

# The Printing of Illustrated Books in Eighteenth Century Japan

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## 1. The Beginning of Illustrated Books

Scholarly opinion is divided on the question when exactly the printing of illustrated books began, but we may be sure that *Wa-Kan sansai zue*, written by Terajima Ryōan (the date of birth and death unknown) and published in 1712, was the first Japanese book to have the word "illustrated" (*zue*) in its title.<sup>1</sup>

*Sansai* ("the three talents") means "heaven, earth, and man." Because the three of them together constitute the whole of the universe, "heaven, earth, and man" are the first three categories of the traditional Chinese encyclopaedia. In other words, the book is an illustrated (*zue*) encyclopaedia, pertaining to Japan (*Wa*) and China (*Kan*).

As I said, *Wa-Kan sansai zue* was not the first illustrated book to be printed, but it was the first in a long line of the books that have the word "illustrated" in their title. Contrary to what one might expect, this first illustrated book was not in much demand. One of the reasons why *Wa-Kan sansai zue* did not sell well is that according to its title, the book should contain illustrations; it does, but the illustrations are few. Furthermore, the text is written in classical Chinese. A third reason may have been that it was a very large book, consisting of eighty-one volumes, and hence, very expensive.

The first illustrated book that did sell really well was *Miyako meisho zue*, written and edited by Akisato Ritō (the date of birth and death unknown) and published in 1780. This book is a kind of guide book that contains illustrations and descriptions of famous places (*meisho*) in Kyoto (*Miyako*). It was published as a six-volume book; six years later, in 1786, a revised edition appeared. In the next year, a five-volume sequel titled *Shūi miyako meisho zue* was published. The fact that a sequel was produced, indicates how well the book had sold. In many of the extant copies of *Miyako meisho zue* and *Shūi miyako meisho zue*, the quality of the printed illustrations leaves much to be desired. The reason is that the printing blocks had worn out. On the other hand, this is again proof that the books sold well.

After the publication of *Miyako meisho zue* many other illustrated books of the same nature and with similar titles were published (see the list at the end of this article).

## 2. The Character of *Meisho zue* (contents and pictures)

The compound *meisho* originally meant "a place with poetical associations" or "a place famed in poetry." The characters with which the word is written were also read *nadokoro*. That word referred to places that were accepted topics of *waka* (the traditional Japanese five line poems). Thus, initially the word *meisho* was closely associated with *waka*. In the course of the Muromachi Period (1392-1573), however, the meaning of the word started to change.

Scenic places which did not necessarily figure in the traditional list of *waka* topics, be they historical spots, flourishing places, or famed or notorious places, all came to be called *meisho*. Thus, the meaning of *meisho* began to be generalised and became "places which attracted mass interest." By the middle of the Edo Period (1600-1868), when our *Meisho zue* were published, the original meaning of the word *meisho* was completely lost. This was the result of the greater availability of information in the urban, mass society, where the channels of communication were many and wide-spread.

In a sense, the change in the meaning of the word *meisho* is related to one of the characteristics of early modern society. From the ancient period onward and throughout the Middle Ages (1192-1600), the educated class, who could read Chinese characters and write poems, had reserved the use of the word *meisho* for itself, but now it was unable to do so any longer. The uneducated classes, too, had acquired an interest in obtaining information about *meisho*. Hence, *meisho* passed from the literate into the non-literate culture.

The fact that also those people who could not read Chinese characters became interested in participating in the world of publishing caused a revolution in the field of printing and publishing. This revolution, which may well be one of the characteristic features of early modern societies in general, in Japan took place in the middle of the Edo Period. One of the effect of the revolution was, that attention was no longer primarily focussed on the written text, but came to be focussed on the illustrations.

Guidebooks of the *meisho zue* type and books of a geographical nature had been published previously. The first book in this genre had been *Kyōwarabe* ("the youth of the capital"), written by Nakagawa Kiun and published in 1658 in six volumes. The book portrays places in Kyoto that were famous for their scenic beauty or on account of their historic associations. It contains eighty-eight small illustrations. Nine years later, in 1667, a sequel was published; it is titled *Kyōwarabe atooi* and contains sixty-seven small-sized illustrations.

*Miyako Meisho zue*, on the other hand, contains 252 illustrations, and each

covers at least one page, but in many instances also two whole pages. (fig.1, fig.2, fig.3) The book contains also a considerable amount of information about the shrines, temples and historic spots in Kyoto and its suburbs. Of every spot that is treated, the book gives a sketch of its history and a summary of the legends associated with it. Then follow old songs, Chinese poems, comic poems (*kyōka*), and *haiku* that are in some way connected to the place. The diversity of its contents makes the book interesting reading.

The persons who are mentioned in the book are *Tennō's*, noblemen, samurais (warriors), monks and men of letters, which means that the book covers the full range from politics and military affairs to religion and literature. The number of persons mentioned by name is approximately 1400 (1411, according to my own account). The author Akisato Ritō had used approximately 300 books as sources for his compilation (305, by my own account). These sources are novels, poetic anthologies, diaries and military tales. In a sense, *Meisho zue* is an illustrated encyclopaedia of Kyoto.

### 3. Circulation of *Meisho zue*

We do not know exactly, how many copies of *Miyako meisho zue* and other books of the *Meisho zue* genre were printed during the Edo Period. If we knew with certainty how many copies could be printed from the same printing block, we would be in a position to make some reasonably sure deductions, but unfortunately we do not know. (A group who is trying to restore wood engraving and wood block printing in Edo-period experimentally, proved that a printing block can be used to print 1500 copies at its maximum.) Printing blocks were repaired again and again; hence, it is difficult to know the exact number of copies published of *Meisho zue* in general. We do, however, possess some evidence regarding the number of copies printed of *Miyako meisho zue*.

In the beginning of nineteenth century, during the Bunka era (1804-1818), a popular writer, Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848), who claimed to "have written down what he had heard," compiled a collection of brief notes, observations, and memoranda. These were published later in 1833, under the title *Ibun zakkō*. In one of the entries in this book, he describes that "the number of copies of *Miyako meisho zue* sold annually exceeds 4,000. Since there are many people who wish to buy the book, the shops are busy printing them; they sell the printed paper with a title page and a string to bind them." Another contemporary source says that the publisher celebrated with festive red rice (*sekihan*) when he had sold 1,000 copies of this title.<sup>2</sup> In other words, if what Bakin wrote was true, *Miyako meisho zue* was a real best-seller at the time.

As the source of his observation Bakin mentions a certain Sōsuke, who was the

head clerk of the Ōsaka publisher Kawachiya Tasuke. The story Bakin reports is not intrinsically very likely. His informant told him, that initially the book did not sell well ; then Lord Sakai, the *daimyō* of Obama (Wakasa) who was at the time serving as Keeper of Ōsaka Castle (*Ōsaka jōdai*), bought a dozen of copies to take them as souvenirs to Edo. This caused the sale of the book to pick up suddenly. The story does not tell us, who bought the book, or whether the buyers were *samurai* or merchants. The story is also difficult to substantiate. But the circulation of such anecdotes tells us that *Miyako meisho zue* could have won popularity enough.

There is one other piece of evidence. This is a remark by the Kabuki playwright Nishizawa Ippō (1801-1852), who in 1830 wrote in his *Denki sakusho* (published between 1843 and 1851) that the publisher earned much money because he sold thousands of copies in a short period. From the above, it seems safe to deduce that at the very least *Miyako meisho zue* sold better than other books, and that more than a thousand copies were printed.

The next topic to discuss is the price of the book. According to Bakin, "the publisher, Tamehachi, within a few years earned back the capital of 2,000 *ryō* that he had invested originally, and he even made a profit." If the publisher earned more than 2,000 *ryō* by selling more than 4,000 books, the price per copy would work out to a minimum of 2 *bu*, for at the time 1 *ryō* converted to 4 *bu* (or to 16 *shu*, or to 60 *monme* of silver, or to 4 *kanmon*, or to 4,000 *mon*). In today's prices, 2 *bu* would be the equivalent of 60,000 to 70,000 Yen, if we use as our standard of conversion the price of a bowl of *soba*: 16 *mon* in the 1830s and approximately 500 yen today.

Other sources tend to substantiate this price of 2 *bu*. There is, for instance, a book called *Edo meisho zue* that was published somewhat later than *Miyako meisho zue* in two sets of ten volumes each; the first ten volumes appeared in 1834, and the second set followed in 1836. (fig.4) Bakin, who helped a friend of him buy the first half of the book immediately after its publication, left a letter in which he wrote that the price he paid for the book was 50 *monme*. Actually, the price was 1 *ryō* 2 *bu*(= 90 *monme*), but Bakin paid only half of that price; perhaps, because he acquired the book for the wholesale price.

Other sources tell us that Hasegawa Settan (1778-1843), who made the illustrations of the book, sold the book at a book store himself for 55 *monme*. Possibly, the wholesale price of the book was 50 *monme*, the discount price for the author was 55 *monme*, and the list price was 1 *ryō* 2 *bu*.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion: if the ten-volume edition *Edo meisho zue*, that was published fifty years after *Miyako meisho zue*, cost 1 *ryō* 2 *bu*, then the six-volume *Miyako meisho zue* may very well have cost ca. 2 *bu*.

We cannot find the custom of paying royalties to authors even in the late Edo period (19<sup>th</sup> century). However, when the first half of *Edo meisho zue* appeared, Genshichi, who was the head clerk of Suharaya, the publisher, came to Saitō Gesshin to bring him ten sets of *Edo meisho zue*, which were probably just off the press, a wild duck and 2 *shō* (ca. 3.6 liter) of sake (rice wine). When the second set of ten volumes had appeared, Genshichi brought Gesshin ten sets of the ten-volume *Edo meisho zue*, together with a barrel of sake and a dozen eggs.<sup>4</sup>

The next question is, how did people actually use *Meisho zue*. Did they use them as guidebooks? Probably not. It would be really difficult for the traveller to carry such large-sized, multi-volume books as the *Meisho zue* with them, when they were going to visit scenic spots. Another reason is that people normally went to scenic spots on foot, so they could visit only one or two places at one outing, or perhaps a few more, when one includes those spots that they passed through on the way. In all probability, people just memorized or wrote down from *Meisho zue* what they needed. At that time sight-seeing trips that took more than a few days were not popular. Later on, handy guidebooks were published that the travellers could take with them on their trip in order to get information regarding souvenirs to buy or scenic spots to visit on the way. **(fig.5)** Such guidebooks were small, so it is only natural that they have no illustrations or small-sized illustrations. The *Meisho zue*, however, were published for a different purpose. People who bought *Meisho zue* did not carry them with them, but looked at them at home.

In his *Ibun zakkō*, Takizawa Bakin declares that the illustrations in *Edo meisho zue* were so wonderful that forty percent of the value of the book was the contribution of the person who made the illustrations. He also remarks that for the sake of women and children who dwell in suburb or in province far from Edo and found it difficult to visit the city, *Edo meisho zue* had its uses, as it helped them to know and enjoy Edo. Since many other books on geography were being published, the information contained in *Edo meisho zue* was not necessarily new, but the illustrations were a marvel. They allowed people to divert themselves in famous places, and roam through mountains and fields, while lolling on their stomachs at home. This was what gave such a high value to the book.

#### 4. How the publishing of *Meisho zue* was organized

In order to publish books, not only capital was needed, but also a some kind of organization. Publishers needed a well-organized network of editors, writers, illustrators, woodcutters and printers. Since in eighteenth century Japan the prevailing

technique was wood block printing, the pivotal skills were the technical skills of woodcutters and printers. In the publishing of the *Meisho zue*, illustrators, too, played an important role but, obviously, in order to execute their designs highly-skilled woodcutters and printers were needed.

It is intriguing, therefore, to notice that the illustrators were highly esteemed in their own days and that even today their names are still remembered, but that few records concerning the woodcutters have survived and almost none regarding the printers. In the colophon of *Miyako meisho zue* the name of the illustrator and the names of seven woodcutters are printed in big and in small characters, respectively, but not one name of a printer is to be found. For that matter, the names of the author and the editor are not mentioned, either. In the fifth volume, finally, the name of Akizato Ritō appears, who claims he is the editor and writes a postscript under his own name.

In other words, it is not easy to know who had the leadership in publishing these books. It is clear, however, that relative importance cannot be deduced from the fact that one's name is printed in the colophons. After publishing *Miyako meisho zue*, Ritō edited and published more than twenty other *Meisho zue*, but we do not even know when exactly he was born or when he died. This fact tells us what the evaluation of publishing and the social standing of writers or editors were in the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. The popularity of the publication and the popularity of writers or editors did not simply coincide.

Materials about Akisato Ritō have been searched for, but with precious little success. The few records we have, show that he lived in Kyōto, and that his house may have been in the area south-west of Gojō Bridge. He may have been born in the 1730s, because there is a record written in 1802 that says he will become seventy years old that year, and it is said that he may have died between 1804 and 1818.

There are two different opinions regarding the way in which *Miyako meisho zue* originally came to be published. One opinion, voiced by Takizawa Bakin, says that the idea was launched by Yoshinoya Tamehachi (the publisher), while the other, expressed by Nishizawa Ippō, maintains that it was suggested by Akisato Ritō (the editor and writer).

According to Bakin, the publisher Yoshinoya Tamehachi lived only for his business. He never enjoyed drinking *sake*, did not play around with women, and was not interested in writing either *haiku* or *waka*; he did not have any hobbies at all. Since he was born and lived in Kyoto, Tamehachi thought that he would like to publish and distribute a *Zue* about Kyōto. This would be an enjoyable occupation for a retired man like himself. So he persuaded Akizato Ritō to be the writer and editor, and Shunchōsai to be the illustrator.

Tamehachi made them stay at Tamehachi's house, preparing three meals a day and twice breaking for tea. Sometimes they were served some *sake*. Everytime they returned home (around every ten days), they were given quite a large sum of pocket money. In this way, they continued working for five or six years.

What Nishizawa says is quite different. According to him, it was Akizato Rito, the writer and the editor, who came up with the idea of publishing a *Zue* about Kyoto, and who wrote the text. After completing the manuscript, he visited many publishers and explained his ideas to them, and tried to persuade them, but he could not find one who was willing to take the risk. At last, he succeeded in persuading Yoshinoya Tamehachi to underwrite the publication. Akisato Rito then engaged Shunchōsai to draw the illustrations and got a publisher interested in investing some money into the venture. As it turned out, the book was well received and sold several thousand copies in a short period. The publisher made quite a profit.

I will not go into detail regarding the way in which the book was printed and bound. It is worth emphasizing, however, that Akisato Ritō visited all the important scenic spots to be referred together with the illustrator and that he himself collected materials of the spots including tales and legends. Since he wrote his texts after a thorough investigation of the history of each spot, and made use of both documentary materials and the results of field work, the geographic and scenic details he supplies are exact. His method was an academic one that differed little from research methods in use today, and even in our day *Meisho zue* are still an important source for academic research. When Akisato Ritō published *Meisho zue*, its mix of academic research, edifying intentions, and highly informative content made the book a hit with the non-literate public. Akisato Ritō's *Meisho zue* enjoyed a high reputation and he continued to compose series of *Meisho zue*, all in the same vein. As a result, many *Meisho zue* were published.

## 5. *Meisho zue* as media

The most attractive feature of *Meisho zue* is its illustrations. If we look at the six prefatory notes (*hanrei*) on the first page of the book, we see that five of these are concerned with illustrations. The notes say the following:

1. I have drawn sights and scenes that really exist in the present day, in order that even children will be able to enjoy these historic spots by looking through this book.

2. The depicted scenes are of different sizes. Large, panoramic scenes are drawn in detail, while the small illustrations are only roughly drawn sketches. In all illustrations human figures are inserted, in order to serve as a kind of measure. When the figures are small, it means that the place is large.
3. When the human figures are illustrated larger than the real scale, this indicates that the spot is worth looking in detail.
4. Scenic spots are sometimes drawn as a sequence. In such cases, I have put down a mark and drawn the scenes without a break.
5. Some scenic spots on Mount Hiei are not in Kyoto, but in Ōmi. Nevertheless, I have included them, because I have drawn sequential scenes stretching from Kyoto into Ōmi without any interruptions.

The last two notes (notes 4 and 5) are not particularly significant, but these 5 notes do show what a prominent role the illustrations played in publishing *Meisho zue*. Akizato Ritō was a pioneer of illustrated books, and *Meisho zue* shows how much importance he attached to the illustrations.

It seems to me that the finest example of a *Meisho zue* is the *Miyako Rinsen Meishō zue* that was published in 1799. The illustrations may be divided into various types, such as bird's-eye views, bug's-eye views, panoramic views, detailed views, night views, and views with snow. All illustrations are in black-and-white, and they show the consummate perfection the techniques of wood block printing reached in Japan.(fig.6, fig.7)

The *Meisho zue* are a typical product and achievement of the eighteenth century. Their distinguishing features can be identified as follows:

1. *Visuality*: The books were intended to be worth looking at, a source of visual enjoyment.
2. *Immediacy*: Even though they cannot actually visit them, the readers are made to feel that they are in the spots depicted by looking at the illustrations. This appeal to the physical senses is important.
3. *Historicity*: Due to the numerous quotations from diaries, novels, or historical romances, and due to the illustrations that are appended to these, the readers have access to quite a lot of information, especially historical information, about the spots depicted.
4. *Narrativity*: The readers not only enjoy the illustrations, they can also enjoy reading the stories about the spots described in the book.



Illustrated books published before *Meisho zue* tended to be mainly concerned with the fundamental questions of human life and to address religious, philosophical, or ideological topics. *Meisho zue*, however, focus on everyday human activities and their surroundings such as amusements, matters of a practical nature and scenic beauty of the landscape. *Meisho zue* is a compound genre that covers such disparate fields as folklore, history, the history of art, geography, and literature.

## NOTES

1. The dictionaries variously define the meaning of the word *zue* as "a collection of special pictures" (Morohashi's *Dai Kan-Wa jiten*) or "a collection of several kinds of figures and pictures" (*Kōjien*).
2. See Noma Kōshin, bibliographical note of *Miyako meisho zue*, in *Shinshū Kyōto sōsho*, Vol. 6 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1976), pp. 8-13.
3. See Nishiyama Matsunosuke, "Edo no Machi-nanushi Saitō Gesshin," in: Nishiyama Matsunosuke, ed., *Edo chōnin no kenkyū*. Vol. 4 (Tokyo: 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1979), pp. 511-515.
4. See op. cit., p. 514. (Saitō Gesshin's dairy)

## A list of illustrated books published in 18-19th century

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author, Published Year</i>
1.	Tōgoku meishō shi	Torikai Suiga 1762
2.	Kai meishō shi	Hagiwara Motokatsu 1775
3.	Miyako meisho zue	Akisato Ritō 1780
4.	Shūi miyako meisho zue	Akisato Ritō 1786
5.	Yamato meisho zue	Akisato Ritō 1791
6.	Sumiyoshi meishō zue	Okada Gyokuzan 1794
7.	Kagoshima-han meishō shi	Shirao Kunihashira 1795
8.	Izumi meisho zue	Akisato Ritō 1796
9.	Settsu meisho zue	Akisato Ritō 1796-98
10.	Nihon sankai meibutsu zue	Hirase Tessai 1797
11.	Ōmi meisho zue	Murakami Sekiden 1797
12.	Ise sangū meisho zue	Shitomi kangetsu 1797
13.	Tōkaidō meisho zue	Akisato Ritō 1797
14.	Gokinai meisho zue	Akisato Ritō 1798
15.	Miyako rinsen meishō zue	Akisato Ritō 1799
16.	Nihon sankai meisan zue	Shitomi Kangetsu 1799
17.	Kumano yūki	Kitabatake kakusai 1801
18.	Sizugatake zue	Nishioka Tadatoshi 1801
19.	Kawachi meisho zue	Akisato Ritō 1801
20.	Morokoshi meishō zue	Gyokuzan Issei 1802
21.	Nijūyohai junpai zue	Ryōtei 1803
22.	Tōtōmi koseki zue	Tachi chōkō 1803
23.	Miyoshino meishō zue	Nakajima Takamasa 1803
24.	Inuyama mikiki zue	Watanabe Kakujū 1804
25.	Banshū meisho junran zue	Ishida Tai 1804
26.	Kisoji meisho zue	Akisato Ritō 1805
27.	Echizen-no-kuni meishō shi	Takeuchi Juan 1806
28.	Teito gakei ichiran	Tatsukawa Seikun 1809
29.	Awa meisho zue	Tankoshitsu Bokukai 1811
30.	Kii-no-kuni meisho zue	Takechi Yukitomo 1812~51
31.	Nihon meizan zue	Tani Bunchō 1812
32.	Ōmi meisho zue	Hata Sekiden 1814
33.	Bicchū meishō kō	Kodera Kiyoyuki 1815
34.	Michinoku meihī ryaku	Hujitsuka tōgō 1816
35.	Nagasaki meishō zue	Nigita Seichū 1818~
36.	Matsushima zushi	Tsutsumi Kanshi 1821
37.	Kashima sankei zue	Takemura Tatsuyoshi 1824
38.	Bicchū meishō kō	Kodera Kiyoyuki 1829
39.	Iseji meisho zue	Tōrakusai Banshō 1823
40.	Kashima meisho zue	Hōjō tokichika 1823

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|-----|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 41. | Yodogawa ryōgan shōkei ichiran | Akatsukino Kanenari 1824           |
| 42. | Edo meisho zue                 | Saitō Chōsyū 1834~36               |
| 43. | Tenpōzan meisho zue            | Akatsukino Kanenari 1835           |
| 44. | Oshi meisho zue                | Tōri Kōsai 1835                    |
| 45. | Tsunokuni meisho zue           | Hosoki Senu 1840                   |
| 46. | Itsukushima zue                | Okada kiyoshi 1842                 |
| 47. | Owari meisho zue               | Okada kei 1844~80                  |
| 48. | Shimōsa meishō zue             | Miyaoi Sadao 1846                  |
| 49. | Edo kinkō meishō ichiran       | Shōtei Kinsui 1846                 |
| 50. | Konpira sankei meisho zue      | Akatsukino Kanenari 1847           |
| 51. | Zenkōjimichi meisho zue        | Toyota toshitada 1849              |
| 52. | Shōdoshima meisho zue          | Akatsukino Kanenari 1850s          |
| 53. | Kai Sōki (Kai meisho zue)      | Ōmori Kaian 1851,91                |
| 54. | Saikoku sanjūsansho meisho zue | Akatsukino Kanenari 1853           |
| 55. | Sanuki-no-kuni meishō zue      | Kajiwara Kageaki 1854              |
| 56. | Naniwa meisho zue              | Utagawa Hiroshige issei 1855       |
| 57. | Hitachi meishō zue             | Kashiwa Chikusai 1856              |
| 58. | Suruga meisho zue              | Nakajima Tōgaku 1857               |
| 59. | Narita meisho zue              | Nakaji Sadatoshi 1858              |
| 60. | Awaji-no-kuni meisho zue       | Akatsukino Kanenari 1862           |
| 61. | Karaku meishō zue              | Akatsukino Kanenari 1864           |
| 62. | Azuma meisho zue               | Chikurindō Masaoka late Edo period |
| 63. | Kamakura meishō zue            | Uedo Mōshin late Edo period        |
| 64. | Hagi meisho zue                | Motonashi Kōjū 1892                |

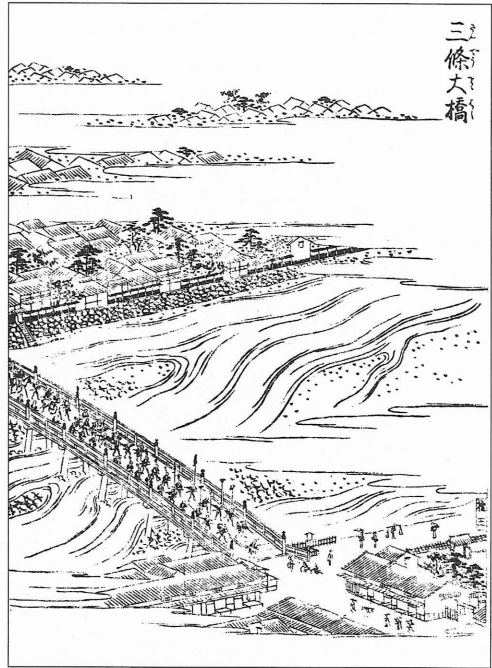
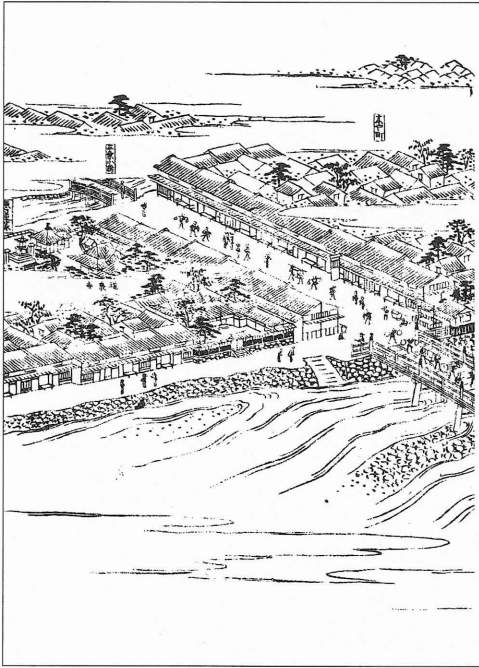


fig.1 Great bridge of Sanjō, Kyoto (*Miyako meisho zue*. Vol.1)

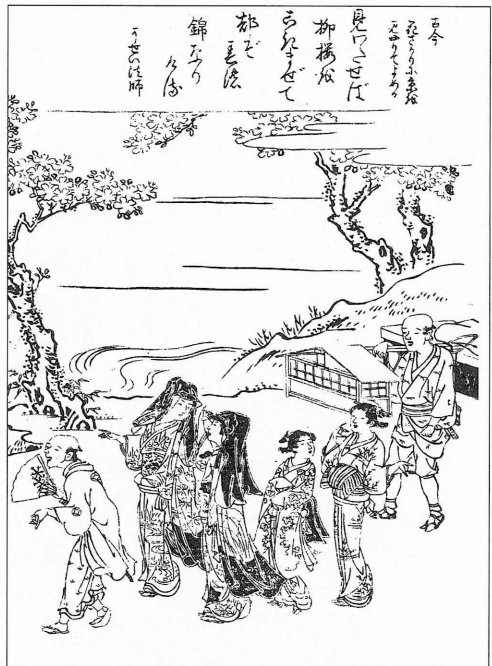


fig.2 People enjoying cherry blossom in Arashiyama, suburb of Kyoto (*Miyako meisho zue*. Vol.4)



fig.3 Dutchmen watch *tōfu* (being) cooked in a famed teahouse, Gion, Kyoto (*Shūi miyako meisho zue*. Vol.2)

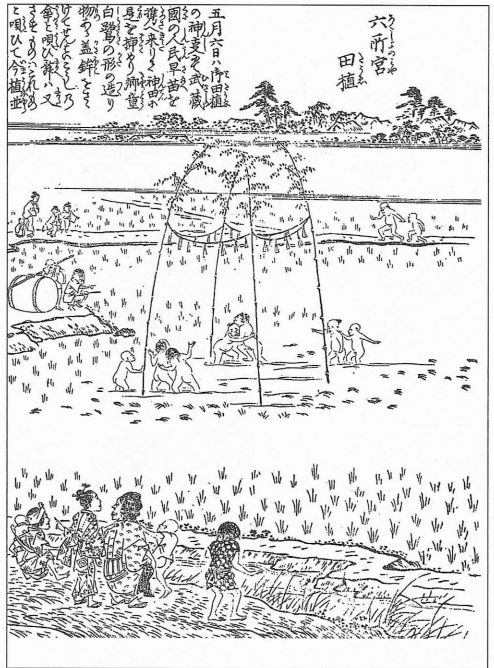


fig.4 Festive rice planting (*Edo meisho zue*. Vol.3)

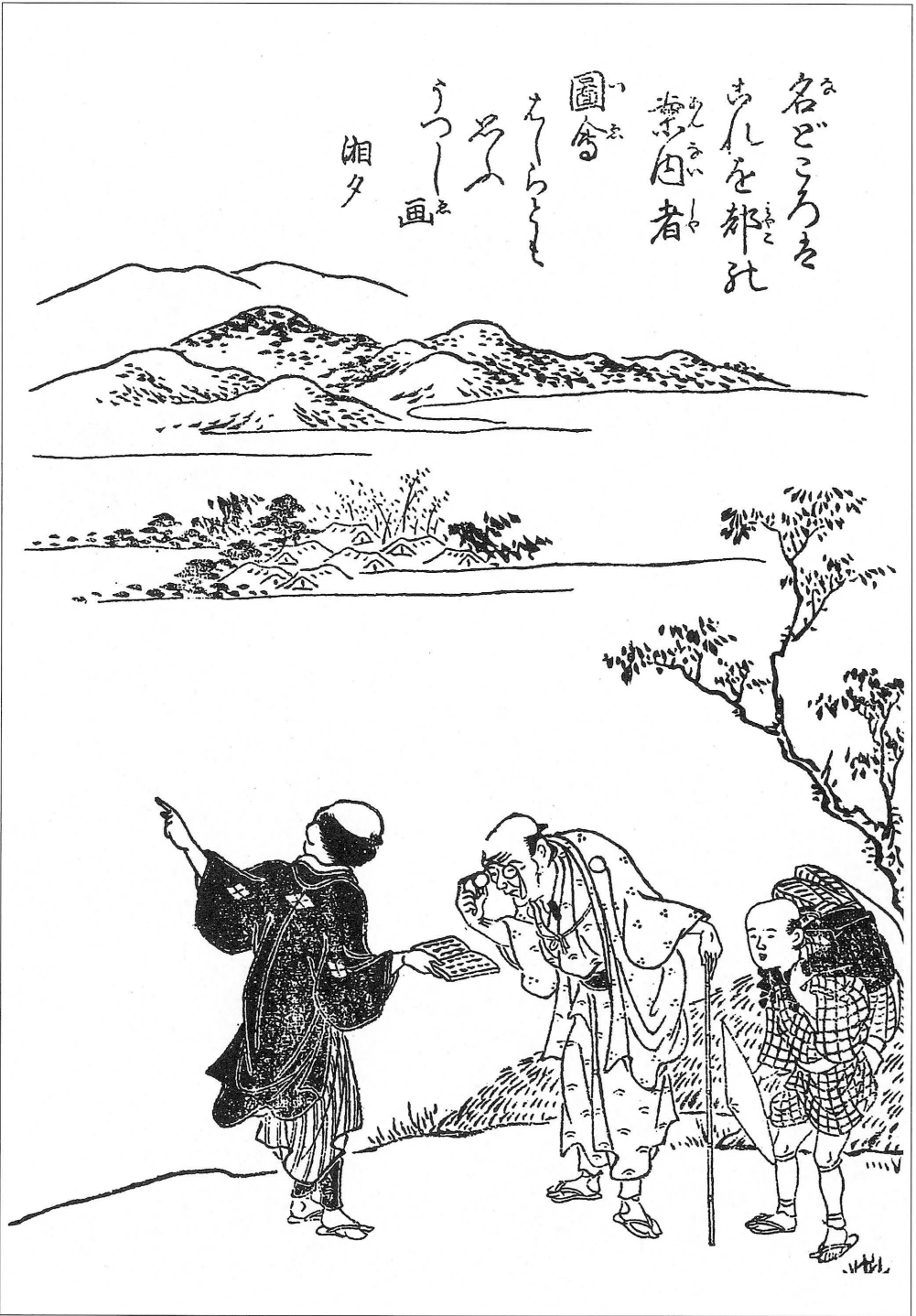


fig.5 Sightseers who are consulting a guide book (*Shūi miyako meisho zue*. Vol.2)

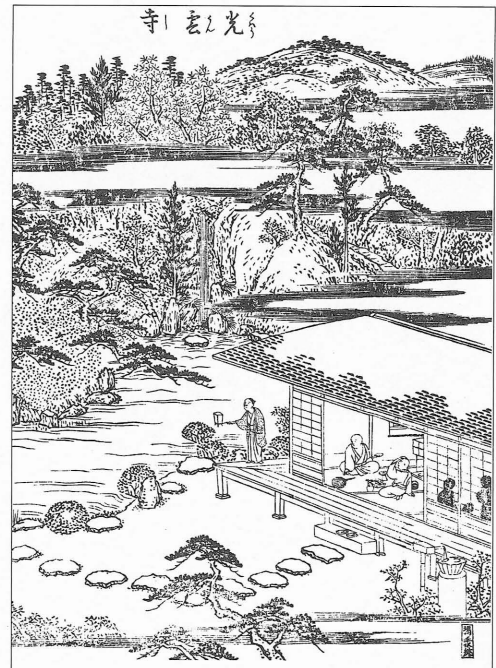
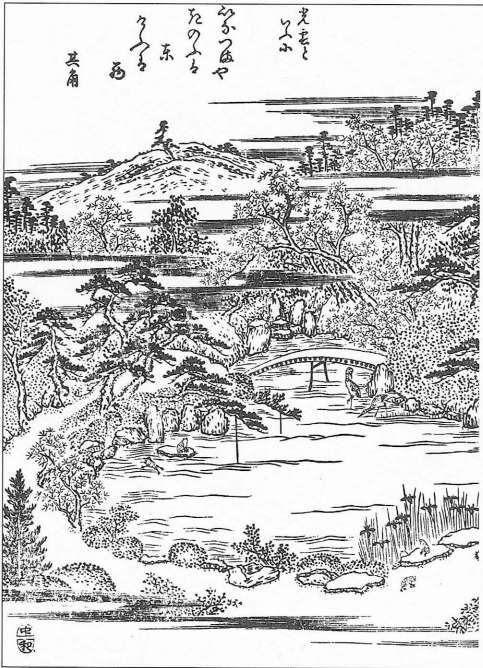


fig.6 Kōun-ji temple in the night (*Miyako rinsen meishō zue*. Vol.2)

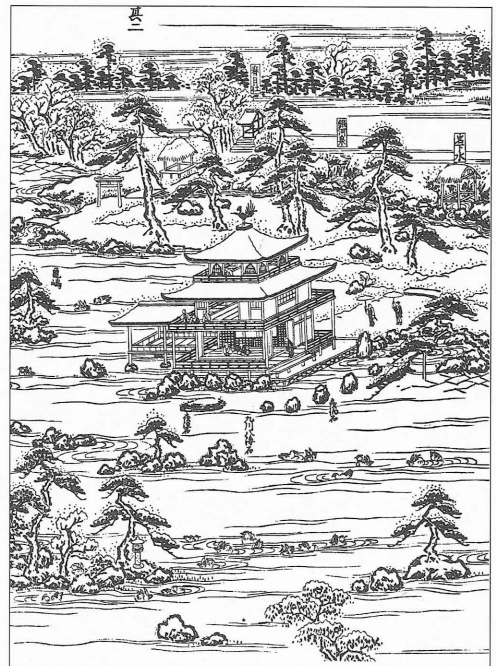
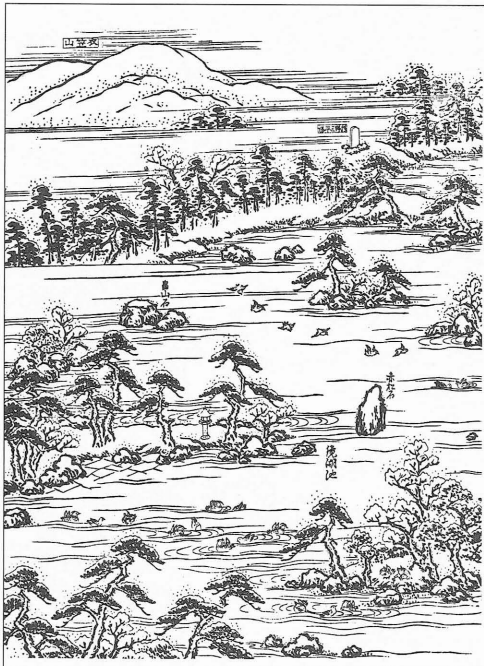


fig.7 The garden of Kinkaku-ji in snow (*Miyako rinsen meishō zue*. Vol.5)