

# GLOBETROTTERS' JAPAN: PEOPLE

## FOREIGNERS ON THE TOURIST CIRCUIT IN MEIJI JAPAN

BY ALLEN HOCKLEY

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### Picturing "the Japanese"

Exotic architecture, quaint villages, historic sites, and scenic natural wonders comprised the "must see" list for late-19th-century globetrotters visiting Japan. No trip would be complete, however, without face-to-face encounters with Japanese people. How Japanese lived, the occupations they engaged in, their pleasures, pastimes, manners, customs, dress, and coiffure were equally attractive to curious globetrotters—but the hurried pace of globetrotter travel precluded any development of deep or extended personal relationships. Despite the effort of guidebook authors to facilitate communication by providing rudimentary vocabularies, globetrotter engagement with native Japanese was primarily a visual experience.

Face-to-face encounters across race and culture can be status neutral in the moment they occur—both parties have equal opportunity to observe the otherness of their counterpart. But globetrotter photography tipped this balance in favor of Westerners by convincingly replicating face-to-face experiences with intimate portraits and authentic-looking scenes of daily life. These images afforded travelers the opportunity to scrutinize Japanese people at length and at leisure. They also silenced those who were photographed, stripping them of the ability to look back, to speak in their own defense, and to correct any misunderstandings a foreigner might acquire from a momentary encounter. The seamless transition from a face-to-face to a face-to-photograph experience empowered globetrotters with an opportunity to re-inscribe these images with meanings, associations, and sensibilities that often were far removed from the lived experience of actual Japanese.



*A sampling of photos of Japanese people published in Brinkley's Japan, 1897–98.*

The commercial underpinnings of globetrotter photography in Japan significantly enhanced this power differential. As with any commodity enterprise, market demand determined the viability of specific products. Photographers made the technical and aesthetic decisions necessary to produce engaging images but the predilections of their globetrotter clientele circumscribed the range of marketable subjects. Just as globetrotters exhibited preferences for specific views of the places they visited, so too did they gravitate towards images of Japanese people that best represented their experiences and, more often than not, their expectations.

To understand globetrotter photographs of Japanese people, then, we need to examine both sides of this symbiotic relationship. Of globetrotters we need to ask what aspects of Japanese life and customs they found most attractive and why they were predisposed to these subjects. For photographers, we need to examine how their studio practices, tailored to meet the demands of a foreign market, skewed their clientele's understanding of Japanese people. Both lines of inquiry speak to a broader and perhaps more important issue. Commercial enterprises that exploit cross-cultural encounters for material gain—such as globetrotter photography—open up the possibility of

misrepresentation and stereotyping. We must ask, then, if the globetrotter photographs represent an accurate record of Japanese life, manners, and customs in the late-19th century.

A small number of globetrotter travel narratives recount experiences in treaty-port photography shops, but none of the authors reflect on their inner deliberations when purchasing photographs and compiling albums. Other available resources capable of shedding light on the sensibilities and expectations of globetrotters toward photographic images require assessments of their value as historical evidence. Hundreds of late-19th-century photo albums have survived and, taken all together, reveal general preferences for certain subjects; but it also becomes apparent that each album is unique to the globetrotter who selected the images.



*The “accordion”-style album was a typical small, portable album globetrotters might acquire; in the background, a Felice Beato album from 10 years earlier.*

Published travel accounts, most of which were illustrated with photographs or engravings based on them, provide more insightful sources, in that descriptive text often elucidates the author’s attitudes toward the subjects of the illustrations. Like photo albums, however, travel accounts are highly personalized documents. They offer informative but individualized perspectives, and any attempt to generalize from them runs the risk of inaccuracy. In short, globetrotters represent a diverse group, and it is misleading to assume the existence of shared values, attitudes, and expectations from highly personal sources such as photo albums and travel narratives.



*A sampling of travel books about Japan written by globetrotting tourists in the late-19th century.*

Captain Frank Brinkley's *Japan: Described and Illustrated by the Japanese* (the source of most of the illustrations in this Visualizing Cultures unit) provides a more reliable estimation of globetrotter preferences. Each set of *Japan: Described and Illustrated* consists of 10 folio-sized volumes of essays on a variety of topics written by eminent Japanese authorities and edited by Brinkley. 16 different editions were published between 1897 and 1898, many with evocative names such as the Mikado Edition, Edition de Grand Luxe, and the Lotus Edition.



*Brinkley's 10-volume set, Japan—the deluxe edition from which the illustrations in this unit have been taken.*

More exclusive editions were limited to as few as 25 sets and were available only by subscription. Larger editions numbered 750 to 1000 sets. 11 editions were illustrated with 230–260 hand-colored albumen photographs pasted in as illustrations; five lower priced editions used halftone reproductions. Estimations based on surviving bibliographic data suggest that the project required a minimum of 344,500 original photographs. K. Tamamura, a prominent Yokohama photographer, was commissioned to supply the images but was overwhelmed by the size of the order and enlisted the support of other photographers, including his main competitor, Kusakabe Kimbei.



### *Capt. Brinkley & the Selling of Meiji Japan*

*Captain Frank Brinkley's Japan: Described and Illustrated by the Japanese is the source of the photographs in this unit. 16 different editions of this 10-volume opus were published between 1897 and 1898, including several particularly sumptuous numbered sets. 11 of these editions included pasted-in hand-colored albumen photographs. It is estimated that the whole project required a minimum of 344,500 original photos—a staggering number that eventually required the services of a number of Yokohama studios.*



*Brinkley's long career in Japan coincided almost exactly with the Meiji era itself (1868–1912). He arrived as a young British naval officer in 1867, resigned his commission not many years afterwards, and passed away in 1912, the same year as the Meiji emperor. Brinkley married the daughter of a former samurai, learned to read and write—as well as speak—Japanese, and in a short time emerged as a major publicist and propagandist for the Meiji regime. After early services as a teacher of artillery to the new imperial navy and lecturer in mathematics at what would later become Tokyo Imperial University, he became owner and editor of the Japan Mail newspaper, a position he held from 1881 until his death. This ambitious 10-volume set is an excellent sample of the carefully constructed and highly selective picture of Japan that commercial photographers presented for foreign consumption. This costly project was undertaken in the immediate aftermath of Japan's stunning victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95. It received generous financial support from the Japanese government, and its many chapters were all "Written by Eminent Japanese Authorities and Scholars" (as the title page proclaimed). As with many other foreign friends of the modern Japanese state, Brinkley's services were acknowledged by the award of the third Order of the Sacred Treasure by the Meiji emperor.*

The value of Brinkley's *Japan* as a historical resource lies in its extensive use of original photographs. Globetrotters constituted the primary clientele for Tamamura, Kimbei, and other commercial photographers who committed photographs to the Brinkley project. Most of the images came straight from the inventories globetrotters would have confronted when purchasing photographs to commemorate their travels. The scale of the Brinkley project further enhances its value, for its encyclopedic coverage of Japanese life and customs surpasses that of any single globetrotter album and provides an indication of the thematic range of images globetrotters encountered in commercial studios.

Even this elaborate and voluminous source, however, is not without problems. Although Brinkley is the person most often associated with this publication, the Boston publisher J.B. Millet conceptualized the project and brought it to fruition. Recognizing the inherent financial risk in an undertaking of this scale, Millet solicited and received generous support from the Japanese government, which at the time (immediately following its victory in the Sino-Japanese War) had a vested interest in promoting a specific image of Japan to the international community. Brinkley's *Japan* is compromised by this official involvement. Although the photographs it contains cover a broad range of places, people, and activities, problematical themes were judiciously avoided. All parties involved in the project—Brinkley, Millet, and the Japanese government—strove to present what was in their minds an attractive and uncontroversial image of Japan.

The analysis that follows utilizes the sources introduced here. Brinkley's *Japan* offers a range of photographic imagery, roughly consistent with that sought by globetrotters. Albums and travel narratives provide individualized examples and anecdotal evidence that help explain globetrotter interest in specific subjects and themes. Additionally, reference is made to a rare but representative 1893 price list of over 2,000 souvenir photographs published by Kimbei, who was one of Yokohama's leading commercial photographers. Collectively these sources offer insights into globetrotter attitudes towards the Japanese people they encountered (or imagined encountering) during their travels and memorialized with photographs they added to their albums.

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Brinkley's *Japan* courtesy of Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

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Representation & Misrepresentation

Images of individuals and small groups of Japanese, mainstays of the genre of photographs referred to in the world of commercial photography as "costumes," were acquired in two ways. Photographers attuned to the patterns of globetrotter travel ventured out along popular routes photographing human activities their clientele would encounter. These *in situ* images showing Japanese engaged in the affairs of everyday life were photographed in homes, shops, markets, and along streets and highways.



*Contrasting methods of photographing vendors: a staged studio shot (left) and a "snapshot" taken on the street (right).*

[gj20409] [gj20704]

Profitable studios also employed models, whom they outfitted with garments and accouterments highlighting gender, age, class, and occupational differences. These studio-posed images constitute the vast majority of the "costumes" sold by commercial photographers.



*A closer look at the studio shot reveals the edges of the background screen and scattered rocks.*



Photographs of shopkeepers in busy markets, farmers working their fields, tradesmen on job sites, and craftsmen plying their skills convey a snapshot sensibility but, in truth, the slow exposure times of late-19th-century cameras meant that photographers had to pose their subjects in order to acquire saleable images.



*“Itinerant Merchant” has an impressive sharpness of detail. While outdoor shots may have been more natural than studio shots, the long exposure time still required subjects to pose for a long while.*



*In this photograph of Main Street, Yokohama, the long exposure time resulted in ghost-like apparitions of a moving jinrikisha and figure with an umbrella amidst more stationary figures in Western and native dress.*

*“Main Street, Yokohama”*

[g]10811]

Studios provided a much more controllable environment. Many studio-posed photographs thus adopt the conventions of portraiture with the subject seated or standing against a neutral backdrop. These images focus viewers' attention on details of coiffure and costume, which were often highlighted with hand coloring.



*“Tokyo Beauty” (left) is a delicately hand-colored photograph from Brinkley’s Japan. A different woman appears in the identical pose and setting in Kasumasa Ogawa’s book Celebrated Geisha of Tokyo, published around 1892. Ogawa used the identical studio setting for many of his geisha portraits. Although the photos in Brinkley’s 10-volume opus came from a number of well-known Japanese photographers, no attributions are given.*

*“Tokyo Beauty”*

[gj20301]

The studio environment, however, could also appear stark. To liven up their images, commercial photographers often utilized props and painted backdrops to suggest architectural interiors or outdoor settings. These artificial environments were especially necessary when photographing occupations and activities that required an appropriate temporal or spatial context. The need to stage most of their images invested commercial photographers with an inordinate amount of authority to determine how Japanese people would be presented to a foreign audience. Misrepresentation was not only possible but also probable given these modes of production.





*Two photos titled "Feeding Chickens" appear in Brinkley's Japan. The painted backdrop and hand-tinting differ, but this highly artificial motif appears to have specific guidelines as to the poses of the women.*

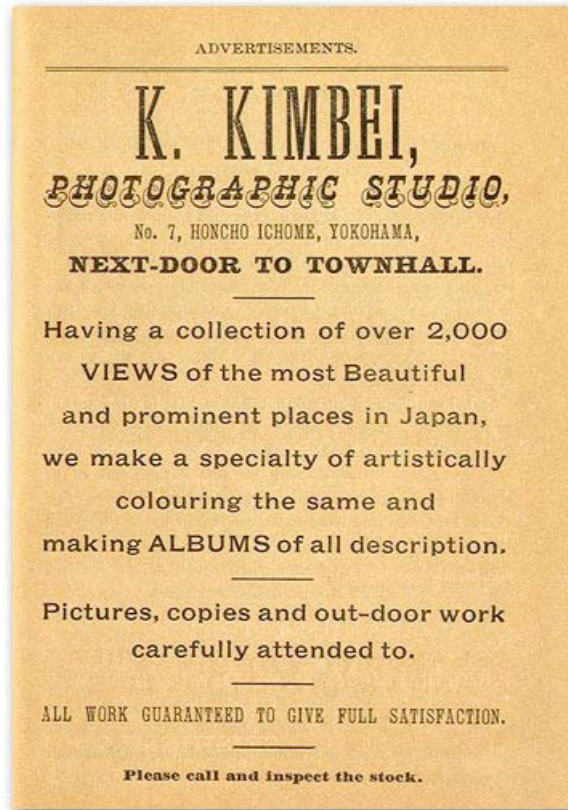
[gj20807] [gj21004]



*The appearance of an identical rooster and chick in the two photos reveals their artificial nature.*

Other studio practices furthered the possibility of misrepresentation. Following protocols established in the 1860s by Felice Beato, the pioneer of Japanese photography, commercial studios organized their inventories into two broad categories: scenic views and costumes. Kimbei's 1893 pricelist exemplifies this practice. The 1,700 scenic views in his inventory were organized according to the routes and destinations most favored by globetrotters. The remaining 400 photographs depicted Japanese people. Unlike his scenic views, this portion of Kimbei's list conveys no organizational scheme and appears to have been compiled in an *ad hoc* and additive manner.

*Kusakabe Kimbei's 1893 ad touts "over 2,000 VIEWS," artistic coloring and "making ALBUMS of all description." 1,700 scenic views in his inventory were organized according to the routes and destinations most favored by globetrotters. The remaining 400 photographs depicted Japanese people.*



The arrangement of inventories into views and costumes was replicated in most extant globetrotter albums. Views typically appear first and are usually arranged to reflect the itineraries of individual consumers. "Costumes" follow, often in disproportionately fewer numbers, indicating scenic views were the primary means by which globetrotters memorialized their travels. Among the latter, *in situ* scenes and studio-posed images were randomly mixed together, suggesting no effort on the part of travelers to distinguish between the two or to question the artificiality of photographs staged in a studio. For globetrotters, the subjects themselves were compelling; the means by which they were photographed mattered little.

The scenes-and-people dichotomy had the effect of extracting Japanese from their broader cultural environment, particularly with studio-posed images. Then, when reunited in albums, new relationships emerged. We assume that globetrotters chose photographs of Japanese people that approximated what they actually saw, but other considerations may have played a role.

Commercial photographers often stocked images that would have been nearly impossible for globetrotters to witness first hand. Although the samurai class that had governed Japan for many centuries was legislated out of existence in the early 1870s, for example, studio-posed photographs of models dressed in full battle armor or enacting *harakiri* appear regularly in globetrotter albums.



*Although the samurai class that had governed Japan for many centuries was legislated out of existence in the early 1870s, studio-posed photographs of models dressed in full battle armor or enacting harakiri—as in this image titled “An Actor”—appear regularly in globetrotter albums.*

*“An Actor”*  
[gj20805]

The separation of views and “costumes” thus becomes more than just an organizational trope. Monumental architectural structures and scenic natural wonders could not be staged and possessed, therefore, the capacity to authenticate globetrotters’ experiences in Japan. Within the context of an album, these scenic views lent their authenticity to the “costumes”—even to posed images that globetrotters’ were unlikely to have seen during their travels. This transference of authenticity facilitated the construction and perpetuation of stereotypes.

Kimbei’s pricelist provides a unique and illuminating glimpse of the array of choices globetrotters confronted when choosing “costumes” for their photo albums. Using the titles he applied to his photographs, it is possible to organize his inventory into broad thematic categories. Typologies are never perfect—some of Kimbei’s titles convey little about what is actually depicted and some images could be assigned to more than one thematic category. Nonetheless, his inventory indicates which photographic subjects globetrotters found most interesting. About 30 percent of Kimbei’s depictions of native Japanese focus on work broadly defined. This includes shopkeepers, itinerant vendors, tradesmen, craftsmen, farmers, and transportation workers such as coolies, *jinrikisha* pullers, and *kago* bearers.



*Great care was taken in hand coloring this “Tattooed Postman.” This method of mail delivery had all but died out by the time globetrotters began arriving in great numbers, but—like samurai and other feudal images—enjoyed iconic status in studio-posed photographs. Where tourist photography focused on “work,” this usually meant shopkeepers, itinerant vendors, tradesmen, craftsmen, farmers, and transportation workers such as coolies, jinrikisha pullers, and kago bearers. Workers in the less picturesque emerging sectors of the economy such as textiles and heavy industry had no place in the tourist’s view of Japan.*

*“Tattooed Postman”*  
[gj20610]



*Images of religious life and customs, comprised mostly of Shinto priests, Buddhist monks, pilgrims, and a variety of rites and festivals, represent about 6 percent of the total.*



*This studio-staged photograph of a “pilgrim” is typical of popular religious subjects. Just as tourist photos of occupations tended to exclude factory work in the emerging industries, portraits of “the Japanese” collected by globetrotters rarely included the wearing of fashionable Western-style attire. The touchstone was almost always “the traditional.”*

*“Pilgrim”*  
[gj20405]

Most photographs depicting occupations and religious life feature men, but the overall gender balance of Kimbei's inventory (roughly 65 percent) favors women. Photographs of women cover a wide range of professional, domestic, and personal activities. 3 percent of Kimbei's images depict samurai. Miscellaneous subjects rounding out the list include exotica such as Ainu and tattoos, as well as more specialized occupations such as sumo wrestlers, doctors, and masseuses. Kimbei also had three photographs of Koreans and one image of Chinese (!) beheading criminals.

It is important to bear in mind that the preferences for certain types of images—as revealed in Kimbei's inventory—were determined primarily by his market. Commercial photographers made their living capitalizing on the predilections and proclivities of their clientele. The task, then, is to understand why globetrotters were drawn to the subjects and themes that dominate Kimbei's inventory.

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Brinkley's *Japan* courtesy of Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

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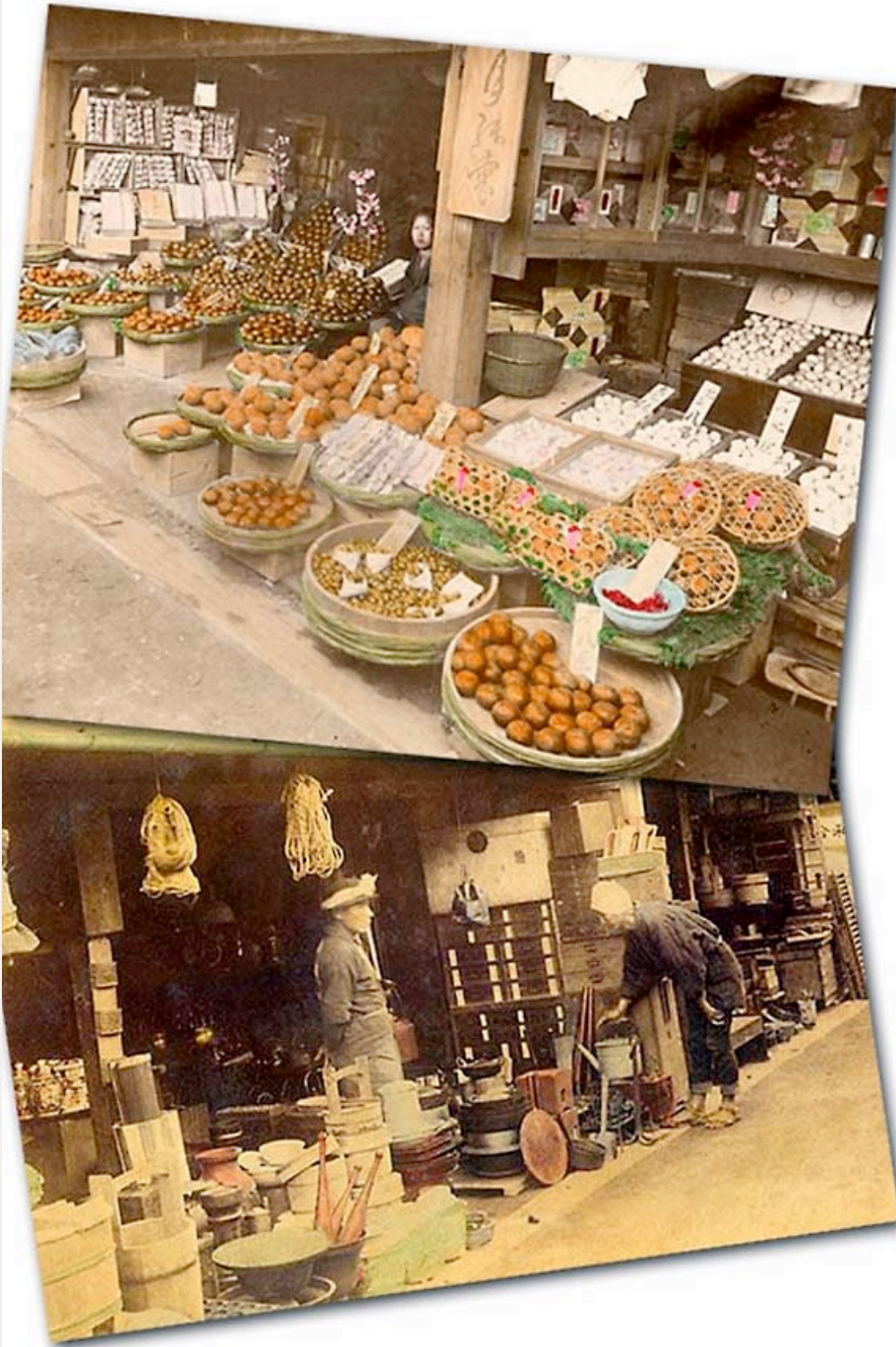
### Urban Life / Rural Life

With globetrotters prioritizing scenic views to memorialize their travels in Japan, it is perhaps easy to understand the appeal of photographs depicting urban life and customs. Scenic views of the treaty ports and major cities tended to focus on important buildings and monuments.



Guidebooks and travel itineraries also drew attention to these subjects, but globetrotters' urban experience was defined by much more than architectural infrastructure. There is a natural tendency among travelers of any epoch to draw comparisons between their lives at home and what they encounter during their sojourns. From this perspective, even something as commonplace as a grocery store can become an exciting adventure for travelers.





*Shops photographed on the streets.*

[gj20412] [gj21101]

As they moved through urban environments en route to a historic building or scenic park, globetrotters encountered an array of interesting scenes. When added to an album, photographs of these street-level encounters would fill out and enliven the record of their urban experiences.

Like tourists today, globetrotters shopped for souvenirs, preferably products and curios unique to Japan. Japan's official participation in world exhibitions held in Europe and America during the late 1800s ensured that Japanese lacquerware, metalwork, and pottery were recognized the world over for their craftsmanship. Discerning collectors sought high-quality examples and rare antiques from exclusive dealers but most globetrotters bought from stores they happened upon during their daily excursions.

Because price and portability were always concerns for globetrotters visiting many foreign destinations, kimono, paper lanterns, fans, and umbrellas proved to be popular purchases. Photographs of shops featuring these items, many of them reconstructed in studios, appear regularly in tourist albums.



*Although these appear at first glance to be photos of authentic shops,  
both are products of the studio.*

*“Dry Goods Shop” [gj20302]*

*“Fan Shop” [gj 20105]*





*Details reveal that the same man, woman, and child served as models.*

Interest in popular crafts was such that commercial photographers even staged their manufacture. Models in their employ posed as if they possessed the skills to create these products.







*Globetrotters did not insist on thoroughgoing authenticity in photos of the Japanese at work. Even Brinkley's expensive "deluxe" volumes did not bother to crop those portions of pasted-in images of people at work that revealed the studio setting. What mattered in photographs such as these was simply showing various traditional handicrafts.*

*"Umbrella Maker" [gj20310]*

*"Maker and Repairer of Samisens" [gj20809]*

*"Cutting Leaf Tobacco" [gj20707]*

If globetrotter interest in shops and merchants was an extension of their urban experiences, it is perhaps easy to understand their fascination with Japanese religious practice. Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines were commonplace in urban environments—even treaty-port Yokohama—and would have been seen on a daily basis. More significantly, the excursions promoted by guidebooks typically lead globetrotters to historically important centers of religious life. Photographs of Buddhist sites in Kamakura and Kyoto and Shinto architecture at Nikko and Miyajima dominate the scenic views found in most albums. Responding to this interest, commercial photographers offered images of Buddhist monks and Shinto priests posed to highlight the costumes and regalia associated with their vocations. Photographs of religious practices were also popular. Many itinerant Buddhist sects proselytized in cities, and pilgrims were still common on Japan's highways in the late-19th century.

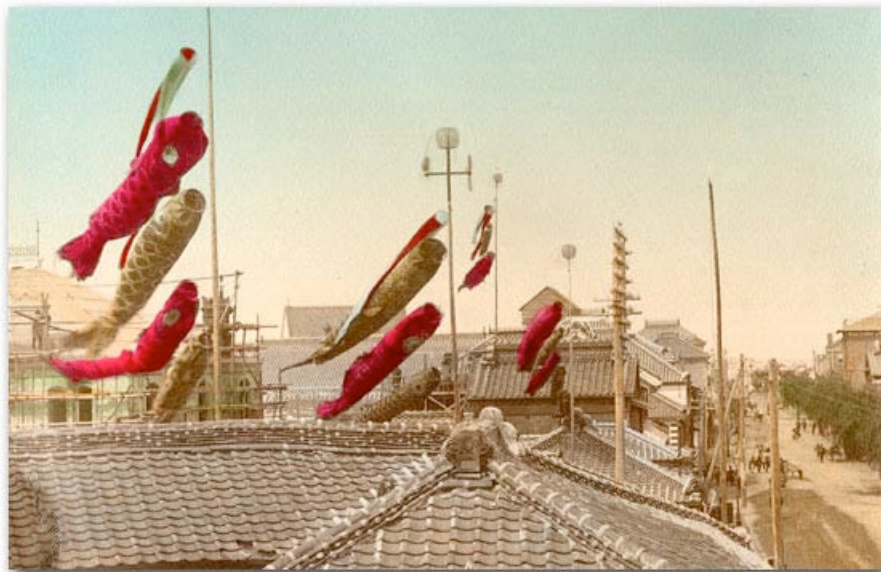


*Commercial photographers offered images of Buddhist monks and Shinto priests posed to highlight their costumes and regalia.*

*“Buddhist Monk”  
[gj20103]*

*“Shinto Priest”  
[gj20803]*

Secular as well as religious festivals constitute another type of imagery globetrotters found attractive.



*This captivating photograph of paper carp flown for the Boys' Day Festival gives a rare bird's-eye view of a Japanese town.*

*“Paper Fish for Boys' Festival”  
[gj20211]*

Christian missionaries, globetrotters of a different sort, sometimes collected photographs of Japanese religious practices as useful evidence of Japanese heathenism when soliciting financial support from their American congregations.

While ships carried globetrotters across oceans and rail across continents, indigenous forms of transport such as *jinrikisha* and *kago* (palanquins) came to represent the experience of travel in Japan. Although *jinrikisha* were a comparatively recent invention introduced by the foreigners themselves in the 1860s, they were in widespread use in urban areas by the time tourists started arriving in great numbers. Vivid descriptions of their first *jinrikisha* ride quickly became a trope in travel diaries and photographs of *jinrikisha* were just as common in albums. *Kago*, a more traditional conveyance in use for several centuries, were still relatively common during the heyday of tourism, especially for travel in mountainous regions. To emphasize this relationship, studio-posed photographs of *kago* frequently included painted backdrops showing Mt. Fuji. *Kago* and Mt Fuji imagery were also popular motifs for lacquer album covers. Although both men and women of all ages used *kago* and *jinrikisha*, tourist photographs typically featured young women wearing fashionable kimono. From a globetrotters' perspective, these "dual-use" images could evoke a personal experience with an indigenous means of transport and, at the same time, satisfy an interest in Japanese women and their dress, coiffure, and deportment.



*Studio-posed photographs of kago or palanquins frequently included painted backdrops showing Mt. Fuji (top). Although jinrikisha were a comparatively recent invention introduced by the foreigners themselves in the 1860s, they were in widespread use in urban areas by the time tourists started arriving in great numbers (bottom). Once again, these purportedly outdoor scenes were taken in a studio.*

*"Kago Bearers" [g]20709]*

*"Jinrikisha Carrying Two Japanese Ladies" [g]20110]*

Excursions outside major urban centers to Nikkō, Kamakura, or the Mt. Fuji region brought travellers into contact with rural life and customs, making photographs of agricultural production popular keepsakes. Kimbei's inventory, for example, lists 24



images featuring silk, tea, and rice production. Responding to market demand, some commercial photographers meticulously documented the planting, harvesting, and processing of these products, each of which appealed to globetrotters for specific reasons. Brinkley's *Japan* also did this.

Demand for high-quality silk in Europe and America rose dramatically with the opening of Japan to foreign trade in the Meiji era, and the Japanese government promoted silk and silk products as one of the nation's premier export products. Globetrotter interest in sericulture was linked to these developments. Fascination with Japanese fashion, particularly women's kimono, also predisposed some travelers to collect images of silk production. Eliza Scidmore, the quintessential American globetrotter who wrote enthusiastically of her visits to kimono shops, devoted an entire chapter to the silk industry in her 1891 *Jinrikisha Days in Japan*.



*The upper photograph of spinning silk is part of a series that documents the actual production process. The image of spinning below (in this case, cotton) has a different purpose: to show a young lady in an engaging attitude.*

*"Spinning Silk from the Cocoons" [g]20914]*

*"Girl Spinning Cotton" [g]20206]*

The relentless quest for tea provides an interesting sub-narrative to British imperialism in Asia outside Japan. Foreign investment in tea plantations in the Darjeeling highlands was a cornerstone of economic development in India during the 1800s. The opening of China in the 1850s added a repertoire of new teas for export back to Britain. As Japanese teas likewise found new markets with the opening of the treaty ports in the 1860s, commercial photographers filled out their inventories with a range of tea-related images.



*A detail from "Tea Pickers." The full group photo of women and children conveys a diversity and authenticity that studio portraits could not rival.*

*"Tea Pickers"*  
[gj20611]

Travellers confronted Japan's tea culture firsthand in every aspect of their travels. Teahouses were popular rest stops along tourist routes, but even wayside kiosks, travelers' inns, and Yokohama shops greeted guests with a cup of tea.

By the 1880s and '90s, the heyday of the globetrotter era that saw the publication of Brinkley's 10-volume opus, most travelers to Japan would have heard of the tea ceremony and welcomed the opportunity to see it performed even by amateurs with no training in the art.

Travel in Asia was a culinary adventure for most globetrotters and Japan was no exception. Guidebooks frequently gave advice about foods that Westerners would find palatable. Published diaries often recommended canned goods from Yokohama suppliers, particularly of beef and coffee, for outings to more remote areas (because Japanese consumed little meat and drank tea). Less adventurous travelers could always retreat to the safety of the Western menus offered in treaty-port hotels.



*“Girl Eating Sushi” features a hodgepodge of items exotic to foreigners: tea implements, chopsticks, a plate of sushi, and a musical score and samisen (a stringed instrument).*

*“Girl Eating Sushi”*  
[gj20508]

Photographs of rice cultivation need to be understood in this context. That Japan’s national diet and, for that matter, its entire economy could revolve around a single agricultural product seemed quaintly archaic to foreigners from industrialized countries. Photographs showing the preparation and eating of rice were a natural extension of those that documented its production. They also afforded insights into eating practices, particularly those employing dishes and utensils unique to Japan.





*Photographs of rice catered to foreign fascination that Japan's national diet and entire economy could revolve around a single agricultural product. The scene in the center depicts rice being washed at a well prior to cooking.*

*"Cultivating Rice Field"* [gj20202]

*"Washing Rice"* [gj20613]

*"Family Supper"* [gj20902]

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Brinkley's *Japan* courtesy of Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

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"Girl," "Girl Sleeping," "Girl Holding an Umbrella," "Kioto Girl," "Two Girls," "Two Girls Standing," "Girls at Home," "Girls Walking," "Three Girls"—121 of Kimbei's 400 photos of Japanese have the word "girl" in their title. Dozens of others on his pricelist feature women engaged in various occupations from shopkeeper to farmer to professional performer. From Kimbei's inventory, it was possible to reconstruct in photographs an idealized woman's life from childhood through adolescence, marriage and motherhood, to full maturity. Alternatively, one could narrate with photographs a supposed complete day in the life of a woman from her morning toilet through a series of cultural pursuits and social engagements to her sleeping arrangements.





*A large portion of the photo inventory of “globetrotter” Japan pertained to women, making it possible to reconstruct an idealized woman’s life from childhood through adolescence, marriage and motherhood, to full maturity.*

*“Little Girls Dressed for an Occasion”* [gj20415]

*“Arranging Flowers”* [gj20905]

No such pretended full-life renderings are possible with coverage of the male population. Some commercial photographers made souvenir images of boys at play, but photographs of mature males, apart from studio samurai, focus for the most part on traditional occupations.



*The same six boys were captured “at play” in these two photographs.*

*“Japanese Kite and Stilts” [gj20305]*

*“Boys Playing Kotoro” [gj20201]*

Why were globetrotters so interested in—even fixated on—Japanese women? With every photograph embodying several possible readings, and with globetrotters constituting a highly diverse market, there are no simple or definitive responses. It is possible, though, to define some of the sensibilities that informed foreign preferences for images of Japanese women.

Understanding foreign fascination with Japanese women requires a global perspective. In most of the Asian, Middle Eastern, and North African countries on globetrotter itineraries, women led cloistered lives. By contrast, Westerners visiting Japan often marveled at the relative freedoms enjoyed by Japanese women of all social classes,

which, in the minds of some, compared favorably with conditions in the West. William Elliot Griffis confirmed this observation in *The Mikado's Empire*:

"The American who leaves his own country, in which the high honor paid to women is one of the chief glories of the race to which he belongs, is shocked and deeply grieved at beholding her low estate in pagan lands.... The student of Asiatic life, on coming to Japan, however, is cheered and pleased on contrasting the position of women in Japan with that of other countries. He sees them treated with respect and consideration far above that observed in other quarters of the Orient. They are allowed greater freedom, and hence have more dignity and self-confidence." (p. 551)

No other culture on globetrotter itineraries permitted such unfettered access to the domestic sphere of women as did Japan. As a result, globetrotters could see and learn more of a Japanese woman's life than any of her counterparts in other non-Western countries. The public visibility of Japanese women thus enhanced their viability as photographic subjects.

Writing in the early 1870s, Griffis also recognized the viability of Japanese women as a subject worthy of further study:

"The whole question of the position of Japanese women—in history, social life, education, employments, authorship, art, marriage, concubinage, prostitution, religion, benevolent labor, the ideals of literature, popular superstitions, etc.—discloses such a wide and fascinating field of inquiry, that I wonder no one has yet entered it." (p. 553)

Few Westerners took up Griffis' challenge, but the range of female subjects in Kimbei's inventory suggests that commercial photographers recognized the economic potential of this "wide and fascinating field of inquiry."

A global perspective on photographs of Japanese women also raises comparisons with social dynamics in the West. For example, attitudes toward motherhood and children shifted considerably in Europe and America during the late 1800s. Whereas previously children were for the most part regarded as small adults, childhood was beginning to be understood as a unique phase of human development. Globetrotters quickly recognized that the sphere of childhood in Japan was clearly defined and that childrearing was a central feature of Japanese family life, one in which women took on most of the responsibility. Griffis drew attention to the special qualities of Japanese mothers:

"In maternal affection, tenderness, anxiety, patience, and long-suffering, the Japanese mothers need fear no comparison with those who know the sorrow and rapture of maternity in other climes. As educators of their children, the Japanese women are peers to the mothers of any civilization in the care and minuteness of their training of, and affectionate tenderness and self-sacrificing devotion to, offspring, within the limits of their light and knowledge." (p. 559)



Photographs of mothers with their children thus provided visual testaments to the very qualities of Japanese motherhood that Westerners, such as Griffis, came to admire.



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*"Japanese Mother and Children" [gj20109]*

*"Mother and Child" [gj20307]*

Any consideration of social dynamics in the West and their effect on globetrotter attitudes toward Japanese women must reflect the changing status of women in Europe and America. The fact that European and American women traveled as much as men is a good indicator of the social mobility they were beginning to enjoy in the late-19th century. Women approached and appreciated travel differently than their male counterparts. Western views on Japanese women could thus be highly gendered. Basil Hall Chamberlain brings these considerations into perspective in *Things Japanese*. Noting that Western men sometimes fell under the spell of Japanese women, he quotes from a letter he received from a male colleague:

"How sweet," says he, "Japanese woman is! All the possibilities of the race for goodness seem to be concentrated in her. It shakes one's faith in some Occidental doctrines. If this be the result of suppression and oppression [of Japanese women], then these are not altogether bad. On the other hand, how diamond-hard the character of the American woman becomes under

the idolatry of which she is the object. In the eternal order of things, which is the higher being—the childish, confiding, sweet Japanese girl, or the superb, calculating, penetrating, Occidental Circe of our more artificial society, with her enormous power for evil and her limited capacity for good.” (p. 453.)

For some globetrotting males, the submissive, gentle, child-like Japanese women embodied in the word “girl”—the term so prominent in Kimbei’s inventory—encouraged an implicit comparison with Western women. Many photographs depict what we might understand as girlish behavior while others connect women to pre-industrial forms of manufacturing. Like the word “girl,” both images betray a desire to fix Japanese women permanently in a state of innocence and domesticity, untouched by maturity and the modernity of a rapidly industrializing world.



*More than a few globetrotting males were attracted to an image of Japanese females as particularly submissive, gentle, and childlike. “Highclass” publications such as Brinkley’s Japan, with its official support from the Japanese government, catered to such tastes. There was an alternate market that featured more explicit photos of young women.*

*“Sleeping Accommodations for Two” [gj20510]*

*“A Tete-a-tete” [gj20601]*

Published travel accounts in the late-19th century generally maintain a high level of decorum but an erotic undercurrent sometimes reveals itself in descriptions of Japanese women written by male authors. Griffis drew attention to this tendency:

“I shall not dwell upon the prevalent belief of foreigners that licentiousness is the first characteristic trait in her character, nor upon the idea that ordinary chastity is next to unknown in Japan.”

Griffis recognized the source of this stereotype and attempted to put it into context:

“The foreign reader must remember that I have not formed these opinions by a hasty glimpse of life at the sea-ports of Japan, where the scum of the world meets the dregs of that country.” (p. 554)

In fact, prostitution had been legal in Japan for centuries, and with official sanction from the government a brothel district intended to serve foreign residents opened in

Yokohama within months after the port was occupied. Purchasing temporary wives—hired mistresses in other words—was also commonplace, even among seemingly respectable members of the foreign community. Foreign males who indulged themselves in this manner developed discursive strategies to excuse their behavior, with most claiming the practice was acceptable in Japanese culture and women were none the worse for it. Globetrotters passing through the treaty ports and witnessing these practices could easily conclude that Japanese women were licentious. Unaccustomed to such openness toward sexuality in general and prostitution specifically, they tended to sensationalize these practices in their travel accounts. Even those who condemned prostitution (as Griffis did) only succeeded in drawing more attention to it.

Commercial photographers thoroughly capitalized on these fixations. As the Yoshiwara—Tokyo’s historic brothel district—gained credibility as a tourist attraction, images of its flower-laden boulevards, unique architecture, and even the women employed there entered studio inventories. Kimbei’s pricelist included four views of the Yoshiwara, three images titled “Yoshiwara Girls,” two views of No. 9 (a prominent Yokohama brothel), two more titled “Group of No. 9 Girls,” and an image of women in the historic brothel district in Kyoto titled “Kioto Shimabara Girls.” Prostitution—meaning the practice, its representation in photographs, and its vilification in print—were all profitable facets of the globetrotter economy.



*As the Yoshiwara, Tokyo’s historic brothel district, gained credibility as a tourist attraction, benign images of its boulevards, unique architecture, and even the women employed there entered studio inventories.*

*“Yoshiwara district in Tokyo” [qj10720]*



In studio inventories and travel narratives, the word “girl” was most often and most consistently associated with female performers—singing girls, dancing girls, and various instrumentalists. Most foreigners mistakenly assumed that all entertainers were geisha.



*In studio inventories and travel narratives, the word “girl” was often associated with female performers—singing girls, dancing girls, and various instrumentalists—and foreigners mistakenly assumed that all entertainers were geisha.*

*“Geisha Playing Samisen” [gj20106]*

*“Dancing Girls” [gj20104]*

Wayside inns, teahouses, and restaurants frequently employed women who possessed some basic skills in dance or *samisen* (the instrument most associated with geisha), but few if any had undergone the rigorous years of training in music and manners required of properly accredited and licensed geisha. Commercial photographers did little to dispel this misconception; most of the geisha in their photographs were models dressed for the part.



*Inns, teahouses, and restaurants frequently employed women who possessed some basic skills in dance and music, but few had the rigorous training required of properly licensed geisha. Commercial photographers did little to dispel this misconception. Most of the geisha in their photographs were models dressed for the part (the same model appears in these two photos).*

*“Geisha, or Singing Girls”* [qj20910]

*“Girl Beating a Tsugumi”* [qj20107]

Western opinion on geisha varied widely from fascination to condemnation. The intrepid traveller Eliza Scidmore took more than a passing interest in the subject, often commenting on differences between Nagoya, Kyoto, and Osaka geisha in her 1891 *Jinrikisha Days in Japan*. Alice Mabel Bacon, a long-term resident as opposed to a globetrotter, offered a more nuanced opinion in *Japanese Girls and Women*, also published in 1891:

“In their system of education, manners stand higher than morals, and many a geisha gladly leaves the dancing in the teahouses to become the concubine of some wealthy Japanese or foreigner, thinking none the worse of herself for such a business arrangement, and going cheerfully back to her regular work, should her contract be unexpectedly ended. The geisha is not necessarily bad; but there is in her life much temptation to evil, and little stimulus to do right, so that where one lives blameless, many go wrong and drop below the margin of respectability altogether. Yet so fascinating, bright and lively are these geisha that many of them have been taken by men of good position as wives, and are now the heads of the most respectable homes.” (pp. 286, 288-89)

It is unlikely foreigners were in a position to take authentic geisha as concubines, but by implicating Western males in this practice Bacon spoke to a broader issue. The geisha profession had been used as a front for prostitution since the mid-18th century, and this practice continued through the globetrotter era. In the male-dominated environment of the treaty ports, elevating temporary wives to the status of geisha based on some marginal skills in music enhanced the reputation of Western men who indulged themselves in this manner. Thus, in the minds of globetrotters passing through the treaty ports, “geisha” became part of a libidinal economy that tended to sexualize all Japanese women. George Rittner confirms as much in his 1904 *Impressions of Japan*:

“Geisha who are trotted out to perform before the average European might shock even many women who call themselves broad-minded; they coquette, flirt, and fling themselves about. They are little better, in fact, than the European music-hall people who profane the world by calling themselves artists; still they are better, and they act in that way because Europeans have taught them to do it. The European man has ruined the morality of the Japanese, and they will probably never regain it.” (p. 115)

Like Bacon, Rittner assigned partial responsibility to foreigners for corrupting geisha, but as with many of his fellow globetrotters, he mistakenly assumed that the women he observed were actually geisha.

Commercial photographers also produced images that we might refer to today as soft-core pornography, something scrupulously avoided in Brinkley’s sanitized and quasi-official opus. Subjects ranged from images of women with exposed breasts to others that show full frontal nudity. Such sights were common in 19th-century Japan and were sometimes mentioned in travel accounts. During hot humid summers, rural women stripped to the waist while laboring at demanding physical tasks. Communal bathing was commonplace. When staged and photographed in studios, these subjects slipped from representations of daily practice into a realm of voyeuristic pleasure. The models posed with their breasts exposed generally have elegant coiffures and wear fashionable kimono more typical of geisha than farmers. And women appear so frequently in photographs of bathing, one almost wonders if Japanese men ever washed. While these subjects might have held some intrinsic cultural interest, they were often photographed in a manner intended to exploit Western tendencies to sexualize Japanese women.

From the relative abundance of brothels, prostitutes, and “geisha” among globetrotter photographs, one could easily assume that representations of Japanese women were skewed towards a predominantly male audience. Such a conclusion would be inaccurate. Chamberlain noted that Western women frequently proclaimed the charm of their Japanese counterparts. Travel narratives affirm this observation. But unlike Griffis, Chamberlain, and Bacon, whose residencies of several years put them in a better position to understand the nuances of Japanese femininity, travelers’ experiences with indigenous women were fleeting by comparison. In such circumstances, globetrotting women generally retained their primary affinity with the West as opposed to with their gender. They were less inclined to be critical of photographic representations of Japanese women because their foreignness diminished the need to empathize with them as members of the same sex. From this perspective, some Western women found the sensuality—and perhaps even the sexuality—of Japanese women as beguiling and attractive as their male traveling companions.

While gender provides one means to break down monolithic constructions of the market for photographs of Japanese women, other factors and forces tend to re-homogenize it. The emphasis on women’s kimono provides a good example. The pace of travel created a culture in which globetrotters sought experiences that would define, in their minds at least, the most essential characteristics of the countries they visited. Indigenous costume was an obvious choice in every country and culture. Because of its ubiquity and uniqueness, women’s kimono became a globally recognized signifier of Japan, one that competed with Mt. Fuji and the colossal Buddha statue at Kamakura. Descriptions of women’s dress in travel narratives often extend for several pages and provide encyclopedic coverage of female fashion, from youth to maturity, in different seasons, and, as discussed above, across dozens of occupations.





*Women's kimono became as much of a globally recognized signifier of Japan as Mt. Fuji and the colossal Buddha statue at Kamakura.*

*"Great Buddha at Kamakura" [gj10202]*

*"Mt. Fuji" [gj10109]*

*"A Summer Costume" [gj20804]*

Some photographers took such foreign fascination with kimono to absurd extremes, with studio-posed images of women gathering seashells and feeding chickens that were little more than excuses to show off fabulous garments.

*Foreign fascination with kimono is taken to absurd extremes in photos such as this studio rendering of "Gathering Shells on the Seashore." Split-toed white tabi socks would have been completely out of place on a wet beach.*

*"Gathering Shells on the Seashore" [gj20605]*



No Japanese woman would dress so lavishly to feed livestock, and split-toed *tabi* socks would not be the footwear of choice on a wet beach. When seen from this perspective, photographs of Japanese women could just as easily be understood as photographs of kimono.



*In similar poses and garb, two Japanese women have “Afternoon Tea” and a globetrotting European family don kimono for a photo souvenir.*

*“An Informal Afternoon Tea” [gj20911]*

*“A European Family Dressed in Japanese Costumes” [gj21002]*

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Brinkley's *Japan* courtesy of Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

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GLOBETROTTERS' JAPAN: PEOPLE  
FOREIGNERS ON THE TOURIST CIRCUIT IN MEIJI JAPAN  
BY ALLEN HOCKLEY

Picturing  
"the Japanese"

Representation &  
Misrepresentation

Urban Life /  
Rural Life

Women: Real  
& Imagined

Media &  
Messages

Sources &  
Resources

### Media & Messages

Did late-19th-century globetrotter photographs seriously misrepresent Japanese people? As so often with images, responses vary according to one's perspective. We are, of course, immediately suspicious of photographs that were staged in commercial studios. But while the painted backdrops and stage sets used for such posed images certainly appear artificial, the costumes, accoutrements, and props represent fashions and artifacts in common use at the time.

Studio inventories require a more nuanced assessment. As demonstrated above, commercial photographers emphasized some aspects of Japanese culture and customs over others. Although the globetrotter era coincided with Japan's rapid modernization and Westernization, tourist photography eschewed these contemporary developments in favor of a romanticized, often even pre-modern image of Japan. Catalogues of scenic views included Western-style infrastructure in the treaty ports (hotels, railway stations, post offices), but evidence of Japan's emerging modernity appears rarely and usually inadvertently in commercial photographs of Japanese people.





*A man wearing a Western suit and carrying a Western-style umbrella accidentally appears in the background of this image of carpenters working with traditional tools. As a rule, commercial photographers catering to the tourist trade focused their lenses away from the more modern aspects of daily life.*

*“Carpenters at Work”*

[gj20503]

One need only compare globetrotter photographs with woodblock prints documenting Japan’s rapid modernization to see two coexisting but radically different visions of Japan. Print artists avoided tradition as much as globetrotter photographers avoided modernity. While we might claim that these omissions constitute misrepresentation, it is perhaps more prudent to see both cases as convincing testaments to the power of their respective markets. Print consumers celebrated Japan’s modernization; globetrotters visited Japan seeking a different vision—one that any smart businessman with a camera would only be happy to fulfill.

## Mediums & Messages (A Counter-Intuitive Story)

*The medium is the message, we have been told, and in late-19th-century Japan this led to a curious development. The most up-to-date medium—commercial photography, devoted largely to the tourist trade—focused almost obsessively on old-fashioned, “traditional,” non-Western aspects of Japanese culture and society. The major exception was Western-style architecture. This is the “Japan” that foreigners chose to see.*

*Where, then, does one find the most graphic popular images of the dynamic transformations that took place during Meiji Japan’s long epoch of pellmell industrialization and Westernization? Ironically enough, in the traditional medium of woodblock prints. In contrast to commercial photographers, woodblock artists reveled in depicting all that was new and inspired by the West—whether this be fashions, occupations, or the very machinery of modern life.*



*From the 1870s into the 1890s, to be counted as “high society” in Japan was virtually synonymous with being seen as “highly Westernized.” Woodblock-print artists dwelled lovingly on this as well, often placing their fashionable women in scenes that included appreciation of Western music (harpsicords and chamber or choral groups). This typical commercial photo for the foreign tourist trade, by contrast, features a kimono-clad woman playing a traditional Japanese instrument, the koto.*

*“Illustration of Singing by the Plum Garden”  
by Toyohara Chikanobu, 1887*

[res.53.82] Sharf Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

*“Koto Player” [gj20206] Brinkley’s Japan*



*This 1894 woodblock print, “Japanese Warships Fire on the Enemy near Haiyang Island” by Mizuno Toshikata, portrays a fiercely modern Japanese naval gun and sailors in Western-style uniforms, while the photographer from the 1890s posed two male models in traditional garb doing handicrafts.*

*“Japanese Warships Fire on the Enemy near Haiyang Island”  
by Mizuno Toshikata, 1894*

[2000.380.13] Sharf Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

*“Lantern Makers”* [gj20306] Brinkley's Japan

Brinkley's Japan courtesy of Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

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Resources

### Sources & Resources

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### Resources

Scholars, teachers, and students interested in the visual history of modern Japan, including photography, can find a wealth of online materials from private dealers as well as public sources. See, for example:

Information on Meiji-era Japan appears in the highly detailed site of antiquarian book

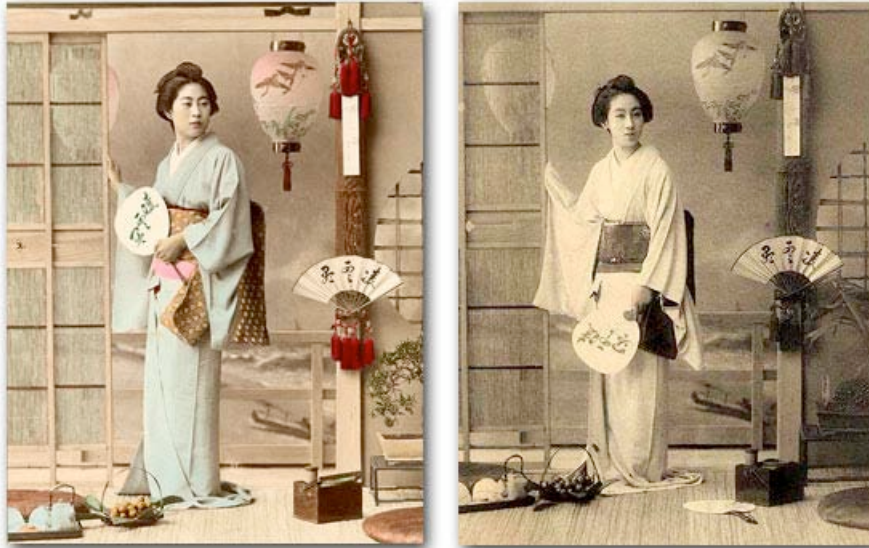
and print dealer George C. Baxley. Several links provide original material relevant to "Globetrotters' Japan" in particular showing various editions of Brinkley's *Japan*:

[http://www.baxleystamps.com/litho/brink\\_15/brinkley\\_deluxe.shtml](http://www.baxleystamps.com/litho/brink_15/brinkley_deluxe.shtml)

[http://www.baxleystamps.com/litho/brink\\_15/1898060107.shtml](http://www.baxleystamps.com/litho/brink_15/1898060107.shtml)

[http://www.baxleystamps.com/litho/ry\\_litho\\_narrative.shtml#brinkley](http://www.baxleystamps.com/litho/ry_litho_narrative.shtml#brinkley)

The following juxtaposition originated on the Baxley website:



*"Tokyo Beauty" (left) is a delicately hand-colored photograph from Brinkley's Japan. A different woman appears in the identical pose and setting in the untinted photo (right) from Kasumasa Ogawa's book Celebrated Geisha of Tokyo, published around 1892. Ogawa used the identical studio setting for many of his geisha portraits.*

*[Click here to see more images from the Ogawa book.](#)*

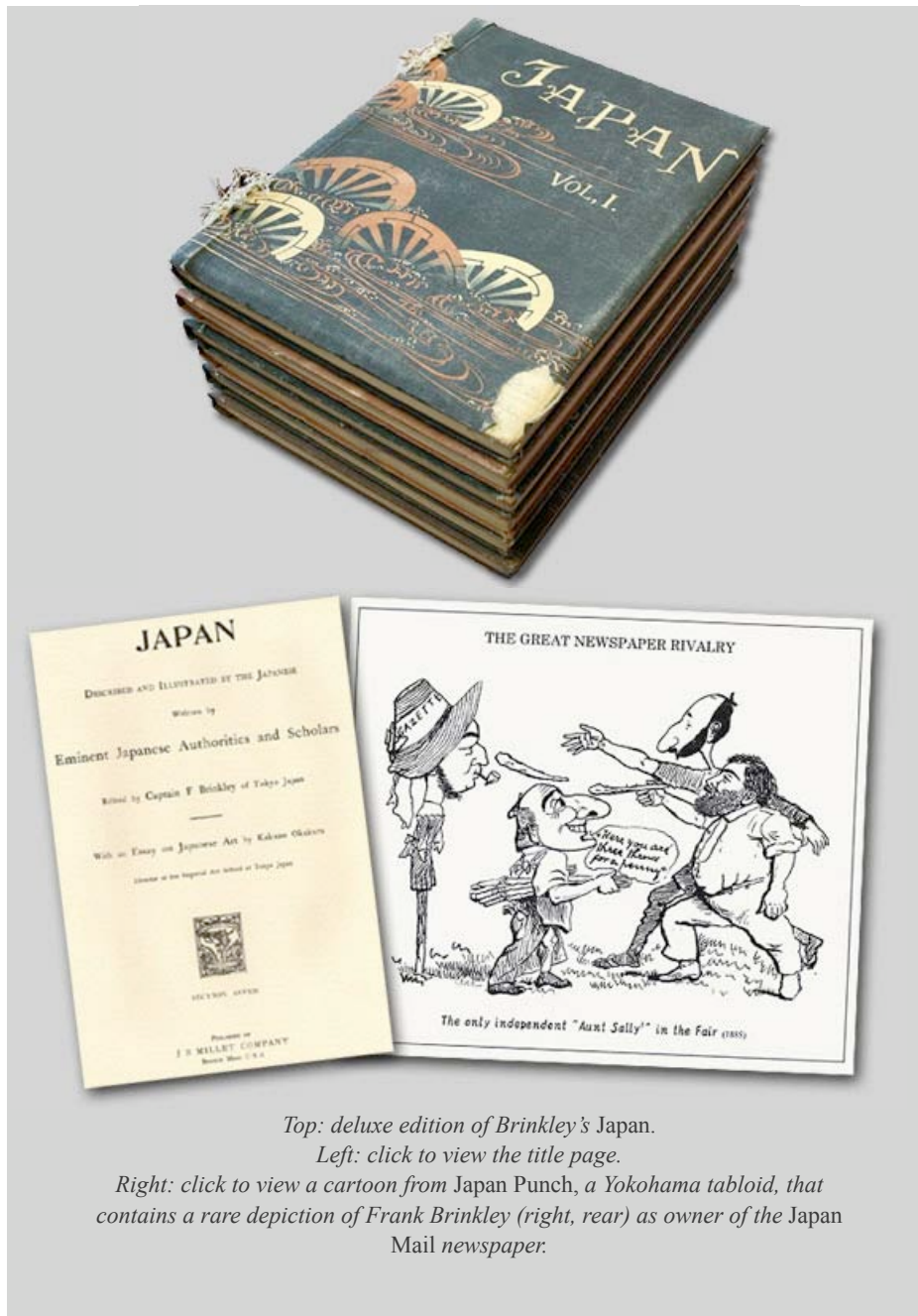
*"Tokyo Beauty"*  
[gj20301]

More Brinkley-related material:

[Japan's Irish Publicists, 1881-1945](#) by Peter O'Connor

[New York Times Obituary](#)

CAPT. FRANK BRINKLEY DEAD.; Japanese Correspondent of London Times, Author and Instructor.



Top: deluxe edition of Brinkley's Japan.

Left: click to view the title page.

Right: click to view a cartoon from Japan Punch, a Yokohama tabloid, that contains a rare depiction of Frank Brinkley (right, rear) as owner of the Japan Mail newspaper.

## CREDITS

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