

Mio Wakita

**Staging Desires:
Japanese Femininity in Kusakabe Kimbei's
Nineteenth-Century Souvenir Photography**

Reimer



The Hammonds Foundation Monograph Series on Asian Art

This book has been published with the assistance of the Japan Foundation



Additional assistance from the Stiftung zur Förderung japanisch-deutscher Wissenschafts-Kulturbeziehungen (JaDe-Stiftung), the MCH-Foundation, Dallas/Baden-Baden (Stiftung Hammonds), and the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” of Heidelberg University

This book is a revised version of the dissertation thesis “In the Guise of Elusive Veracity: A Visual Construct of Meiji Femininity in Kusakabe Kimbei’s Souvenir Photographs in the Age of Visual Modernity” submitted to Heidelberg University in 2010

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

Layout and Coverdesign: Nicola Willam, Berlin
Illustration: Kusakabe Kimbei, *16 Wind Costume*, see also Plate 19
Printing: Wilhelm & Adam Werbe- und Verlagsdruck OHG, Heusenstamm

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www.reimer-verlag.de

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Printed in Germany
Printed on resistant to ageing paper

ISBN 978-3-496-01467-6

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Japanese name order, i.e., surname followed by given name, is used within the text.

Introduction

The Point of Departure

The nineteenth century is often described as a century of new visibility. Japan's encounter with this visual modernity was heralded by the introduction of daguerreotype in 1848. With its mechanic reproduction as well as mimetic quality of its image, the incorporation of photography as a new medium in indigenous practices was destined to be far from straightforward. Given the fact that visibility itself is a socially and historically defined notion, the impact of photography's visual modernity on Meiji visual practice was truly an intriguing issue to pursue.

One of the practices in the age of visual modernity was Japanese souvenir photography, which emerged from the thriving tourist industry in the major port cities by the early 1860s. After the Tokugawa government opened its ports in 1854, Japan appeared increasingly on the international arena. Photography being the best medium for capturing and disseminating visually convincing images of Japan, at the height of the industry from the 1890s until the 1900s photography studios received overwhelming amount of orders on site as well as from trading companies abroad, demonstrating the power of photographic imagery in envisaging the now accessible country. The wide availability of this visual product outside Japan denotes the powerful role of Japanese souvenir photographs as iconic signs of Japan, functioning as a vital source of knowledge about "Things Japanese" (Basil Chamberlain)¹ in the West, and helping to shape still present stereotypes of "Japaneseness" such as *Fujiyama*, geisha, and samurai. Even the Meiji Japanese regarded souvenir photography albums as something representing their country and worth presenting: Jane Stanford (1828–1905), a co-founder of Stanford University and avid collector of East Asian art, received lacquer-covered photograph albums as gifts from some of the young Japanese graduates of her university on her journey to Japan in 1904.² Above all, female imagery is one of the major thematic subjects of Japanese souvenir photography, and was the most prominent category in terms of numbers of images produced. It seems that women represented in Japanese souvenir photography were predestined to signify the alleged "national" femininity, or even the symbolic identity of Japan itself.

1 Chamberlain (1890).

2 Guth (2009), 57.



Figure 1 [Kusakabe Kimbei, 86 *Snow Costume*.] Reprinted in: Stratz, (1902), p. 98, figure 46

Indeed, female images of Japanese souvenir photography as a visual product underwent a multitude of semantic transformations in the process of image transfer. For example, the photographic collection of the Central Archive of the Protestant Church in the Pfalz region (*Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche der Pfalz*), located in Speyer, Germany, includes many Japanese souvenir photographs and lantern slides brought back from Japan by members of the German Mission for East Asia (*Deutsche Ostasienmission*), active in Yokohama since 1885, as anthropological material for Christian missionary seminars. Souvenir photographs, among them several works by Kusakabe Kimbei, were also in use by the German gynaecologist Carl Heinrich Stratz (1858–1924) as visual specimens for his popular scientific eugenic studies on women of different human races (figures 1 and plate 1).³ There was indeed the latent possibility that nineteenth-century Japanese souvenir photographs would have easily been perceived in the context of popular ethnographic interest, for “tea-house girls” or “geishas” from Japan belonged to the culture of nineteenth-century *Völkerschau* or commercial ethnographic exhibitions from their emergence in the 1870s.

Photographic images of them represented a comfortable replacement for live events that required the physical presence of the women, offering an instant ethnographic show to be enjoyed at home at any time without being disturbed by the annoying gaze of the exhibited. Simultaneously, souvenir images also often accompanied travel literature as vivid illustrations of the far distant country.⁴ British photographer and critic Victor Burgin has argued that the reception of photographs acts as “a *place of work*, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, whatever codes he or she is familiar with in order to *make sense*.”⁵ The wide range of discursive forms for the reception of Japanese souvenir photography described above demonstrates that photography indeed functions as a “text” or a signifying system.

3 Stratz (1902). Stratz also used diverse geisha portrait photographs as well as souvenir photographs as illustrations in his book on the study of Japanese bodily forms and depictions and the aesthetics of the naked body in Japanese art works. Stratz (1925). On the use of Stillfried’s photographs for phrenological studies, see Gartlan (2006), 251–256.

4 See for instance Sladen (1904); Finck (1895).

5 Burgin (1982a), 153.

Claiming the complexity in the signification of the Japanese souvenir images, art historian Kinoshita Naoyuki argued already in 1990 that any analysis has to consider the roles they played in the society in which the images were produced and the social implications of their staging.⁶ However, while admitting that the expectations and desires of consumers were present in the images of souvenir albums, and that one is constantly reminded that the commercial underpinnings of the products could have powerfully dictated the creation of the images, a “consumer-driven history”⁷ of nineteenth-century souvenir photography still seems to me as too monolithic in perspective. Were Japanese souvenir photographs really mere indexical traces of the physical world and its cultural objects, projecting those traces embedded within shifting patterns of ownership, organization and use? What seems to me critically missing in the perspective of previous studies on this subject is an approach which addresses its aspect as a polysemous image.

The multiplicity of the ways in which Japanese souvenir photographs have been received perfectly witnesses to the mechanism of the transfer of the meaning of images. In his essay “Encoding/Decoding”, Stuart Hall describes the system through which meaning is produced, explaining that the meaning of images is generated in the course of transfer process from the producer of the images to their recipients/viewers.⁸ In this process, the “transparent” transfer of meaning encoded by the image producer might be obscured by incompatible systems of signs and symbols that depend on the background of the recipient – i. e. class, gender, ethnic origin, sexuality, religion, understanding and relations to various forms of media etc. What Hall is elucidating here is the fact that visual messages are not always read as they are intended. His concept of semantic system corresponds to Julia Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality. In the same manner, Victor Burgin discusses the semantic structure of photographs. In approaching photography through its relation to the general sphere of cultural production, he argues that photography’s primary characteristic is its capacity to produce and disseminate *meaning*. But the meanings of photographs are not determined by, or confined to, the pictures themselves, for meaning is continually being reproduced within the context in which these pictures appear: “Meaning is perpetually displaced from the *image* to the discursive formations which cross and contain it.”⁹

The photographic “text,” like any other, is the site of a complex intertextuality, an overlapping series of previous texts “taken for granted” at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture:

These prior texts, these *presupposed* by the photograph, are autonomous; they serve a role in the actual text but do not appear in it, they are latent to the manifest text and may only be read across is “symptomatically.” ... The question of meaning therefore is constantly to be referred to the social and psychic formations of the author/reader.¹⁰

6 Kinoshita (1990), 96–97.

7 Hockley (2004b), 67.

8 Hall (1980).

9 Burgin (1982b), 215–216.

10 Burgin (1982a), 144.

As visual texts in the transcultural flow produced in Japan and consumed in the West, Japanese souvenir photography perfectly testifies to this ambivalence as well as multifaceted structures in the generation of meaning.¹¹

The complex intertextuality of the photographic text, at the same time, also invites us to move beyond an approach examining the Western reception of such photographs, so that we can interrogate how the Japanese creator of the image encoded this photographic text. A discernible shift in the ownership of Yokohama studios producing souvenir photographs took place in the 1880s, when Western photographers who had dominated the market during the 1860s and the early 1870s gave way to Japanese photographers.¹² This shift in the profile of the photographers led to vital paradigm changes, as the framing of the self inevitably comprised ideological, cultural and semantic changes in the discourses within which the photographer was framed and meaning generated.¹³ These discursive shifts transformed the hegemonic relationship between the photographer and the sitter in a period that coincided with emerging nationalistic sentiment in Japan. The 1890s were an important turning point in terms of Japanese nationalism and nation building. In 1889, a Prussian-style constitution and male suffrage had been implemented in Japan, indicating the nation's accelerated process of Westernisation. There followed Japan's military victory over China (1894–1895), the annexations of Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910), and the defeat of the Czar's forces in 1905. Although Japanese souvenir photography had to satisfy diverse interests, both as a source of visual information about Japan and its people, and as a commercial product that piqued Westerners' curiosity about the exotic nation, these nationalistic sentiments had a profound effect on its production.

In this transformed environment, one in which the Japanese became the primary image creators, female images serve as a vital index for interrogating the changing hegemonic structure between photographer and model. Japanese Women were one of the most ubiquitous subjects in Japanese souvenir photography, far in advance of male imagery. One of the earliest souvenir photographs with Japanese subjects, produced in 1860 by Pierre Joseph Rossier (1829–1883/1898), already featured “Japanese ladies in full dress” (figure 2).¹⁴ Thereafter Japanese female figures remained the dominant subject in the portfolios of the major photographic studios producing souvenir photography in Yokohama. Kusakabe Kimbei's studio (日下部金兵衛, 1841–1932)¹⁵, for instance, included in its sales catalogue more than half of the available 416 “*costume*” images exclusively featuring women, whereas only about seventy images depicted men as the main subject.¹⁶ This predominance of female images to be observed in Japanese souvenir photography was not

11 Some anthropologists working on photographic images also take a similar intertextual approach to objects, especially in speaking of cultural objects defined in context of social relations. See for instance Edwards (2007).

12 Saitō (2004), 152.

13 Tran follows the same line of argument in his dissertation, acknowledging Japanese souvenir photography as “representative of contentious cultural, ideological and economic activity.” Tran (2005), 10.

14 An advertisement posted by Negretti and Zambra in *The Times* (May 28, 1860), 3. Reprinted in Bennett (2006a), 223.

15 Other than common spelling ‘Kinbei’, Kimbei's name is written as ‘Kimbei’ according to the spelling given in his studio catalogue.

16 Catalogue (1893). For a facsimile copy, see Nakamura (2006), 173–184. For the list of catalogue numbers and captions see also Bennett (2006a), 135–145.



Figure 2 Pierre Joseph Rossier, “Japanese Ladies in Full-Dress Winter Costume,” no. 79 from Negretti and Zambra’s *Views in Japan*, published 1861, albumen print stereoview

exceptional. Nineteenth-century colonial photography also favoured women, visualising the hegemonic structure to which the colonised and coloniser belonged through a gendered relation. James William Murray was not too reserved to disclose their incitement: “In all counties, the most interesting objects in the eyes of a stranger, are the female population.”¹⁷

In the field of literary study, the analysis of Western image of Japanese women revolves around the “*musume*”¹⁸ that often appeared in the nineteenth century literary works with Japanese subjects, such as *okiku-san* of the bestseller *Madame Chrysanthème* by Pierre Loti (1887), and *Madame Butterfly* in the short story of the same name by John Luther Long (1898), on which the opera by Giacomo Puccini was based.¹⁹ Such discourses on *musume* as emblematic figures of otherness can be summarised by saying that they frequently reflect the schematic picture of “West-aggressor-male” vs. “Japan-victim-female” which confirms the perceived structure of nineteenth-century Orientalist ideology. It seems to be taken as fact that this gendered paradigm was already immersed within the larger late nineteenth-century discourse on Japan, a primary signification of asymmetric power relationships. Furthermore, a study of British generalist descriptions of Japan published from 1895 to 1910 suggests that for all the diversity and inconsistencies in discourse on Japan an underlying pattern of representation of Japan, casting Japan as young, innocent

17 Letterpress text accompanying Beato’s photograph *Out for a Walk* in the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

18 The term *musume* appeared in the 1860s for the first time in Western literature and gained large popularity in European and North American countries from the 1870s upwards until the beginning of the twentieth century. A special feature of the term is that this description contains extremely opposed images of Japanese women: *musume* refers both to young girls and prostitutes (including geisha). See Mitsutani (1994), 177–182.

19 See Mitsutani (1994). Kawamoto (2006).

and feminine, was established.²⁰ Whereas such an analysis primarily emphasises the reception of Japanese women in the West, the case with Japanese souvenir photography is, however, more complex, in that the dominance of Japanese photographers from the mid-Meiji period and Japan's political independence belie the possibility of reading Japanese souvenir photography as merely representing "Otherness," since the simple binary paradigm of the East as submissive female object and the West as authoritative male subject cannot be sustained. The change in studio ownership also involved a further change in how images by Japanese photographers were embedded and formulated, with an impact on the signifying system that Japanese photographers adopted as well as on the images' significance as encoded information. This study seeks to explore how Japanese souvenir photographers represented and marketed the alleged "Otherness" of their own nation by focusing on female images. In this context questions arise: Did images of Japanese women in souvenir photographs represent mere self-exoticization, or do they require another interpretive model?

Driven by this intellectual concern, this book examines how images of Japanese femininity in Meiji souvenir photography were signified by Meiji Japanese at the zenith of its production. The semantic construction of the images, I argue, should be analysed in the context of Meiji visual culture and Meiji visual practices, in which the producer of the images was embedded as an active participant. Points of departure in this inquiry are two crucial aspects of female images of Meiji souvenir photography: In conjunction with the inquiry into its visual idioms that clarifies the visual strategy of the image creator, the issues of female model will also be considered in relation to the visual and cultural practices in Meiji visual culture. The rather unorthodox inquiry into the second issue is motivated by the capacity of the female figure to constitute a cross section of hegemonial power relations, especially due to its own contested status in the visual regime of Japanese visual culture. Thus alongside the socio-cultural persona of the female model, the different conditions for generating the semantic significance of female imagery will be examined in order to reframe the discussion, with a shifted focus on the Meiji context. This includes the problem of female visibility in Japanese visual practices, and actual photographic practice in Meiji Japan in reaction to this visibility, as well as the resulting contemporaneous concept of photographic mediality. This concern reflects the understanding of "photography" as having been specifically conceived and employed in the course of its own cultural assimilation. This study therefore abandons the concept of photographic history as "the explosion of a Western technology whose practice has been molded by singular individuals,"²¹ and instead proceeds from the notion of photography as "a globally disseminated and locally appropriated medium,"²² a concept shared by recent studies on photography both by cultural anthropologists and art historians.²³ The approach of

20 See Pham (1999), 163–181.

21 Pinney (2003), 1.

22 Ibid.

23 For discussion on culturally specific photographic practices, see for example, Pinney (2003), 1–14; Schwartz and Przyblyski (2004), xxi–xxii. See also Foster (1988), ix. It is notable that a substantial body of research dealing with the significance of specific cultural and historical contexts in shaping photographic practices was first provided by cultural anthropologists. A recent publication that aims to follow a similar approach, *Photographies East: The Camera and its Histories in East and Southeast*

this study is thus based on the assumption that the formal qualities of images themselves may only be relevant to a limited degree. As Christopher Pinney has suggested, it would appear to be inappropriate to propose inflexible links between formal qualities and their effect if “an image that appears to do a particular kind of work in one episteme is able to perform radically different work in another.”²⁴ A more nuanced analysis of “the affinities between particular discursive formations and the image worlds that parallel them”²⁵ is indeed required. Bearing the concept of socio-historically challenged visibility in mind, the widespread prevalence of photography in Meiji Japan certainly justifies asking how the visual novelty summoned by photography, and its cultural impact on Meiji visual practices, regulated and connoted the semantic construction of this female imagery. By doing so, I aim to re-examine the highly intricate process through which visual semantics were generated in the photographic media in Meiji Japan.

The shift in perspective from a reception-orientated approach²⁶ – commonly employed in the research on female images of Japanese souvenir photographs – to one that is producer-orientated is grounded on semiotic concern directed towards photographic “intertextuality” rather than its visual veracity. In considering photography as a complexly textured artefact concealing many different depths, this thesis might be seen as what Ivan Gaskell termed “historical retrieval”, or an attempt to construe visual material in the original context.²⁷

Such an approach also represents a critical reflection of classic Orientalist discourse on the visual confrontations of different cultures, which always posits the West as the centre. More precisely, this thesis is to be understood as part of an endeavour to analyse the historical context and cultural nuances of the given situations in which images were generated. It re-examines the reading of female images in the nineteenth century Japanese souvenir photography according to which they mirror Westerner’s libidinous desire towards the exotic femininity of Japan.²⁸ Such a reading would seem to be in agreement with the classic idea of hegemonial structure of the gaze. Hence in her much-debated essay on feminist film theory Laura Mulvey speaks of the cinematic gaze as masculine, underlining the asymmetric power relationship between the observer and the object.²⁹ Expanding upon Mulvey’s theory, the camera – analogous to the cinematic apparatus internalising the spectators’ gaze – transforms *the way* woman is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. The photographic gaze creates “a gaze, a world and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire.”³⁰ However, while this concept of relation between looking and empowerment addresses the aspect of voyeurism as a form of

Asia, includes contributions mostly of anthropologists. Morris (2009). Young scholars working on early modern and modern Japanese art histories, on the other hand, increasingly share this concept of culturally conceptualised photography. See, for instance, Fukuoka (2006), and Kim (2010).

24 Pinney (2003), 3.

25 Ibid.

26 For this scholarship, see, for instance, Ozawa and Shinoyama (1981); Iizawa (1987); Delank (1996b); Hight (2002); Hockley (2006).

27 Gaskell (1991), 182.

28 See Hight (2002).

29 This classic scheme refers to the particular configuration reflecting a gendered binary paradigm of the West as authoritative male and Japan as submissive and thus objectified female. See Nochlin (2004), 289–297.

30 Mulvey (1989), 25.

nineteenth century imperialist appetite for surveillance and possession, it fails to touch upon the crucial issue of female agency. The taken-for-grantedness of the status of the female models as subject of desire on which the hypothesis is based on thus needs to be reconsidered.

The object of analysis in this thesis is the photographic depiction of women by Kusakabe Kimbei photo studio, one of the most prolific photo studios in Yokohama during the 1880s and the 1890s. Kusakabe Kimbei, professionally known by his given name, Kimbei, was one of the most commercially successful Japanese photographers of the nineteenth century. By 1893 it was ranked as one of the most prolific photography studios in Yokohama catering to Western customers, alongside the studios run by A. Farsari and Tamamura Kōzaburō. Photographs of the Kimbei's photographic studio are the most frequently found Japanese souvenir photography from the Meiji period, with the result that he is better known outside Japan than in his homeland.³¹ Not only are a great number of his photographs extant, his images of women also exemplify the mainstream visual strategies of Japanese souvenir photography during this period.³² This thesis looks into the making of images of Japanese femininity in Meiji souvenir photography produced by Meiji Japanese by verifying the practices surrounding Japanese women in Meiji souvenir photography mentioned above.

The State of Research

Nineteenth century Japanese photography is a comparatively new field of academic inquiry. Souvenir photography from Yokohama (*yokohama shashin* 横浜写真) seldom found entry in the standard historiography of photography in Japan. The reasons are many. First of all, owing to its nature as export or souvenir articles the great majority of its collections are housed outside Japan. In addition, the emphasis on a creator-orientated study of Japanese photography that often mutates into the genealogy study of photographers necessarily excludes such photographic works as souvenir photography from Yokohama, most of which were created by anonymous photographers.³³ Owing to the highly staged depictions of its genre scenes as well as the images' nature of appealing to foreign taste and artificial staging, they have been often considered as "pandering to nineteenth century Western notions of exoticism,"³⁴ thereby sometimes condemning them as nothing but tourist kitsch. Photography historian Ozawa Takeshi even found harsh words for the Meiji professional photographers in the Kantō area who sold souvenir photographs. Ozawa contended that they marketed "souvenir albums with photographs showing droll and hilarious (*chinkina* 珍奇な) native customs."³⁵ At the same time, their perceived "lack of individualism" had long contradicted modernist principles predominate until the 1980s. These aspects

31 Saitō (1990), 247; Saitō (2004), 177–178.

32 Saitō (2004), 177.

33 Kinoshita (1990), 96.

34 Dobson (2004), 15.

35 Ozawa (1981), 29.

have long contributed to the exclusion of souvenir photography from the “history of great photographers.”

From the mid-1970s, however, an increasing number of Japanese souvenir photographs have been brought ‘back’ to Japan by dealers. Analogous to this trend, the Yokohama Archives of History (*Yokohama Kaikō Shiryōkan* 横浜開港資料館), opened in 1981, has become a motor for the study on Japanese souvenir photography. With its vast collection and exhibitions on this subject, this institution provided one of the first occasions that original photographic works of Meiji Yokohama could be viewed in Japan. The general turning point for the study of these for a long time poorly regarded photographs was the 1980s. Following the opening of the Yokohama Archives of History, in 1988 Nagasaki University Library launched a collection of Japanese photographs from the Bakumatsu and Meiji periods, which was expanded up until 1995. From its opening in 1987, the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto has held around 5,000 original Japanese ‘old photographs’ (*koshashin* 古写真). Furthermore, a growing number of publications on the comprehensive history of photography in Japan have appeared from the 1980s onwards. With the series of publications – *Complete Works of Japanese Photography* (*Nihon shashin zenshū* 日本写真全集) (especially the first volume *Dawn of Photography* [*Shashin no makuake* 写真の幕あけ], published in 1985)³⁶, *History of Photography in Japan* (*Nihon no shashinshi* 日本の写真史, 1986)³⁷, *Collection of Photographs by F. Beato from the bakumatsu Era* (*F. Beato Bakumatsu Nihon shashinshū* F.ベアト幕末日本写真集, 1987)³⁸, and *Japan in the Meiji Period: the World of “Yokohama Photography”* (*Meiji no Nihon: ‘Yokohama shashin’ no sekai* 明治の日本 – 《横浜写真》の世界, 1990)³⁹ –, Japanese souvenir photography from Yokohama has gradually achieved rehabilitation within the history of early photography in Japan. Tucker’s *History of Japanese Photography* (2003), one of the recent substantial discussions on Japanese photography by Japanese writers, for instance, included a subsection on nineteenth-century souvenir photographs as an integral part of the history of Japanese photography.⁴⁰ After Worswick’s pioneering work *Japan: Photographs 1854–1905*⁴¹ was published in 1979, a wave of publication of Western-language volumes on nineteenth-century Japanese souvenir photography set in from the 1980s, benefiting from existing collections in their original destinations outside Japan. Based on the Bigelow and Knox collections at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology and Wellesley College Museum, *A Timely Encounter*⁴² came out in 1988, followed by *Souvenir’s from Japan*⁴³ in 1991, based on the private Schelling collection purchased by Ukiyo-e Books in Leiden. In 1995 the collection of Japanese souvenir photographs from the archives of the Russian Geographical Society in St. Petersburg was published in *Japan: Caught in Time*⁴⁴ co-authored by Terry Bennett

36 Ozawa et al. (1985).

37 Ozawa (1986).

38 Yokohama Kaikō Shiryōkan et al. (1987).

39 Yokohama Kaikō Shiryōkan et al. (1990).

40 See Kinoshita (2003), 29–31; Tucker (2003), 7–8.

41 Worswick (1979).

42 Banta and Taylor (1988).

43 Winkel (1991).

44 Cortazzi and Bennett (1995).

and Hugh Cortazzi. Terry Bennett's *Early Japanese Images* (1996)⁴⁵ includes the vast collection of the images built up by the author himself working as photography dealer and collector. Two substantial works came out in 2004 and 2006. The findings of the long-term research for the discovery and reconstruction of its history conducted by Saitō Takio 齊藤多喜夫, one of the leading scholars in this field, were presented in his book *Histories of Photographic Studios in Yokohama during the Bakumatsu and the Meiji Periods* (*Bakumatsu Meiji Yokohama shashinkan monogatari* 幕末明治横浜写真館物語) covering the major Yokohama-based photographers of the souvenir photographic business.⁴⁶ In 2006 the photography dealer and researcher Terry Bennett published his study on the history of the Japanese souvenir photography *Photography in Japan 1853–1912*, a comprehensive work on its indigenous and non-Japanese creators.⁴⁷ This particularly extensive work marks the turning point in the study of the Japanese photo-history, not only focusing on genuine Japanese protagonists – as was the case with the Anne Wilkes Tucker et al.'s *The History of Japanese Photography* (2003)⁴⁸ – but also by paying much respectful attention to the trans-cultural genealogy of the early Japanese photography. In the same year, Bennett also published the source book *Old Japanese Photographs: Collectors' Data Guide*, a compilation of various valuable original sources vital for reconstructing the activity of creators.⁴⁹ Containing lists of catalogue numbers of major photo studios it was the best publication of its kind, providing helpful tools for proofing image attribution. While his earlier publication *Early Japanese Images* (1996) contained 1200 firm attributions, in his *Old Japanese Photographs: Collectors' Guide* Bennett expanded the list of attributed photographs and provided over 4000 catalogue numbers of major studio photographs.

As to the evaluation of Japanese souvenir photography, until the rise of in-depth analysis from the late 1980s the undertone of the accounts on Japanese souvenir photographs was divided. On the one hand, many authors of the publications focusing on these visual materials deemed them – even with a certain nostalgia – as faithful documents of a bygone era.⁵⁰ This view has its background: In the second half of the twentieth century, images of Japanese souvenir photography served to authenticate descriptions of cultural practices of the past, taking the alleged “veracity” of photographic images for granted. One of the earliest examples is *Photographic Documents of Customs from the Bakumatsu Meiji Era* (*Bakumatsu ishin fūzoku shashin-shi* 幕末維新風俗写真史), published in 1950.⁵¹ This book, a loosely organized collection of frequently referred-to locations and customs of the late Tokugawa period as well as several novelties in the early Meiji period, contains a great number of souvenir photographs taken between the 1860s and 1890s. Descriptions of individual topics are accompanied by photographs which endorse a validity of the accounts. Topics within the category of the lost customs in particular were marked by the heavy use of souvenir photographs which had previously catered to the interest of foreigners. It

45 Bennett (1996).

46 Saitō (2004).

47 Bennett (2006b).

48 Tucker et al. (2003).

49 Bennett (2006a).

50 For instance, Yokohama Kaikō Shiryōkan et al. (1990); Cortazzi and Bennett (1995); *Once Upon A Time* (1986); Dobson (2004); Saitō (2004).

51 Yamada Shūbidō (1950).

is therefore an ironic turn in the function of the images that a century after the inauguration of souvenir photographic industry in Japan Japanese souvenir photographs came to contribute to the transmission of what were considered to be genuine images of the past, without questioning, for instance, their validity in terms of the identity of models or the constructed nature of the highly staged images. Allen Hockley has rightly criticized that the authors of such publications, mostly historians, failed to acknowledge the precarious, highly problematic nature of images as primary sources.⁵² Half a decade earlier, the art historian Claudia Delank had also addressed the myth of the photographic veracity, in her nuanced analysis focusing on the ambivalence in the authenticity of images of Meiji souvenir photographs.⁵³ On the other hand, some scholars stress the *mise-en-scene* character of the genre images, maintaining that this was a clear reflection of their function as minor commercial products catering to foreigners' exoticism.⁵⁴

While acknowledging its great potential as historical resource, nineteenth century souvenir photography from Japan needs to be handled with sharp sensibility, asking "to which history this resource should be applied."⁵⁵ Only this approach, I believe, can do full justice to the materials. A photograph is not a mute, raw image without an author or a date. Because time, space, the author pressing the shutter button, and the photographed subject are involved, a photograph is never simple. In this sense, the contention that Japanese souvenir photography was merely shaped according to the customers' expectations is much too simplistic, especially given the intricate ideological circumstances surrounding the image makers from the mid-Meiji period.

Many scholars working on these images have turned their attention to the role of consumers in the generation of image meanings. John Dower argues that by choosing such motifs which they as indigenous people would have otherwise regarded as too trivial to select Japanese photographer simply conformed to the interests of Western customers.⁵⁶ Focusing on the specific contexts in which souvenir photography was embedded (i. e. photographs put together before embarking on a trip, as well as the signification of the photographs provided by accompanying texts), but unfortunately avoiding paying any attention to the actual images, Iizawa Kōtarō contends that the reception of these visual products was heavily dictated by the discourses in which the viewers found themselves.⁵⁷ Pursuing a similar line of logic, Satō Morihiro discusses scenic views of Japanese souvenir photography, applying the discursive framework of the contemporary concept of the "picturesque" prevalent in the nineteenth century western aesthetic discourse.⁵⁸ Through the six case studies of New England collections of Japanese souvenir photography, Eleonor M. Hight highlighted preserving "their" Old Japan in photographs as the guiding motivation for the collectors, thus building their personal "museum without walls" in a Malraux's

52 Hockley (2006), 116.

53 Delank (1996b).

54 Ozawa (1997), 199.

55 Hockley (2006), 116. The increasing sensitivity toward the constructedness of the Japanese souvenir photographs and the context of their generation is also shared by other scholars such as Kaneko Ryūichi. Kaneko (2004), 12–13.

56 Dower (1980), 5.

57 Iizawa (1987).

58 Satō (2001); Satō (2003).

sense.⁵⁹ In another study, dealing with female imageries, she argues in line with the classic concept of female imagery as internalising the male gaze from John Berger. Hight stresses the desires of Western men, who she – somewhat erroneously – defines as the exclusive recipients of nineteenth century Japanese souvenir photographs and hence as a both primary and defining force for shaping their image.⁶⁰ Focusing on samurai images, in his article “Expectation and Authenticity in Meiji Tourist Photography” Hockley discloses the multi-layered structure of meaning and authenticity. Using examples of Felice Beato’s photographs, Hockley argues that the souvenir images pre-shaped by Western discourses on Japan were nevertheless given enhanced authenticity by means of accompanying texts, however retrograde their subject might have been.⁶¹ In a similar line of argument, Hockley proposes in another study that the authorship of meaning in the photographs in Japanese souvenir albums of the 1880s and 1890s belonged to their consumers, through their individual selection of images into a personalised album, drawing also a parallel between image selection by the consumer and standing behind the camera as authoritative figure for the images’ signification.⁶² It would seem therefore that the scholarship on this visual material is moving towards the poststructuralist understanding that the wide variety of consumer profiles as well as viewing contexts necessarily imply a polyvalence of meaning of any images. Gartlan’s analysis of the reception of Japanese souvenir photographs by Stillfried, based on the terminologies to describe them, basically follows the same line of this approach.⁶³ The discussion on Japanese souvenir photography and its significance for the Japanese, on the other hand, is still scarce. John L. Tran’s dissertation is one of the first studies of this kind. Tran takes landscape images of Japanese souvenir photography as the object of inquiry, focusing on their immanent nostalgic gaze. His study demonstrates that Japanese souvenir photography posited the ideological potential for the Japanese as “an internal response to the issues of creating and sustaining a national identity in the face of increasing Westernisation.”⁶⁴

As for Kusakabe Kimbei, despite all this fame during his lifetime, for a long time the lack of acknowledgement of nineteenth-century Japanese souvenir photography also ensured his absence from the standard historiography of Japanese photography. One of the first mentions of Kimbei appeared in the *Who’s Who* catalogue of photographic industry published in 1952, in which a brief summary of his career is provided.⁶⁵ Subsequently, he remained widely unknown until the end of the 1970s. Even the publication *History of Japanese Photography (Nihon shashin-shi 日本写真史)* put out by the Photographic Society of Japan in 1971 contains no mention of Kimbei as a photographer. However, with Clark Worswick’s publication of *Japan: photographs 1854–1905* in 1979, Kimbei finally received acknowledgement as one of the key figures in the Meiji souvenir photography industry.⁶⁶ The heightened interest in nineteenth-century Japanese souvenir

59 Hight (2011a).

60 Hight (2002).

61 Hockley (2006).

62 Hockley (2004b).

63 Gartlan (2006).

64 Tran (2005), 10.

65 Umemoto and Kobayashi (2007), 74.

66 Worswick (1979).

photography, including Kimbei's photographs, reached its first zenith with the publication of the first compilation of its kind, *Saishoku arubamu: Meiji no Nihon* in 1990, which presents more than seven hundred photographs from the collection of the Yokohama Archives of History.⁶⁷ While Kimbei, for all the centrality of his images for Meiji souvenir photography, still remained a minor character in the "canonical" history of Japanese photography in the late 1990 – Kimbei was not among the forty Japanese photographers featured in the forty-volume *Nihon no shashinka* (Japanese Photographers)⁶⁸ – several survey publications on major photographers in Japan in the 2000s indicate that Kimbei and thus souvenir photography industry in general have finally been integrated into the standard discourse on the history of Japanese photography.⁶⁹ In 2006 Nakamura Keishin issued a monograph on Kimbei which provides one of the most detailed accounts of his life, surpassing those in the standard works on general history of souvenir photography from Yokohama by Saitō Takio and Terry Bennett.⁷⁰ Given the waves of recent research focusing on individual photographers or photography studios in the last ten years, and after a series of publications on the general history of the industry in the 1980s and the 1990s, it seems that the study of Japanese souvenir photography from Yokohama has now entered into a new phase.⁷¹

Yokohama shashin Terminology

Nineteenth-century Japanese souvenir albums made in Yokohama as commercial commodity for foreigners are often referred to as Yokohama photography (*Yokohama shashin* 横浜写真), a term coined by photography historian Ozawa Takeshi in the 1980s which simply records the site of its production. The connotations of the term, however, tend to contain a biased view. As Iizawa noted, in general the term recalls highly staged photographs for which hired models were choreographed to pose for camera, but not landscapes, which were nevertheless another major motif of the product.⁷² Owing to its artificiality, Yokohama photography has often been evaluated as a commodity pandering to the desire of Westerners for exoticism. Given this fact, Nakamura considers *Yokohama shashin* to be a derogatory term coined by the photography historians who constructed the alleged "standard history" of Japanese photography until the 1980s. While the negativity inherent in this term, so Nakamura, has now been diminished by its unconscious and indiscriminate use,⁷³ for the sake of factual correctness here the term "Yokohama photography" is avoided in favour of *omiyage shashin* お土産写真 or souvenir photography.

67 Yokohama Kaikō Shiryōkan et al. (1990).

68 *Nihon no shashinka* (1997–1999).

69 See Iizawa (2008); Tōkyō-to Shashin Bijutsukan (2000).

70 Saitō (2004); Nakamura (2006); Bennett (2006b).

71 For studies of this approach, see, for instance, Gartlan (2001); Gartlan (2005); Baba (2006b); Kinoshita (2006); Osano (2006); Nakamura (2006); Osano (2007); Ura (2007); Fukushima (2008); Kinoshita (2008), Osano (2008); Ura (2008).

72 Iizawa (1987), 166.

73 Nakamura (2006), 4.

The Research Background

Obstacles to research this subject are many. The scattering of the material among public archives or private collections obstruct organized research. No report giving a complete overview of Japanese souvenir photography collections in and outside Japan has been published so far. The collections themselves are still largely unrecorded, so that just detecting collections holding the material often becomes the main activity of research. Thus for my dissertation project available fragments of information about collections had to be searched for and collected simply in order to gain a general idea of the whereabouts of Yokohama souvenir photography. In North America and Europe, only a few collections of material in museums are known to the public; most of them, however, are kept in storage without ever been catalogued. Unlike Western collections, Japanese collections of Yokohama souvenir photography are relatively well-known. Some collections in libraries in Japan such as the Nagasaki University Library, Tokyo University Library, and Library of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto are well catalogued. With the publication of Bennett's source book the process of the registration and inventory of Japanese souvenir photographs in public and private collections will surely be accelerated in the future, resulting in better accessibility for scholars working in this field. To summarise, owing to these circumstances previous research on this material has long been restricted to the excavation of historical materials and to locating their place in the history of Japanese souvenir photography.

The Precarious Issue of Attribution

When dealing with nineteenth century photography, a difficulty often encountered is discerning whether one is looking at an original or a copy. It is well known that many pirate copies of photographs were made during the Meiji period.

Souvenir photography albums were issued by various photo studios, both Japanese and foreign. The difficulty in my theme exists in the identification of the photographer. Sometimes the studio is identified by a photographic frontispiece, photographers' stamp, or other markings; if this is not the case, numbers and printed captions which appear on the face of each photograph serve as clue. Nevertheless, there are many cases of acquisition of prints and negatives from other studios and even pirate copying. As Winkel also points out, an attribution solely relying on stylistic grounds may thus lead to a completely erroneous assumption.⁷⁴ In the case of Kusamabe Kinbei, Kinbei could build a representative portfolio by acquiring prints and negatives from other studios, thus filling in the gaps in his own catalogue.⁷⁵ The copyright protection available, first established in 1876, was not particularly strong due to its short period of granted protection (ten years).⁷⁶ Even the mark of a particular studio on the album board does not guarantee that all the images

74 Winkel (1991), 33.

75 In the early years of his studio, Kusabe advertised his business as photographic dealership, and he began to declare himself as a photographer only in the later phase of his activity. Bennett (2006a), 122.

76 For detailed information on copyright issue, see *Ibid.*, 85–87.

can be attributed to the owner of this studio, since most Meiji-era studios included work from his colleagues in their souvenir albums, and arrangements between studios to buy or exchange their negatives seems to have been commonplace. During the early years when Kimbei worked more as a dealer than photographer, he would have freely integrated photographic images of his colleagues into his early albums.⁷⁷ As Bennett points out, from the 1890s onwards an increasing number of shops emerged which mainly dealt in photographs rather than took them, as was the case with Tamemasa, Ryo-Un-Do, Shin-E-Do and Okamoto.⁷⁸ Extremely confusing for those trying to identify a particular studio is another practice, that of travellers: they would purchase some photographs at tourist venues and then combine them with other photographs from other studios or from other countries that they visited in their world tours. Studio assistants could also have been the actual authors of an image. As a rule, it is extremely difficult to say who exactly took a particular photograph. Against this background, “interpretive studies built solely on a foundation of authorship and attribution will ultimately be incomplete, if not altogether inaccurate.”⁷⁹

Given these preconditions as well as the large quantity of extant materials, the best way of proceeding seemed to me to confine myself to a small number of representative photographs as the subject of analysis. Hence I focus on photographs of Kusakabe Kimbei, as already mentioned one of the major Japanese protagonists of the 1890s and 1900s. Conforming with contemporary practice, the images in Kimbei’s early photography albums and – to a certain degree – possibly his studio albums from the 1890s exhibit a mixed provenance (see the detailed discussion in Chapter 1). Bearing this in mind, I basically take the stance of regarding all the images included in studio albums bearing Kimbei’s studio stamp as part of Kimbei’s oeuvre. Selected and included in his portfolio, these photographs surely met criteria which reflected Kimbei’s business, aesthetic, and ideological concerns. In this sense, I regard Kimbei as a producer of the “Kimbei” brand rather than solely an image maker.

Plan of the Book

The scope of analysis in this thesis is female images of Meiji souvenir photographs from Kusakabe Kimbei’s photo studio. There were actually two major media to disseminate souvenir images from Yokohama to the rest of the world: photography prints and lantern slides. In Yokohama, photographers were also especially experimental in their use of materials, so that other media such as porcelain (by Suzuki Shin’ichi), gold *makie* lacquer (by Mizuno Hanbei), handkerchiefs, as well as Japanese fans were also used for receiving photographic images. For the sake of consistence, I focus on photography prints as the target of my study.

In chapter one, the historical facts and analysis are presented, with the aim of putting the detailed discussions in subsequent chapters in a historical context. This chapter contains a brief introduction to Japan’s encounter with photography and a sketch of the history of souvenir

77 Ibid., 135.

78 Ibid., 122.

photography in Japan. Following this, the business history of Kusakabe Kimbei is illustrated. Additionally, Kimbei's pictorial and aesthetic strategies are closely examined, by reference to a selection of frequently surfacing Kimbei images. In doing so, I was not only able to trace the pictorial transformation process during Kimbei's active years but also to discover the conceptual program below the surface. Chapter two focuses on the female models featured in souvenir photographs by Kimbei and other studios. Above all, the pivotal questions in this chapter are the social identities of the staged models and their socio-cultural significance as well as their relation to photographic visibility. In chapter three, Kimbei's works showing female figures are discussed in detail. After a brief section on the gender balance of models featured within his portfolio, possible genealogies for their image types are re-considered and analysed. In the following sections of this chapter, major aspects of Kimbei's female typologies are investigated in order to deconstruct their ideological significations. Alluding to the previous analysis of Kimbei's visual idioms, his use of female figure as cultural Self is contextualised within the indigenous cultural paradigm, to reconsider the classic discursive framework of gendered power relations. Building upon the findings of the preceding chapter on the persona of photo models, chapter four looks into the negotiation between photography and Meiji Japanese as reflected in the structures of their understandings of the media. Departing from the guiding question of the significance of a particular group of woman being featured in Kimbei's photography, the discussion in this chapter deals with the crucial issue of female visibility in the Meiji society in conflict with photography's ever penetrating gaze, as well as the reproductivity of its images. This discussion also touches upon the issue of the visual display of women in contemporary indigenous visual conventions, its semantic relevance for Kimbei's female images, and, finally, the question of female agency.

The focused analysis of particular images conducted in this thesis not only makes a vital contribution to the state of the research on Japanese souvenir photography, which has seen comparatively few works of this kind, but also substantially revises the perspective which has previously shaped the dominant discourse on this topic. By means of examining Kimbei's female images from the crucial aspects within the context of local Meiji visual culture discussed above, together with gendered power relations and a transformed concept of photographic media, I aim to illuminate the intricate structure of significations embedded on the visual plane and finally to demonstrate how Yokohama photography became a locus of multi-layered meanings.



Plate 1 Kusakabe Kimbei, *86 Snow Costume*, 1880s?, hand-coloured albumen silver photograph



Plate 2 Matsumoto Fūko, *Western Woman dressed in Japanese Clothing (Wasō seiyō bijinzu)*, early Meiji period, colour on silk



Plate 3 Kusakabe Kimbei, *Untitled*, ca. 1885–1887, hand-coloured albumen silver photograph



Plate 4 Kusakabe Kimbei, 520 *Festival Lanterns, Bentendori Yokohama*, mid-Meiji period, hand-coloured albumen silver photograph



Plate 5 Kusakabe Kimbei, 535 *Honchodori Yokohama*, mid-Meiji period, hand-coloured albumen silver photograph