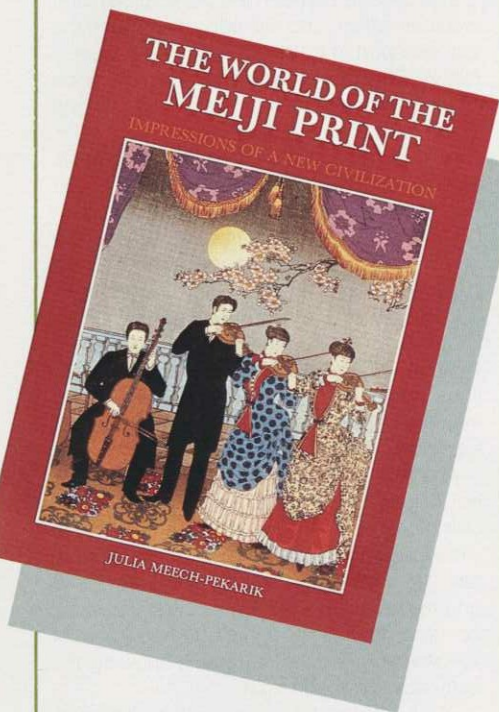


The World of the Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization

By Julia Meech-Pekarik
Published by John Weatherhill, Inc.
1986, Tokyo
259 pages; ¥5,000/\$60

I can't find a proper term in my lexicon for *déjà vu* in reverse but Pekarik handles this particular historical era in just such a manner in her book on Meiji woodblocks. One reads her words relating the imagery of these little-appreciated artworks to historical facts concerning the "Westernization" of Japan and senses that time has either stood still or certainly gone full circle and is in replay mode.



The only negative thing one can say about the book is with regard to the chosen publishing house—Weatherhill, an over-the-hill remnant of far more lucrative and innovative publishing days following the Pacific War. Weatherhill's last print book supposedly covering the full sweep of Japan's printmaking history was by Munsterberg, whose out-of-touch authorship was very much in keeping with the firm's out-of-step management.

But looking past the printing house to the book itself, I found it exceptionally informative. One is taken back to the momentous events of the restoration in Japan, when the oligarchy of the Tokugawa shogunate was replaced by Imperial rule tempered by democratic reforms. It was foreign intrusion into these sequestered islands that helped foment those changes and thus it was on both the now-visible Emperor's person and role and the activities of the foreign enclaves that interest was focused.

Every action of the foreign community was a

topic for artistic interpretation. Many times such interpretations were far removed from reality as they were often based on second- and third-hand accounts, ending up as fanciful renditions much resembling confectioner's delights. Since travel was still proscribed, most scenes purporting to be of overseas sites were based on foreign illustrated newspapers, making the final mix both highly imaginative and amusing. Pekarik pulls from historical archives of the era examples of such European and American gravure art as surely served as basic models for several of the illustrated Meiji woodblocks shown. This comparison is a perspective that one needs for full appreciation of this genre of art.

Color—strong, vibrant and occasionally strident in its brash contrast to the more subtle colors of earlier woodblock prints—is an important aspect of Meiji print art. Imported aniline dyes used in preference to the natural base hues of ukiyo-e were responsible for the rather unusual color palette that dominates Meiji prints. A regal purple and a brilliant Chinese red were modified somewhat by an extravagant use of pinkish tones in many prints. So often is springtime invoked that one wonders whether or not the other seasons had ceased to be observed!

The way in which Pekarik ties into her well-researched text the words of many published observers from the period is a charming plus. There were (and in new reprints still are) many such accounts of the restoration era of the Emperor Meiji and his changing court. The adoption of Western-style dress by the Emperor was soon followed by his entire family from the Empress down. Their persons and personalities are well-documented in both word and woodblock. The visuals serve well the unrestricted commentaries of such diarists as Clara Whitney and Sir Rutherford Alcock. By working these era-bound reminiscences into her text, Pekarik conjures up a view of a changing society that includes both Japan's viewpoint and that of her often-bemused foreign guests. Their written notes on the oddities of the Japanese are equaled by visuals in many early Meiji prints on the seemingly incomprehensible oddities of Westerners as seen and reproduced via woodblock artistry.

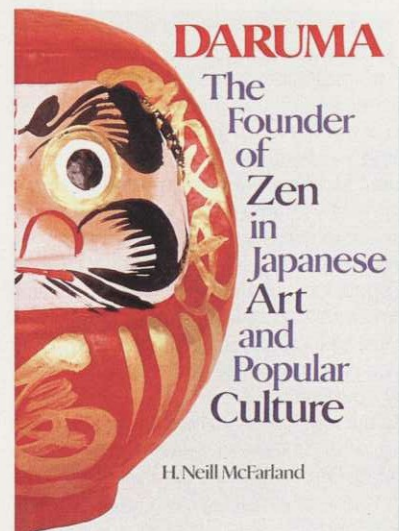
One comes away from the book with a thoroughly pleased understanding of a rather important but little-understood era in the nationhood of Japan. That the medium for this understanding is a penny-format art in no way lessens its impact or readability. One would wish for Pekarik to undertake a similar appreciation of the art and times of the short-lived Taisho reign and the early (prewar) portion of Showa. It would surely be as engrossing a subject which, handled with her sense of even-handed editorial scholarship, could certainly provide the material for a most suitable companion volume to this finely turned account of the Meiji era.

Amaury Saint-Gilles
Japan-based art critic

DARUMA: The Founder of Zen in Japanese Art and Popular Culture

By H. Neill McFarland
Published by Kodansha International Ltd.
1987, Tokyo
124 pages; ¥3,200

If as a visitor to or a resident of Japan you have ever wondered about the significance of the ubiquitous Daruma images that abound in the country, then this is the book for you. From his initial trip to Japan over three decades ago, the author of this invaluable study—H. Neill McFarland, professor of religion at Southern Methodist University—was fascinated by the



representation, seemingly everywhere, of the pot-bellied, hairy monk with the huge glowering eyes. Over the ensuing years, McFarland amassed a treasure trove of Daruma material which he has lovingly arranged and presented in *Daruma: The Founder of Zen in Japanese Art and Popular Culture*.

Daruma, in his original incarnation, is the First Zen Patriarch Bodhidharma. Legend maintains that the future founder of Zen was born into a royal family in India in the 5th century but renounced the world as a youth to become a Buddhist monk. Rejecting all external religious aids, Bodhidharma practiced meditation pure and simple. Appalled that the pseudo-Buddhists in China were attempting to bribe their way to salvation by giving alms, constructing temples and spending fortunes on lavish ceremonies, Bodhidharma journeyed to the Middle Kingdom with this direct message: "Look into your heart and become Buddha!" Disgusted with the materialism of the age, Bodhidharma secluded himself in a cave at Shaolin Temple where he "contemplated the Absolute" for nine straight years. Later, it is said, Bodhidharma mysteriously disappeared,