



**Takehisa
Yumeji**

Takehisa Yumeji

Nozomi Naoi

Sabine Schenk

Maureen de Vries



Hotei Publishing



Nihon no hanga - Amsterdam

Colophon

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On the cover

Dutch lantern

From the series *Yumeji's masterpieces*

(see fig. 1.5, p. 15)

Takehisa Yumeji



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Foreword

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 Snowy wind
 From *The ladies' graphic*
 (see cat. 47, p. 118)

It gives me great pleasure to present the first catalogue in a Western language on the Japanese artist Takehisa Yumeji (1884–1934). When we began collecting almost twenty-five years ago, we were immediately drawn to the twentieth century, in particular, to the prints of artists such as Torii Kotondo, Hashiguchi Goyō and Itō Shinsui. For us, the portrayal of the female form by these masters was the quintessence of Japanese prints of this era. Somewhat later, we were introduced to the adherents of the *sōsaku hanga* ('Creative print') movement and were equally enthusiastic about the expressive strength conveyed in their oeuvre.

In Japan, there is almost no escaping the art created by Takehisa Yumeji during the Taishō and early Shōwa eras. Even today his distinctive imagery pops up on phone cards, stationery, handkerchiefs, door curtains (*noren*) and T-shirts. The ubiquity of his work inspired us to visit the many Yumeji museums around Japan—six in all—that outnumber the institutions dedicated to the internationally celebrated artists Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige. The more we saw of Yumeji's art, the more we wished to acquire pieces for the Nihon no Hanga collection: it currently holds over 400 Yumeji items. To our surprise we also realised that the enormous interest in Yumeji was limited to Japan. Eager to learn more about him, but not versed in Japanese, we discovered that there was little information on him in Western languages. I was resolved to set the record straight—this publication is the result of that effort.

I was fortunate enough to meet Nozomi Naoi and Sabine Schenk, who both have undertaken extensive research on Yumeji. They were willing to publish aspects of their findings in the essays in this volume, and I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to them for their participation and cooperation with Nihon no Hanga on this project. Maureen de Vries, assistant curator at Nihon no Hanga, contributed descriptions of the pieces selected from the collection, and curator Chris Uhlenbeck wrote a short historical introduction. Robert Schaap's elegant sense of design has added to the book's visual appeal. A difficult task rested on the shoulders of Amy Reigle Newland, who was required to shape the individual efforts into a uniform publication, and I am grateful for her dedication and excellent work.

It is my hope that this publication will introduce Western audiences to an artist who, while praised in his native Japan, has been neglected far too long on the international stage.

Elise Wessels

Director

Nihon no Hanga, Amsterdam

Notes to readers

Japanese names and terms have been transliterated in accordance with the modified Hepburn system of romanisation. The order of Japanese names is generally given in the native form, with surname preceding first name, unless otherwise known in the West. Personal names, place and era designations appear in their original accented form, except when they have entered into common English usage (e.g. Tokyo not Tōkyō).

Titles of individual artworks and series titles of prints, books and journals are supplied in both English translation and in the original (transliterated) Japanese, wherever possible. There are a number of works discussed in this publication, which were not given titles by the artists, so where possible, we have attempted to provide descriptive titles. In the main texts, the titles of artworks, journals, as well as the names of organisations and institutions, are usually cited in English translation followed by the original (transliterated) Japanese, except if the work is otherwise better recognised by its original language title such as the Minatoya (not 'Harbour Shop'). For reasons of readability '*Yumeji gashū*' is employed after the first mention in each of the sections, rather than the more cumbersome *The Yumeji collection of work*.

Dates given on artworks are indicated as such; when undated, an approximate date has been supplied, wherever possible. Dates of artists, writers and so forth are generally provided at first mention and only when known. Yumeji's age is listed using the Western calendar, but according to the Japanese system his age would have been calculated based on

the traditional system of 'inclusive counting' (*kazoe-doshi*), in which a child was in 'year 1' at birth. In the Yumeji accounts included in this volume we have retained his age based on this system and the Western equivalent then follows in square brackets. Signatures and seals are given when documented. An abbreviated bibliographical form is used in the endnotes, with full citations included in the Bibliography. Sizes are given in centimetres, height before width; unless indicated, all works are woodblock printed (this does not apply to drawings and sketches).

Contributors to the catalogue section are indicated as such:

NN	Nozomi Naoi
SS	Sabine Schenk
MdV	Maureen de Vries

Takehisa Yumeji and his times

Chris Uhlenbeck

The life and career of Takehisa Yumeji (1884–1934) bridged distinctly different eras. He came of age in the later Meiji (1868–1912), and was at the height of his artistry during the comparatively liberal Taishō (1912–1926) and the early Shōwa (1926–1989) when Japan's political landscape was undergoing tremendous change.

Unprecedented social, cultural and economic transformation characterised the Meiji era as Japan sought to develop as a modern nation state and evolve a sense of national identity. The country's victory in the Sino-Japanese (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese (1904–1905) Wars inspired patriotic fervour in many quarters and resulted in a growing recognition of the country as a world power on the geo-political stage. For Prime Minister and founder of Waseda University, Okuma Shigenobu (1838–1922), Japan was 'no longer a Japan for Japan, but a Japan for the world', reflecting a newly found national confidence and a reversal of the inward-looking attitude prevalent during the previous Edo period (1615–1868).¹ However, Japan's treatment by other Western powers following the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese conflicts, and even the First World War, whereby it was awarded neither the spoils of war nor acknowledged on equal footing with Western powers, caused deep resentment within the government and the populace.² Such turns of events helped spawn strong nationalist sentiment, particularly among the military and in certain official sectors.

Both the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese Wars greatly impacted daily life. The demand of the war efforts resulted in intensive industrial production and incidents unfolding abroad contributed to expanded coverage in printed media. During the Sino-Japanese War the technology of woodblock-printed broadsheets (and imagery) was still in use, but the explosion of mass-media reporting led to the increased adoption of mechanical printing technologies to meet this boom. By 1911, and at the dawn of the Taishō era, the number of newspapers tripled to 236 titles, with the circulation of the seven biggest dailies reaching one hundred thousand copies.³ The manufacture of books also appears to have reached new heights, aided by metal typesetting and the development of alternatives for woodblock printing as a means of illustration—lithography, photography and collotype—that relegated woodblock-printed images and texts to the realm of 'art'. Magazines, too, appeared in ever-greater numbers, catering to all tastes and readerships. This burgeoning of the publishing industry went hand in hand with a growing literate population: school enrolment levels were almost one hundred percent and information could now be widely distributed. And it was not only the printed media that witnessed advancement: radio, cinema and gramophones were likewise being integrated into the country's cultural fabric.

Women as consumers

Societal changes at the end of the Meiji and the beginning of Taishō also extended to the position of women. Women became a cog in the Japanese capitalist machine as the industrial revolution demanded a larger labour force for mass production, even though economically and legally their status lagged far behind their male counterparts. However, the evolution of the media and the rise of women as consumers led to a flourishing of women's magazines. While many were short lived, their influence cannot be underestimated: some were

principally practical how-to magazines acquainting Japanese women with modern domestic gadgets or imported Western styles, including fashions, all of which were significant in creating a space for women's independent identity. Such magazines can be considered among the first items of mass consumerism and the more successful titles had editions of several hundred thousand. Women bought them, read them and participated in them, sending in contributions that offered commentary, posed questions and requested advice. Another aspect of Yumeji's work comprised illustrations for these women's magazines as well as other types of journals and newspapers (see cat. 37–65).

A society in ferment

The rise of socialism in Japan paralleled developments in Europe and resulted from the widening gaps in wealth due to the rapidly growing capitalist system of production. Between 1900 and 1917 alone, the number of factory workers tripled and social discord surfaced as the country was repeatedly rocked by strikes and riots. The government reacted by enacting a policy aimed at suppressing socialism, with the potential of the mass media a worrying trend, '... recipes for omelets and pork cutlets to which the government did not greatly object', but 'pornography and socialism, to which it did, found increasingly wider audiences'.⁴ It banned socialist parties and touted propagandistic stances that centred on 'traditional' Japanese values stressing harmony and cooperation, familial unity and a respect for ancestral customs. The trade unions aligned themselves with the leftist political parties (Socialist, Communist and Marxist), limiting their influence on a central government dominated by centre right and right-wing parties and ideologies.

A changing art scene

From the later 1800s, foreign magazines and art publications channelled the information and imagery arriving from the West, and they served as catalysts for artistic change. By the early twentieth century, when Yumeji was embarking on his own career, Western-style painting had been subsumed into the curriculum of recently established art schools. It offered a parallel visual mode to traditional Japanese art. During this period, too, Japanese artists sought training abroad in Europe or the United States. Upon their return to Japan they introduced new sets of values, not just relating to social issues, but also to art practice. It was a period of intense discussion and interaction among those inhabiting the cultural landscape. Artists (and writers) were torn between their Japanese roots and incoming Western values, between the increasingly apparent social inequalities and governmental propaganda that argued for national unity and the exclusion of individualism. Art associations formed and disbanded, and the discourse surrounding art and its creation sowed the seeds for experiments in all fields of artistic endeavour. Despite the fact that Taishō society was on one level a society in ferment, on another it was a crucible for vibrancy and innovation in the arts and literature, often equated with *la belle époque* in Europe: a world of clubs, beer and dance halls, coffee shops, department stores and images of the self-assured 'modern girls' (*modan gaaru* or *moga*) strolling along the avenues of fashionable Tokyo districts like Ginza. This era's cultural milieu is often described as one representing what some Japanese scholars label as 'Taishō Romanticism' (*Taishō roman*). While at times a problematic term, 'Taishō Romanticism' reflects the emphasis on a romantic vision of the world in which women's independence was paramount, and the emergence of the female consumer explains in part the success of Yumeji's mass-produced designs with this audience. European fashion took Japan by storm and the affluence resulting from the booming economy during the First World War allowed many of the nouveau riche to partake of the offerings of modernity.

The repression of freedom of thought and expression

Another term frequently associated with this era—‘Taishō democracy’ (*Taishō demokurashii*)—has been coined to reflect an age perceived as possessing relative liberalism, an age wedged between the more hierarchical Meiji era and the growing militarism typifying the later 1920s and the 1930s. Political participation increased markedly with the elimination of tax qualification for voters and with men receiving full voting rights in 1925 (women much later in 1945). But the practice of censorship and the control over ideas was firmly entrenched in Japanese history, and in the early twentieth century the dramatic societal changes led to repressive laws as a means to deal with protests, strikes and violence.⁵ The most celebrated of these was the ‘High Treason Incident’ of 1910 when a socialist-anarchist plot to assassinate the Meiji Emperor was foiled. Twenty-six left-wing activists were arrested on questionable charges and twelve were executed in January 1911.

Even within the seeming liberality of Taishō, measures of control targeted trade unions and official trade unions were banned until after the First World War. Established in 1911 in the aftermath of the ‘High Treason Incident’ and in an effort to monitor the development of Marxism and socialism, as well as the activities of political groups and individuals, the ‘Special Higher Police’ or ‘Thought Police’ further extended its long arm following the passage of the Peace Preservation Law in 1925. This gave the government the opportunity and excuse to eradicate the Communist party, and the raids that followed were soon widened to include the hunt for any person with ‘deviant’ ideas (i.e. liberals and radicals). With the mounting holding power of an increasingly nationalist and imperialist Japanese government in the 1930s, repression became more commonplace, and severely restricted the freedom of thought and speech. The government also expected artists to take an augmented nationalistic expression in their choice of subject matter and to lend moral support to the war effort, particularly from 1931 with the commencement of the ‘Fifteen Years War’. Artists were sent abroad to oil the propaganda machine with the depiction of victorious Japanese troops or to teach in the occupied territories. The majority complied, some grudgingly and others more enthusiastically, with the rules and restrictions because they provided one method of gaining access to the tools and materials required for their artistic production. The general attitude of the artists seems to have been one grounded in practicality, aimed at survival and not necessarily imbued with strong political feeling.

As the essays in this publication demonstrate, the historical, social and cultural events of the later Meiji and Taishō profoundly impacted the course of Yumeji’s art: the arrival of Japan on the world stage, the emergence of a middle class, the creation of a multi-faceted cultural scene, the move towards the emancipation of women and the build-up of a totalitarian state were all aspects that contributed to Yumeji’s artistic vision.

Notes

1. Duus, ed., *The twentieth century*, 654.

2. After the Sino-Japanese War, Russia, France and Germany intervened to force Japan’s return of the Liaodong peninsula and Port Arthur to China, even though Russia then immediately occupied Liaodong, and the Germans and English moved into parts of China. Japan was outmanoeuvred following the Russo-Japanese War by the Russians and never received reparation payments from the defeated. These events, coupled with the hardships endured by the Japanese for the war effort, led to public outcry and riots (e.g. the 1905 Hibiya riots). Following the First World War and

despite its alliance with the Allies against Germany, Japan was not seen as coequal with other nations.

3. Gluck, *Japan’s modern myths*, 171.

4. *Ibid.*, 174.

5. For example, the censorship of the content of prints was well established in the Edo period. From the early eighteenth century, the portrayal of contemporary events, erotic imagery and political ideas were banned in woodblock prints.