

A CENTURY OF JAPANESE

PHOTOGRAPHY



JAPAN PHOTOGRAPHERS ASSOCIATION

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHN W. DOWER

WAYS OF SEEING ■ WAYS OF REMEMBERING

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF PREWAR JAPAN

John W. Dower

■ The photographer both reflects and creates reality, invents a past while capturing a fragment of the present, and this of course is a potent but subtle contribution. It is certainly more ambiguous than what the earliest photographers thought they were up to, which is nicely suggested by the two ideographs used to denote “photograph” in Japanese: *shashin* 寫眞 literally means to copy truth, reproduce reality.

This rendering probably became established in the mid-1860s, some two decades after photography was introduced from the West. The traditional date of the first photograph taken in Japan was long held to be June 1, 1841, a scant two years after Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot formally presented their parallel inventions in Paris and London respectively. Although the anecdote on which the 1841 date is based has been shown to be spurious, photography clearly did enter feudal Japan through Dutchmen in Nagasaki prior to Commodore Matthew Perry’s exercises in gunboat diplomacy in 1853–1854. Japanese writings in the late 1840s render the daguerreotype (which Oliver Wendell Holmes called “the mirror with a memory”) as “mirror that stamps images” or “mirror that stamps reflections” (*inshō-kagami*; *inkei-kagami*), and confirm that native scholars of “Dutch learning” were struggling to master the process at least as early as 1848, albeit with uncertain success. The earliest extant daguerreotypes in Japan date from 1854 and were taken by a member of the Perry expedition. There exists today but

a single daguerreotype that can be attributed to a Japanese photographer, a portrait of the feudal lord Shimazu Nariakira that dates from 1857 and was only discovered in 1975. Japanese photography really began to flourish in the late 1850s, with the introduction of the “instantaneous” wet-plate collodion process (which was invented in England in 1851 and soon supplanted both the daguerreotype and the talbotype) and the appearance of Japan’s first two professional photographers, Ueno Hikoma and Shimooka Renjō, each of whom proceeded to establish a studio in 1862.

Although the legacy of Japanese photography differs from that of the West in offering no treasure trove of early daguerreotypes and talbotypes, the timing of photography’s introduction to Japan does have special resonance for students of the country. It preceded by over a decade the signal event in Japan’s transition from feudal to capitalist society: the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The camera thus was present to capture the faces of a people under feudalism and the final moments of a warrior class that had ruled for seven centuries. It was a small product of Western genius that arrived early enough to record the subsequent massive onslaught of Western culture and technology. It was available from the start to bear witness to the traumatic course of the modern Japanese state: the swift innovations; the emergence of cosmopolitanism, industrialization, and bourgeois culture amidst persistent backwardness and exploitation; the succession of imperialist wars; the devastated landscape of 1945.

Among Westerners, the historians of photography have neglected Japan, and the historians of modern Japan have neglected photography and indeed much of the whole Japanese visual record, including paintings, posters, prints, and cartoons. As the selection in this volume reveals, the photographs taken by Japanese prior to 1945 are diverse and evocative. As a contribution to photography, they are impressive. As a witness to history, they are a compelling complement, supplement, and corrective to the orthodox written record on which most historians rely. They are also potentially deceptive witnesses that the general historian must use carefully.

This caution deserves brief explanation. The camera can convey what scribes ignore or are simply incapable of expressing: details, sensations, worlds outside the realm of words. It is the mirror with a memory of things that otherwise might have been neglected or remembered differently; but as a record of the past, it can also become a distorting mirror. Most obviously, what the camera remembers is what the photographer selects, and capable photographers usually find what they seek, whether it be order or disorder, sun or shadow, freaks or the family of man. More subtly, the photograph can confer a kind of arbitrary immortality upon those images and events that happen to be captured; and what is a compelling way of remembering can simultaneously operate as a way of forgetting, as later generations literally lose sight of what for one reason or another was not preserved, or not memorably preserved, on film. The

frozen moment of the photograph in itself contradicts the essence of history, which is flow and interaction; and terrible violence can be done to the past as the camera turns poses into personalities, fragments into wholes, transience into permanence, minute splinters of time into eternities—or gives a romantic patina to what actually may have been experienced as routine, mundane, miserable, painful, heartbreaking. As Susan Sontag has observed so persuasively, the camera can not only beautify the commonplace but also trivialize the extraordinary. It can harden or inure one to brutality, to which modern Japan has contributed its full share. It can democratize perception in a manner that is illusory and perhaps even immoral—for all subjects are not equal, not equivalent.

This said, the photograph remains a powerful and penetrating way of seeing and remembering, and as the decades accumulate and prints proliferate, the historical-minded aficionado has greater and greater opportunity to exercise his or her own discretion and to use old photographs in new ways. One such opportunity lies in juxtaposition, and the photography of Japan prior to 1945 illustrates how this can operate on various levels. One can set photograph against photograph in a manner that graphically illustrates not merely change over time but also social contradictions and historical ironies: the clan portrait of young men in samurai garb and the team portrait of their descendants in baseball uniforms; the capitalists behind their neckties and workers behind their machines; the wholesome young ladies touting crackers,

dry goods, or beer and their male contemporaries killing and burning abroad. One can juxtapose the generally austere black-and-white photographs of the nineteenth century and the brilliantly colored prints or “brocade pictures” (*nishiki-e*) that remained in vogue until the turn of the century. One can quite devastatingly place photographs alongside the conventional homilies and rhetoric of Imperial Japan: photos of strikes, riots, and demonstrations with captions describing the innate “harmony” of Japanese social relations; photos of miners or poor tenant farmers or slum dwellers with quotations praising the traditional “beautiful customs” of Japan; photos of aggression and atrocity abroad with captions about “coexistence and coprosperity.” At the same time, many Westerners may find their own stereotypes of prewar Japan eroded by a photographic record that reveals women workers in the front ranks of the May Day parades, or surrealist influences in the period of mounting militarism.

■ The initial impact of photography in Japan was part of a larger Western impact upon both scientific and aesthetic ways of seeing, and the earliest photographic inquiries were expensive, particularly where they entailed importing basic materials. Among the first patrons of such investigations here as in other areas of Western studies were the daimyō, or feudal lords, of a few of the several hundred fiefs into which land was divided. Satsuma in the southern island of Kyūshū took the lead in this, and

inquiries were also sponsored by the lords of Mito, Chikuzen, Fukui, Tendō, Matsumae, and Tosa. After the opening of the country in the 1850s, would-be Japanese photographers were assisted directly by a number of foreigners, with the intensified Western influence emanating most strongly from three points of contact: Nagasaki in Kyūshū, Yokohama in the Kantō region of the main island of Honshū, and Hakodate in the southwest corner of the northern island of Hokkaidō. Both Nagasaki and Yokohama had been opened to foreign trade and residence as designated “treaty ports” in 1858, while Hakodate was opened in 1854. The three great meccas of pioneer photography in Japan became Kyūshū (plates 25–47), the Kantō area (plates 77–122), and Hokkaidō (plates 48–76), and thus coincided loosely with the geographic accommodations conceded to the imperialists.

As a new style of perceptual and aesthetic “realism,” photography reinforced the portrayal of shadow and perspective the Japanese discovered in Western paintings and engravings, and offered a fidelity to the subject depicted that was conspicuously lacking in such dominant native traditions of visual representation as the Yamato pictures (*Yamato-e*), ink paintings (*sumi-e*), or woodblock prints (*hanga*) and demimonde “pictures of the floating world” (*ukiyo-e*). Where human subjects were concerned, the faces recorded by the camera were vastly different from those depicted in the highly stylized conventions of Japanese portrait art. Yet there is a puzzle here, as well as a danger of exaggerating the contribution of photography to a more “realistic” way of perceiving

and depicting the physical world. During their so-called “Christian century,” beginning in the mid-1500s, the Japanese had already encountered Western ways of seeing, and with a few notable exceptions deliberately turned their back on them. The camera obscura had been introduced to China by the West in the seventeenth century, and to Japan by China in 1718. It was used by the woodblock artist Maruyama Ōkyo in the mid-eighteenth century, and later by the Western-style artist Shiba Kōkan. In the 1730s, Okumura Masanobu experimented with “perspective pictures” (*uki-e*) influenced by European art, while several decades later Maruyama Ōkyo enjoyed considerable popularity producing works in this vein known as “eyeglass pictures” (*megane-e*). The Japanese aesthetic tradition, moreover, did include styles of great literal exactitude. From an early date, there was a powerful realistic strain in Buddhist sculpture, for example, while in the later feudal period there flourished a genre of colored depictions of flora and fauna that were detailed and accurate enough to serve as guides for the serious naturalist. Indeed, the new machines that copied reality had a linguistic and conceptual predecessor of sorts in the “pictures that copy life” (*shaseiga*), a school of painting that entered Japan through Nagasaki from Ming and Ch’ing China. Photography thus did not teach the Japanese to render the external world less stylistically or impressionistically, but rather further encouraged them to do so.

Actually, the more interesting question may be: What if anything did traditional art contribute to early photog-

raphy in Japan? In the West, it seems possible to detect the influence of engravings upon the composition of certain early photographs of landscapes or architecture (as well as the later reciprocal influence of photos on engravings); and the inspiration of the grand painterly tradition of the West is dramatically evident in photographs such as the famous series of talbotype portraits done by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson in the 1840s. In Japan, one might have expected the photographer’s eye to be influenced by the dynamic sense of composition and line that distinguished woodblock prints—and even more, by the disciplined use of form and emptiness in the great tradition of *sumi-e*, or ink painting, which could indeed be regarded as a long and brilliant tutelage in the aesthetics of black and white. In practice, however, the earliest Japanese photographers appear to have been uninfluenced by these traditional ways of seeing. The photographs of nineteenth-century Japan have many strengths, but they are not distinguished by any distinctive sense of line and balance, any remarkable use of space. It was not until the vogue of “art photography” began around the turn of the century that Japanese photographers found inspiration in paintings, and even then such inspiration often came from contemporary Western painting rather than from traditional Japanese art.

At a less esoteric level, the subject matter of early photography did pick up certain themes already popularized in the native arts of the late feudal period. These included scenes of famous places, depictions of evocative women, portraits of actors, and impressions of artisans and the

laboring classes. The presentation of these subjects, however, was greatly influenced not just by the technology of the camera but also by treaty-port tourism and the tastes of the Westerners. Although the foreigners’ tastes were often aesthetically trite, their curiosity was buoyant and their pocketbooks were frequently full. This was a major factor behind the creation of the intimate pictorial record of mid-nineteenth-century Japan that exists today. Both as purchasers of photographs and as photographers themselves, Westerners showed an interest in subjects that Japanese photographers on their own would in all likelihood have ignored. Customs commonplace to the Japanese were exotic to the foreigners. Furthermore, the foreigners were interested in a fairly comprehensive photographic record of occupational types and lower-class persons who in other circumstances almost certainly would never have found themselves posed before the camera. Although craftsmen and commoners of every sort had been depicted in Japanese genre art ever since the illustrated scrolls of the twelfth century, in the mid-nineteenth century the costliness of photographic equipment and the relatively high sitting fees for portrait photography would have made the poor unlikely subjects indeed had there not been a Western market for their likenesses.

One result has been that some of the more interesting photographs of Japan and the Japanese dating from the 1850s through the Meiji period were taken by foreigners, or at least acquired by foreigners, and are now preserved outside Japan in the archives or rare books of the West.

They depict a broad spectrum of people in addition to the men, women, and children of the ruling samurai caste—prostitutes, rikisha pullers, palanquin bearers, artisans, shopkeepers, vendors, farmers, doctors with patients, priests, children in a temple school, orphans under a bridge—and the effectiveness of these photos derives partly from the very fact that although their subjects paused to pose, they left no names.

The full range of these materials is fare for a different sort of pictorial history of Japan, but their flavor emerges in some of the selections in this present volume. Japanese catered to the treaty-port clientele of foreign residents and visiting sailors both by taking their portraits (if desired, in Japanese garb or with a young Japanese woman) and by selling them pictorial Japanalia. This was an especially lively trade in the Yokohama-Tokyo hub of the Kantō area. When Shimooka Renjō opened a new two-story shop in Yokohama in 1868, it sported a huge sign in the shape of Mount Fuji, with the English word “Photographer” running up the left side and again down the right side of the sacred mountain. “Renjō’s Branch House” (using the old-style Romanization of the name) wriggled under this, and a separate large sign declared “Pictures Up Stairs.” Photographs prepared with foreign customers in mind occasionally bore captions in English, and some are simply conventional scenic postcards. Others are plain kitsch: a handsome Gilbert-and-Sullivan couple selling a child (they appear about to burst into song about their pretty baby in a bas-

ket); a warrior performing “Harakiri” in an appropriately tinted print, with red blood and green complexion (plate 114); “Eating Macaroni”; “Girls in Bed Room” (plate 116); “Home Bathing” (plate 113); and so on. This tourist-oriented tradition continued into the twentieth century, and was well exemplified by the prolific Ogawa Kazumasa (plates 110, 152; possibly also 114–116), who contributed illustrations to several score of books published in English during the Meiji period.

The early treaty-port photos of anonymous persons by usually anonymous photographers included numerous poses by nude or seminude women, many of whom were prostitutes or “teahouse maids” in Yokohama and Nagasaki. The crudest of these photographs, which are not included here, made minimal pretense to art. Poses were stiff, and although pubic hair was brushed out, the groin was frequently exposed and apparently never coyly covered. Again, foreigners appear to have been among the major customers for such items, and in this respect the early nudes can serve as slight reminders of the whorehouse dimension of the treaty ports and the sexual exploitation that commonly accompanies imperialism. At the same time, Japanese art itself boasted a tradition of graphic eroticism, ranging from the woodblock prints of prostitutes, maids, and low-ranking geisha in dishabille to the exuberant pornography of the “spring pictures” (*shunga*). Bawdiness, pictorial titillation, and sexual exploitation did not need to be imported into Japan, and the depiction of naked-

ness was not taboo, although never a part of high art as in the West.

The early photographs of nudes or seminudes thus can be seen not only as another form of catering to treaty-port tastes but also as a rather predictable development: poor daughters of the erotic tradition in Japanese culture (and poor sisters to the *carte érotique* of the West). While certain of these compositions such as “Home Bathing” make some pretense to artistry and convey an air of *nāvetè*, the overall impression left by this mild early erotica is that it does indeed “transcribe reality,” but in a manner different from that intended and experienced at the time. Certainly the reality transcribed is worlds apart from the lubricious and often hilarious sensuality depicted in the *shunga* and other *ukiyo-e* from the pleasure quarters. Occasional photographs such as the unsmiling post-town prostitute applying cosmetics (plate 84) survive as unintentionally effective pieces of realism. In the cruder poses, the models are usually very young, often stiff and vacant-looking, sometimes physically unattractive. They are clearly sexual objects rather than participants. For some contemporary Japanese commentators, their stumpy bodies, slightly bent backs, and general facial features provoke images not of eroticism but of the wretchedly poor farm families in the Tōhoku region and other deprived parts of Japan from which many of the young women in the treaty ports and urban centers were recruited. Depiction of the nude in painting, sculpture, and photography was subjected to

government restrictions beginning in the late 1890s, and in some instances even involved placing cloth “underskirts” over the portions of exhibited works deemed morally offensive by the authorities. Restraints were not eased until 1918, and serious nude photography did not appear in Japan until the 1920s.

In contrast to the early treaty-port nudes, there also emerged a more decorous and enduring genre of photographic pinups in the form of portraits of famous beauties. Here the continuity with the more dignified woodblock prints of famous geisha was notable. The Meiji beauties upon whom the camera doted were also mainly geisha; and in contrast to the pathetic and anonymous nudes, they were or quickly became celebrities. The face was virtually all that mattered, and the standard of beauty was usually a somewhat softer version of features that had been glorified by such masters of woodblock art as Harunobu, Utamaro, and Kunisada: oval face, white complexion, high-bridged nose, sensuous mouth, almond eyes, fairly strong eyebrows. Poise, intelligence, and taste emanated from these perfectly regular countenances, and although some of the geisha were photographed in fashionable Western dress, the majority wore kimono.

In the early 1870s, after the introduction of albumen paper made reproduction easier, photos of these beauties as well as other traditional woodblock subjects such as actors and famous places were pasted on thick paper and sold in special shops, in the manner of woodblock prints.

By the time of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), when printing processes were more sophisticated, standardized postcards of beauties had become available throughout the country and were often carried to the front by enlisted men, who in official propaganda were concentrating on the emperor. Subsequently, stage and screen actresses merged with these geisha idols, and more “exotic” (that is, Westernized) ideals of beauty, albeit still primarily beauty of countenance, saturated the country in the form of pinup cards known as “bromides” (*buromaido*). In the realm of highly idealized feminine beauty, it has been said, the Japanese were not “liberated from the face” until after 1945.

Alongside kitsch, souvenir photography, and the general pandering to foreign and popular tastes that characterized much early work, especially in the Kantō area, the pioneers of Japanese photography also moved in more sober directions. One such direction, a mainstream in Japan as elsewhere, was portrait photography. Initially, again as elsewhere, various superstitions arose concerning the occult powers of the camera. “Once photographed, your shadow will fade; twice photographed, your life will shorten,” went one. Another held that if three persons were photographed together, the one in the middle would die early. Like comparable fears concerning the telegraph and other Western technologies, these fears were soon dispelled, and Japanese who could scrape up the fee began to flock to photographers’ studios. Foremost among them were the samurai, for as Shimooka

Renjō recalled, “The warriors of various fiefs, being resolved to fight and prepared to die, asked to be photographed as a memento.” Indeed, instead of losing one’s shadow, one could now hope to leave it to posterity.

Thus, from before the overthrow of the *ancien régime* in 1868 until the last futile agony of samurai resistance in 1877, the warriors sat for the camera. They posed singly or with their comrades, retainers, families, women of pleasure. They sat with pistols as well as the traditional two swords, in lounging postures as well as stiffly, sometimes looking straight at the lens and sometimes to the side. They left images of status, pride, and also unpredictable explosiveness, particularly the portraits of the younger men—effective “mementos” of the youthful, determined, radical, but ambiguous nature of the personal forces behind Japan’s transition to “modernity.” The photographic record from before the overthrow of the old feudal regime in 1868 includes portraits of several of the more famous “men of spirit” (*shishi*) who were cut down before their plots succeeded, as well as portraits of other conspirators who survived to don frock coats and be rephotographed as pillars of the new establishment. It is these later images as doyens of the status quo by which the latter figures chose to be, and commonly are, remembered.

The acknowledged master of portrait photography in mid-nineteenth-century Japan was Ueno Hikoma (plates 25, 26, 28, 29, 31–47), who was only twenty-five in 1862 when he opened his first studio in Nagasaki. Prior

to 1868, his subjects included many of the activists associated with the Restoration cause, both the well known and the unheralded, as well as a gamut of non-samurai and non-Japanese denizens of the treaty ports. The sharp lighting and bare settings of the unretouched portraits by Ueno and his contemporaries, which place them so obviously before the advent of artistic and soft-focus influences, probably have a special appeal to the sated eyes of today: their very lack of sentimentality and finesse seems a closer approximation to the “truth” of lives and years that were hard.

Despite these promising beginnings—and despite the elite tradition of portrait painting, the inclination toward personalized history, the near mania for compiling “definitive” collections in Japan, and the overweening egos of most of Meiji Japan’s leaders—Japanese photographers somewhat surprisingly did not proceed to produce a systematic and coherent gallery of their eminent countrymen. The sheer volume of individual, family, and group portraits that has accumulated in Japan since the time of Ueno and Shimooka is probably as great as or greater than anywhere else in the world, but there is no counterpart to Mathew Brady’s *The Gallery of Illustrious Americans* (1850) or the multivolume French *Galerie contemporaine* (1876–1884). Among photographers, there were no personal counterparts to such nineteenth-century masters of portraiture as the Frenchman Nadar (Gaspard Félix Tournachon), the Englishwoman Julia Margaret Cameron, or the Scotsmen Hill and Adamson.

From a broader perspective, it can be argued that documentary photography in general developed slowly in Japan. Ueno Hikoma did not restrict his activities to the studio, and some of his outside work was distinguished. His panorama of the harbor at Nagasaki nicely captures the physical landscape of the treaty ports (plate 25), while his famous shot of a white man being pulled in a jinrikisha followed by an endless procession of ox-borne luggage can be read as an effective evocation of the psychological landscape of the ports (plate 26). He turned his camera upon subjects like the huge, ugly Takashima coal mine that had been gouged out of the hills near Nagasaki, and he contributed perhaps the most famous war photograph of mid-nineteenth-century Japan: the scene of the empty battlements at Kagoshima in 1877 (plate 47), a shot worthy of both a haiku by Bashō and a place alongside some of the scenes of still battlefields from the American Civil War.

The greater significance of this photograph, however, is that it stands virtually alone. Although the Japanese had the technology, however cumbersome, photographers did not cover the military struggles both before and after the Restoration of 1868 in any depth, and the failure to do so is especially conspicuous because of the striking coverage given around the same time to the Crimean War and the American Civil War. There was no counterpart to the “Brady boys” in Japan even in 1877, when the more reactionary samurai waged war for seven months against the new government. Ueno actually was commissioned by the government to cover this insur-

rection, and took eight assistants with him; their total output was sixty-nine photographs, in contrast to the thousands taken by Brady and his colleagues. Thus, Ueno’s record of the deserted Kagoshima stronghold is impressive not only as a good photograph but also because it is a rather solitary photograph. For a pictorial record of the two decades of domestic strife and struggle surrounding the Restoration, it is necessary to rely on the highly dramatic but unreliable “brocade pictures” of the old woodblock process. Documentary photography of a sustained nature did not develop seriously in Japan until the Sino-Japanese War at the turn of the century, although the genesis of a powerful documentary style can be seen among the third group of pioneer Japanese photographers, the so-called Hokkaidō group.

That a high point in the development of Japanese photography was attained in the least developed part of Japan is not as surprising as may appear at first glance. To a certain degree, Hokkaidō was the Japanese equivalent of the American West. It was a rough frontier region that attracted a tough breed of settlers. In the Ainu it had its own vanishing race, a counterpart to the American Indian. The initial development of Hokkaidō was even guided by foreign technicians, most of whom (46 out of 63) were Americans who were knowledgeable about the pioneer work in frontier photography being done by their own countrymen such as Timothy O’Sullivan and Alexander Gardner under the sponsorship of the United States government. Interest in photography in Hokkaidō had quickened prior to the Meiji Restoration,

with the support of the local daimyō Matsumae Takahiro (plate 5) and the tutelage of certain Russians in Hakodate. The two greatest pioneer cameramen in Hokkaidō, Tamoto Kenzō and Kizu Kōkichi, were both assisted by Russians in their early studies, and Kizu established Hokkaidō's first photo studio in Hakodate in 1864. The most intense period of accomplishment for these men and their colleagues, however, was the decade following 1871—the year the new government announced its ten-year plan for development of the northern island and began hiring foreign advisers. The general budget allotted for this frontier task included generous sums for photographs, which were used both to record progress in reclamation and construction and to publicize the undertaking among prospective settlers. For the two years 1879–1880 alone, the allotment for photographic materials was a handsome 210,029 yen.

Although the names of many of the Hokkaidō photographers are well known, their work, as in the case of the Kantō group, has tended to survive in good part as a collective contribution. Some photographs, such as Takebayashi Seiichi's portraits of prisoners (plates 63–65) are clearly identified as the work of a specific individual, and a large percentage of the early photos are believed to be by Tamoto (plate 131 is definitely by him; plates 49, 51, 53, 54, 56, and 60 may be). In most cases, however, the identity of the photographer is uncertain. As with some of the sod-hut and frontier-town photography of the American West, the great impact of many of the Hokkaidō photographs lies in their evocation of a

harsh life amidst blasted landscapes and shabby buildings. On occasion, as in the depiction of men wandering on a grey plain of tree stumps taller than themselves (plate 55), the impression is almost surrealistic, and the fact that many of the Hokkaidō photographs were used to publicize the frontier can only deepen the awe of the contemporary observer. The relatively late date of this photograph, like that of the extraordinary “Cat of Sakhalin” (plate 69), is testimony to the fact that the severe environment of the north continued to inspire striking creativity with the camera even after the especially intense and coordinated activity of the 1870s.

Photographs of the racially and culturally distinct Ainu who lived in Hokkaidō (and Sakhalin) constituted a separate category that also received encouragement from the foreigners, as suggested by Kajima Seizaburō's choice of an English title, *The Ainu of Japan*, for an 1895 album (plate 76). Most of the Ainu studies were carefully arranged photographs of customary activities or straight-on portraits reminiscent of some of the American portraits of Indian chiefs. (Unlike the Ainu, however, the Indians usually had their names recorded.) When the camera wavered momentarily from this posed record to see the stupefied Ainu in beggar's rags sprawled in the dirt (plate 66), the result was a lasting vision of the demoralization and degradation of a people on the verge of extinction.

■ The first generation of professional photographers were men of high talent and high prices. Those who

learned their craft in the 1850s and 1860s usually had been compelled to master the English and Dutch languages as well as the rudiments of Western science, and most of them were esteemed as genuine experts. A popular saying of 1872 included photographs as one of seven items in the “standard paraphernalia of civilization and enlightenment” (*bunmei kaika nanatsu dōgu*)—along with newspapers, the postal system, gaslights, steam engines, exhibitions, and dirigible balloons—while the photographers themselves were mentioned in limericks, songs, novels, and plays and even portrayed in the “brocade pictures” that their own craft would eventually supplant. By the 1870s, there were over one hundred professional photographers working throughout Japan, and several were listed in the various “Who's Who” publications of that decade. They worked exclusively in the wet-plate collodion process and almost entirely with equipment and materials imported from the West through Western treaty-port intermediaries.

As photography became more popular, however, photographers became less esteemed. In Japanese, this change was reflected in a new word for photographer that suggested an ordinary small tradesman rather than a professional with truly exceptional skills. Whereas the cameramen of the pioneer generation were (and still are) known as *shashinshi*, “masters of the photograph,” most of their commercial successors from the 1880s on were simply associated with the workplace where photography was done. They were identified as *shashinya* (literally, “photograph room”) or *shashinya-san*, that is,

“photo-shop persons.” In place of languages and science they marshaled an array of props and painted backgrounds that flattered their subjects and prettified their craft. This shift coincided with technological innovations, especially the dry-plate process, which was first imported in 1883 and made photography simpler, faster, and cheaper. A broader spectrum of the populace now could afford to sit for the camera on special occasions, while at the same time a new class of socially privileged amateurs could aspire to pursue photography as a serious avocation.

These developments also were interwoven with Japan’s industrial revolution and the diversification of native entrepreneurship, as capitalists led by the Asanuma and Konishi companies slowly but steadily began to expand their involvement in both domestic manufacture and direct importation from Western suppliers. At the same time, advances in printing technology paved the way for wider dissemination of photographs in books, magazines, and newspapers. From the latter part of the 1870s, photographs were occasionally pasted onto printed pages; and a milestone in Japanese journalism occurred in 1890, when the newspaper *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* included photographs of the members of the newly created parliament as a separate insert. It was not until 1904, however, that it became possible to print photographs and type on the same page, and consequently photojournalism and the flowering of books and magazines containing photographs was largely a twentieth-

century phenomenon. Until almost the very end of the Meiji period in 1912, the public’s visualization of the great events and trends of the day remained highly colored by the imaginative “reporting” of woodblock prints and drawings.

There was subtle reciprocity in these developments. While technological and industrial change made possible the popularization and (more slowly) material domesticization of photography in Japan, photographs themselves—in the form of the family portrait, group portrait, or “commemorative photograph” (*kinen shashin*)—could offer a mild sort of ideological antidote to the ravages of technology and industrialization. Thus, the period beginning around the 1880s, when family albums became an almost obsessive part of popular culture, was the same period in which it became clear that traditional family relationships were being eroded by urbanization and modernization. Similarly, the popularization of formal portraits of the homogenized work group or social group coincided with fears, clearly expressed by Japan’s leaders in the latter part of the Meiji period, that Japanese workers would jump their jobs if the opportunity arose and that egoism and individualism, or even socialism and anarchism, threatened to tear the social fabric to shreds.

The positive accomplishments and amiable associations conveyed by the “commemorative photographs”—the happy odysseys of birth, childhood, graduation, employment, recreation, marriage, and parenthood—

were ritualized for the masses by the commercial photographers of Meiji Japan during the same period that other sources suggest was a time of uncertainty, pessimism, and “anguish” (*hanmon*). The photo-shop men lived practical lives by portraying life ideally. They offered comforting scrapbook evidence that everyone had a place and everything was proceeding well—and in the same gesture they offered seductive models of harmony to emulate. In this respect their work was propaganda, the visual and generally unwitting counterpart to ruling-class rhetoric about the traditional “beautiful customs” and “harmonious” social relationships of Japan. The family album in Japan as in most other places is a classic example of the manner in which photographs function both as a way of remembering and as a way of forgetting, playing, in the process, an ideological role.

Occasionally, romanticization failed: the camera was gracious to the Meiji emperor (plate 128), who is known to have been surly and carnal, but no commercial photographer and no amount of plumage and braid ever succeeded in removing the dullness from the eyes of Meiji’s son, the mentally infirm Taishō emperor (plate 129). Romanticization also could be iconoclastic: Ogawa Kazumasa’s 1892 portrait of his aged parents, the mother resting her head upon the father’s shoulder, was for its time an astonishing declaration of warmth and affection in a fiercely patriarchal society (plate 156). On rare occasions, the portrait business was even capable of contributing to wry and slightly manic humor, as in Ezaki

Reiji's 1893 collage of the faces of 1,700 babies (plate 111), looking at first glance like a bumpy shell midden (cf. plate 282). From late Meiji on, however, the mainstream of commercial photography consisted of portrait work of a solid and stolid nature, creating and perpetuating small myths by preserving touching, optimistic moments.

Like other forms of fiction, whether songs, novels, graphics, political pronouncements, or historical essays, these romanticizations produced with chemicals and glass are part of the reality of their times. Moreover, like any other meaningful way of seeing, photography itself simultaneously offered both refutations and elaborations of its own myths. The posed world of the photo-shop men was offset by the emergence of photojournalism and the maturing of documentary photography, represented in this present collection under war photography and "the camera's eye." At the same time, the more aesthetic inclinations of the studio photographers were isolated and nurtured and played with in a manner that ultimately proved extremely creative. This emerged as "art photography" at the end of the Meiji period, and was carried to an entirely new level of modern and modernistic visions in the 1930s. As revealed in the organization of this volume, contemporary Japanese photographers look back upon the decade prior to 1940 as the true "epoch of development" upon which postwar Japanese photography was constructed.

Beginning with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895,

Japanese photographers were given ample opportunity to develop the art of war photography. As recorded by the camera, the military stepping stones in Japan's emergence as a modern state now seem appalling to most observers, but this was not always so, and it still does not hold true for everyone. Some of the images captured by the Japanese photographers would seem to be wordless cries for peace as horrific and eloquent as any ever made: the helmet and skull in a stagnant pool (plate 479), the charred mother and child (plate 505). Sometimes it is words that make the difference. The mind becomes numb, the eye literally and figuratively films over, as images of death and suffering follow one upon the other and begin to seem nothing more than photographic clichés. At such times, a caption can make a photograph suddenly sear the mind's eye by offering an unexpected explanation and returning the observer to a sharp realization of the intimacy and individuality of the war experience. Thus, Yanagida Fumio's macabre photograph of a corpse with a blade protruding from his throat (plate 499) may change some people's way of remembering Japanese militarism when the caption sinks in: "An intellectual soldier from the Shizuoka Regiment who committed suicide with a bayonet during training." The war photography of Imperial Japan also enables the latter-day observer, if so inclined, to make Biblical points by juxtaposition: the carnage abroad and carnage come home, the sowing and the reaping. Or for Americans, confronted with the photographic record of 1944 and 1945:

the shared guilt and the inability ever to cast the first stone.

In pre-1945 Japan, however, war photography did not conspicuously carry such antiwar messages. The problem of censorship is a complicating factor here. It is not clear how complete the photographic war record is, and it is difficult to ascertain how much of what is available at present was actually seen at the time by the Japanese public. From the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 on, many war photographers were directly attached to the Japanese army, and controls were placed on permissible subjects. Some of the photographs now available, especially from the 1931-1945 period, are stamped "censored" (*fukyoka*) and were declassified only in recent years (cf. plates 487, 491). Other censored photographs are known to have been among the heaps of incriminating material that the Japanese frantically destroyed at the time of the surrender in 1945. Military censorship was abetted by self-censorship (as well as by rationing and simple scarcity of materials in the early 1940s), and for various reasons there are aspects of Japan's wars that are barely covered in the extant record. There appears to be but a single Japanese photograph of the Rape of Nanking (plate 482), for example, and coverage of Japanese involvement with White Russians and the White Terror in Siberia between 1918 and 1922 is thin (plates 186-192). Apart from Yanagida's suicide of the intellectual recruit, very little in the photographic record conveys the brutality of the officer corps or the despair or utter exhaustion

of conscripts. Propaganda holds that most Japanese soldiers died with the words "Long Live the Emperor" on their lips, but those who survived have indicated that more commonly their comrades died calling for their mothers. The camera sheds no light here, for it records only the living face or the dead face, but not the face between.

However incomplete the visual record may have been, it is clear that Japanese in the prewar period were exposed to many sobering war photographs, and that in general they found them stirring and inspirational. Photography has been integral to the war propaganda of all countries in the twentieth century, and it was Japan that gave the world its first great, and greatly photographed, modern war with the undeclared attack on Russia in 1904. In the 1930s, the Nazis in Germany carried the art of photographic propaganda to an entirely new level of slick manipulation, and the Japanese militarists attempted to follow suit by establishing new publicity sections in both the Cabinet Information Bureau and the Imperial Military Headquarters in 1937. By 1940, one finds an article in *Fuoto Taimusu* [Photo Times], one of Japan's most reputable photography magazines, quoting with approval Goebbels on the obligation of the artist to the state. By 1943, photographic propaganda for domestic consumption was overtly fanatical and palpably lunatic (as witness the posed maniacs in plate 478). More interesting than such blatant and overt propaganda, however, is the very subtle, innate propagandistic poten-

tial of war photography, which in the Japanese case emerges with great vividness in the photography of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905.

The Russo-Japanese War was covered by photographers from many countries, and the photography as a whole is stunning. From just the small Japanese sample included here (plates 172–183), one can begin to imagine the impact these photographs must have had at the time. Even at that late date, elaborate woodblock prints were still a major medium through which the war was presented to the Japanese public. But it is at this juncture that the photograph can be seen coming into its own as the more potent medium—partly because of its ability to convey a sense of immense space, partly because it held a mirror to the "real" faces of war in a way not possible with the slower lenses and processes of prior years, and partly because the journalistic breakthrough in reproducing photographs occurred at precisely this time.

The camera, like the Japanese soldiers themselves, captured Manchurian space in a breathtaking manner. To the Japanese then and for decades thereafter, there was an epic symbolism in these panoramic vistas and far horizons: images of space became intimations of destiny. That this new frontier was militarily and economically essential to Japan was rarely questioned by a vigorous people in a crowded place, especially when the other powers were also busy dismembering China. What the photographs of 1904–1905 etched in the Japanese popular consciousness was the vision of a Russian enemy, a

virgin land, a sparse and backward native population, and a triumph of Japanese will over nature's forces as well as the tsar's. Photography went further, moreover, by assisting in the wedding of destiny to obligation, for the mounds of corpses recorded by the camera were an unforgettable memorial to the 120,000 Japanese who died to establish Japan's foothold on the continent. It was inconceivable that such sacrifice should ever be betrayed, and the more the corpses accumulated on later battlefields, the more impossible it became to abandon the imperialist quest. In such a context, photographs of patriotic gore could never serve as effective inducements to antimilitarism, for they were constant reminders to the Japanese of their blood debt to the dead.

Looked at now, these records naturally carry different messages. The same photographs of vast terrain and tiny figures seem symbols of Japanese fatuity rather than Japan's destiny. It is far easier now to perceive the blood lust rather than the blood debt, and the image of Japanese soldiers snickering over the decapitation of a prisoner (plate 182) emerges as a more accurate symbol of the course of empire that the Russo-Japanese War foreshadowed. There is scant honor to be found through such a reading of these war photographs, but rather a troubling reminder that today's pitiful Japanese corpse may have been yesterday's perpetrator of atrocities...all the while carrying sentimental family portraits, and possibly pinups of soft beauties, in his pocket. To begin to comprehend how all this could fit together, it is necessary to

place the battlefield against the domestic scene, the war photographs against the camera's eye at home.

When the camera was taken outside the studio in prewar Japan, and used without deliberate artifice or sentimentality, the record that resulted bore striking parallels to the record made abroad by the war photographers. Here again are devastated landscapes, oppressed people, people in conflict—even severed Japanese heads (plates 379, 380), although after the 1870s the beheadings and public display of corpses were reserved for non-Japanese (plate 416). Prior to 1944, the devastation came from natural disasters which repeatedly wracked the country, and the corpses were often strewn as on battlefields (plates 382–389); the toll in the 1923 Kantō earthquake was over 100,000 dead or missing and over 500,000 injured. Oppression was structured by class rather than race or nation (plates 390–399); and conflict, so vigorously denied in ruling-class homilies of harmony and group loyalty, was not only class-based but also increasingly organized and articulate in the years following World War I (plates 401–402, 404–406, 408–412). The camera records intimations of the most ominous ideological threat the ruling groups could imagine: lese majesty (plate 413). This record of internal strife even embraces the Japanese military, but this time in arms against the Japanese government itself, in the abortive *coup d'état* of February 26, 1936 (plates 417–421). Viewed from this vantage point, Japan's military debaucheries can be seen as a kind of grotesque transposition abroad of disloca-

tions, hatreds, and upheavals at home. Scholars of this period sometimes refer to diversion of resentment, explosions of pent-up rage, the transfer of oppression. Photography insinuates such propositions more intimately.

■ The social landscape of deprivation at home, however, was complemented by a landscape of relative privilege that became increasingly conspicuous as Japan entered the twentieth century. Here scholars attempt to impose abstract order through vocabularies of paradox, dichotomy, dualism, or contradiction. The camera's contribution to the perception and recollection of this experience is twofold. Photographs *show* many of the contradictions (in ways that often become complex, as when one sees here the oppressed and there the oppressor, and then recognizes that the same person may be both; or when one sets the pleasure-loving cosmopolitan against the poor farmer or worker on the one hand, but against the fanatic militarist on the other hand). Photographs also *exemplify* some of the contradictions, for the most creative developments in twentieth-century Japanese photography were rooted in the uneven but highly dynamic emergence of middle-class culture, bourgeois values, and a broader range of cosmopolitan interests—were, briefly put, an integral part of the landscape of relative privilege.

Because the memory of war-crazed and war-torn Japan is so vivid and the image of matchbox cities and

dirt-poor farms so compelling, it is easy to forget that prewar Japan enjoyed a blighted flowering of politics and culture comparable in numerous respects to developments in Europe and the United States prior to World War II. Loosely referred to as the era of "Taishō democracy," a reference to the reign of the Emperor Taishō (1912–1926), this period actually extended from around the turn of the century to the very early 1930s. Like a pale version of the politics and art of Weimar Germany, it is an epoch that now raises ambiguous images of what might have been.

The economic base of the era of Taishō democracy was dynamic but unstable, as stimulation from the Russo-Japanese War and World War I helped promote the emergence of thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises, the swelling of the ranks of city workers, the appearance of flamboyant *nouveaux riches*, and the fattening of the great zaibatsu conglomerates. The political scene witnessed both energetic electoral politics and radical left-wing activities. The literary world saw articulate espousal of such schools as naturalism, romanticism, idealism, humanism, and aestheticism. In painting, Japanese and Western styles flourished side by side. The passionate "Orientalism" of Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Tenshin had coalesced with Meiji nationalism in the 1880s to inspire the regeneration of highly idealistic traditional styles; and Western-style painting was revitalized by the introduction of impressionism in the 1890s and postimpressionist trends such as fauvism and cubism in

the 1910s. Cinema and the modern-theater movement appeared on the scene in the early 1900s, and in the 1920s the gaudy cabaret and flapper culture was imported into Japan in a vogue of *ero-guro-nansensu* (eroticism, grotesqueries, and nonsense), as espoused by the *moga* and *mobo* (linguistic grotesqueries for *modan garu* and *modan boi*, that is, “modern girl” and “modern boy”).

In this milieu, Japanese photography developed in several directions. Commercial photographers expanded into advertising and propaganda, for example, initially relying mostly on kimono-clad beauties to sell soap, cosmetics, and endless bottles of beer (plates 430–441). The peak of the coy soft sell was attained in 1922 in the warm sepia-toned poster of a kimono-less young woman gazing up at the viewer over a sparkling glass of red wine; this invitation to sample “delicious, nutritious” Akadama port wine, featuring an eighteen-year-old actress, was a sensation in its day and remains perhaps the most famous single piece of commercial art produced in prewar Japan (plate 423).

While some photographers were perfecting the art of commercial seduction, many more were discovering the seduction of Art. As in the West, the perception of photography as an art turned the medium in new directions, and in its initial stages “art photography” tended to mimic the fine arts closely. Much of the early impetus for this trend came from amateurs, with support from the photo industry and enterprising professionals such as Kajima Seibe-e. Kajima’s clever late-Meiji photograph of men wearing mantles (plate 135) suggests a bridge

between the studio-portrait genre and the new aestheticism, while his flamboyant activities personify the exuberant entrepreneurship that helped usher in the age of the amateur. Some of the photo excursions organized by Kajima in the final years of the Meiji period involved hundreds of upper-class participants rolling through the countryside in rented trains accompanied by geisha and musicians, singing and drinking and presumably even taking an occasional picture.

The popularization of photography led to a blossoming of clubs, exhibitions, publications, educational courses, and domestically produced equipment and materials. The first photography association was formed in 1889, its membership including both commercial and amateur photographers. The first technical handbook for amateurs was published in 1900. The clarion call to “art photography” is generally dated from 1904, when the Yūbuzutsusha association was formed and Katō Seiichi published a landmark essay titled “On Photographic Art.” The staging of photographic exhibitions on a major and regular basis began in 1907. The first photo club for young people was organized in 1913.

Several photography journals were published in the 1890s, one of which—*Shashin Geppō* [Photography Monthly]—remained in circulation from 1893 to 1940. Beginning in 1921, specialty magazines began to appear like mushrooms after rain, and several survived to become mainstays in the field; the most famous were *Kamera* [Camera], 1921–1956, with a break during World War II; *Fuoto Taimusu* [Photo Times], 1924–1941;

and *Asahi Kamera* [Asahi Camera], 1926–1941. A magazine titled simply *Amachua* [Amateur] that was founded in 1922 is said to have sold around 10,000 copies of each issue before being wiped out in the 1923 Kantō earthquake. The 1920s saw a flood of mass-circulation weekly and monthly magazines with high photographic content, and the major newspapers emerged not only as promoters of photojournalism but also as publishers of photography books and sponsors of exhibitions. At this time, publishing houses such as Ars (the Latin word for art) also came on the scene as patrons of fine photography.

The economic boom from World War I stimulated Japanese photography in numerous ways. The number of amateur photographers ballooned, and imports of photographic materials increased almost eight times by value between 1916 and 1922. At the same time, a shift toward greater professionalism in camera work became discernable, and Japanese industry began to make more rapid progress toward the goal of relative self-sufficiency in the production of cameras, film, plates, papers, and the like. Educational courses in photography were offered from 1900, and the Tokyo Academy of Fine Arts included photography in its curriculum from 1915 to 1926, at which time the program was transferred to the Tokyo Higher Technology School. In 1923, the fully accredited Tokyo College of Photography was established, backed by the Konishi Company and offering a full three-year program. Foreign cameras were greatly prized by the affluent amateur as well as by the profes-

sional, with English models in special favor prior to the importation of the vest-pocket Kodak beginning around 1915; the Kodak remained in vogue until the appearance of the Leica in the mid-1920s. From the turn of the century, however, manufacturers led by Konishi began to produce a steady stream of domestic models, usually with Anglicized names: Champion, Paris, Noble, Pearl, Idea, Lily, Minimum Idea Camera, Idea Flex, and so forth. As one commentator has observed, the cameras of prewar Japan sound like the cigarettes of post-1945 Japan.

Art photography in Japan lagged somewhat behind its counterpart in the West, where Peter Henry Emerson's revolutionary theories and photographs first appeared in the latter half of the 1880s. The pioneer exhibitions of photographs as art (as opposed to heavy allegory in the Henry Peach Robinson mode) took place in Europe between 1891 and 1893. In the United States, Alfred Stieglitz returned from Germany in 1890, announced the Photo-Secession in 1902, and published *Camera Work* with his distinguished colleagues from 1902 to 1917. In Japan, as has been seen, photography was not effectively presented as an art until around 1904, and many of the techniques as well as ideals of the new movement were indebted to Western precedent. Akiyama Tetsusuke introduced the gum-bichromate process and other "pigment prints" between 1904 and 1909. Rough paper was used to further enhance the impression of a drawing rather than a straight photograph, and artistic effect was sought through soft focus, distortion (plates 212–215,

218, 219, 243), and outright abstraction (plates 224, 229, 230). Despite such an obvious relationship to trends in the West, it is nonetheless misleading to assume that the Japanese devotees of art photography were merely responding to outside stimuli.

"Influence" is an illusive beast, and the plain facts of contact between Japanese photographers and Western photographs in the early twentieth century are hazy. Emerson was introduced at an early date, and a photographic exhibition from London was shown in Japan as early as 1892. Alvin Langdon Coburn's discovery of abstract patterns through the camera was admired, and the Japanese were especially impressed by the writings and photographs of E. O. Hoppé, an individual neglected in current Western histories of photography. Paul Gauguin's paintings clearly fixed the photographic eye of Nojima Kōzō (plates 195 and 233), and many of the Japanese prints in the art-photography mode surely would have pleased the European impressionists (cf. plates 205, 206, 207, 220). But the impressionists at the outset had been inspired by traditional Japanese prints that arrived in their countries wrapped around china-ware, making the question who-is-fertilizing-whom, if not moot, certainly intricate.

The question of influence is further complicated by the fact that at the time Japanese photographers decided they were artists, a large portion of Japanese society was embracing Ernest Fenollosa, Okakura Tenshin, and National Essence. Photographers suddenly discovered the unsurpassed chiaroscuro of the traditional brush-

and-ink tradition (plates 201, 202, 203). Or, more obliquely, they emulated this tradition by admiring and copying virtuoso contemporary painters in the classical mode such as Yokoyama Taikan (cf. plate 199). Or, more obliquely yet, photographers came to impressionism through their own literary tradition, in which suggestiveness had been reduced to the quick moment of the seventeen-syllable haiku. Nothing is more impressionistic—or painterly—than the haiku, and one of the most famous Japanese photographers said to exemplify the haiku spirit on film is Fukuhara Shinzō (plates 221, 222), who was also inclined to give haiku-esque advice to fellow photographers ("Find life's whole history in a stone, life's intricate relations in a tree, and life's inner movements in a leaf"). By the mid-1920s, Fukuhara felt that the photographic art of Japan had begun to reflect the "national character" (*kokumin-sei*) in a distinctive manner comparable to that of the great woodblock prints themselves. But Fukuhara also, as it happens, had studied in France and clearly imbibed the impressionist influence there (plate 220). In practice, if not so easily in theory, it was possible to reach simultaneously for the Japanese spirit and a cosmopolitan identity.

By the 1920s, there was a current of anticipation among Japanese photographers in the art-photography mode that they were about to become a respected part of the international world of photography. Photography journals attempted to attract the non-Japanese audience by including English captions and prefaces in their publications, and Japanese sponsorship of the First Interna-

tional Photographic Salon in Tokyo in 1927 sparked great hopes of an epoch of cosmopolitan relationships. Japanese entries began to be solicited more frequently for exhibitions abroad. An advertisement published in English in 1928 for one of the Japanese magazines captures this sense of excitement:

There [is] something else in Japan besides the proverbial cherry blossoms and woodcut colour prints! It is no other than ... pictorial photography. In the past few years, not only have the flowers of the Japanese Photographic art blossomed, but their sweet fragrance and beautiful light have shone throughout the world.

Today, no camera workers and enthusiasts in the world can do without taking heed [of] the progress of Japanese photography.

As it turned out, Japanese photography did have a decade of dynamic growth ahead of it, but in directions different from those suggested in this sugary paean to "pictorial photography." Although art photography at its best produced elegant works such as those selected for this present volume, the genre as a whole fell easily into a redundancy of misty scenes and blurry figures. A critic commenting on a major exhibition in 1928 concluded that Japanese photographers preferred nature over daily life, and what is quiescent in nature over what is active. They were, by and large, uncreative, indifferent to humanity, abstruse, and aristocratic. Such critical feelings were echoed by many Japanese photographers, who began to feel by the mid-1920s that art photography had

become mere artifice, a romanticization as sentimental and divorced from reality as were the posed and tidy portraits of the conventional photo-shop men.

■ While the decline of art photography coincided with the demise of "Taishō democracy," for the historian there is a fascinating twist to this: the demise of "Taishō democracy" in turn coincided with the beginning of a decade of intense diversity and innovation in Japanese photography. To the present-day observer, this may seem quite astonishing, for it means that photography flourished as never before during a period popularly associated with the "dark valley" of mounting militarism and repression. This "epoch of development" continued through the 1930s and was not effectively throttled by the state until around 1940.

Upon closer analysis, and with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that this was not an anomaly, not a solitary freak bloom in a cultural and social wasteland. Many sectors of Japanese society underwent immense transformations in the 1930s. Certain fields in the arts and sciences continued to play out the momentum, or the logic, of developments set in motion during the era of "Taishō democracy." In other areas, politically and morally onerous aspects of the period proved conducive to photographic creativity. Some of the most brilliant—even "humanistic"—documentary photography of pre-war Japan, for example, was taken in the 1930s in the new puppet state of Manchukuo (plates 313–327, 337–338, 340–342), calling to mind the role played by the

new frontier of Hokkaidō in Japanese photography a half-century earlier.

The photography of this "epoch of development" embraced a number of styles and labels—New Photography, News Photography, Vanguard Photography, the Real Photo, the Surreal—and reflected the way massive influences from the West meshed with the domestic influences and pressures of a wobbly but advanced capitalism. The most immediately obvious Western influence was the Leica and the new world of 35-millimeter work this permitted. A magazine titled *Geppan Raika* [Monthly Leica] was actually established in 1934, and it was altogether fitting that one of the most esteemed of Japanese photographers, Kimura Ihe-e, should publish a volume in 1938 titled (in English in the original) *Japan through a Leica*.

Beginning in the latter half of the 1920s, the Japanese also suddenly acquired almost unrestricted access to the latest trends in Western photography through a steady stream of articles, translations, exhibitions, and systematic photographic reproductions (including yearbooks of international photography). They were especially receptive to the avant-garde developments in the country from which the Leica had come—the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) and visions of the Bauhaus group, as expressed by such innovators as László Moholy-Nagy and first introduced to Japan around 1926.

This attraction to the Germany the Nazis devoured is instructive when one recalls the Bauhaus ideal of a new unity of art and technology. For the receptivity of Japa-

nese photographers to such theories derived from the fact that Japan itself now confronted the challenges and seductions of modernity—or at least (keeping in mind the contradictions) the attraction of modern forms. In addition to its war boom (and bust) and technology boom and communications boom, post-World War I Japan also had experienced “booms” in construction, urbanization, industrialization, consumerism—the list is virtually unending. The metropolitan heart of the country had been leveled in the 1923 Kantō earthquake, and rebuilt in part on more modern lines. The plunge into crass, go-it-alone imperialism beginning in 1931 was also the impetus for a “second industrial revolution” in heavy and chemical industry. Japan, racked by the strains of unbalanced capitalism and second-string imperialism, was now also confronted as never before with the nice geometries of modern buildings and orderly, functional machines. The aesthetic, psychological, political, and symbolic options in such a situation were diverse, and Japanese photographers explored many of them.

These options were not necessarily avant-garde, but however different their styles, the major photographers of the early 1930s shared the articulate consciousness of being engaged in the creation of “new photographs” or a “new photography” (*shinkō shashin*). The popular phrase actually was adopted in the names of an association and a magazine founded in 1930 (the Shinkō Shashin Kenkyū Kai and its journal, *Shinkō Shashin Kenkyū*), which is not only tidy for the historian of photography but also suggestive to the social and political historian.

The vocabulary of new photography dovetails with the renovationist (and ideologically ambidextrous) ideals and labels that were being trumpeted throughout Japan in the 1930s: the “new haiku,” “new bureaucrats,” “new zaibatsu,” and ultimately the “new structure” at home and the “new order” abroad. In embracing the new, moreover, many of these photographers made it explicit that they were casting off the “old” fashions of art photography. The tone of their iconoclasm is suggested by the following lines from an often-quoted manifesto on behalf of the “real photo” published by Ina Nobuo in 1932 in an essay titled “Return to Photography”:

Sever all connections with “art photography.” Destroy every conception of established “art.” Break down the idols! Keenly recognize the “mechanistic nature” unique to photography! The aesthetics of photography as a new art—the study of photographic art—must be established on these two premises.

Like most prose on the subject, this is somewhat ambiguous; but the product of verbal ambiguity was photographic diversity of a very creative sort. Whereas art photography had found its model in painting and its mood in an indulgent and romantic subjectivity, the avant-garde of the “new photography” looked to the modern and mechanistic world for models, and assumed a pose of unsentimental objectivity that emphasized the “real,” the “factual,” the impersonal. Such photography often focused on architecture and machines, the modern world of concrete and metal, and turned the very stuff of relentless, bewildering, chaotic change into photo-

graphic statements of form, order, and clarity (cf. plates 251, 259, 260, 262, 325, 327). Whether this was indeed objective and unsentimental is another matter.

It was also possible, on the other hand, to present the material forms of contemporary society in a manner that carried a stronger sense of disenchantment and implicit criticism. This is the mood, for example, that emerges from several photomontages by Horino Masao titled “The Character of Great Tokyo,” which were published in 1931 in the well-known journal of opinion *Chūō Kōron* (plates 367–369). Photomontage was another of the techniques that had attracted European innovators, and Horino acknowledged his debt here to certain layouts by Moholy-Nagy. In its most dynamic form, the montage or photo spread or composite photograph can convey a graphic sense of dialectics, of both linkage and disequilibrium, and the character of modern Tokyo that emerged from Horino’s juxtapositions and angles of vision was harsh and unstable. Yet the following year Horino himself presented a famous series of photographs of modern ships under the collective title “Camera: Eye × Steel • Composition” that seems to reflect the more naïve infatuation with modern forms that generally characterized the so-called functional aesthetics (plate 260).

As Ina Nobuo’s manifesto reveals, the emphasis on “mechanism” also reminded photographers that in addition to the machines in their neighborhood, they had a machine in their hand. The camera too was a mechanical device—not a paintbrush, not a simple mirror, not a

human eye—and exploitation of its “mechanical nature” could offer a unique perception of reality. To present-day observers this may seem obvious, but it was a genuine discovery for photographers of this generation, and a discovery that truly did alter ways of seeing. Through multiple exposure, manipulation of shutter speed, manipulation of lens, and other techniques, the photographer could draw a variety of unique impressions from the external world. Perhaps of greater significance in shaping the cast of the contemporary eye, photographers now exploited the camera’s capacity for close-up work and unconventional angles of perspective, uncovering a new world of sensory impression through the isolated detail and unexpected vantage point (cf. plates 250, 252, 253, 255–258, 261–264, 278, 282, 283). Where the camera originally had been prized for its ability to “capture reality” in full detail and proper perspective, it now was cherished as a mechanism that could isolate fragments and transcend conventional perspective to reveal a new reality of patterns and spacial relationships.

As photographers emphasized the close-up or exploited the mechanical nature of the camera in other ways, the hard lines associated with the cult of functional modernity softened. The “real” became increasingly difficult to identify; the rational gave way to the unpredictable; the fact gave way to the suggestion. Thus, another dimension of the new photography was the semi-abstract or abstract composition, a trend already apparent in the art-photography mode but now carried further (cf. plates 252, 254, 256, 261, 265, 276, 277, 280).

In this case, the product of the new objectivity became nonobjective imagery. In yet another direction, avant-garde photographers attempted to transcend materialist realism by introducing the human element as well as elements of dream and unreality. Their absurdly rational creations drew upon the conventions of another modernistic school that had emerged in Europe in the 1920s: surrealism (plates 245–247, 270–274). Many photographs naturally blurred the lines between the close-up and the abstraction, or the abstract and the surreal. The Japanese also incorporated Western techniques such as the “lensless photography” of the photogram (plate 279) and the solarization process pioneered by Man Ray (plates 269, 297).

What the mechanists excluded and surrealists dismembered, other contributors to the new photography attempted to present whole and even with reverence, and this of course was humankind. Such turning away from machines and modern geometries also could be undertaken in the name of “the real,” and the vanguard photography of the 1930s included a variety of impressions of the human subject that were technically more sophisticated than those of the past. As had been the case ever since the introduction of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, the individuals depicted included both the famous and the nameless. They were now caught on film, however, in soft focus or by snapshot or from unusual angles or in more “natural” poses. Nojima Kōzō, whose work bridged the art-photography and new-photography modes (plates 195, 200, 233, 244,

291–295, 306, 308), produced many of his most striking and creative studies of women and nudes in the early 1930s, when he was over forty. Kojima Ihe-e, who was born in 1901, burst on the scene in the 1930s as a master of both the portrait and the street shot (plates 285, 286, 309, 310, 341, 353–356, 375, 452). With deliberate avoidance of finesse, Watanabe Yoshio caught the hurlyburly backstage jumble of a musical review (plates 363–366), while Hamaya Hiroshi cast a slow, loving, uncritical eye on rural customs (plates 370–374). The most distinguished amateur photographer of this period, Yasui Nakaji, abandoned the painterly tradition of art photography to produce powerful works of social realism before his death in 1942 at the age of thirty-nine (plates 328–330, 344, 348, 352). The versatile Horino Masao turned his camera on the lower classes (plates 345, 349, 362) at the same time as he was achieving recognition for his photomontages and images of the world of steel.

Had there been a counterpart to Roy Stryker and the United States Farm Security Administration in Japan in the mid-1930s, these photographic glimpses of the powerless and the poor might have been carried to the level of a truly sustained documentary vision. As it was, the closest approximation to a coherent documentary statement was created outside Japan proper and was inspired by imperialist romanticizations. This was the photography by Japanese in China’s Three Eastern Provinces—the new photography in the “New Manchuria,” to borrow from the title of a photo collection from this decade. Like the photographic record of the Russo-Japanese War

three decades earlier, these were indeed powerful images of space, toughness, and destiny. They were by no means condescending to the peoples of the new imperialism. Many of the best-known Japanese cameramen visited Manchukuo at one time or another during the 1930s (cf. plates 337, 338, 340, 341), but much of the finest work came from photographers, amateurs as well as professionals, who settled there. They were encouraged by the Japanese government, the Japanese Kwantung Army, which controlled Manchuria, and the South Manchurian Railway Company; they had an effective leader in the photographer Fuchigami Hakuyō (plates 313, 314); they had several magazines of their own through which to publish photographs in the neo-colony; and they appear to have absorbed some of the genuinely idealistic dreams of a new order in Asia.

Photographers of the human condition in the 1930s worked within a variety of overlapping schools associated with photojournalism, “news photography” as redefined to include the pictorial chronicle of daily life, the proletarian-art movement, and the like. In addition, it is clear that they drew not only upon the abiding interest in portraiture but also upon the ostensibly outmoded aesthetics of the epoch of art photography, refreshed and revitalized by theories and examples from the West. Of notable influence here from the mid-1930s on were the teachings and photographs of Paul Wolff, the German master of miniature-camera photography who retained an appreciation of more traditional photographic aesthetics as well. Two well-attended exhibitions

of Wolff’s photographs in Japan in 1935 elicited the critical accolade “this is the art photography of a new era, and it can be concluded that both the old ‘art photography’ and the new ‘new photography’ have by and large completed their missions.”

On one side, work associated with these new trends shades off into the photography previously discussed here under war photography and “the camera’s eye.” On the other side, the shading is toward overt propaganda, first for the company, then for the state. The modern photographic visions and techniques that had been solemnly advanced in the name of new perceptions of Truth or Reality were perfectly adaptable to selling soap, and it was but a small step from touting consumer goods to touting the country, the expanding empire, and finally war itself. Many of the most famous photographers turned their talents to advertising and propaganda work, always with two clear audiences in mind: domestic and foreign.

Western influences were at play here as elsewhere; as early as 1928, one volume in a multivolume series on contemporary commercial art had been devoted to European advertising, and the Bauhaus influence in this as in other artistic fields is widely acknowledged. The real takeoff in Japanese advertising photography, however, is dated from 1930, when the first association of advertising photographers was formed and Japanese won the first and third prizes in the First International Advertising Photography Exhibition (plates 442, 444), which was held in Tokyo. The following year, a team

centering on Kimura Ihe-e made a dramatic departure from the traditional soft pitch by using a photograph of the slums in an ad for “99.4% pure” Kao soap (plate 452). This striking composition was a breakthrough in several respects: it moved some of the most promising trends in documentary photography into the hucksters’ camp; it was addressed to a mass audience; it included a lengthy text; and it was presented as a large front-page ad in the daily press.

These trends suggest both a new domestic market and a new type of commercial professionalism, which is not what most observers would expect given the date: 1931 was the year of the Manchurian Incident, and Japan was still by all general indices in the depths of the Great Depression. Yet it was at this time that free-lance photographers and graduates from the new photography courses joined a variety of designers, journalists, and ad men to push luxury products on the masses and to cater very conspicuously to the “modern girl” (cf. plates 424, 425, 441; also, in the “new photography” mode, plates 300–303). There was a 1930s magazine for women titled *Shinkō Fujin* [New Woman], a title consistent with the pervasive vocabulary of renovation, and in 1937 some of these new women of leisure even formed their own photography group with the English name “Ladies’ Camera Club.” At the same time, a polished advertising campaign was directed toward the English-speaking market. Where in 1928 Japanese had dreamed of exporting the fragrant blossoms of their art photography to the West, by the mid-1930s they were using slick photography to

sell the Westerners autos, textiles, light bulbs, and mandarin oranges (plates 427, 453–456).

Beginning in 1933, the hub of such commercial photography was the Japan Atelier (Nihon Kōbō; reorganized in 1939 as the Kokusai Hōdō Kōgei Kabushiki Kaisha), established under the guiding hand of Natori Yōnosuke, who had been a student and photojournalist in Germany prior to the Nazi regime. The Japan Atelier handled a large portion of the commercial advertising directed toward foreigners (plates 427, 453–456, 458), and in 1934 moved into the business of selling Japan itself to the West. The chosen vehicle was the English-language illustrated magazine *Nippon*. In Manchukuo, a bilingual counterpart already had appeared a year earlier under the title *Manshū Gurafu* (subtitled in English “Pictorial Manchuria,” or later, “Manchuria-Graph”). In 1938, following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and the undeclared “war of annihilation” against China, the Natori group began publication of the English-language graphic *Shanghai*, followed by three siblings the next year: *Commerce Japan*, *Manchukuo*, and *Kanton*. In 1939, the Japan Photo Service sent a book titled *Girls of Japan* into the battle for Western affections. Other glossy magazines were subsequently directed to European and Southeast Asian audiences, including *Van* (from 1940) and *Front* (from 1942; plates 428, 429, 463, 476).

In the process of selling their services, photographers associated with the Japan Atelier or its counterparts quickly revealed the conservative uses to which the “modern” or “avant-garde” could be put. The montage or composite photograph, for instance, could become a

vehicle of pure propaganda, devoid of tension or contradiction and devoted simply and deliberately to reinforcing the orthodoxies of the ruling groups. In a sophisticated 1934 presentation prepared by the Japan Atelier this took the form of photomontages incorporating sharp and sparkling images of order, progress, and taste (plate 458). A different tone was ventured four years later in a composite photo six feet high and fourteen feet wide that the Japanese displayed at the Chicago Trade Fair. Made up of shots by Kimura Ihe-e and Koishi Kiyoshi, as orchestrated by Hara Hiromu, this impressive piece of wallpaper contained every soft cliché known to have titillated Japanophiles in the twentieth century: cherry blossoms, Mount Fuji, a geisha with trailing sleeves, the classic symbols of quietist culture (Shintō torii, pagoda, the Kamakura Buddha), an ancient castle, the Diet building, a few modern edifices, and a modern ship (plate 457). By 1943, such camera work for the state had ballooned out of control. The famous poster of fanatic soldiers and a trampled American flag (plate 478) was composed of photographs by Kanamaru Shigene and was first displayed as a giant billboard covering 1,800 square feet on the front of the Nichigeki Music Hall in downtown Tokyo. Subsequently this technical tour de force was widely reproduced with, as its caption, an archaic slogan that had been pried from the ancient classics: *Uchiteshi yamamu*—roughly, “Fight to the Bitter End.”

As the camera was also present to record, without art or artifice, the end was closer, more bitter, more terrifying than anyone standing by the music hall in 1943 really imagined.