aggressive flirtation such as is visible in Kobayakawa’s martini-swilling *bijin* led to a belief that the *moga* was more prevalent than she actually was. According to Barbara Sato, in 1925 99% of the women on the Ginza (the premiere fashion district) in Tokyo were still wearing kimono. She asks:

Where was the modern girl? By 1925 the fashionable aspects of consumerism were said to be everywhere visible, but the imaginary multiplication of the

modern girl is revealed by the discrepancy. What made the modern girl such a powerful symbol was not that she represented a small percentage of ‘real women,’ but that she represented the possibilities for what all women could become.⁵⁹

Sato demonstrates that the true power of the *moga* resulted not from her physical presence but from her unrelenting existence in the imagination of the broader Japanese public. The *moga* (and her male counterpart, the *mobo* or *modaan boi*) maintained a strong enough media presence to provoke anxiety and contempt. Ryûsei Kishida, of the Taishô Period, lamented the changed femininity the *moga* embraced:

Modern beauty is a busy beauty, a beauty for a quick glance. It is a beauty which strikes the eye and is not one for aesthetic observation. But the kind of beauty where the hair has a wet black look with a boxwood comb, is one where the beauty appears the more you look at it...In any case, it is sad that the tastes of old Japan are being lost...we must not leave them unregretted.⁶⁰

Though this author conceded that such changes are inevitable, his words echoed the prevailing attitude among Japanese men and expressed an aesthetic concern that preoccupied *bijin-ga* artists. The *bijin-ga* prints, exemplified in the work of Shinsui, Onchi, and Yumeji, therefore, attempted to sustain the old-fashioned beauty in order that it need not be regretted at all.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 49.

⁶⁰ Ryûsei Kishida, “*Modaango – Short-haired Missy*,” trans. John Clark, ed. Jakcie Menzies, *Modern Boy Modern Girl: Modernity in Japanese Art, 1910-1935* (Sydney, Australia: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1998) 122.

INDIVIDUALISM IN THE TAISHO ERA

In the modern Japanese art world, self-cultivation was a lesser goal than straightforward individualism. This new dogma revolutionized a tradition in which strict emulation of one's teacher had constituted the highest artistic achievement. In 1910, the poet and artist Takamura Kôtarô (1883-1956) wrote an essay titled "A Green Sun," in which he established artistic individualism with religious conviction and justified its necessity. In his manifesto, Takamura defended the personal vision of an artist, stating that because an artist's choices reflect his (for he was referring to male artists) own perceptions, one cannot dismiss a green sun within art even if the sun is not objectively green. The cult of individualism permeated not only artists' studios but intellectual and political discourse, too. Beliefs in the sovereignty of the individual caught hold of the Japanese public, which began to uphold tenets such as: "the individual ought to have as his sole purpose the satisfaction of his desires"⁶¹ and "the development of free and autonomous individuals was the most fundamental value by which state and society should be judged."⁶² *Shin-hanga* artist Hiroshi Yoshida once reportedly responded to a question of whether his landscape print represented what Japan actually looks like: "Well, I **felt** like that" [original emphasis],⁶³ and Watanabe himself has defended the individual agency of the artist, stating: "An artist should use freely whatever materials he pleases...[and] as long as the artist can express himself in the manner he pleases, even if

⁶¹ Sharon Hamilton Nolte, "Individualism in Taishô Japan," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Aug., 1984), 667-684, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2057149>. Iwano Hômei (1873-1920) quoted pp. 673.

⁶² Ibid. 670.

⁶³ Susan Ford, "Each for the Joy of Working: Hiroshi Yoshida, 1876-1950," *Montage Journal of Arts & Humanities*, 5-7, Aug. 11 1997, 5.

he draws on the strength of another...the artist [may] express his ideals.”⁶⁴ Even *Shin-hanga* artists, therefore, subscribed to Takamura’s philosophy of the supremacy of individual visions in art.

Because early twentieth century artists who chose to work with the woodblock print had embraced this tenet of individualism, their work simultaneously sought to elevate the status of their chosen medium. Traditional Japanese woodblock prints had grown out of a tradition of artisanship within an urban working class (the lowest class according to the Confucian order) and had subsequently fallen out of favor amongst the Japanese elite during the Meiji Period. Edo Period *ukiyo-e* print designers, working with a team of skilled craftsman and within the constraints of both their publishers’ interests and government censorship, would not have considered themselves “artists” in the way their Taishô heirs did. Indeed, the de-facto leader of *Sôsaku-hanga* Onchi Kôshirô “believed that the print is an important and rewarding medium, worthy of as much attention as painting.”⁶⁵ His daughter recollected how he defended the medium throughout his life: “Father spent much energy on promoting the artist-print development both inwardly and outwardly. Even several months before his death, he almost dragged himself out just to attend a conference for selecting works for international exhibitions abroad. And to our worries, he only answered: ‘I am the only committee-member representing print-artists. I must be there to protect our right.’”⁶⁶ Onchi’s conviction and determination propelled him to sustain and elevate the woodblock print in the face of

⁶⁴ Amy Reigle Newland, “*Shin-hanga: Innovation from Tradition*” in *Printed to Perfection: Twentieth-century Japanese Prints from the Robert O. Muller Collection* (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, in association with Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2004), 19-31. Watanabe Shôzaburô, quoted p. 19.

⁶⁵ Oliver Statler, “An Introduction,” in *Kôshirô Onchi, 1891-1955*, 3.

⁶⁶ Mioko Onchi, “My Father,” in *Kôshirô Onchi, 1891-1955: Woodcuts, July 11 – September 20, 1964* (San Francisco: Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, 1964) 8.

Westernization and a canonization of Japanese art that excluded prints in favor of painting, calligraphy, ceramics, and the like.

This negative attitude towards prints, together with the modernization efforts of the Meiji Period and the advance of photography, led to the genre of *ukiyo-e* prints “falling into terminal decline.”⁶⁷ Such a fate for woodblock prints might have prevailed had not early Taishō Japanese artists discovered that Western artists such as Vincent van Gogh, Mary Cassatt, and Claude Monet drew inspiration from *ukiyo-e* prints [Image #7]. Coupled with the realization that established Western artists, such as Toulouse-Lautrec, were able to develop their reputation through their prints rather than their paintings, Japanese artists began to regard the woodblock print medium with newfound esteem.⁶⁸

Like Onchi, Watanabe Shōzaburō understood the capability of woodblock prints to become “high art” and succeeded in realizing this potential through his production of prints, which emphasized high quality and execution. Watanabe persuaded artists to convert their paintings into print designs, and published limited editions to increase their value and contribute to their categorization as “true” art (unlike the infinitely reproducible Edo Period woodblock prints). He tracked down the young painter Shinsui, then only twenty-one years old, after seeing his *Before the Mirror* (ca. 1916) in a gallery displaying work from the school of Shinsui’s teacher, Kaburagi Kiyokata. Although Shinsui was accustomed to the flexibility of a paintbrush and often frustrated with the precision of woodblock carving and printing, his collaboration with Watanabe in 1916 constituted “the first time that artists were creating prints from the start *according to their own conceptions and compositions* [as opposed to those of their publishers or teachers],

⁶⁷ Yomigaeru *Ukiyo-e: Uruwashiki Taishō Shin Hanga/Beautiful Shin-Hanga: Revitalization of Ukiyo-e*, (Tokyo: Edo-Tokyo Museum, 2009) 8.

⁶⁸ Smith, *The Japanese Print Since 1900*, 13.

in the tradition of Edo Period prints.”⁶⁹ Though the artists still created prints according to the Edo Period workshop model, with a master-carver and a master-printer, the artist directly oversaw each stop of the process to ensure the realization of his own design. Watanabe’s son Tadasu, who took over the family printing business after his father’s death in 1962, recalled witnessing this process, remembering how specific Shinsui would be regarding the shade or intensity of a given color or whether or not to reveal the movement of the *baren*.⁷⁰

Sôsaku-hanga had, by nature, a more apparent dedication to personalization. The movement’s name alone implied its emphasis on the artistic process: these “creative” prints earned this denomination thanks to their “self-designed, self-carved and self-printed” motto. This insistence on the artist’s direct involvement in each step in the printing process constituted a rejection of “the archaic *ukiyo-e* idiom,” which the *Sôsaku-hanga* artists detested.⁷¹ For many *Sôsaku-hanga* artists, the creative process itself constituted the artwork more than the final product did. For this reason, in spite of the reproducibility of the medium, Onchi in particular considered “the actual printing [to be] the moment of excitement. He thought of each print as an individual work of art...” and at times would even go as far as to produce only one print from a single woodblock.⁷² His attitude, and that of his peers, distanced the woodblock print from its artisanal history, helping to elevate the medium to “high art” standards. Their dedication to self-expression

⁶⁹ Tadasu Watanabe, “Shinsui-san no mokuhanaga,” in *Itô Shinsui Zenshu*, Vol. 6 (Tôkyô: Shûeisha, 1981-1982) 73. My translation and emphasis.

⁷⁰ A tool used during the printing process. After applying colors to the carved woodblock according to the artist’s directions, the printer would place the paper on top and rub the back surface with the *baren* to apply the color evenly. A twentieth-century innovation that *Shin-hanga* artists pioneered involved applying varying pressure to the surface so that a textured background appears. See Shinsui’s *After the Bath* (1917), Image #1.

⁷¹ Alicia Volk, “Japanese Prints Go Global: *Sôsaku Hanga* in an International Context,” in *Made in Japan: The Postwar Creative Print Movement* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Art Museum, 2005) 5-23, 7.

⁷² Smith, *The Japanese Print Since 1900*, 15.

and their investment in each individual print as a finished product reveal how the *Sôsakuhanga* artists, like their *Shin-hanga* counterparts and those in *Yôga* and *Nihonga*, subscribed to the prevailing Taishô doctrine of individualism.

ESCAPISM IN *BIJIN-GA*

Itô Shinsui, often hailed as the “modern-day Utamaro,” owed his success to this predecessor, an artist whose prints helped shape pre-modern standards of beauty. The print designer Kitagawa Utamaro (1753?-1806) has become nearly synonymous with the *bijin-ga* genre in art historical discourse; his bust-length portraits of women from all social strata inspired a hype for beauty prints that not even the Western buyers of *Shin-hanga bijin-ga* could match over one hundred years later. His contemporaries considered Utamaro a naturalist: his treatment of all types of women, from the elite *dayû* courtesan, whose services only the supremely wealthy could hope to engage, to the housewife to the lowest of prostitutes, created an oeuvre that functioned as a “veritable taxonomy of the feminine.”⁷³ But Julie Nelson Davis maintains that his *bijin-ga*, together with the *ukiyo-e* genre as a whole, constituted a “sustained illusion,”⁷⁴ constructing a fantasy world in which these idealized women existed. Utamaro’s viewers, therefore, “were unaware, chose to ignore or became inured to the facts that underlay the glamorous façade, as well as to the status of the ‘women of play’ as commodities.”⁷⁵

Indeed, series such as his 1794-95 *Twelve Hours in the Yoshiwara* emphasize the leisurely life of a courtesan, illustrating the episodes in which she attends to her coiffure, her make-up, her correspondence (most likely comprised of love letters), and preparing for the arrival or departure of her customer. Every hour of the day has a corresponding image; the viewer becomes so absorbed in Utamaro’s delicately constructed realm of

⁷³ Julie Nelson Davis, *Utamaro and the Spectacle of Beauty*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007) 63.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 62.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 36.

frivolity and luxury that he/she hardly notices that the courtesan sleeps for only one hour of the day.⁷⁶ *The Hour of the Snake* [Image #2] represents the beginning of the cycle, from eight until ten in the morning, when the *bijin* has emerged from her bath. In the print, the courtesan stands with a blue-and-white patterned kimono falling from her left shoulder to reveal one breast and some of her stomach; she raises the kimono in her right hand to dry her ear. Her black hair is piled atop her head and tied back with a white bow; a single strand has escaped to frame the left side of her face. Her attendant, clad in a purple kimono decorated with white outlines of birds, a green trim with white flowers and a red *obi* sash, kneels beside her, offering up a black lacquer tray on which rests a teacup with designs as intricate as those of the textiles. Her hairdo is immaculate, coiled on top of her head, and the fold of her knee peeks out from beneath her robes suggestively. Both women look towards the left side of the composition, as if interacting with someone (likely a client or a lover) outside the frame.

Though Shinsui and the twentieth-century *bijin-ga* artists may have borrowed the “After the Bath” trope from Utamaro’s *The Hour of the Snake*, their compositional debts are more evident in prints such as his *Geisha from the House of Sumiyoshi Before a Mirror* [Image #3]. The beauty in this print has her back to the viewer and though the composition is cropped to Utamaro’s signature bust-length portrait size, he illustrated enough of her torso to indicate her blue on white patterned kimono slipping off her left shoulder. This casual wardrobe accident furthers the conventional notion that the *bijin* believes she is alone while simultaneously giving prominence to the nape of her neck, an erogenous zone according to traditional Japanese thought. The woman’s hand creeps onto

⁷⁶ In Edo-period Japan, every “hour” corresponded to roughly two hours in contemporary terms. The hours were not fixed intervals, however, but changed according to the amount of daylight per day. See Davis, *Utamaro and the Spectacle of Beauty*, pp. 119-141.

the back of her neck, applying white makeup; one can see the sections of skin she has already covered, blinding white in contrast to the more neutral natural skin tones.⁷⁷ Her black hair is piled neatly on top of her head, kept in place with yellow hairpins favored by Edo Period courtesans (the same hairpins are visible in the hair of the courtesan in *The Hour of the Snake*). The black lacquer frame of the mirror that rests at the bottom left corner of the composition appears less brilliant than the shining strands of her hair; but the mirror allows the woman's face to be visible in its reflection. Unlike in *Tipsy*, however, the gaze of the *bijin* is directed not at the viewer but at herself; she is wholly absorbed in her own actions.

The correlations to Shinsui's print [Image #1] are abundant. Shinsui depicts the classic *bijin* crouched, kneeling by a bucket as she wrings dry a blue and white cloth. A bright, orange-red kimono envelops her lower body, allowing her toes to peep out from underneath, and revealing the form of her legs and stomach through its darkened folds and contours. A white layer of cloth sheaths her midriff, yet her chest is completely exposed—the pink rosininess of her left nipple is just visible beneath her arm. Her skin appears smooth and is pristinely pale, in contrast with the deep black of her hair and the color of her kimono, so bright it is almost garish. Her nakedness, coupled with the mundane act of bathing, contributes to the sense of viewer-as-voyeur: that we, while looking upon this print, have stumbled upon an intensely private moment, though the woman (like her Edo Period forebears) believes herself to be alone.

The woman's face, like that of the subject of *Geisha from the House of Sumiyoshi Before a Mirror*, is turned away from the viewer; only her chin and a small portion of her

⁷⁷ In the ARTstor image [#3], the white pigment of her makeup contained a chemical that has faded over the years to the dirt-like color we see now. A later printing of the print reveals how the image was intended to look.

cheek are visible. In positioning her thus, Shinsui ensures that the highly fetishized nape of her neck maintains a prominent position and also denies her the individual expression that might appear in her eyes and face—something Utamaro’s earlier print allows. Shinsui’s *bijin* exists solely to be admired, however: the fine lines of the stray hairs that have escaped her bun and the flowing contours of the outline of her skin indicate a technical achievement equal to that of the innovative gray swirls of the background that reveal the movement of the *baren* during the printing process. Shinsui’s *After the Bath* situates his *bijin* in direct dialogue with her Edo Period predecessors, both in terms of the composition and subject matter. The vantage point from behind the subject, engaged in activities surrounding her beauty, refers to Utamaro’s *Geisha from the House of Sumiyoshi Before a Mirror* while the moment chosen—between the bath itself and the public state of being fully clothed—recalls images such as *The Hour of the Snake*. Shinsui departed from his Edo forebear in his treatment of the woman’s physicality, however. He discarded the traditional two-dimensionality of Utamaro’s figures in favor of a careful application of foreshortening and subtle shading, particularly evident in her hands and feet and the folds of the woman’s kimono.

Though Utamaro’s subjects are clearly courtesans, evident from the presence of the attendant, the context of the series from which *The Hour of the Snake* stems, and the title of *Geisha from the House of Sumiyoshi Before a Mirror*, the woman in Shinsui’s print has a more ambiguous social status. Typical models for *Shin-hanga* artists were waitresses and maids, whose virtue may not have been as impeccable as a housewife’s, but with whom the artists probably had more experience. The expansion of *bijin-ga* subjects beyond the realm of courtesans and prostitutes in the twentieth century reveals

another element of woodblock “pictures of beautiful women” that *Shin-hanga* artists updated and redefined. Twentieth-century *bijin-ga* artists at once broaden the genre to include a wider variety of types of women, while at the same time associating these women with the courtesans of Edo Period *bijin-ga*.

Like Shinsui, Yumeji’s designs promoted conservative and traditional notions of feminine beauty. Though he is now associated with “the urban flavour of his age,” his women are more nostalgic than they are modern.⁷⁸ Almost twenty years older than Shinsui, Yumeji would have witnessed more of the rapid changes transforming Japan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and would therefore have had greater regrets regarding the increasing independence of Japanese women. As Chiaki Ajioka has expressed it, Yumeji’s regrets “epitomised [Taishô] culture...his dreamy, languid young women in kimono represented an ‘ideal’ woman: not one of the so-called ‘new women’ who advocated women’s rights in the magazine *Seitô* (Bluestocking), but passive women who accepted their place, be it in the drawing room of a comfortable middle class home or the gaudy interior of a brothel, and conformed rather than rebelled.”⁷⁹ Yumeji’s agenda, therefore, coincides with Shinsui’s, despite divergences in their respective aesthetic ideals.

Yumeji’s *Frog* (published posthumously, ca. 1935) [Image #5] realizes this agenda to promote the traditional kind of ideal woman over the increasingly widespread Taishô ideal. He preserves the traditional *ukiyo-e* style outline in his *bijin-ga*, but his lines appear hatched, with a sketch-like quality implying a certain hastiness or casualness to his technique. Yumeji also pays less attention to anatomical accuracy than Shinsui: the

⁷⁸ Smith, *The Japanese Print Since 1900*, 20.

⁷⁹ Chiaki Ajioka, “Lure of the City,” in *Modern Boy, Modern Girl: Modernity in Japanese Art, 1910-1935*, ed. Jackie Menzies, (Sydney, Australia: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1998) 29-54, 48.

woman's hands are somewhat awkward as they arrange her hair above her head, and the foreshortening of her left hand is so clumsy as to make the hand nearly unreadable. Her skin is a pure, even white, interrupted only by the pink pinpricks of her nipples, her light pink lips, and the black of her nostril, eyes, and eyebrows. Her hair is wispy and tinged with blue, and Yumeji succeeds in creating the impression of real, soft hair, in contrast with the metallic, wiry strings of the hair of Shinsui's belle, giving it "the kind of beauty where the hair has a wet black look with a boxwood comb" that Ryûsei Kishida had described as the traditional ideal, the beauty that "appears the more you look at it."⁸⁰

She is, however, in a state of undress similar to that of her *Shin-hanga* cousin: her only clothing consists of two patterned cloths, which adorn her from her angular waist down. A thin, pink-and-blue striped *obi* sash encircles her waist, with one loose end draped across her lap. The second fabric is a deep blue with white floral patterns, hugging her body on the left to indicate the fold of her legs as she kneels on the floor. The other side, separated from the left by the *obi*, spills outward with mountainous creases. Next to the figure rests the only accoutrements a *bijin* (and, by extension, a Japanese woman) would need: a light blue bottle, rounded with a sliver stopper on top of its neck, most likely containing perfume or another beauty product, and a comb (the boxwood comb?) resting at the center of a crumpled piece of fabric or paper on the ground. The woman in *Frog* is not one who would have been contributing to *Seitô*, nor would she have had the political drive to follow in anarchist Kanno Suga's footsteps, a woman who upon her death sentence in 1911 declared: "We die for our principles. Banzai!"⁸¹ Instead, she

⁸⁰ Kishida, "Modaango – Short-Haired Missy," 122.

⁸¹ Quoted in Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 139. Suga was the first female political prisoner in modern Japanese history to be executed. "Banzai!" is an exclamation used in moments of triumph or celebration, similar to the English "Hurrah!"

recalls the submissive compliancy of women under the Tokugawa regime of the Edo Period.

Not even Kôshirô Onchi contested such rhetoric, in spite of the more “progressive” aesthetic *Sôsaku-hanga* artists embraced. Though this movement belonged to the avant-garde of modern Japanese art, Onchi’s *Woman After the Bath* from 1930 [Image #4] espoused the same philosophy towards feminine beauty as did his rivals, Shinsui and Yumeji. While Onchi often favored abstract compositions, his female figures tended to support this philosophy (of the six Onchi prints in Smith’s *The Japanese Print Since 1900*, three depict *bijin*, and two of those are “After the Bath” images). Like the *bijin* of the others, Onchi’s is clad in a kimono only from the waist down. Its waves of dark- and light-purple stripes echo the waves of her black hair, cascading in front of her titled face. Onchi discarded the delicate naturalism Shinsui and Yumeji employed in favor of over-simplified and somewhat awkward modeling, achieving a rough three-dimensionality through simplified shading and suggesting the woman’s figure rather than delineating it. The contours of the woman’s arm, face, and torso are indicated with only two tones: a pale purple that is almost white, and a gray-lavender. Only the woman’s earlobe, lips, and one visible nipple stand out with a pink hue, matching the color of the polka-dotted washcloth she uses to wash the nape of her neck. Her eyelashes, too, stand out from the colors of her skin, in the same definitive black as her hair.

A brown swath of color frames the left side of the image, forming the only straight line of the composition and situating the woman within some unidentified physical space. The line is broken only by the curve of her back and of the cloth encircling her waist, a construction that serves to emphasize these curves. Onchi relied on

the interplay of shapes and blocks of color, rather than on outline, as did both Shinsui and Yumeji. The brown background has a light gray outline, but the shape of the woman herself emerges through differences in value or tone, marking a clear departure from the traditional *ukiyo-e* technique, which relied on the foundation *sashiage*, or “line drawing.” As a result, Onchi’s print appears blurred, in comparison with the carefully controlled and linear works of Shinsui or his *Shin-hanga* contemporaries. Onchi’s determination to design an unfocused illustration of the *bijin* emphasizes her hazy, dream-like beauty.

All images depict a woman fresh from a warm bath, whose semi-nude figure is prominently on display. Just as the twentieth century images represented a nostalgic fantasy for tradition, Utamaro illustrated an idealization of a lifestyle full of romance, ignoring the fact that in patriarchal Edo society a woman’s value resided in her purpose. For most women, this purpose entailed their role in creating alliances through [arranged] marriages and perpetuating a male line. Therefore, Davis argues, “one of the reasons the Yoshiwara (and images of the Yoshiwara) flourished was that it offered men the allure of romance often lacking in the home environment. The women of the Yoshiwara were encouraged to nurture elaborate fantasies of tenderness and passion...” regardless of the commercial nature of such affection.⁸² Such fantasies became necessary since marriages were typically business transactions devoid of emotional regard during the Edo Period and because courtesans were rarely considered marriageable. Kaibara Ekiken’s influential *The Greater Learning for Females* from the 1670s epitomizes the general attitude towards women in the Edo Period, recounting the “orthodox ideals of Tokugawa society [which] held that women should be kept ignorant...[and] offering general principles for

⁸² Davis, *Utamaro and the Spectacle of Beauty*, 109.

educating women and specific injunctions to submissive behavior.”⁸³ Although Utamaro’s courtesans were certainly no less subservient than their Taishô heirs years later, they fulfilled a similar escapist function, offering both intellectual and sexual stimulation.⁸⁴ Utamaro’s perpetuated the desires the Yoshiwara realized, becoming a form of romance portable and accessible to those who may not have been able to afford a physical encounter in the Yoshiwara, Shinsui’s *bijin-ga* embody the desire to preserve the traditional, subservient Japanese woman, rapidly disappearing to make way for the *Atarashii onna* and the *moga*.

Thus in offering a romantic and erotic image of the Japanese woman, disappearing from popular culture and Taishô-era society, these twentieth-century *After the Baths* further conformed to their heritage. In the *bijin-ga* of Shinsui, Onchi, and Yumeji, the artists offered a means of escaping the realities of the modern Japanese woman, considered appalling in her brazen pursuit of literary expression, Western fashion, or most especially, equal political and social rights. Because female activism throughout the late Meiji and Taishô periods, primarily pursuing “ideas [that] inspired fear and loathing among [most] male rulers,”⁸⁵ went so far as to persuade the Lower House of the Diet to approve female suffrage in 1931 (though the Upper House vetoed the movement and women would not receive the vote until the U.S.-directed constitution granted them this right after World War II), a conservative backlash movement was born. An exhortation for a return to the so-called “traditional,” apolitical woman surfaced in order to escape from what the Japanese woman now stood poised and eager to become.

⁸³ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 32.

⁸⁴ Courtesans were highly trained in the art of conversation, as well as in classical instruments and singing. The entertainment they provided often extended far beyond the sexual realm.

⁸⁵ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 133.

CONCLUSION: TWENTIETH-CENTURY *BIJIN-GA* AND PRESERVATION

The push towards the evasion of the changes of modernization through the preservation of traditional models had its origin in the Meiji Period, and provided a foundation of decades for the efforts of Taishô-era *bijin-ga* print designers. Taishô efforts to preserve traditions increased in fervor and determination as the threats to these traditions escalated. It is no coincidence that *Shin-hanga* emerged during this era, as Watanabe's answer to the "discovery of the foreign [that] was accompanied by an equally momentous rediscovery of the native,"⁸⁶ and that Shinsui and Watanabe began their collaboration, establishing the young artist's reputation overnight on the immediate success of his *bijin-ga*. Though some print designers, such as Kobayakawa Kiyoshi, proved willing to depict the *moga* in their prints [Image #6], most artists shied away from illustrating such brazen females, who directly engage the viewer and flaunt their bobbed haircuts, Western-style dress, cigarettes and alcoholic drinks. Indeed, Kobayakawa's image depicts a rather unflattering portrayal of the *moga*, evident in its somewhat scornful title, *Tipsy*, and in her self-possessed and shameless sexuality. Instead, the popularity of the *bijin-ga* of Shinsui, Yumeji, and Onchi resulted from their designs of demure, sensual beauties who recalled their Edo Period predecessors—*not* the modern women of the era.

After the Bath, one of Shinsui's first collaborations with Watanabe, epitomizes the kind of print that functioned "as a symbolic message to Japan's women to become

⁸⁶ Alicia Volk, "A Unified Rhythm: Past and Present in Japanese Modern Art," in *Japan & Paris: Impressionism, Postimpressionism, and the Modern Era* (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2004), 38-55, 40.

repositories of the past.”⁸⁷ This symbolic message resurfaced in various points throughout Shinsui’s career (such as in his *After the Bath* from 1929) [Image #10] and proved to be almost universal among *bijin-ga* artists of the Taishô era. Even female *bijin-ga* painter Uemura Shôen (1875-1949) passionately defended the genre, declaring beauty to be a lofty goal but cautioning: “In order to paint the beauties of the present age, of course, I have to depict the manner and customs of today with great care. However, if things from the present time are drawn as they actually are, it would be ‘vulgar.’ Therefore, it must be combined with aspects of an earlier age.”⁸⁸ Uemura, like Shinsui, may have depicted the manner and customs of today through stylistic choices, but she combined her use of foreshortening with the *bijin-ga* model, inherited from “an early age.” Because *ukiyo-e* had historically been considered a “low” art in and of itself, due to its preoccupation with daily life and association with the merchant class, modern Japanese artists strove to distance themselves from any profanity. They intended their *bijin-ga* to inspire lofty ideals, and in extensive writings on the genre many appealed to the universality of beauty, claiming that: “A beautiful woman is as a flower in nature.”⁸⁹ No artist could afford to let a Bluestocking or a *moga*, despised for her writings on free love or her reputation for promiscuity, mar the exalted territory of universal beauty. Early twentieth century *bijin-ga* artists condoned “[a]ttractive beauty but not indecency,”⁹⁰ a philosophy to which Shinsui, Onchi, and Yumeji steadfastly adhered.

⁸⁷ Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 15.

⁸⁸ Hamanaka Shinji, “*Bijin-ga*: The Portrayal of Beauties in Modern Japan,” trans. Paul Wijsman, in *The Female Image: 20th Century Prints of Japanese Beauties* (Tokyo: Abe Publishing Ltd and Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2000) 10-16. Uemura Shôen, quoted pp. 15. Though Shôen may have supported a conservative female appearance and aesthetic, her success as a female painter in the male-dominated interwar art world proves her to be a “New Woman” of sorts, albeit perhaps a reluctant one.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Kaburagi Kiyokata, quoted p. 15. Itô Shinsui was an apprentice of Kiyokata.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Kiyokata, quoted pp. 15.

These “After the Bath” images, therefore, functioned as this “symbolic message” exhorting women to return to past ideals “rather than [to become] pioneers, with men, of some unknown future.”⁹¹ These *bijin-ga* artists, by nature of their chosen genre, allude to the past and, by nature of their social context, call for a return to these previous societal norms. Hanna Papanek argues:

In societies that are changing very rapidly, ambiguous signals are presented to women [i.e. to modernize and to remain the same]. Fears are often translated into attempts to prevent changes in their roles. They become the repositories of ‘traditional’ values imputed to them by men in order to reduce the stresses men face. Resistance to women’s greater participation in economic and political life may be felt especially strongly among groups most exposed to rapid change and ambivalent about it.⁹²

This ambivalence towards change Papanek mentions certainly pertained to early twentieth century Japanese (male) intellectuals, who had begun to question, condemn, and regret Meiji-era Westernization policies. The “Woman After the Bath” prints, exemplifying trends across genres in Japanese imagery from the Taishô Period, embody male fears regarding Japanese women in the face of the widespread changes introduced since the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The women in these prints emerge from their baths, beautiful, sensuous, and ignorant, manifesting a means of coping with rapid cultural transformations for the men who designed, produced, and consumed these images.

The Japanese print designer of the Taishô-era revealed his implacable stubbornness in his presentation of a meek and idle woman in his definition of modernity. According to Joshua Mostow, Japanese art from the twentieth century became “a world

⁹¹ Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 15.

⁹² Ibid. Quoted p. 15.

peopled almost exclusively by women, who serve[d] as the repositories of a national and ‘traditional’ beauty, while their men compete[d] in the modern West...” and established themselves in the global art market.⁹³ Their contributions to the national discourse of the nature of modernity in Japan relegated women to their previous social positions in the private, domestic sphere, though women themselves were actively entering the public realms of literature, publishing, labor movements, and popular protest, to name but a few of the activities of the “new women” of Japan.

Despite their adherence to diverging aesthetics, Taishô printmakers employed the traditional trope of the *bijin*, appropriating its history as an expression of fantasy and ideals to construct such a fantasy for the early twentieth century. While Edo Period consumers of *bijin-ga* prints sought to fulfill a desire to perpetuate an encounter in the Yoshiwara (or, for those of less considerable means, to simulate such an encounter), in the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration, *bijin-ga* became a means of first creating and then preserving an idealized vision of Japan’s now-lost past. In both situations, the woman represented in the print became preferable to the average Japanese woman the print designers would have encountered; Utamaro’s women offered an alternative to conjugal arrangements founded on business rather than on affection, and Shinsui’s provided an image of an idle woman whose value resided in her beauty, not her political or literary voice.

This conceptualization of the Japanese woman was widespread and highly desired during the Taishô years, as is evidenced in the appearance of the traditional *bijin* in the prints of Onchi and Yumeji as well as in those of Shinsui. In fact, *bijin-ga* resurfaced in

⁹³ Joshua S. Mostow, “Introduction,” in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003) 1-16, 13.

abundance throughout the print movements of the twentieth century, establishing the careers of many *Shin-hanga* and *Nihonga* artists in particular. These artists worked to promote a genre of prints that simultaneously realized their conceptions of “Japaneseness” and “modernity,” blending the woodblock print medium and heritage with imported visual techniques from Europe. Though the *Sôzaku-hanga* artists expanded their oeuvre beyond pre-modern themes, some traditional subjects remained, as Onchi’s *Woman After the Bath* demonstrates. Clinging to this trope, Taishô *bijin-ga* artists deliberately selected their subjects from the past, not the present, ultimately condemning the genre (particularly within *Shin-hanga*) to the images of “over-sweet Japanese beauties...degenerating quickly into tourist art” after World War II.⁹⁴ The women fresh from a bath, sensual and oblivious, perpetuate a fantasy of an ideal woman as a means of coming to terms with the social and political changes bombarding Japan in the early twentieth century.

⁹⁴ Smith, *The Japanese Print Since 1900*, 17.

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Image #1



伊東深水、浴後 1917

Itô Shinsui, *After the Bath*

Color woodblock print

Image Source:

http://www.mailchristies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=5347147

Image #2



喜多川 歌麿

Kitagawa Utamaro, *The Hour of the Snake* (*Mi no koku*), from the series *Twelve Hours in the Yoshiwara* (*Seirô jûni toki tsuzuki*), c. 1794-5

Color Woodblock Print

Image source: <http://www.ikipedia.de/135.php>

Image #3



喜多川 歌麿

Kitagawa Utamaro (1753?-1806)

Geisha from the House of Sumiyoshi Before a Mirror (Left: 1796; Right: a 20th century reproduction)

Color woodblock print

Image Source:

Left: ARTstor <http://library.artstor.org/library/iv2.html?parent=true#>

Right:

http://www.artelino.com/archive/artist_catalog_show.asp?alp=&art=432&cay=1&pp=3&pp1=1&rp=25&rp1=1&rp2=25&lvl=2&sea=&tie=Utamaro%20Kitagawa%201750-1806%20-%20Beauty%20in%20front%20of%20Mirror%20-%20artelino

Image #4



恩地 孝四郎, 髪 1930

Onchi Kôshirô, *Woman After the Bath (Hair)*

Color Woodblock Print

Image Source: <http://local.yahoo.co.jp/detail/event/p10012352/?disp=photo>

Image #5



竹久 夢二, かえる c. 1935

Takehisa Yumeji, *Frog*

Color Woodblock Print

Image Source: Smith, Lawrence. *The Japanese Print Since 1900: Old Dreams and New Visions*. New York and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983. 71.

Image #6



Kobayakawa Kiyoshi, *Tipsy* (1930)

Color Woodblock Print

Image Source: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts-reviews/taisho-chic/2008/05/16/1210765147735.html>

Image #7



Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Père Tanguy*, 1887-88 oil on canvas

Image Source: http://www.artchive.com/artchive/V/van_gogh/pere_tanguy.jpg.html

Image #8



Kageyama, Kôyô. *Mogas in beach pyjama fashion*, 1928

Image Source: Clark, John. "Introduction." *Modern Boy, Modern Girl: Modernity in Japanese Art 1910-1935*. Ed. Jackie Menzies. Sydney, Australia: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1998. 15-24. 17.

Image #9



Shiseido Graph covers [Above: 2, cover, August 1933; Below: 5, cover, November 1933]
Image Source: Weisenfeld, Jennifer. "Selling Shiseido: Cosmetics Advertising & Design in Early 20th Century Japan." *MIT Visualizing Cultures*, 2010. Accessed April 17 2011.
http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/shiseido_01/sh_essay03.html "Marketing Beauty" section.

Image #10



Itô Shinsui, *After the Bath* (1929)

Color Woodblock Print

Image Source:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/97585179@N00/2587677101/in/photostream>