As the name suggests, ukiyo-e (pictures of the floating world) originally specialized in depictions of the manners and customs of women and children, as well as portraits of actors, but later the changing tastes of the era and artists’ maturing skills led to the production of great landscapes.

From the start, ukiyo-e and Western painting have been quite similar in that both emphasize shasei (realistic representation of nature). Landscape in Western painting emerged out of the background portions of portraiture and gradually became an independent subject. This separation began in seventeenth-century Dutch painting, continued through the eighteenth century, and was perfected in nineteenth-century French Romanticism. In other words, landscape painting arose after the development of portraits. Our ukiyo-e shares this characteristic. The fūzokuga genre (pictures of manners and customs) of ukiyo-e developed with Suzuki Harunobu (1725-70), Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-93), and Torii Kiyonaga (1752-1815), reaching its height of maturity with such masters of the Kansei period (1789-1800) as Kitagawa Utamaro (circa. 1753-1806), Katsukawa Shunchō (?-1821), Chōbunsai Eishi (1756-1829), and Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825). At that point, the two great masters appeared—Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Ichiryūsai Hiroshige (1797-1858)—who perfected landscape as an independent ukiyo-e genre, adding a final magnificence to the Edo period history of commoners’ art.

In discussing landscapes by Hokusai and Hiroshige, I would like to first inquire into the course of the development of ukiyo-e landscapes. I find one source to be uki-e (literally, “floating pictures,” or perspective pictures) of distant views, prolific since Okumura Masanobu (1686-1764), and I consider the second source to be the influence of kyōka (comic poetry in 31 syllables) that flourished in Edo during the Tenmei period (1781-88). Following Suzuki Harunobu, artists like Katsukawa Shunshō and Isoda
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Koryūsai (1735-90) added sophistication to ukiyo-e in composition and coloring. In the Tenmei period, the background of some fūzokuga had already begun to constitute perfect landscapes. Examples are the backgrounds of Torii Kiyonaga's triptych *A Pilgrimage to Enoshima* (Jijo Enoshima-mōde, about 1789) and Kitagawa Utamaro's *Ferry Across the Sumida River* (Sumidagawa watashibune, date unknown). The trend of the era finally came to demand landscape representations independent of genre pictures.

Now, since the Genbun (1736-41) and Kyōhō (1716-36) periods, there has been a kind of panoramic painting called "uki-e" (floating picture). This genre represented interior and exterior views of brothels and theaters, scenes from *The Treasury of 47 Loyal Retainers* (Chūshingura, first performed in 1748) and *The Soga Felling Ten Enemies* (Soga jūbangiri, 1720) and famous places and religious sites. *Urushi-e and beni-e* (pictures colored with lacquer and safflower, respectively) from around the Kanpō (1741-44) and Enkyō (1744-48) periods already skillfully depicted distant scenes and crowds of people based on techniques of Western perspective drawing. Artists like Okumura Masanobu and Torii Kiyomitsu (1735-85) created such block copies in addition to portraits, but during the An'ei period (1772-81), Utagawa Toyoharu (1735-1814) exclusively produced distant views of famous places, which became fashionable. The Kansei period had already seen a trend toward mass production of inferior work.

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Katsushika Hokusai, *Chushingura, Act Two* (Kanadehon Chushingura, Nidan-me, around 1806). Courtesy of Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon.
Viewing the most dexterous *uki-e* from the An’ei period, it becomes clear that the dominant color is brown, which Koryûsai had favored, along with yellowish red and green, thus achieving an excellent harmony. Imitating Dutch copperplate printing in terms of composition, the technique is clumsy but has an unexpected charm. Because An’ei *uki-e* imitates both Dutch copperplate prints and Edo landscapes of famous places, it reproduces Western-style temples, streets, and canals. Following Utagawa Toyoharu and Kitao Shigemasa (1739-1820), in the Tenmei period, Hokusai, under the name of Katsu Shunrô, also produced many *uki-e* works, including those of Kinryûzan (the Sensô-ji Temple) in Asakusa, the Atago Shrine in Shiba, the Kameido Tenjin Shrine in Kameido, and the gate to the Yoshiwara. Uki-e should be regarded as the premise of the ukiyo-e landscapes that Hokusai and Hiroshige would later perfect.

In the early Tenmei period, talented literati like Yomo no Akara (*kyôka* pen name of Ôta Nanpô, 1749-1823), Karagoromo Kissû (1743-1802), and Akera Kankô (1740-1800) revived *kyôka* in Edo. The fashion for *kyôka* led to the flourishing of gorgeous prints called “*surimono*” and the publication of *kyôka* anthologies and picture books with *kyôka*. This helped ukiyo-e landscapes to make strident progress.

If we wish to visit picture books of famous Edo places of scenic beauty, all we have from the early Edo period are *Famous Places in Comic Verse* (*Kyôka utamakura*, 1682) by Hishikawa Moronobu (1618-94) and from more recent times, *Souvenirs of Edo* (Edo miyage, 1753) by Nishimura Shigenaga (1697-1756) in the early Hôreki period (1751-64) and Suzuki Harunobu’s *Sequel to Souvenirs of Edo* (Zoku Edo miyage, 1768) in the Meiwâ period (1764-72). But the Tenmei period saw successive publications, including Kitao Masayoshi’s (1764-1824) *Mirrors of Edo Famous Places* (Edo meisho kagami, date unknown) in three volumes, Torii Kiyonaga’s *Viewing Hill* (Monomigaoka, 1685) in two volumes, Kitagawa Utamaro’s *Edo Sparrows* (Ehon Edo suzume, 1786) in three volumes, and Kitao Shigemasa’s *Azuma Sleeves* (Azuma karage, 1786) in three volumes. Pictures in these books are accompanied by panegyrics by the leading *kyôka* poets of the times. Utamaro’s landscapes interspersed in the *kyôka* anthologies *Humorous Full Moon* (Kyôgetsubô, 1789) and *The Snow-Covered World* (Ginsekai, 1790) are outstanding works that Westerners today unreservedly praise. In this manner, the fashion for *kyôka* on themes of famous Edo places stimulated city folks’ love for famous Edo landscapes, and, at the same time, strongly encouraged artists to sharpen their observations of landscapes and to refine their compositions. *Kyôka* not only perfected ukiyo-e landscapes in picture books and *surimono* but also produced notable results in bird-and-flower ukiyo-e. Utamaro’s picture books *Myriad Birds* (Momochidori, 1790 or 1791) and *Selected Insects* (Mushi-erami, 1788) are prime examples. If we find it difficult to disregard a certain influence of haikai poetry on works by Hanabusa Ichô (1652-1724), Yokoya Sômin (1670-1733), and others in the Genroku period (1688-1704), then we should be able to say that the latent power of commoners’ art in the Tenmei and Kansei periods lay in *kyôka*. 
Katsushika Hokusai emerged in the golden age of kyōka and mastered the art of sketching from life (shasei) in ukiyo-e landscapes. Later, from around the eighth year of Kansei (1796), he studied techniques of Western oil painting with the Dutch studies scholar Shiba Kōkan (1747-1818, who created ukiyo-e under the name Suzuki Harushige). By combining his own techniques with those he studied, Hokusai was able to create a unique landscape style. His single-block nishiki-e (polychrome) print series include: Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjūrokkei, 1823-29), A Tour of the Waterfalls of the Provinces (Shokoku taki meguri, 1827-30), Remarkable Views of Famous Bridges in the Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran, 1827-30), and Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands (Ryûkyū hakkei, 1832); and his picture books include Fine Views of Edo (Edo shôkei ichiran, 1790), Amusements of the Eastern Capital (Tôto asobi, 1802), Range upon Range of Mountains (Yama mata yama, 1804), and Panoramic Views Along the Banks of the Sumida River (Sumidagawa ryôgan ichiran, 1806). Because I discuss in detail his nishiki-e landscapes in my essay on Hokusai, here I would like to concentrate on his picture books.

Hokusai’s picture books of celebrated places are tributes to kyōka. It is difficult to say that these works demonstrate his truly unique abilities, especially in comparison with later masterpieces like Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji and A Tour of the Waterfalls of the Provinces. Fine Views of Edo, for example, which arbitrarily introduces unseasonal sunset clouds and mist to obstruct distant views, recalls the yamato-e scrolls of old. The overly tall figures also reflect Utamaro’s influence. However, Panoramic Views Along the Banks of the Sumida River proves that, from early on, Hokusai had a superior aptitude for drawing from life and nature and the acute power of observation appropriate for gesaku. At the same time, we cannot help but be delighted to see that, in this period, the influence of Chinese paintings, often displeasing in Hokusai’s more mature works, is not yet prominent. Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji and A Tour of Waterfalls in the Provinces are masterpieces that make his name immemorial, and in both series, the coloring and composition support each other. But something often seems Chinese about the boats, figures, trees, houses, and roof tiles. For example, it is my impression that, at first glance, the views of Surugadai and Tsukudajima in Edo, and of Tamagawa in Musashi Province do not look Japanese. In contrast, in Panoramic Views Along the Banks of the Sumida River, while in some respects his brushwork seems more restrained, Hokusai presents drawings faithful to life and nature in Edo in the early years of the Bunka period (1804-17). These prints put us in contact with the kind of city atmosphere we seek to enjoy.

Panoramic Views Along the Banks of the Sumida River consists of three volumes. However, the pages are connected in a way that makes them unfurl like a picture scroll, showing panoramas of riverbanks at different times during all four seasons. The first scene of volume one presents the dawn at Takanawa. Behind a lonely-looking traveler on horseback, dressed for the journey, are several travelers, wearing similar hats, within a few steps of each other. All are walking by a teashop, in front of which a woman stands...
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serving tea. A row of teashops with woven rush curtains extends as far as one can see, forming an arc along the seashore. Out at sea, the mast of a parent boat adorned with a New Year’s pine decoration stands as tall as the distant Mount Fuji against the clear sky. The second picture shows a ferry to Tsukuda Island. Aboard are a formally clad samurai with a cloth hat, a merchant, a master carpenter, a married woman with a child, a young woman wearing a kimono with long sleeves, a manservant carrying packages, and others. Two boatmen stand, one at the helm and the other at the bow, propelling the boat with long oars; both have bulging tobacco pouches tied to their waist sashes. The third picture is the view of Tsukuda Island, dotted with boats and thatched roofs, as seen from a narrow bridge where two boys fly kites. We see many passers-by on the Eitai Bridge in the distance. Near the Mitsumata shore, in the fourth picture, ice-fishing boats spread their four-arm scoop nets. The view of the riverbank with cherry blossoms in full bloom in the fifth picture immediately changes to a summer landscape of Old Yanagibashi Bridge surrounded by green foliage in the sixth picture. A man carrying packages sits on the railing of the bridge and fans himself, and two courtesans, each holding a parasol, walk by, talking to each other. Nearby, a man, the bottom of his kimono tucked, raises his hand to gesture toward the sea where net-fishing boats have amassed, suggesting perhaps that the cry of a cuckoo has pierced the quiet of the cloudy early summer sky. The time now turns to mid-summer.

The first and second pictures of the middle volume show crowds on the main thoroughfare of Ryōgoku with a view of the Honjo shipyard. Parasols and travelers’ hats collide, as people noisily swarm along the theaters roofed with woven rush. Now, after we go from the scenes of a crowd cooling off on Ryōgoku Bridge and houseboats crossing (volume 2, figure 3), the fourth picture shows an evening shower over the New Yanagibashi Bridge, on which three charming women walk briskly, barefoot, their kimono skirts in disarray and their umbrellas half closed in the rain and wind that blows at their sleeves. Two naked men walking in the other direction, one holding his summer kimono overhead and the other covering his head with a thin mat, have just passed the women. A fishing boat near the “pine of success” seems cool, and the evening cicadas (volume 2, figure 5) at the Shiinoki Residence already suggest the beginning of autumn. The ferry at Onnaya riverbank with a view of Kayadera Temple’s high lantern (volume 2, figure 6) carries two mendicant priests, seated at the center, along with a monkey trainer and monkey dressed like Momotarō, an old woman carrying a stick decorated with gohei over her shoulder, a married woman with a package wrapped in a furoshiki cloth tired to her back, a merchant, and others. The setting sun over the white wall of Komagata Hall and the migrating geese over Tada no Yakushi Temple suggest the gathering dusk (volume 2, figure 7). And in the eighth picture, we see countless passers-by on the Ōkawa Bridge, with a view of the Koume-no-sato village with dense bamboo groves. In front of the tea stalls by the riverbank, a young woman serves tea on a red-lacquered tray. She and her customers resting on the benches watch with amusement as a street performer
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attracts a crowd of children by skillfully twirling a wooden water basin on the top of a bamboo pole. The middle volume ends here.

The third volume starts with a scene of a flock of crows flying over the roof of the Kannon Hall of the Sensōji Temple. That the picture somehow conveys the loneliness of a late autumn evening gong is a testament to the artist’s careful preparation. In the second picture, the few travelers at the Mimeguri Shrine by the Mimeguri riverbank under a cloudy sky suggest winter showers. At the Matsuchiyama Temple (volume 3, figure 3), a caretaker sweeps fallen leaves. Near the torii gate is a maple tree and just two elegant visitors dressed in kimono with fine patterns, strolling leisurely, hands tucked. The wintry riverbank is even more desolate as a white heron dances on the water. The view of the pine trees at the Shirahige Shrine across the water is perhaps from the shore of Imado (volume 3, figure 4). Here, we see two ferrymen carrying roof tiles to a boat. As we go to the ferry by the bridge (volume 3, figure 5), women who appear to be townspeople walk in front of the boathouse, perhaps on their way to their boarding house. They pass a peasant with a pipe in his mouth, standing under the eaves of a house with a thatched roof. The gong of Mokuboji Temple in the distance signals sundown, and the snow falling over the red buildings of Masaki Inari Shrine is beautiful (volume 3, figure 6). But before having the chance to fully enjoy the scene, we arrive at Shinmei Shrine (volume 3, figure 7). Three Shinto priests in black eboshi hats are already busy putting a ladder against the torii gate, near which red plum blossoms are in bloom, to hang shimenawa. Thus the year ends. The artist leads his viewers to the Yoshiwara, where the New Year’s matsukagiri decorations are ready, and he completes this picture book by showing the crowd at the licensed quarter who, after that night, will welcome in the first day of spring.

Here, Hokusai’s detailed study of life, presented alongside interpolated kyōka, makes the viewer feel immersed in the atmosphere of the age. Art in those days praised and showed gratitude for everything from the era and its landscapes, making them the greatest source to convey the prosperity of the city of Edo and how interesting and enjoyable life there was. Landscapes by Ichiryūsai Hiroshige likewise often portrayed scenes of Edo streets and suburbs.

III

Hiroshige’s Edo landscapes include single-sheet prints of simultaneously occurring scenes like those in One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (Meisho Edo hyakkei, 1856-58), Eight Views of the Suburbs of Edo (Edo kinkō hakkei no uchi, around 1838), Famous Places in the Eastern Capital (Tōto meisho, 1831-32), Scenic Views of Edo (Kōto shōkei, between 1833 and 1842), Famous Restaurants of Edo (Edo kōmei kaitei zukushi, 1852-53), and Scenic Slopes of Edo (Edo meisho saka zukushi, 1844-53), as well as those included in such picture books as Edo Souvenirs (Edo miyage, 10 vols., 1850-57) and Famous Places in Edo with Kyōka (Kyōka Edo meisho zue, 16 vols., 1856).
Westerners who have a good eye for painting most likely regard Hiroshige and Hokusai as Japan’s two master landscape artists. These two masters portrayed similar geographical areas numerous times based on Western perspective drawing and the study of life in ukiyo-e. However, their stylistic differences are obvious at first sight. Hokusai added elements of nanga and Western painting to ukiyo-e. But Hiroshige seems to have exclusively followed the style of Hanabusa Itchō (1652-1724), who branched off from the Kanō School. Hokusai’s style is strong and firm, while Hiroshige’s is gentle and calm. Despite that Hiroshige’s technique for depicting the study of life is often more minutely detailed, at a glance, his work always appears purer and lighter than Hokusai’s sōga. To make a literary analogy, Hokusai recalls travelogues that abundantly employ ornate kanji epithets, while Hiroshige resembles the flowing style of gesaku writers who smoothly describe minute details. The masterpieces of Hokusai’s mature period often make us sense something that is not Japanese, as I have discussed, but Hiroshige’s works greet us with more Japanese, purely regional feelings. The latter’s art does not exist apart from the Japanese climate. I consider Hiroshige’s landscapes and Ogata Kōrin’s (1658-1716) flowering plants to be the most important art that richly conveys the characteristics of the Japanese milieu.
On choosing a landscape to depict, Hokusai was not content to present the landscape itself but instead always surprised viewers with his unconventional designs. Hiroshige’s approach, on the other hand, was so unvaryingly calm that he tended to be somewhat monotonous and lacking in variety. To present mountains and waters dynamically with storms, lightning, and torrents was what Hokusai enjoyed. To add greater calm to a lonely night scene with rain, snow, moonlight, and bright stars was what Hiroshige did best. Figures in Hokusai’s landscapes are strenuously at work, or if not, they gesture at landscapes in admiration or amazement. In Hiroshige’s pictures, a boatman oaring does not seem to be in a hurry to get to any destination, and a traveler in a hat on horseback always seems tired or half asleep. Those who walk on the crowded streets of Edo look as if they were ready to spend a long day with a dog by the roadside. Through the two different approaches demonstrated in their works, we can easily see the completely opposite dispositions of these master landscape artists.
After choosing a landscape, Hokusai sharpened his awareness, set his expectations high, and invariably took great pains to come up with some new design or device. Hiroshige, on the contrary, seemed to pick up his brush with ease as he observed and interest moved him without reserve. Hokusai’s pictures are always intentional, even his fast, sketchy drawings, although they seem as if he only arrived there after painstaking effort and refinement. On the other hand, Hiroshige’s simplified drawings seem like mere products of occasional improvisation. When comparing master drawings used to carve the woodblocks (ukiyo-e hanshita), those by Hiroshige make it seem that he never worked hard as Hokusai did. At one point, so many reprints were made from Hiroshige’s woodblocks that the results were quite crude. Even if we look at his oldest and most carefully reproduced prints, his color tones rarely stir the delicate pleasure that we experience when facing Hokusai’s nishiki-e. In particular, in One Hundred Famous Views of Edo, produced in the Ansei period (1854-59), in Hiroshige’s later years, the green and red coloring, among other qualities, greatly disappoints us despite the creative designs and delightfully agile brushstrokes. Hiroshige used black ink for drawing outlines as in traditional Japanese painting and used coloring only as a convenient way to compensate for the monotony of a scene. Even so, nobody could hope to equal him in skillfully creating a complex, beautiful effect by the arrangement of two or three colors. See, for example, how he contrasts the blue flowing water and the evening glow of the pink sky against the white clouds, or how he arranges a boat with a yellow thatched roof between the blue evening river and the uniformly grey sky. The extremely simple and clear coloring is the very reason that the viewer can freely experience the feel of time, air, and light.

In the catalogue for the 1898 ukiyo-e exhibition curated by Kobayashi Bunshichi (1861-1923), the American Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908) comments on Hiroshige’s picture of Mount Atago:20 “A distant view of the sea, dotted with white sails, skillfully suggests soft winds and also spontaneously conveys the reflection of light in the distance. Small figures as in the work of his contemporary English master painter Turner, are often no more than a row of wooden stakes, but this also helps to emphasize various points of the landscape.” About the view of the Eitai Bridge, he writes: “The presentation of the boats should be called fundamental and grammatical. The artist effectively combines two-shade coloring and black-and-white drawing, contributing to the clear demarcation of parts. It is beyond the achievements of colors in oil painting. I prefer this work to Whistler’s most famous copperplate etching.”

Because the [Japanese] translation is quite stiff and the explanation of the art is minimal, those who do not remember the 1898 exhibition have no way of clearly knowing which prints Fenollosa is praising.21 However, this praise provides a sense of the characteristics of Hiroshige’s prints.

Among Hiroshige’s depictions of the famous places of Edo are the series of horizontal prints Famous Places in the Eastern Capital (Tôto meisho) and Scenic Views
of Edo and the series of vertical prints *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. Although these collections depict the same landscapes of the Edo urban areas and suburbs, the dates of publication and the difference between horizontal and vertical settings naturally create distinctive artistic styles. *Famous Places in the Eastern Capital* and *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaido* (Tōkaido gojū-san tsugi no uchi, 1833-34) have horizontal arrangements based on the minute study of life, and the coloring is not especially vivid. Thus they make us experience the kind of charm that we have generally come to expect from ukiyo-e. On the other hand, *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, unfortunately deviates from realistic study, and despite the absolute freedom of brushwork and the extremely unconventional composition, the coloring in the prints is far from beautiful. In particular, the deep, raw red and green hues greatly disappoint us. This makes us sense how ukiyo-e printing skills degenerated with each successive year starting in the Tenpō

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**Utagawa Hiroshige, Akasaka, in the series Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō (Tōkaidō gojūsan-tsugi).** Courtesy of Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon.

**Utagawa Hiroshige, Evening Sun over The Drum Bridge in Meguro (Meguro Taikobashi yūhi no zu), in the series One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (Edo meisho hyakkei, 1856-58).** Courtesy of Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon.
period (1830-44). At the end of a monograph on the life of Kitagawa Utamaro, Edmond de Goncourt (1822-96) wrote that Hiroshige strove to return color prints to what they had been in Utamaro’s heyday but that he never succeeded.

To collect all the pictures of Famous Places in the Eastern Capital and explain them in great detail, as Goncourt did of Hokusai’s and Utamaro’s work, is beyond my present scope. Therefore I will select two or three important examples of the places Hiroshige enjoyed painting in different ways.

First, Hiroshige enjoyed depicting Kasumigaseki Hill, where the white walls of daimyō houses continue near the great Edo Castle from the Benkei Canal of Outer-Sakurada. One picture presents a summer afternoon after a sudden rain shower. A large rainbow has boldly appeared at an angle in the broad sky above the hill, with a lookout station at the top, and commoners’ houses and sails in the Shibaura Bay below. But aside from a woman with her umbrella half closed and the child accompanying her, no passers-by seem to notice the beautiful rainbow. Passers-by include samurai in formal clothing, each wearing a pair of swords; a townsman in a summer kimono jacket decorated in a fine pattern; and merchant venders carrying what seems to be a box of medicinal loquat leaves or fans, who shield their faces under large sedge hats, looking somewhat troubled by the wind that sweeps the hems of their clothes. These figures show the care with which the artist tries to let the viewer imagine how high the hill is. In another picture, on both sides of the climbing slope we can see long houses with grey roofs, white walls, and pale indigo stonewalls in their foundations, and the Sannō Shrine festival procession of

Utagawa Hiroshige, Sannō Festival Procession on Kasumigaseki (Tōto Kasumigaseki Sannōsai nerikomi no zu, c. 1830s-50s). Courtesy of Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon.
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floats and people wearing hats adorned with flowers. These details are accompanied by the distant view of the slope and houses as far as the eye can see, becoming gradually more distant and smaller. Needless to say, the contrast between the procession of people wearing hats with flowers or parasols and the houses on both sides seen from above and the perspective approach are extremely refreshing.

The landscape from the Eitai Bridge to Tsukuda Island and Teppōzu and the arc of the seashore from Takanawa to Shinagawa most easily allow Hiroshige to produce the best and simplest pictures of water and sky, bridges and boats. First, toward the bottom left part of the long bridge depicted at an angle is a lonely night carriage and a man with his head and cheeks wrapped in a towel. To the right of the vast water, Tsukuda Island at night floats like a cloud, and to the left, specks of lamplight glow from the windows of courtesan houses in the New Yoshiwara, facing the fires of the ice-fishing boats scattered on the water. A full moon floats between the masts of large boats anchored for the night, and, in that vast sky is the faint form of cuckoo or a line of wild geese. These are the characteristics that permitted the simplest and most charming cityscapes that Hiroshige strove to depict.

Everyone knows that snow heightens the beauty of various Edo landscapes. Hiroshige’s most outstanding landscapes in the snow include those of Ochanomizu, the stone steps of the Yushima Tenjin Shrine, the embankment of Susaki Bay at high tide, and Yabūkōji Street in Shiba, while Mukōjima, the Nihonbashi Bridge, and the Yoshiwara embankment, contrary to expectations, did not inspire masterpieces. Hiroshige set a snowy landscape in the year-end market at Asakusa’s Sensōji Temple. There, the brightly white roof of the temple rises sharply against the sky full of dancing snowflakes, as groups of countless umbrellas climb the steps. This picture is rather unexpected from the brush of Hiroshige, who always preferred loneliness and quiet grace.

The Mimeguri Shrine in Mukōjima, the Hashiba Ferry, Imado, Masaki, the San’ya Moat, and Matsuchi Hill are famous places that could inspire any artist to create great landscapes. This was certainly the case for Hiroshige. What we should note, however, is that despite the fact that he was also skilled at human portraits as a student of Utagawa Toyohiro (1773-1828), he deliberately avoided the large crowds of people viewing cherry blossoms, even when depicting the Sumida River. Instead, Hiroshige consistently sought the calm of rushes and white sails. Consider Cherry Blossoms in Full Spring Along the Sumida River (Sumidagawa hanazakari) in Famous Places in the Eastern Capital. Hiroshige first presents the embankment that rises like a hill. As one looks up at the cherry blossoms on the embankment from the vast river, one can only imagine the crowds of people coming and going. Also, upon the water, there are no roofed pleasure boats with courtesans, sake, and revelers. Instead we see fishing boats, rafts, and seagulls. Such an inclination is particularly striking in Hiroshige’s representations of the Yoshiwara. The scenes he preferred to depict were not the splendors of a magnificent nightless district but the loneliness of men, heads covered with cloths, hands tucked in their kimono,
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walking after midnight in twos and threes, looking cold outside the lattice doors along the riverbank after the courtesans have already left for their lodgings (Edo Souvenirs, volume 6) or an early morning scene in which the wooden gate to the Yoshiwara’s main street, the Nakanochō, looks like a barrier house in the mountains (Dawn Clouds in the Pleasure Quarters [Kakuchū shinonome] in One Hundred Famous Views of Edo). Even when the night cherry blossoms are at their peak on Nakanochō Street, Hiroshige might provide only a view from high above of humble roof tiles with just a glimpse of the treetops. Along the Nihon embankment are commoners’ houses buried in snow and the traffic of carriages having difficulty on the way, evoking the pathos of traveling rather than the sentiment of the previous night’s revelry. In this respect, Hiroshige is through and through a poet representing wayfarers. The Yoshiwara that he depicts has something reminiscent of the rustic charm of a post town. The Nakanochō teahouses, each with a lit lantern under the eaves, when depicted with Hiroshige’s refined touch, are no different from landscapes of Shinagawa, Itabashi, and the like. The crowded Edo Sanza theaters, which were moved to the post town of Asakusayama in 1841, receive the same treatment as the Yoshiwara. In Hiroshige’s landscape prints, one can no longer see the jovial din and bustle in Fukiya and Sakai that Shunrō, Toyokuni, and other artists depicted. Disregarding the crowds gathering for the annual all-cast productions and the splendid teahouse decorations in honor of these occasions, Hiroshige considered it enough to depict countless banners fluttering over humble roof tiles, as seen through the thick foliage of Matsuchi Hill. For the sights in front of the theaters, he showed a closed gate in the moonlight, passers-by thinning out, a dog sleeping near a rainwater barrel under the eaves, and a night palanquin waiting for a passenger, thus creating his own unique charm. In representing the precincts of the Kannon Hall of Sensōji Temple, he does not focus on the crowds near tea stalls, arrow stands, mechanical doll shows, and other entertainments, but instead, for example, he makes the great lantern of the Kaminari Gate occupy the entire space, with seemingly countless umbrellas beneath.

IV

Needless to say, there is much to discuss in Hiroshige’s landscapes, particularly with regard to landscapes from all around Japan in addition to those of famous Edo places. This is a topic that I hope to address in the future. Before concluding this essay, I would like to take a look at prints by Shōteihaku Hokuju (circa. 1763-1824) and Ichiyūsai Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), who followed Hokusai and Hiroshige in depicting Edo landscapes.

Around the Bunka period, Hokuju, a disciple of Hokusai, became a name in ukiyo-e landscapes. His single-sheet, block-print landscapes, which seem to have been created in his later years, show a unique style in the manner of Dutch painting, but somehow his biography is not detailed in any book. Ukiyo-e ruikō, without specifying his real name, only lists him as a man who lived near Yagenbori in Ryōgoku around the Bunsei period (1818-30).

No more than thirty or forty of Hokuju’s prints are extant. Considering how prolific fulltime ukiyo-e artists were in those days, he may not have been a professional in the field. Or because his style was too unconventional, he might not have been as popular as the likes of Hokusai and Hokkei. His biography aside, looking at his prints, it is apparent that he was a painter who, under the influence of Dutch painting, attempted to apply Western perspective, coloring, and even light to woodblock printing. He was not the first or only one to do so. Utagawa Toyoharu, early uki-e master and founder of the Utagawa School, at the start of his career, copied Dutch copperplate print landscapes of Venice, Amsterdam, and other places and turned them into color woodblock prints. After the Bunka period, that sort of carefully calculated uki-e went entirely out of fashion, and when Hokusai’s new landscape painting rose to prominence, Hokuju, too, discarded uki-e and tried to follow his own path. Let me take as an example the landscape of Dōkanyama Hill. In comparison with uki-e by Toyoharu and Kitao Shigesai (1739-1820), the composition is extremely simple, but the coloring is complex and very much in harmony. Hokuju demonstrates the effort to choose one color to be the basic tone for the entire piece and to achieve a harmonious effect expressed by Hokusai in his Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji. (Those who see the print of Dōkanyama Hill will be instantly impressed by the harmony of the light, soft chartreuse, dark green, and indigo. In a print of Susaki Benten with a view of the open sea, they will see the harmony between yellow and orange.) What I should mention about the Dōkanyama Hill print is that, in depicting the side of the cliff that rises on the left, Hokuju uses a series of triangles and forms the spacious farm field that lies at the foot with a checked pattern of three colors—yellow, green, and brown—arranged in perspective. If Hokuju had had the chance to advance one further step, he might have become Japan’s first Cubist.

Viewers of Hokuju’s prints will also notice that he invariably provides a large space for the sky and water because he is fond of depicting clouds. In Susaki Benten, a View of the Sea, scenes of Mount Fuji from Ochanomizu, the Chōshi Beach, the Sumida
River, Masaki, and other places, the large white clouds floating in the sky are just as essential an element of the composition as the houses and trees. No other Japanese artist has paid so much attention to the sky and clouds in his landscapes. His teacher Hokusai no less enjoyed the influence of Dutch painting, but, even in his later years, he often used traditional horizontal streaks of mist, sometimes as a method for obstructing unnecessary distant views and, at other times, as a means of indicating height. (Perzyński likens the shape of Hokusai’s mist to the parallel fingers of a Western glove.) Hiroshige used the different shades seen in Shijō school landscapes to skillfully depict overcast tree landscapes, but he never paid attention to clouds sailing in the blue sky on a fair day. (Hokusai’s *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* in three volumes includes many scenes showing clouds. The picture in volume 1 depicting something that resembles cirrocumulus clouds is quite good. However, this picture book belongs to his later years, which postdates Hokuju.)

Another of Hokuju’s innovations is the introduction of light into landscapes. The Susaki Benten print succeeds in expressing the feel of sunlight because of the houses and buildings in shades of yellow and orange, but in the picture of the mouth of the San’ya Moat, he tries to express the shading of houses and figures on the ground, which creates major errors in perspective. Still, in Hokuju’s landscapes, from the start, we have to accept immature skills based upon the mimicry of Western painting and innocent errors in production. The reason is that these major flaws create a distinct tonality that is the charm of amateur painting. The reason I suspect that ukiyo-e was probably not Hokuju’s principal occupation is that his work does not include any female portraits or genre scenes, and that, despite being extremely immature technically, his landscapes are rich in tonality and light in sentiment, whether viewed as Japanese or Western paintings.

Suppose, in discussing ukiyo-e landscape, one begins with Toyoharu and Kitao Masayoshi, proceeds to Hokusai and Hiroshige, and then adds Hokuju. The only one who remains to discuss is Ichiyūsai Kuniyoshi. Along with Toyokuni III (Utagawa Kunisada, 1786-1865), he concludes the glorious history of Edo ukiyo-e.

Kuniyoshi’s monument, which his disciples erected at Mimeguri Inari Shrine in Mukōjima in 1872, is inscribed: “While Kunisada was good at portraying beautiful women in their chambers and graceful ladies in waiting, the master excelled in depicting fine military leaders in camps and warriors demonstrating bravery.” However, Kuniyoshi did not only excel in pictures of warriors fighting hard. His scope covered beautiful women, flowers and birds, mountains and water, and satiric and humorous representations. It is not excessive praise to say that, in successfully adapting the Western study of life to ukiyo-e figures, Kuniyoshi is superior to, or even surpasses, Hokusai. (Among framed pictures dedicated to the Kannon Hall at Sensōji Temple is one by Kuniyoshi of an old woman in a lone house. You should go and see it.) Those who have seen the nudes in his erotica know that their physical framework is accurate and their delicate lines are rich with a decadent
mood, reminiscent of Utamaro. The Frenchman Tei-san writes in his history of fine art: "Kuniyoshi’s art is always filled with vitality, and his line-drawing is usually admirably clear and precise. He fondly mixes red and indigo and utilizes extremely clear apple green, and he demonstrates the beauty of color tone that one sees in woodblock printing before the Bunka period. Yet in depicting warriors in battle, quite to the contrary, he matches the coloring to the theme by deliberately using many contrasting colors to collide and confuse."29

Kuniyoshi produced comparatively few landscapes of the Tōkaidō and famous places in the Eastern Capital.30 His prints of the Tōkaidō are mostly of nature and villages from a bird’s eye perspective, while in Famous Places in the Eastern Capital, he arranges figures to convey the sentiments of the people of Edo. See the night scene on the Nihon embankment titled The New Yoshiwara (Shin-Yoshiwara). In the sky is a yellow moon with a large halo. Down below toward the horizon, where horizontal clouds float like smoke, we have a distant view of the roofs of the licensed quarter beyond the rice paddies. A night palanquin hurries past two dogs that are fast asleep, unruffled by the sound of footsteps. This, along with the closed commoners’ houses under the embankment, suggests that the night has far advanced. The scene does more than make the viewer imagine the sky with impending rain and hazy moonlight.

We see a pair of townsmen—each in a jacket casually worn over kimono, its bottom tucked to reveal long, silken underwear above leather-soled straw sandals. One retying the knot of the cloth covering his head and the other affecting a dandy pose, his fists pressed against his chest inside his kimono and his elbows poking out—they seem to unconsciously hasten their steps toward the quarter. From the opposite direction comes a man, the playboy type, wearing komageta and a long, padded kimono, its hem almost trailing on the ground, low sash tied in front. His arms tucked inside his sleeves hang as if they had been cut off. He gazes slightly upward with his mouth agape. Perhaps he sings nagebushi as loudly as he can as he walks along the otherwise deserted street under the dim moon.

Those who have studied biographies of ukiyo-e artists know that Kuniyoshi was proud to have been a man of Edo. This print, I think, perfectly demonstrates his temperament. Suppose we see in Hiroshige’s bleak, tranquil Famous Views of Edo the way of a literary man in a peaceful era, who gladly accepted a humble lifestyle and enjoyed the realm of light poetry of kyōka and haikai and glimpse in Hokusai’s Chinese taste the mild ethical inclination of an elderly man of Edo. Then from Kuniyoshi’s landscapes—the chokibune boat carrying courtesans beneath the Eitai Bridge, goby fishing by the stonewall at Teppōzu, and the eel fence in the Sumida River—we can imagine an Edo temperament that these earlier two artists did not possess. If we compare these prints by Kuniyoshi with the works of artists of the Kansei period and earlier, we realize how very different his presentations of customs and manners are and how the mentality of people in the late Edo period had changed. One of the two female performers on a boat in Kuniyoshi’s print wears a bold and rough tie-dyed indigo summer kimono, revealing her bare arm, while the other, also with her hand on the side of the boat, props up her provocatively seductive chin and allows her only lightly oiled hair to blow freely in the river wind. They express the sharp feelings of women who are desperate and prepared to risk anything. A beautiful woman in Koryūsai’s art thoughtfully sees off migrating geese in the autumn night sky, and Utamaro’s women walk together along a street on a spring evening in the soft light of lanterns. The gentle atmosphere, so gentle that it was almost mournful, favored in the An’ei and Tenmei periods disappeared in Edo women of the Ka’ei (1848-53) and Bunkyū (1861-63) periods.

With Kuniyoshi as the last artist, ukiyo-e, portraiture, and landscape, alike, ended here. (Kunisada, or Toyokuni III, died in 1866, three years after Kuniyoshi.) Several of Kuniyoshi’s disciples (Yoshikiku, Yoshitoshi, and Yoshitora, for example) continued to produce ukiyo-e into the Meiji period, but their works only serve as tragic material for those who inquire into the fading last years and eventual death of this Edo art form in the Meiji period.
Nagai Kafū

Translators’ Notes
“Ukiyo-e Landscapes and Edo Scenic Places” (Ukiyo-e no sansuiga to Edo meisho) first appeared in 1914 in the journal Mita Literature (Mita bungaku), the literary organ of Keiō University that Nagai Kafū (1879-1959; given name Nagai Sōkichi) helped to edit. It was reprinted, along with additional essays dating between 1913 and 1918 on ukiyo-e, theater, and literature, in the 1920 book On Edo Art (Edo geijutsu-ron) published by Shunyōdō. This translation is based on the version that appears in Kafū zenshū (The Complete Works of Kafū), vol. 10 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1992-95), 169-85.

Perhaps in homage to the culture he describes, Kafū rewrote the essays in his own version of Edo-period prose style, influenced by classical Chinese and replete with wordplays, literary allusions, and parenthetical references. The book was published without illustrations, but his detailed descriptions enabled readers to visualize the colorful prints and sense the moods that they evoke. Kafū collected ukiyo-e in Japan and was widely read in the history of Western art. In addition to offering a wealth of information about ukiyo-e artists, schools, and movements and introducing texts written in English and French about them, this lyrical essay epitomizes many of the themes of Kafū’s literature and shows the faith he had in the ability of artists to capture the tenor of their times and the power of art to shape the ways people view cities.

1. Hereafter, Katsushika Hokusai and Ichiryūsai Hiroshige are referred to by their common names of Hokusai and Hiroshige. The translators have added the dates of time periods, artists, and artworks.

2. Uki-e presents views using Western linear perspective. Okumura Ma-sanobu studied European engravings and learned the rules of perspective. Utagawa Toyoharu (1735-1814) was the first to adapt the techniques to Japanese subjects, such as the kabuki stage.

3. This Edo jōruri text was inspired by a Muromachi recitative dance, of the type called Kōwakamai, that dramatizes the revenge scene from Tale of the Soga Brothers (Soga monogatari, thirteenth century). In the tale, based on a historical incident of 1193, the brothers take revenge on the enemy of their uncle and their father on the hunting ground at the foot of Mount Fuji and, when chased by his supporters, defeat ten or so of them. Chāshingura, a puppet and kabuki play the most common version of which was written in the mid-eighteenth century, is based on the Akō Vendetta of 1703, in which a band of loyal samurai avenge the disgrace and ritual suicide (seppuku) of their daimyō. Chāshingura has been a popular subject of ukiyo-e since the eighteenth century.

4. Urushi-e and beni-e are types of ukiyo-e, with coloring over black-and-white block printing. Urushi-e was characterized by the use of black lacquer or varnish in colored portions, such as hair or sashes, and beni-e mainly by the use of safiflower dyes.

5. The Yoshiwara was a major Edo prostitution district sanctioned by the government. It was founded in 1617 near Nihonbashi. After fire destroyed the district in 1657, a new Yoshiwara was constructed on the Nihon em-bankment behind the Sensōji Temple. This location was called Shin (New) Yoshiwara, and the old location Moto (Original) Yoshiwara.

6. Kyōka, playful poetry, was popular in the Kansai area earlier in the Kyōhō period before spreading to the city of Edo.

7. Surimono (literally, “printed thing”) is a genre of woodblock prints privately commissioned for special occasions that was most popular from the 1790s to the 1830s.

8. On Edo Art (Edo geijutsu-ron, 1920) includes the essay “Katsushika Hokusai as Seen by Europeans” (Taiseijin no mitaru Katsushika Hokusai).

9. Yamato-e style of painting, which often showed the beauty of nature, developed from the late Heian period (around the eleventh century).

10. Gesaku is the general name for the playful popular literature of the Edo period. Genres include yomihon, kibyōshi, sharebon, kokkeibon, and ninjōbon.

11. The pine tree, Shubi no matsu, is a legendary landmark for boats sailing along the Sumida River.

12. According to legend, the folk hero Momotarō (whose name translates as "Peach Boy") came to Earth in a giant peach, which was found floating down a river by an old woman who was washing clothes there.

13. Made as an offering to the gods in Shinto religion, gohei is an upright stick to which white papers or cloths has been affixed so that they hang in a zigzag on either side.

14. There are four Shirahige Shrines in Tokyo: Yotsugi in today’s Katsushikaku, Tachibana and Higashi-Sumida in the Sumida Ward, and Hirai in the Edogawa Ward. The shrine in Higashi-Sumida in Imado (today’s Taitō Ward) is famous for Imadoyaki, unglazed ceramics that include roof tiles and dolls. Hokusai’s
Nagai Kafū's poem clearly refers to the smoke from Imado's roof tiles. Thus, there is no question that Hokusai means shore of Imado, although Kafū ends the sentence with the interrogative "ya aran" (perhaps it may be).

15. *Shimenawa*, literally "enclosing rope," is a sacred braided rope from which ornaments are hung. *Shimenawa* delimits sacred space.

16. *Nanga* is late Edo period painting inspired by Chinese literati painting. Founded by Kanō Masanobu in the mid-fifteenth century, the Kanō school was the dominant school of painting in the Edo period.

17. Literally "grass-style drawing," *sōga* are simple ink paintings or light colored-drawings done with rough brush strokes.

18. More "serious" literary works in a lofty, ornate, rhetorically controlled style were influenced by Chinese scholarship and targeted at urban intelligentsia, while *gesaku*, intended as popular fiction, employed freer, more vernacular expressions.

19. The preface to Fenollosa's *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Ukiyo-e Paintings and Prints* is available online at Kindai Digital Library at http://kindai.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/850003. Ernest Fenollosa was a historian of Japanese art and a professor of philosophy and other disciplines at the University of Tokyo. Kobayashi Bunshichi was a Tokyo art dealer and publisher of art books and reproductions.

20. *Mount Atago, Shiba* (no. 79) from *Famous Places in the Eastern Capital,* and *Eitai Bridge, Tsukuda Island* (no. 4) from *One Hundred Famous Places of Edo* both match the description.

22. *Outamaro, le Peintre des Maisons Vertes* (1891). Goncourt also wrote *Hokusai, l'art Japonais au XVII Siècle* (1896). Kafū introduces these works in a separate essay on "Goncourt's Biographies of Utamaro and Hokusai." Edmond de Goncourt was a French writer, art and literary critic, publisher, and founder of the Académie Goncourt.

23. The San'ya Moat is a canal drawn from the Sumida River that connected Imado and San'ya and was a route to the New Yoshiwara licensed quarter. Matsuchi Hill is located near Matsuchi Shūden Temple in Asakusa.

24. Around the 1670s, there were four licensed kabuki troupes in Edo. After one was disbanded in 1714, the Nakamura troupe of Sakai-chō, Ichimura troupe of Fukiya-chō, and Morita Kobiki-chō became the official Edo Three Troupes. The Nakamura troupe's theater burned down in 1841, and the following year the Nakamura, Ichimura, and Kawarazaki (or Morita) troupes were moved to an Asakusa area called Saruwaka-chō.

25. Fukiya-chō and Sakai-chō, along with Kobiki-chō, all in close proximity, formed a kabuki theater district before all theaters were moved to Saruwaka-chō.

26. Published between 1800 and 1802, *Ukiyo-e ruikō,* or *Various Thoughts on Ukiyo-e,* is a collection of essays by Ōta Nanpo, Santō Kyōden, and other Edo period authors.


28. The Shijō school was founded by the mid-Edo period artist Goshun (Matsumura Gekkei, circa 1752-1811), who had studied with the haiku poet and painter Yosa Buson (1716-84) and was developed by Okamoto Toyohiko (1773-1845) and Goshun's younger brother Matsumura Keibun (1779-1843). The school was so named because Toyohiko and Keibun, among others, lived on Shijō Avenue in Kyōto.

29. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Tei-san, or Comte Georges de Tressan, published books about Japanese art, including *Notes sur l'Art Japonaise: La Peinture et la Gravure* (1905).

30. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Tei-san, or Comte Georges de Tressan, published books about Japanese art, including *Notes sur l'Art Japonaise: La Peinture et la Gravure* (1905).

31. *Komageta* are clogs made out of single pieces of wood instead of different pieces for the base and "teeth." *Nagebushi* refers to either an early Edo popular song genre that originated in the mid-seventeenth century in the Shimabara pleasure quarter of Kyoto, or a late Edo popular tune in 7-7-7-5 syllables sung by visitors in the pleasure quarters, or a specific type of *shamisen* tune expressive of scenes of the pleasure quarters.

32. *Chokibune* is a small boat with a pointed helm used in Edo rivers, especially for transporting patrons to the New Yoshiwara.
Nagai Kafū

Note on the Author

Kafū, a rebellious son of an affluent family, grew up in the Koishikawa district of Tokyo and was schooled in classical Chinese, among other subjects taught to young men in preparation for higher education and future careers as government officials or other elite jobs. After he failed the examinations to the Tokyo First Higher School, Kafū was sent abroad by his father, first to China in 1897 and later to the United States (1903-7) and France (1907-8), with the hopes that he would find a sense of direction, become well-versed in Western customs, learn languages, gain a sense of international business, and be inspired to become a diplomat, a highly regarded job in the Meiji period (1868-1912). Although he had published plays and stories before traveling to the United States, Kafū became known in the literary world for his fictionalized personal travel accounts America Stories (Amerika monogatari, 1908) and French Stories (Furansu monogatari). The publication of the book version of France Stories, mostly complete by 1909, was delayed until 1915 due to censorship. This marked one of the first of many battles Kafū fought with government censors over the perceived erotic content of his writing. Although he never graduated from university, Kafū became a professor of French at Keio University and editor of Mita Literature, but he resigned both positions in 1916 to be a full-time author. Kafū challenged authority throughout his career, as evidenced in his professed dislike of Meiji-period leaders, his opposition to the war and Japanese militarism in the 1930s and 1940s, and conflicts with censors and publishers. Kafū is best known for short stories and novellas about Tokyo courtesans and low-ranking geisha. Such works as Sumida River (Sumidagawa, 1909), Rivalry (Ude kurabe, 1917), and Strange Tale from East of the River (Bokutō kidan, 1937) were set in the Yoshiwara and in unlicensed prostitution districts east of the Sumida River, namely, the sites of many of the Edo-period ukiyo-e landscapes Kafū analyzes here in this essay. From 1917 to his death in 1959, Kafū kept an extensive illustrated diary, Dyspepsia House Diary (Danchōtei nichijō), in which he expressed both his fascination for and disillusion with Tokyo, which he saw as characterized by rapid urban development, new architecture, technological advances, increasing control of the police state, social contradictions, and squalor.

As expressed in "Ukiyo-e Landscapes and Edo Scenic Places," Kafū sought through ukiyo-e landscapes access to daily life in the city of Edo, which he idealized as more refined, "honest," and less pretentious than early-twentieth-century Tokyo. Ukiyo-e, like kabuki and kyōka poetry, was also a means to understand how people expressed themselves under rigid government censorship. As analyzed by literary scholars Edward Seidensticker (1990 [1965]), William Tyler (1998), and Stephen Snyder (2000), among others, Kafū became increasingly fascinated with Edo-period culture, especially that of the "chōnin," or urban commoners, after returning from France in 1909. He prided himself on being similar to Edo literati, such as poet Ōta Nanpo (also known as Shokusanjin), who used kyōka as an elegant form of veiled social commentary. As Tyler notes, to withdraw from contemporary society and immerse oneself in culture of the past has been "a socially sanctioned refuge or a cover for advancing ideas at variance with or designed to subvert the powers-that-be," and "a time-honored pattern of resistance in the eremitic tradition of East Asian letters" (186). At the end of this essay, Kafū goes as far as to say that ukiyo-e died in the Meiji period.

Kafū can be called a "flâneur," a man with the finances and leisure to wander through the city, blending into urban crowds yet retaining a sense of detachment from them. Like many literary flâneurs, he wrote a version of himself into his stories. For example, in Strange Tale from East of the River, the narrator is an aging author who, driven from his house by the summer heat and the noise of his neighbor's radio, wanders to the unlicensed prostitution district of Tamanoi (now Higashi-Mukōjima) and finds refuge in a courtesan's room. The courtesan with whom he forms a relationship reminds him of the kinds of women he had encountered in the past and are now disappearing from Tokyo. In Dyspepsia House Diary, Kafū provides maps of streets, diagrams of houses, and drawings of people he observed. Kafū's vivid descriptions of specific ukiyo-e landscapes in this essay almost seems like literary urban sketches, as if he were leading his reader through the streets of Edo and explaining how to view the scenery. Almost every landscape he describes contains people, who, in turn, give places meaning through their activities in and reactions to them. Most of the people Kafū describes are women—travelers, wives, and workers at teahouses, in addition to courtesans. In many cases, Kafū views these women as figures of nostalgia, representing customs that have been lost through changes in Tokyo.

While expressing nostalgia for Edo and its decorative arts, Kafū implies that Western artists and art critics have set standards that Japan should try to meet and surpass. Kafū distinguishes ukiyo-e from Western landscapes in many respects, including content, mood, perspective, modes of expression, colors, and printing techniques. He cites Ernest Fenollosa, Edmond de Goncourt, and Friedrich Perzyński and speculates
how other “Westerners with a good eye for painting” would consider works by Hokusai and Hiroshige. The essay “Katsushika Hokusai as Seen by Europeans” (Taiseijin no mitaru Katsushika Hokusai) is included in On Edo Art. In 1920, Kafū designed his own home, called “Henkikan,” or “Eccentricity House,” in Azabu near the American Embassy and foreigners’ residences, perhaps showing his orientation toward the West. Kafū’s literary style was strongly influenced by classical Chinese, but, in this essay, he critiques Chinese influences as something Edo-period artists were finding passé and leaving behind. Last, in “Ukiyo-e Landscapes and Edo Scenic Places” Kafū describes the festival atmosphere of theaters and their importance in ukiyo-e. This reflects his lifelong interest in theater. As a youth, he dabbled in rakugo storytelling and kiyomoto singing, other popular forms of theater that had developed in the Edo period. In 1899, he apprenticed as a kabuki playwrite. Like ukiyo-e, Kafū saw kabuki as a form of expression that had gone beyond mere representation to become a decorative art that expressed the mood of urban life in Edo (Seidensticker, 11-12, 73). In the 1930s and 1950s, Kafū frequented Asakusa theaters and dance revues and associated with the women who worked as entertainers there.

