

Japanese wood-block painters

I - Hiroshige Utagawa

In ancient times, although the emperor of Japan reigned in Kyoto the core of power, of government, of economy and of social life resided in Edo, the name given to Tokyo at that time (1603-1868).

It was when the artistic talents were explored. Japanese found inspiration in the Italian Renaissance, and the British Victorian London. Although today's modern Tokyo may look very "Western" on the surface the spirit of Edo is still there.

Japanese woodblock prints are often referred to as Ukiyo-e. The word Ukiyo-e was originally Buddhist and meant 'sad world'. The Ukiyo-e paintings of the Edo era were very popular and are very popular even today. Some were painted by hand, but it is as prints that they became widely known.

One of the masters was **Hiroshige Utagawa**. Hiroshige was born at Yayosugashi of Edo in 1797. He was the son of Anda Genemon (a member of the firefighting brigade, maintained by the Tokugawa Shogunate). Hiroshige's real name was Juemon, but he was called Tokutaro in his childhood.

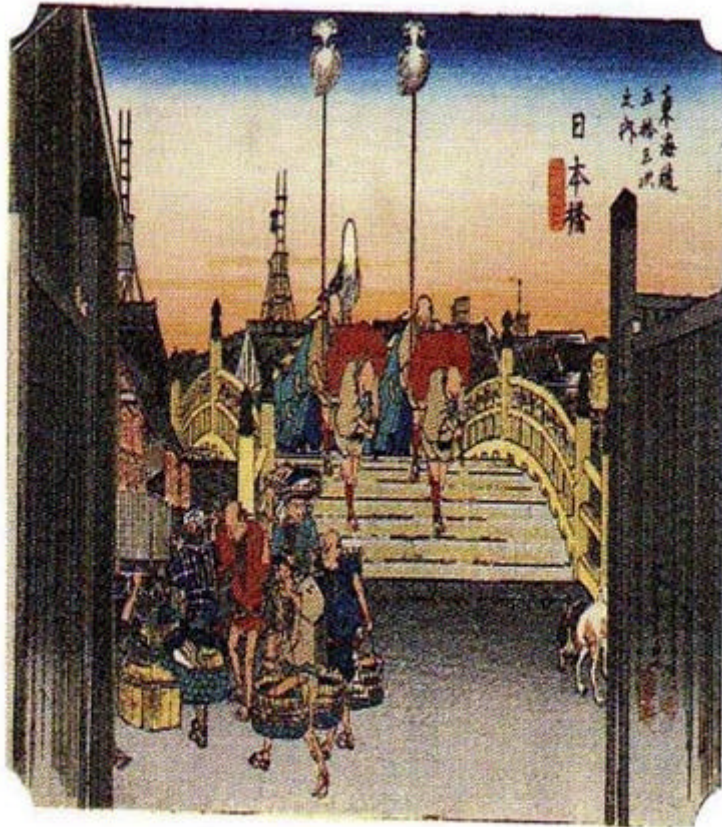
At the age of 17 Hiroshige published his first art book under the name Hiroshige Utagawa.

In 1832 Hiroshige Utagawa made his first trip down the Tokaido Highway from Edo to Kyoto, joining an official procession sent by the Shogunate to present horses to the Emperor in Kyoto

The Tokaido Highway extended 500 kilometers from the eastern capital of Edo (now Tokyo), to the old capital of Kyoto. It was the most important road in Japan during the Edo period.

At his return to Edo, based on sketches done during the trip, Hiroshige drew a series of pictures depicting scenes from each one of the way stations on the Tokaido Highway.

He collected that work in a book
"Views of Fifty-three Stages"
also known as Tate-e Tokaido



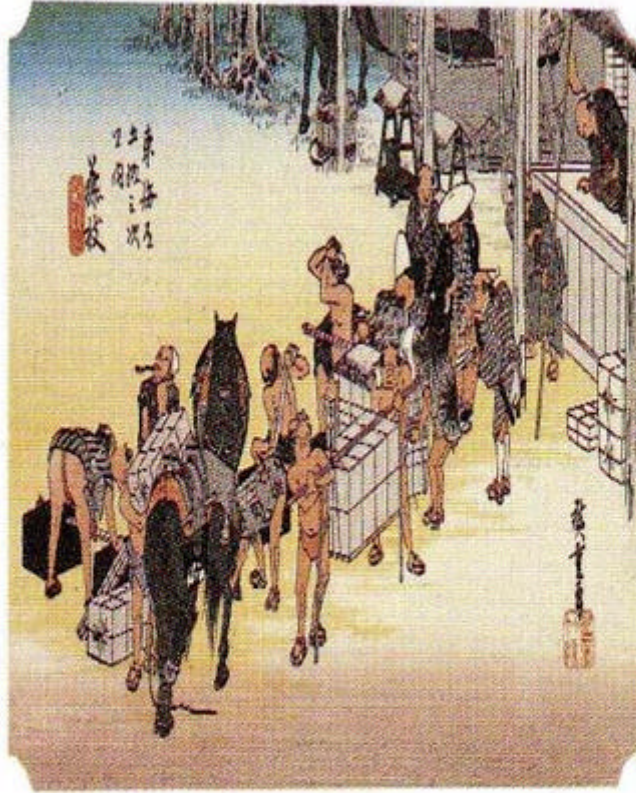
1 日本橋

NIHONBASHI



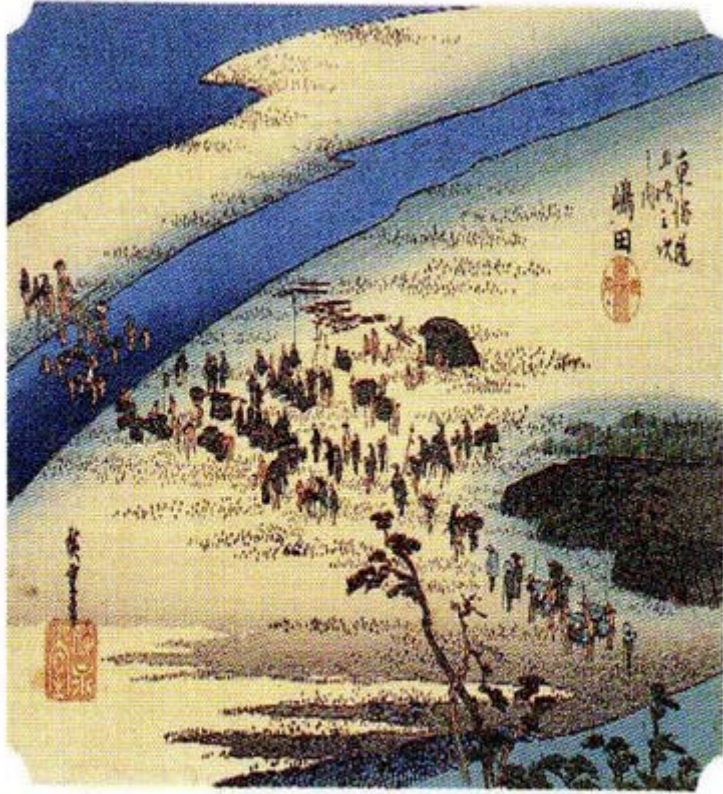
2 品川

SHINAGAWA



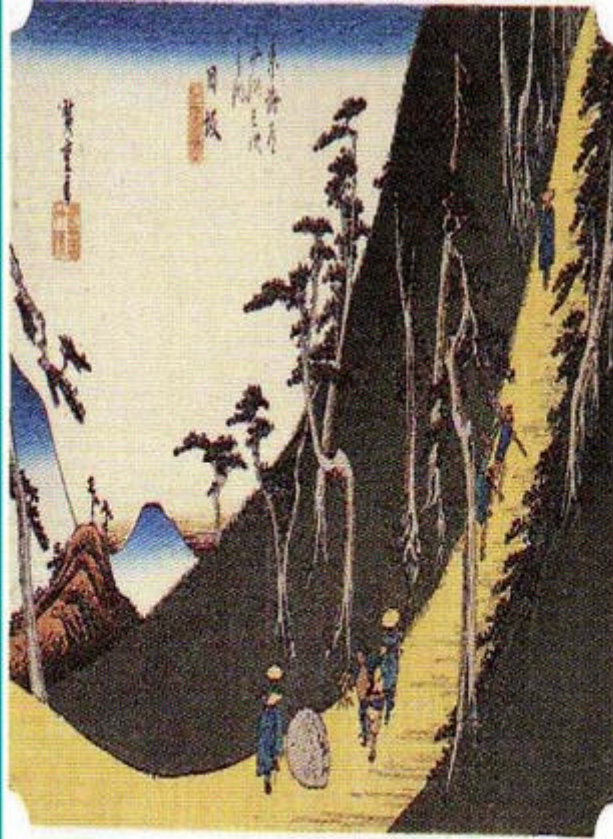
23 藤枝

FUJIEDA



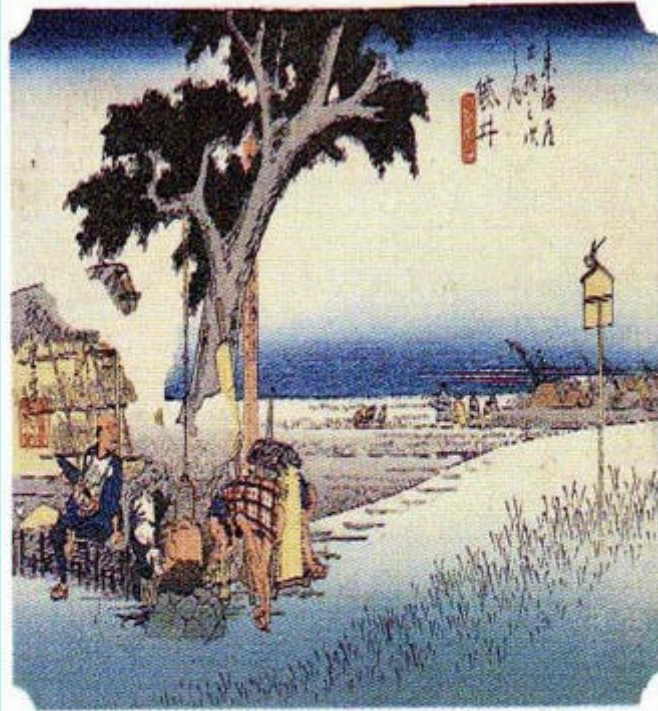
24 嶋田

SIMADA



26 日坂

NISSAKA



28 袋井

FUKUROI



31 舞坂

MAISAKA



32 荒井

ARAI

Hiroshige was one of the outstanding masters of this delicate medium. Early on, like artists in the Japanese "Big Six" (**Utamaro**, **Sharaku**, and **Kiyonaga** among others) he did portraits of beautiful women, actors, and historical figures. One outstanding aspect of Hiroshige's work is that his images have shaped Westerners' conventional conceptions of the "exotic" landscape of early-and mid-nineteenth-century Japan (just before and during the time that the country was opened to the West). It is said that the Ukiyo-e art of drawing had a great influence on such post-impressionists as **van Gogh** and **Gauguin**, and resulted in the development of the new techniques of realism. During the craze for Chinoiserie and Japonaiserie in Europe during the nineteenth-century, Hiroshige prints were some of the most influential among Western painters. Van Gogh famously copied two of Hiroshige's midcentury views of Edo, *The Plum Garden at Kameido* and *A Sudden Shower on the Ohashi Bridge Near Ataka* both of which appear in the Royal Academy of London.

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Bibliography on request