Invisible City : An Ukiyo-e Series Suggesting Events

HARASHIDA Minoru

The title of this paper, "Invisible City", has been borrowed from a famous novel, "Invisible Cities" by Italo Calvino, an Italian writer. While the novel is about many cities, this paper is about a single city, Edo.

In "Invisible Cities", Marco Polo describes the cities he visited on his expeditions to Kublai Khan. Kublai could not see those cities and could not tell whether they were all created out of imagination. While listening to Marco's stories, Kublai begins weaving tales of the invisible cities for himself, as listeners of fantastic stories may often do.

Like Kublai we can no longer 'see' the city of Edo and can only imagine and create our own "Edo." One of the clues left for us in doing so are paintings and drawings where invisible aspects of the subject are depicted by using icons, a technique later used in photography.

"One Hundred Famous Views of Edo" ukiyo-e series by Hiroshige, described in this paper is one of the significant examples of drawings where invisible aspects of the city are excellently visualized. By using non-existing icons hidden aspects of the city life are brought to light; "invisible" city is thus turned visible. There lies a secret that the series continue to fascinate us.

"One Hundred Famous Views of Edo" is an ukiyo-e series published from 1856 to 1858, 10 years before the Meiji restoration. In 1853, the arrival of Commodore Perry and his "black ship" had triggered widespread consternation in Edo. The following year in 1854 two huge earthquakes, the Ansei Tokai Earthquake and the Ansei Nankai Earthquake, occurred successively and damaged a vast area including many stations along the Tokaidō road and even towns in Shikoku Island on the Pacific Coast hundreds of miles away from the epicenter. Then in 1855 the city of Edo had suffered catastrophic damage by an earthquake with an estimated magnitude of around 7.0 on the Richter scale. This was the Ansei Edo Earthquake. The scale of the extensive damage caused by the earthquakes created enormous needs, not only for food and housing, but for information: People were eager to get information on the recovery process.

Around this period in late Edo the photography was introduced to Japan. In 1848, a set of daguerreotype camera was imported to Nagasaki. It took nearly 10 years though for a Japanese to use the camera and actually take a photo: The powerful Satsuma clan in southern Kyushu Island bought the camera and in 1857 had succeeded in taking a portrait for the first time. Antecedent to that trial and error, in 1853, the first photograph of a landscape in Japan was taken by Eliphalet Brown Jr.（1816-1886）, an American photographer who had come aboard "black ship" with Commodore Perry. In the next year, a Russian naval officer of Diana, Alexandr Fyodorovich Mozhaiskiy（1825-1890）took photos of the town of Shimoda（Shizuoka Pref.）. He also depicted the port of Shimoda being hit by Tsunami of the Ansei Tokai Earthquake in 1854. Photography, however, did not become common yet under the Tokugawa regime as there was no freedom of press in Japan

in those days.

On the other hand, ukiyo-e prints were increasingly used as a means of information dissemination in the time when journalism was still in its infancy. The producer of "One Hundred Famous Views of Edo" Sakanaya Eikichi was a newcomer to the publishing industry who had joined one of its subgroups just two months before the Ansei Edo Earthquake. He had an ambition to make money in publishing and planned an ukiyo-e series of one hundred views to show the Edo people how the city recovered after the earthquake. He then assigned Hiroshige（1797-1858）, the leading expert in the genre of landscape prints at that time, as the creator of the series. For Hiroshige, it was the first ambitious project in his career. He decided to draw one hundred famous places in Edo. He and Sakanaya sensed expectations of the Edo people eager to learn the recovery process from the earthquake and further "improvement of the world." In one of the first five prints of the series Hiroshige featured full-blown cherry blossoms as a symbol of "the improved world." As subjects of other prints he picked up reconstructed warehouses and Kabuki theatre, big festivals, Buddhist image exhibitions and rehabilitated famous gardens. In other words, they were all popular places among the people in Edo.

There are at least two factors of the series' success: luxurious style of prints and a surprising and innovative idea of putting an object that indexes or symbolizes the place on the foreground and things he secretly aspired on the background（"close-up scheme"）, triggered by a specific event. In this talk, I would look at the relation between landscape and imagery, focusing on the close-up scheme.

Let me take an example: "Kinryūzan Temple, Asakusa" is one of the best prints of the series. In this print, Hiroshige attempted to portray the recovery of the nine rings of the five-story pagoda in the precincts. The pagoda, a landmark of Edo, was destroyed by the earthquake but was rehabilitated by May 1856, or 7 months after the earthquake. He had selected a snow scene of the place to send a message that the rehabilitation should be celebrated, using red-on-white color scheme, which is reserved for propitious occasions. In the print, he puts a close-up image of Thunder Gate, a famous symbol of Asakusa, in the foreground and rehabilitated pagoda, which is a focus of his interest, in the background, indicating the place with the title "Kinryūzan Temple, Asakusa". It is the style of composition that he seemed to have established around that time; he was in heavy use of an image as an index or a symbol of the place in the foreground. The composition of "Kinryūzan Temple, Asakusa" so perfectly matches the real landscape that it has been considered that Hiroshige portrayed what he saw. It is now clear, however, that he composed from the landscape according to his concept as mentioned.

For a print to sell, the meaning of the close-up icon in a print should be shared by the creator and the appreciators. Frequent use of icons by Hiroshige suggests that the series were primarily produced with the appreciators, or the Edo consumers, in mind. The pagoda in "Zōjōji Pagoda and Akabane", channel markers and black-headed gulls in "View of Shiba Coast", and a replica of Mount Fuji in "New Fuji, Meguro" all play the role of an index of the places. A giant banner in "Sumiyoshi Festival, Tsudajima" and a geisha in "Night

View of Matsuchiyama and the San'ya Canal" are a symbol of the places. What irises in "Horikiri Iris Garden", a plum tree in "Plum Estate, Kameido", and flowers of wisteria in "Inside Kameido Tenjin Shrine" mean are also shared by the Edo people.

Eye-catching animals are portrayed in five other prints: a horse in "Naitō Shinjuku, Yotsuya", a cat in "Asakusa Ricefields and Torinomachi Festival", a turtle in "Mannen Bridge, Fukagawa", an eagle in "Fukagawa Susaki and Jūmantsubo", and foxes in "New Year's Eve at the Changing Tree, Ōji". Though one might meet the animals at these places, no one could stand on the vantage points, in terms of photography. These icons are drawn for the design purpose. I doubt that photography could easily imitate the usage of icons. It is Hiroshige, the master of landscape prints, who could use these icons as indexes or symbols of a place, in terms of a modern semiotic, Peirce's semiotic, on purpose. He was familiar with various aspects of the city while being an expert of the ukiyo-e art. He had succeeded in visualizing the invisible aspects of the city by the creation of the close-up icons while maintaining the convention of landscape prints. The appreciators congratulated him for combining icons with places in an astonishing way. The close-up icons are still attractive for us today.

Lastly, I would suggest that the composition of close-up foreground and background which Hiroshige invented might be postmodern, looking at what it means in the light of philosophy. In his "Eye and Mind", Merleau-Ponty, a French Philosopher, referred to depth Cézanne had sought as an alternative to the linear perspective created in the modern age.

> Depth thus understood is, rather, the experience of the reversibility of dimensions, of a global "locality" – everything in the same place at the same time, a locality from which height, width, and depth are abstracted, of a voluminosity we express in a word when we say that a thing is *there*. In search of depth Cézanne seeks the deflagration of Being, and it is all in the modes of space, in form as much as anything.
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> "Eye and Mind", from "The Primacy of Perception"

Depth created by the composition of foreground and background in "One Hundred Famous Views of Edo" also suggests something to kill the effects of the linear perspective. It is another intriguing possibility of Hiroshige's close-up scheme.