

Raising subjects: The representation of children and childhood in Meiji Japan

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Abstract

Two mutually dependent ideologies emerged during the first few decades of the Meiji period (1868-1912): universal education and nation. Both ideologies sought to redefine existing perceptions of childhood as a period of life subordinate to status, to a unifying experience for all subjects of the nation state. This paper examines coloured woodblock prints (*nishikie*) of ethical themes produced by the studio of Utagawa Kunitaru and the newly formed Ministry of Education, and Inoue Yasuji between 1873 and 1887, and the new notions of children and childhood the prints espoused. The means by which these images were distributed, their subjects, and the visual and design devices that they employed contrived to identify children with education and a new repertoire of civic duties, which bound them to the state and subjected them to new kinds of disciplinary power.

Keywords

nishikie, Meiji, childhood, education, Monbushō

Introduction

Two mutually dependent ideologies emerged during the early Meiji period: universal education and nation, both of which sought to redefine existing concepts of childhood. This paper examines new notions of children and childhood expressed in full-coloured woodblock prints (*nishikie*) issued by the newly formed Ministry of Education (the Monbushō) between 1873 and 1885. These images identified children with education and a new repertoire of civic duties, bound them to the state and subjected them to new kinds of disciplinary power.

Childhood and public institutions in the West

The implementation of widespread schooling is regarded as a turning point in the way childhood was thought about in Western societies. Part Two of Philippe Ariès' pioneering study *Centuries of Childhood* describes how the modern child emerged as



the object and product of primary state education, subject to the constant scrutiny and judgement of teachers, parents and peers.¹ According to Ariès, school prolonged the period of dependency for young people by physically and conceptually isolating them from the rest of society, hence lengthening and defining the duration of childhood. Since its publication in 1960 in French and 1962 in English, *Centuries of Childhood* has been critiqued and revised by other scholars; however, state schooling continues to be regarded as having fundamentally shaped the social construct of childhood.

Focusing on a later period of history than that covered by Ariès, Part Three of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* describes changes in mechanisms of social control that occurred in Western societies and how they created the modern individual. In the past, power relied on its visibility to inspire submission and obedience in its subjects. Since the nineteenth century, power became increasingly anonymous and diffuse by acting directly upon individuals within their everyday lives. In the modern penal system and other institutions including schools, the object of power was not just the tissues of the prisoners' physical body, but also the internal workings of their minds. The target of power in modern Western societies, the individual prisoner, patient and of particular interest here, school child, therefore became more visible and more individualised. This was not only due to increased personal autonomy, but also a result of new means of social control.²

Also contingent upon the emergence of mass education for children and new technologies of power in modern societies were the discourses of nation and nationalism. Benedict Anderson defined nation as an imagined political community: imagined in that its members may be of disparate situations and entirely unknown to each other, and a community, because, 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.'³ As Meiji statesman Inoue Kaoru (1836-1915) proclaimed, 'Those who exist in one country are all interconnected... [b]ecause the interests of the nation-state and its influence extends to all nationals.'⁴ Following Émile Durkheim's view of the role of formal education in the socialisation of the young into 'moral culture', Anderson identified state schools as privileged sites for transcending parochial loyalties to forge the bonds among individuals that made national collectives possible. For Ernest Gellner, nationalism, which he defined as 'the organisation of human groups into large, centrally educated, culturally homogeneous units', is similarly inseparable from state-run compulsory education.⁵

1 Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*.

2 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 135-228.

3 Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p. 6.

4 Cited in Tanaka, 'Childhood: Naturalization of Development into a Japanese Space', pp. 21-56.

5 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 35.

The Japanese education system

The mid-nineteenth century saw the collapse of the feudal Tokugawa shogunate and the construction of a modern state, founded upon the ideal of the active involvement of the entire population in the life of the nation. During the Edo period, power was relatively decentralised and regional barons, caste groups and communities held considerable powers of self-regulation. The primary concern of political authorities was to maintain harmony within and among these bodies; accordingly, the main goal of education was to exercise moral influence over social collectives and to funnel children into their preordained status groups.⁶ Within such a system, the subjectivity of individual children was of little interest.⁷

In contrast, the modern Japanese state sought to integrate individuals into its institutions, mobilise them for service to the nation and inspire in them a sense of personal identification with the nation.⁸ As Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) wrote in his *Encouragement of Learning* of 1872, 'All the people of the country, whether noble or base, whether high or low, must feel that they have personal responsibility for the country'.⁹ The idea that education was one of the keys to the power of the West had been in circulation for some time. Faced with threats to its autonomy from without and popular unrest within, Japan's administrators identified childhood as a time of crucial importance for making useful, active citizens out of the populace. As Inoue wrote in his commentary to the *Imperial Rescript on Education* (1891), '[if] all children receive this national education there is no doubt that our land will coalesce into one country'.¹⁰ Childhood was thus constructed as a unifying experience for all subjects, and children, as individuals belonging to a stage of life through which all would pass, existed largely through the discourse of nation, through becoming Japanese.¹¹

Rapid Westernisation

Throughout the early Meiji years, factions of Confucianists, *kokugakusha* (national scholars) and Western scholars sought control of children's education.¹² A simplified narrative of this period would describe an initial phase of zealous Westernisation guided by liberal leaders, followed by a conservative reaction during the 1880s, culminating in the *Imperial Rescript on Education* of 1890 which sought to reconcile Confucian ethics

6 Platt, 'Japanese Childhood, Modern Childhood: The Nation-State, the School, and 19th-Century Globalization', p. 969.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 965-985.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 971-973.

9 Passin, *Society and Education in Japan*, p. 68.

10 Cited in Tanaka, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

12 Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 62.



with the new ideologies of nationalism and state Shintoism.¹³ Mark Lincicome, however, argued that liberalism continued to disrupt state authority over education, culture and society in the 1880s and beyond, while the images that will be discussed in this article question the apparent liberalism of the 1870s.¹⁴

The School Commission, established in 1868 to supervise existing schools and to prepare a new educational system, was dominated by men such as Fukuzawa Yukichi, Uchida Masao (1838-1876) and Mori Arinori (1847-1889) who believed that Japan's independence could only be built upon the successes of individuals who would improve the position of their families and the nation as a whole. In 1870, the Iwakuni domain released a statement declaring, 'Now that we are all reunited in the Imperial system...we must seek knowledge broadly throughout the world, and our main task is to open schools...[to] which all, without distinction or rank, go'.¹⁵ Participation in the life of the new nation was thus as much as an obligation of Japanese children as it was a privilege. While poor enrolment and attendance rates undermined this confident proclamation for another three decades, the creation of an "imagined community" remained a priority.¹⁶

Although the liberals of this initial phase emphasised knowledge over the neo-Confucian ethics that had dominated education in the Edo period,¹⁷ and their educational aims are said to have been child-centred, obedience and discipline nonetheless occupied a central position in the imaginations of early administrators.¹⁸ In 1871, a delegation of embassaries led by Iwakura Tomomi was sent on a two-year research tour of the USA, Europe, and their colonies. The embassaries' impressions speak of the possibilities they envisaged and the mechanisms by which they would be realised should such an education system be established in Japan. In January 1872, Kido Takayoshi (1833-1877), councillor of state and later Minister of Education, wrote in his diary: 'We went to elementary schools in three locations; and the largest had an enrolment of 1300 or 1400 boys. The discipline there was admirable'.¹⁹ He concluded, 'We clearly must have schools if we are to encourage our country's development as a civilised country, improving ordinary people's knowledge, establishing the power of

13 Tsurumi, 'Meiji Primary School Language and Ethics Textbooks: Old Values for a New Society?', pp. 247-261; Hane, 'The Sources of English Liberal Concepts in Early Meiji Japan', pp. 259-272.

14 Lincicome, 'Local Citizens or Loyal Subjects? Enlightenment Discourse and Educational Reform', pp. 451-465.

15 Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

16 According to one estimate, in 1906 96.6% of school-aged children were enrolled in elementary school. Emig and Shimizu, 'The Challenges of Japanese Education: From Uniform Arrangements to Diversity', pp. 86-87. According to David Ambaras, such estimates only included children who were legally obliged to enrol. Ambaras estimated that in 1903, 15.7% of school-aged children were not legally obliged to enrol due to government exemptions for poor families. Comparable rates persisted for several years. Ambaras, *Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan*, p. 41.

17 Education for the children of commoners during the Edo period was largely provided by *terakoya*, parish schools taught by samurai, priests or other members of the village elite. Reciting and copying neo-Confucian classics and copybooks were staple components of the *terakoya* curriculum. Nakae, *Edo no shitsuke to kosodate*, p. 165; Nakae and Yamazumi (eds.), *Kosodate no sho*, p. 30.

18 For example, see Passin, *op. cit.*, pp. 68 and 70.

19 Kido, *The Diary of Kido Takayoshi*, p. 118.

the state and maintaining our independence and sovereignty. It is not enough to have a few able men make good; nothing is more important than schools.²⁰

Kido's journal entry emphasises two points that interested him. First, the management of children in America was not, as it had been in the Edo period, left to social collectives and regional authorities but rather was the focus of state control. As Foucault observed, 'for a long time ordinary individuality...remained below the threshold of descriptions...The disciplinary methods...lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and a method of domination.'²¹ Second, the degree and means of control impressed Kido. The day after Kido's visit, the *San Francisco Chronicle* explained that '[t]he boys were marched into the yard, where they went through their usual drill.'²² Despite the stated aim to 'improv[e] ordinary people's knowledge', apparently, it was less the content of the education that impressed him than the rigorous discipline of the children.

The 1880s: conservatism and militarism

In 1878, Emperor Meiji (reigned 1867-1912), unimpressed by the students' ignorance of Confucian values, drafted a statement via the Confucian Lecturer, Motoda Eifu (1818-1891). The result was *Kyōgaku Taishi* (*The Great Principles of Education*), which warned that the emulation of Western ways would lead to the loss of 'the great principles governing the relations between ruler and subject, and father and son.'²³ Motoda's variety of conservatism would dominate education in Japan until the Second World War. In 1881, Article One of the *Memorandum for Elementary School Teachers* stipulated that 'teachers must particularly stress moral education to their pupils.' It continued: 'Loyalty to the Imperial House, love of country, filial piety toward parents, respect for superiors, faith in friends, charity towards inferiors, and respect for oneself constitute the Great Path of human morality. The teacher must himself be a model of these virtues in his daily life, and must endeavour to stimulate his pupils along the path of virtue.'²⁴

In 1885, Mori Arinori was appointed Minister for Education. Having observed how Western governments disciplined the minds of their subjects through disciplining the body, Mori incorporated aspects of military training and a military-style uniform into the middle schools and teacher-training schools.²⁵ Students became accountable

²⁰ Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, p. 43.

²¹ Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

²² Kido, *op. cit.*, p. 118n.

²³ Cited in Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²⁵ Mori visited England on a mission in 1879. He wrote that 'military training must be carried on for the sake of physical development... But I want to make it clear that it is in no sense for the sake of military training itself', indicating that he saw the worth of such training beyond its value to the military. Cited in Passin, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-89.



for each other's behaviour - they were expected to show respect to their seniors and 'discipline' their juniors for any infraction of protocol. This emphasis on military-style discipline was adopted by elementary schools in the 1890s.²⁶

The various accounts, policies, and proclamations of the early Meiji officials present a somewhat ambivalent view of children. On one hand, children were the embodiment of Japan's hopes for the new era, on the other, a source of danger that could only be subdued through a rigorous regime of surveillance, indoctrination, drills and endless recitations. The following section will examine how these views were expressed in prints that were published by the Ministry of Education.

The Monbushō prints

Background and mechanisms

From 1873, the newly formed Ministry of Education commissioned and issued colourful woodblock printed board games, toys and educational illustrations of ethical and historical subjects. The prints came with the promise: 'As an aid to the education of the young child (*yōdō* 幼童) within the home... use these pictures as a toy when the child is sitting or lying down. And when the child reaches the age to enter elementary school, the effect will be no small matter.'²⁷ Various known as 'the full-colour prints of education (*kyōiku nishikie*)', 'pictures for children and home teaching (*yōdō katei kyōikuyō kaiga*)', or 'the full-colour prints issued by the Ministry of Education (*Monbushō nishikie*)', extant sheets bearing the Ministry's seal and comprising 104 different designs are dispersed among public and private collections. The largest collection of extant prints belongs to the University of Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan.²⁸ The *Records of the Ministry of Education (Monbushō shuppan shomoku*, 1884, two volumes) cite the prices for eighty sheets of *nishikie* prints in 1874 at 26 *sen* and six *ri*; however, it is unclear whether this value refers to a wholesale or retail purchase or sales price. The 95 prints held by the University of Tsukuba were assembled by Miyaki Yūitsu (1868–1953), a priest and collector of Meiji educational material. There is no information about the size of the editions of these prints, but evidently, they must have been large enough such that many prints survived their intended use, involving small children, to be collected several decades after their production.

²⁶ Hane, *Peasants, Rebels and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan*, pp. 57–58. This account evidently relates to a time after the introduction of the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890.

²⁷ Cited in Nagata, *Ehonkan omoichakan no henshen*, pp. 31–32. I have used Mark Jones' translation from Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 229–230.

²⁸ Okano, 'A study of the full-colour prints issued by the Ministry of Education in Meiji Era Japan', pp. 1–17; Okano, 'Monbushō hakkō nishikie no kenkyū', pp. 3–17. See also Furuya, 'Meiji shoki ni okeru shikaku kyōiku media seisaku no shisōteki haikai ni kansuru kōsatu', pp. 312–321 and Furuya, 'Meiji shoki no shikaku kyōiku media ni kansuru kōsatu', pp. 73–82.

Analysis of the prints has suggested that they are the work of six different artists, including Utagawa Kunitaru II (1830-1874), a pupil of Utagawa Kunisada (Utagawa Toyokuni III, 1786-1865). The other artists remain anonymous, although Okano Motoko suggested that they were probably other pupils of Kunisada.²⁹ Many high-profile *ukiyo*e artists of the Edo period, including Kunisada, Toyohara Kunichika (1835–1900), Urakusai Nagahide (active 1805-1848), and Utagawa Hiroshige I (1797-1858), designed prints for children.³⁰ The Meiji administration's use of popular culture as a medium for promoting civil morality was not restricted to *ukiyo*e; kabuki, *gesaku* fiction (light, popular fiction) and geisha were similarly recruited for civil service.³¹ Some of the types of objects issued by the Ministry were adaptations of pre-existing objects, such as board games, that were produced by commercial publishing houses in the Edo period. In other cases, they were new resources such as large-format educational wall charts that were necessary for the relatively new phenomenon of teaching groups of children *en masse*.³² The images to be examined in the following section are the moral precepts prints (*kyōkun dōtoku*, of which eleven designs are known) from 1873, and the *Young children's exercise instruction chart* (*Yōdō etoki undō yōjō ronsetsu*, 1873). Each print is of *ōban* size (approximately 36 × 24 centimetres) and bears a seal reading 'Ministry of Education bookbinding publication mark' (Monbushō seihonsho hakkōki). In addition to these, a commercially published print titled *Gakkō gigei sugoroku* (an educational board game akin to snakes and ladders, 1887), its subject matter suggesting that the general public had begun to associate the child with new forms of discipline and national subjecthood, will be analysed.³³ The *sugoroku* board, composed of six *ōban* prints, was designed by Inoue Yasuji (1864-1889) and published by Matsuno Yonejirō (dates unknown). No price is available for this item. A *sugoroku* board, *Shin kyōgen Atari sugoroku*, by Toyohara Kunichika (1835-1900) and published by Asano Eizō in the collections of Waseda University, Tokyo and the National Library of Australia, Canberra bears a price of 30 *sen* on the lower right-hand corner. Kunichika was the foremost print designer of the 1880s, so it is likely that Yasuji's *sugoroku* board had a lower price than this.³⁴

While the images contain unmistakeable signs of modernity, such as Western dress and architecture, the conservative medium and familiar Utagawa style lend a sense of continuity with the past. The new obligations of children and their parents to the state represented in the *dōtoku* prints are represented alongside older Confucian virtues

29 Okano, 'A study of the full-colour prints issued by the Ministry of Education in Meiji Era Japan', p. 12.

30 On *omocha-e*, or 'printed toys', see Iizawa, *Omocha-e*; Herring, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73; Newland et al. (eds.), *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, pp. 231, 247, 307; Tsukuba daigaku fuzoku toshokan, *Meiji no ibuki*.

31 In August 1872, the Ministry of Education stipulated that kabuki theatre must not portray emperors or embarrass them, moral righteousness was to be the theatre's top priority, and as actors were no longer considered outcasts, they must be exemplars of morality in keeping with their status. Takahashi, 'Kabuki Goes Official: The 1878 Opening of the Shintomi-za', p. 140.

32 Such materials were unnecessary in *terakoya*, where teachers taught individual students in turn. Tsukuba daigaku fuzoku toshokan, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

33 Nagata, *op. cit.*, p. 32; Furuya, 'Meiji shoki no shikaku kyōiku media ni kansuru kōsatu', p. 77.

34 Marks, *Japanese Woodblock Prints*, p. 160.



such as respect for elders, which perhaps ameliorated the novelty of the prints' message of national subjecthood and facilitated the naturalisation of the Monbushō's notion of childhood.³⁵ Unlike pedagogical prints of the Edo period, which were typically of lively design with text filling much of the space around the images, the Ministry's ethics images adhere to a more restrained aesthetic, in keeping with the rational spirit of the period. Images are clear and text is usually limited to the pictures' titles, reflecting possible Western sources, intended use and audience.³⁶ The sparseness of the text, while possibly reflecting varying levels of literacy within the target audience, was perhaps intended to encourage a discussion between parent and child of the behaviour presented in each image, and thus achieve a deeper level of moral internalisation than would have been possible from having parents simply recite a given narrative. By leaving interpretation and instruction to the parent, the prints enlisted the influence and privileged access of parents to their children, as well as giving them a sense of involvement at a time when children's education was increasingly under the control of civil servants.

The intended use of these images within the domestic sphere exemplifies the infiltration of official power into the intimate places of an individual's life by which Foucault characterised modern systems of power. Evidently, it was not enough for the state to assert control over children in the public space of the classroom. Recalling Judith Butler's thesis that 'gender is not an inner core of static essence, but a reiterated enactment of norms, ones that produce, retroactively, the appearance of gender as an abiding interior depth', many scholars have argued that modernity, specifically national citizenship, is similarly at least partly constituted through performance.³⁷ The Monbushō images, as Stephanie Donald and T.E. Woronov have observed of propaganda in communist China, represent the discourse of nation being repeatedly enacted through the daily repertoire of a child's behaviour and movements so as to constitute the child as a national subject.³⁸

As Donald wrote of Chinese didactic posters, the Ministry's prints call children's bodies into service as intermediary figures that influence rather than order, softening the delivery of the uncompromising moral message to parents and to the adults children would become, thus promising greater infiltration of authority.³⁹ As a subject of praise or disapproval, the child is a non-confrontational third party, deployed to appeal to

35 The prints combined virtues endorsed by Confucianism with new values such as co-educational schooling and position based on merit. See Tsurumi, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-261, for a discussion of the 'old' and 'new' values endorsed by Meiji elementary school ethics textbooks. See also Tanaka, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-44.

36 Utagawa school artists frequently referred to Western illustrated newspapers and magazines. Meech-Pekarik, *The World of the Meiji Print*, pp. 18-19. Other series of prints published by the Monbushō were adapted from Western originals such as *Chambers Information for the People*. Okano, 'A study of the full-colour prints issued by the Ministry of Education in Meiji Era Japan', p. 10.

37 Butler, 'Further Reflections of Conversations of our Time', p. 14; Schein, 'Performing Modernity', pp. 361-395; Schein, *Minority Rules: the Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics*, pp. 254-279.

38 Donald, 'Children as Political Messengers: Art, Childhood, and Continuity'; Woronov, 'Performing the Nation: China's Little Red Pioneers', p. 655.

39 Donald, *op. cit.*, pp. 75, 84-86.

and thus more effectively engage the adult viewer, instructing and normalising the performance of both membership to the national polity and childhood to adult and child viewers alike. Like the Chinese children of Donald's study, Japanese children were invested with meaning, yet had very little power to exercise at will.

Representations of children as national subjects

During the Edo period, *ukiyo*e prints distributed by commercial publishers represented children as examples of the social ranks, livelihoods and cultural groups to which they belonged. In the images of Suzuki Harunobu (1724-1770), Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806) and Chōbunsai Eishi (1756-1829), children can be clearly identified as the precious sons and daughters of affluent *chōnin* (townsmen, or members of the merchant class), courtesans in training (*kamuro* and slightly older *shinzō*) or young male prostitutes, known as *kagama*. Education during the Edo period aimed to socialise children into situations to which they were born.⁴⁰ One of the main objectives of nationalism, however, was to reorient these kinds of loyalties and tendencies to identify oneself and others with a particular social group toward the nation and fellow subjects. The Ministry's publications accordingly represented Japanese children as national subjects committed to the improvement of their minds and bodies for the service of the nation, despite, or perhaps responding to the discouraging reality that only about 30% of children went to school with any regularity during the 1880s.⁴¹ That is not to say that any instance of heterogeneity, such as socio-economic class, is obliterated beneath an uncompromising rhetoric of nationalism. Class is made visible in these images, but only so that it may be subsumed within the new, more compelling discourse of nationalism.

The two little girls leading a blind man out of the path of an oncoming coach in *Kind girls* (*Shinsetsunaru dōjo*, figure 1) are identifiable as middle-class by their elegant kimono and intricately arranged hair, which contrast with the man's shabbier dress. On the other hand, the simple interior inhabited by the *Industrious family* (*Shusseisuru kanai*, figure 2) suggests more modest circumstances. The girl in figure 1 with her back to the viewer holds a brush and a wad of paper, suggesting that she and her companion are on their way to school; economic privilege has not made them too arrogant to care for or show respect to their elders, nor too superior to shun their duty to their nation to improve their minds. The children in the second image are not too humble to commit themselves to academic learning. Against these socio-economic differences, an alternative system of identification is implied, an 'imagined community' to which membership is determined not by class or profession but by merit.

⁴⁰ Tanaka, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴¹ Hane, *op. cit.*, (1982), p. 51.



The busily weaving mother of the *Industrious family* oversees her son's writing task, anticipating the 'good wife and wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*) that authorities would soon promote. Apparently coined by Nakamura Masanao (1831-1891) in 1875, this phrase became the catchcry of politicians, educators and social reformers seeking to mobilise women through education for nationalistic purposes while setting limits on their spheres of mobility and influence.⁴² The girl in the foreground of figure 2 emulates her mother's example, simultaneously taking responsibility for the youngest child, tending to the family's meals and reading a book. *Studying family* (*Benkyōsuru kanai*, figure 3) depicts a similar scene of female multitasking. The girls' exemplary behaviour in the above images pre-empts the views expressed by the Meiji Empress in her opening address to the Peeresses' School (*Kazoku joshi gakkō*), that:

...upon women, whose destiny it is to become mothers of men, evolves the natural obligation of guiding, assisting, and giving culture to their offspring...Young ladies entering the institution should endeavour to attain proficiency in various subjects of study, and be thus enabled to discharge their duties.⁴³

This model of girlhood differs with that set forth by neo-Confucian scholars of the Edo period, who framed a girl's moral duties mainly in terms of her status as a future or actual daughter-in-law and wife rather than as a mother.⁴⁴ Until the late Meiji period, girls were almost always represented as older siblings and only rarely appeared as young children or babies, perhaps because girls were valued for domestic work and as babysitters of their younger brothers. According to Ariès, modern childhood was granted to girls later than to boys, and indeed, in Meiji literature such as Higuchi Ichiyō's *Takekurabe* (1895-6), the novel's heroine passes from childhood into adolescence before her male playmates, while girls' school attendance lagged behind that of boys.⁴⁵ Other researchers have suggested that because maleness is regarded as the "default" gender, femaleness represents a step away from the natural (male) state of childhood.⁴⁶ The representation of girls as slightly older children is consistent with this idea that gender is a role that individuals learn to perform, despite the empress's view of motherhood as the 'natural' fate of female children.

While these diligent, morally upright figures are held up as models of a new age of progress and enlightenment, those who do not conform to this vision seem to

42 In his speech, *Creating Good Mothers* (1875), he urged, '...we must inevitably have fine mothers if we want effectively to advance the people to the area of enlightenment and to alter their customs and conditions for the good. If the mothers are superb, they can have superb children, and Japan can become a splendid country in later generations'. Cited in Braisted, *Meiroku Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment*, pp. 401-402. See also Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour and Activism, 1900-1937*, pp. 39-41 and Uno, *Passages to Modernity: Motherhood, Childhood and Social Reform in Early Twentieth Century Japan*, pp. 44-45.

43 Cited in Meech-Pekarik, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

44 Uno, *op. cit.*, p. 31. On the significant role assigned to fathers, see Ōta, *Edo no oyako: chihioya ga kodomo o sodateta jidai*.

45 Ariès, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

46 Jones, 'Tomboy Tales: the rural, nature and the gender of childhood', p. 118.

be throwbacks of the former regime. The romping boys in *Studying boy (Benkyōsuru warabe otoko*, figure 4) recall scenes of *karako asobi* ('Chinese children at play'), which were a popular theme of prints in the Edo period. *Karako*, meaning 'Chinese child' or 'Tang boy', refers to the 'Chinese style' in which the child's hair was shaved, the exotic clothing in which they were sometimes dressed, and decorative potential as a motif in visual culture, as can be seen in Okumura Masanobu's (1686–1764) *Boys Masquerading as Chinese* (figure 5, 1748).⁴⁷ The *karako* is derived from the Chinese *tangzi*, the Sino reading of the same characters. *Tangzi* were auspicious symbols of prosperity and family status that appeared on various artistic and domestic objects such as scrolls and ceramics.⁴⁸ Although the prefix *kara* referred to the Tang dynasty, it could equally apply to things of imagined Korean or generic foreign origin.⁴⁹

Masanobu's print depicts four boys re-enacting what is probably a Korean embassy rather than something related to the Chinese, given the shape of the boys' hats and the popularity of the subject for woodblock prints. Here, the *karako* provides a metaphor for the otherworldliness of children.⁵⁰ Representing the child as the ethnic other, in particular associating the child's image with the festive and carnivalesque atmosphere of the Korean embassies, expresses the liminal position of young children in relation to the daily life in early modern Japan. Masanobu's image alludes to Shinto ceremonies in which a young child was chosen to be a spiritual medium known as the '*hitotsu mono*' ('the one'), dressed in white and carried on the shoulders of festival participants or led about on a horse, an event that appears in medieval picture scrolls such as the *Urashima Myōjin Enki*.⁵¹ Ordinarily, commoners were prohibited from riding on horseback; this event thus involved an inversion of usual order characteristic of the carnival. Johan Huizinga saw religious rites to be closely related to children's games. Both involve 'actualisation by representation,' that is, participants *become* rather than simply mimic their roles, ascending from their daily lives into a sublime realm of existence.⁵² According to the ethnologist and folklorist Yanagita Kunio, forgotten spiritual rites (of which festivals are an example) were preserved in children's games; for example, '*kagome-kagome*' is thought to have come from a shamanistic ceremony used to summon the gods through a child medium.⁵³

47 According to Kuroda, although images of *tangzi* would have reached Japan well before the Edo period, there are no images of *karako* in Japanese visual record prior to then. Kuroda 'Karako ron', p. 85. From the seventeenth century, *netsuke*, dolls and puppets in the form of *karako* appeared, while *karako odori* (*karako* dance) was one of many forms in which foreign (particularly Korean) embassies were re-enacted for many years after their arrival in Japan. Prior to the Edo period, children were typically represented naked, wrapped in cloth or wearing kimono-like garments that fastened with a tie rather than an *obi*. *Karakogami* meant a tuft at the centre of the forehead, at the nape of the neck and one above each ear. Shaving children's heads was thought to ward off heat rash. See Bolitho, *op. cit.*, p. 42 and Kumon Kodomo Kenkyūsho, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

48 Barrott Wicks and Avril, 'Introduction: Children in Chinese Art', pp. 7–8.

49 Toby, 'Carnival of the Aliens: Korean Embassies in Edo-Period Art and Popular Culture', pp. 415–456.

50 Emissaries from the Korean court made twelve visits to Japan over the Edo period. See *Ibid.*, pp. 415–456.

51 Kuroda, *Emaki kodomo no tōjō: chūsei shakai no kodomozō*, p. 27.

52 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: a study of the play-element in culture*, p. 14.

53 Yanagita 'Kodomo fudoki', p. 23; Tanahashi and Murata (eds.), *E de yomu Edo no kurashi fūzoku daijiten*, p. 228; Iijima, *op. cit.*, p. S45.



Without a ground-line to anchor them, background figures or details to situate them within a tangible context, Masanobu's *karako* float suspended in imaginary space evoking the 'temporarily real world' common to sacred performance and children's play. Their movement separates them from linear time; the two boys on the right appear to be moving backwards, but they face the left and the parasol bearer is typically positioned to the rear of a procession. While conveying the confusion of a child-managed event, this movement further closes off the scene from the adult world of linearity, and exemplifies Honda Masuko's view of the double perception of the child at play, incessantly shifting between reality and unreality, day and night, consciousness and unconsciousness, positive and negative.⁵⁴

Through masquerade, the boys 'mak[e] an image of something different, something more beautiful or more sublime, or more dangerous than what [they] usually [are];'⁵⁵ a state that also evokes the playful fantasy of the floating world to which this image belongs. Like *putti*, the winged infants found in visual culture of the early Renaissance, these children were not intended or perceived to be 'real', but this very fact allowed artists to express aspects of real children's lives and the way they were socially contextualised.⁵⁶ Although scholars like Kathleen Uno and Ujiie Mikito have shown that children could be socially marginalised in early modern Japan, representations of children as *karako*, associated with play and with festivals, convey the otherness of childhood as a benign, even positive quality.⁵⁷

The *karako* thus embodied the otherness of children, the alternate reality that their active imaginations allowed them to occupy, and brought a festive otherness to the images of the pleasure-seeking floating world. This view of childhood as a liminal and non-productive time of life, however, was incommensurable with the Ministry's vision of modern Japan.⁵⁸ The man's hat and cane in place of double swords in figure 4 announce a new reality in which bullying *bushi* were as unwelcome as idle children. Where children's play is shown to have positive value such as in the *Young children's exercise instruction chart* (*Yōdō etoki undō yōjō ronsetsu*, figure 6), it is rationalised on the basis of the subjects' education and duty to maintain good health. Considering the role of play in enabling children to cognitively assimilate the adult world, turning play into training represents a significant attempt to sequester the previously inconsequential experiences and imaginative life of children in order to re-imagine them as productive and useful citizens of the new regime.⁵⁹

54 Honda, *Kodomotachi no iru uchū*, pp. 11-14.

55 Huizinga, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

56 According to Ariès, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries *putti* were mythological and decorative motifs, but not intended as representations of real children. In the seventeenth century, their 'ornamental nudity' spread to child portraiture. Ariès, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-3.

57 Ujiie, *Edo no shōnen*; Uno, *op. cit.*

58 Kuroda, *op. cit.*, (1994 b), pp. 76-99.

59 Takeuchi, *op. cit.*, p. 56; Donald, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

The smallest child in figure 4, head studiously bowed over his calligraphy practice while manning his family's *senbei* stall, appears as a quiet hero of modernity, rising in the world by virtue of his own hard work. Nakamura Masanao's *Saikoku Risshi Hen* (*Western Countries' Success Stories*, 1870), adapted from Samuel Smiles's *Self Help* (1859), introduced the notion of *risshin shusse* (self-advancement) to Meiji Japan and was one of the most influential publications of the period.⁶⁰ The image, like Nakamura's book, urges that the little autodidact of humble origins is not restricted by his birth, but rather is a future engineer, industrialist or statesman. Furthermore, in honouring both his family's need for him to contribute to their livelihood and his emperor's call for him to take his place as an educated and hardworking subject, the boy offers the administration's answer to parents' complaints that state education was taking valuable workers away from family farms and businesses.⁶¹ The image distances childhood from the culture of play that *ukiyo*e artists such as Utamaro and Kiyonaga associated it with in favour of a code of rationalism, in which the actions of even small, working class children, had social and political significance.

Unfortunately, the ministry's prints had little of meaning to say about the vast population of children working outside family context including sex workers, factory workers and *komori*. *Komori*, a frequent sight in photographs from the early Meiji period, were typically lower class girls employed to carry their charges tied to their backs. They began work around the age of nine years, although some began much younger. They did not receive wages, but were paid in kind; usually in board, meals and the occasional gift, and were often mistreated by their employers and poorly fed.⁶² Evidently, some children were more difficult than others to assimilate to the state's notion of a childhood of diligent students and productive subjects. The well-groomed girl with a baby tied to her back in *Diligent family* somewhat filters out the grimness of many girls' experiences.

Representations of children and disciplinary power

The images discussed so far represent children as the locus of progress and the vanguard of modern Japan. As Ariès and Foucault would argue, central to a modern idea of childhood is its discursive existence; indeed, public education thrust children from relative epistemological obscurity under the scrutiny of adults, who sought to know and control their bodies and minds alike. Foucault explained that one of the ways in which modern disciplinary power controls its subjects is through increasing the visibility of the individual, while becoming relatively more invisible and diffuse itself. The modern

⁶⁰ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 63; Hane, *op. cit.*, (1969), p. 267.

⁶¹ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁶² Tamanoi, 'Songs as Weapons: The Culture and History of *Komori* (Nursemaids) in Modern Japan', pp. 793-817.



subject consequently internalises surveillance and monitors his or her own thoughts and actions.⁶³ Although the display of institutional power was indispensable to the Meiji administration's ability to inspire obedience in the populace, the treatment of children within the Ministry's prints as objectified subjects to be known and controlled suggests that the disciplinary technology that Western powers exploited were also being employed in Japan.⁶⁴ The content of the prints is reproduced in their distribution: not content with the classroom but with ambitions to penetrate the home and family, the prints demonstrate the omnipresence that state authority aspired to.

The children depicted in these images are enmeshed within a matrix of gazes. Adults peer down from open windows and children surreptitiously eye each other. Jeremy Bentham's design for the Panopticon introduced 'a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind' by not allowing prisoners to know whether or not they were being watched.⁶⁵ Similarly, much of the surveillance operating within the *dōtoku* images is undetected by those who are being watched. In some cases, such as in *Industrious family* (figure 2) and *Studying boy* (figure 4), this is because the child is so absorbed in his or her task or misdeed that the observer is unnoticed. In other cases, such as the *Rough boys* (*Sobō no warabe otoko*, figure 7), *Boys mocking an unfortunate person* (*Nanjūmono o anadori-hazukashimuru warabe otoko*, figure 8) and *Cruel boys* (*Zuruasobi o nasu warabe otoko*, figure 9), the observer's vantage point is such that he or she is invisible to the wrongdoers, the implication being that an anonymous pair of eyes might be watching at any time. According to Foucault, '[h]e who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.'⁶⁶

In the *Quarrelsome boy* (*Sōtō o konomu warabe otoko*, figure 10), discipline is represented as both a display of authority and a more covert presence. A policeman intervenes, a new sight and a concrete representation of the infiltration of authority within the population in Meiji Japan. The window, revealing an interior containing the child's neglected homework and a blazing (Western-style) lamp, suggests the internalisation of discipline as knowledge and alludes to the Meiji-period slogan 'civilisation and enlightenment' (*bunmei kaika*).⁶⁷ The illustrator distinguishes the internal, subjective elements of the child from external, objective properties, deploying

63 Foucault, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.

64 See Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*.

65 Bentham, 'Panopticon (Preface)', pp. 29-95.

66 Foucault, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.

67 For Natsume Sōseki, 'illumination' was the soul of the Meiji period. Meech-Pekarik, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

the reproachful eye of the lamp to suggest self-discipline through guilt and shame, as well as discipline through force, symbolised by the policeman's stick.

Another means by which modern systems of power sought to exercise control over individuals was through drills and physical training. Training, which Foucault defined as the art of arranging bodies in space and time, is the means by which disciplinary power 'manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects'.⁶⁸ As we saw earlier, pseudo-military drills and other procedures were imposed on school students under the leadership of Mori in the mid-1860s. Images such as the *sugoroku* board (1885, figure 11), created prior to Mori's term of office began, depict children engaged in various training and militaristic exercises, reflecting and normalising this view of a child as an object to be disciplined and made useful to the country. The subject matter of the *sugoroku* board, published by a commercial publisher, indicates that the notion of a child as a disciplined national subject of discipline had begun to infiltrate the populace and be spontaneously cited within the private sphere.

The board is divided into eleven boxes under the heading 'school accomplishments' (*gakkō gigei*). Ten of the boxes illustrate different scenes, corresponding to the subheadings 'Dressmaking', 'Tug-of-war', 'Parade', 'Snow fight', 'Pleasure park', 'Kindergarten', 'Choir', 'Slide show', 'Exercise' and 'Gymnastics'. The eleventh box, the goal, depicts children receiving books under the benevolent gaze of the emperor and empress who are theatrically framed by the chrysanthemum crest.

Although the 1880s are generally characterised as a period of reaction to what was perceived as excessive Westernisation in the decade before, the *sugoroku* board represents a highly Westernised vision of modern Japan. As in *kaikae*, ('enlightenment prints'), which represented the adaptation of various foreign customs in the 1870s and 80s, all figures are dressed in Western-style apparel and sit on chairs at desks inside Western-style schools, play Western instruments and consume Western learning. The Western elements need not be read as a devaluation of Japanese cultural heritage, but rather as affirming the ability of modern Japanese individuals to adapt to change and assimilate new forms of knowledge.

It is difficult to see how some of these scenes can be characterised as 'school accomplishments', for example, the first box resembles nothing so much as the inside of a fashionable dressmaker's shop. It is as if all conceivable diversions of a child were subsumed under the umbrella of education, again, representing an attempt by the

68 Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 187.



Ministry to rationalise children's experiences so as to create bodies that were useful to the state. Indeed, '*sugoroku*', customarily written with Chinese characters meaning simply 'double six', has been written using characters that individually mean 'long life', 'language' and 'benefit', thus reframing the game within the context of education. The child, no matter where he or she is or what he or she is doing, is always a student and therefore contained within the institutional framework of the state.

Other scenes appear to be play, but on closer inspection, reveal themselves to be training. The snow fight (*Yuki nage*) in the bottom left-hand corner of the board appears at first to be spontaneously erupting children's chaos; however, the children are organised into two teams, each defending its own flag. Behind them looms a Western-style schoolhouse, its impassive windowpanes gazing down at them. The parade scene (above the snow fight), in which little boys march under the Rising Sun wearing military garb and formidable countenances, is brazenly militaristic. One child plays a trumpet; another beats a drum. Two boys in sailor suits watch on from their boat, although it is unclear whether they are spectators or surveillants. Although it was not required for elementary school students, even the smallest boys in the kindergarten scene (bottom centre) wear uniforms modelled on army livery.⁶⁹ The presence of adults in some of the scenes links the lives and activities of children with the lives and activities of teachers and officials and contains them within the larger category of pious acts of service to the emperor and the state.

In the scene entitled 'Gymnastics' (*Taisō*, lower right), the children stand to attention in neat rows with matching red caps, but despite the homogeneity, the artist has individualised each child, suggesting the extent of the drillmaster's ability to monitor them. We are reminded of Foucault's comments on the bell curve, that 'the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another'.⁷⁰ No girls participate in the snow fight or the drill, perhaps reflecting popular attitudes that saw guardians' groups withdraw girls from Kyoto schools in 1881 in protest over gymnastics classes, which they regarded as 'obscene' (*waisetsu*). The offending classes were consequently cancelled.⁷¹

The children are not the only figures under scrutiny. Behind the drillmaster in the foreground of the gymnastics scene, another teacher watches on, who is in turn framed by the schoolhouse, the opaque windows of which conceal untold omniscience.

69 Hane, *op. cit.*, (1982), p. 57.

70 Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

71 Shimokawa (ed.), *Kindai kodomoshi nenpyō* vol. 1, p. 103.

Despite early recommendations that teachers retain some autonomy in relation to the government, ordinances promulgated in 1880 insisted that teachers were public officers and official guardians of morality, roles that were reinforced by Motoda's *Memorandum* in 1881, as cited earlier.⁷² The *sugoroku* board illustrates some principles that have been employed by modern hierarchical institutions, including Bentham's Panopticon and Japan's education system, in which individuals at all levels are subject to intense scrutiny.⁷³

The Ministry of Education thus sought to redefine ideas about children that had been inherited from the previous regime. In an age when theoretically, any child of talent could hope to one day lead his countrymen, or alternatively create unrest through adherence to class or regional factions, it was crucial for the government to win over the minds of individual children. Reflecting this reality, the *nishikie* publications conveyed the view that children and what they did and thought were of singular importance to Japan's future as a strong and united country. The emphasis placed on the role of children resulted in a duality of images. On one hand, children are heroic beings, willing defenders of the nation who could be relied on to bring Japan power and glory. On the other, they are targets of relentless surveillance and rigorous discipline, suggesting an anxiety about what they might do should the government fail in its task to thoroughly indoctrinate them.

The ideas of children and childhood promoted by the Ministry do not necessarily reflect the views of the population at large. As E.J. Hobsbawm wrote, 'official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what it is in the minds of even the most loyal subjects or supporters.'⁷⁴ Indeed, lagging attendance rates and sporadic acts of rebellion among the populace indicate that many did not share the government's view. For some, state schools were suspiciously linked to military conscription, destabilised 'traditional' society and drained rural areas of their best young minds.⁷⁵ Yet the events of the twentieth century suggest that the official ideologies with which successive cohorts of schoolchildren were inculcated had a profound influence on Japanese society.

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⁷² Passin, *op. cit.*, pp. 72 and 85.

⁷³ Jansen and Rozman, 'Overview', p. 24.

⁷⁴ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality*, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Hane, *op. cit.*, (1982), pp. 51-2.



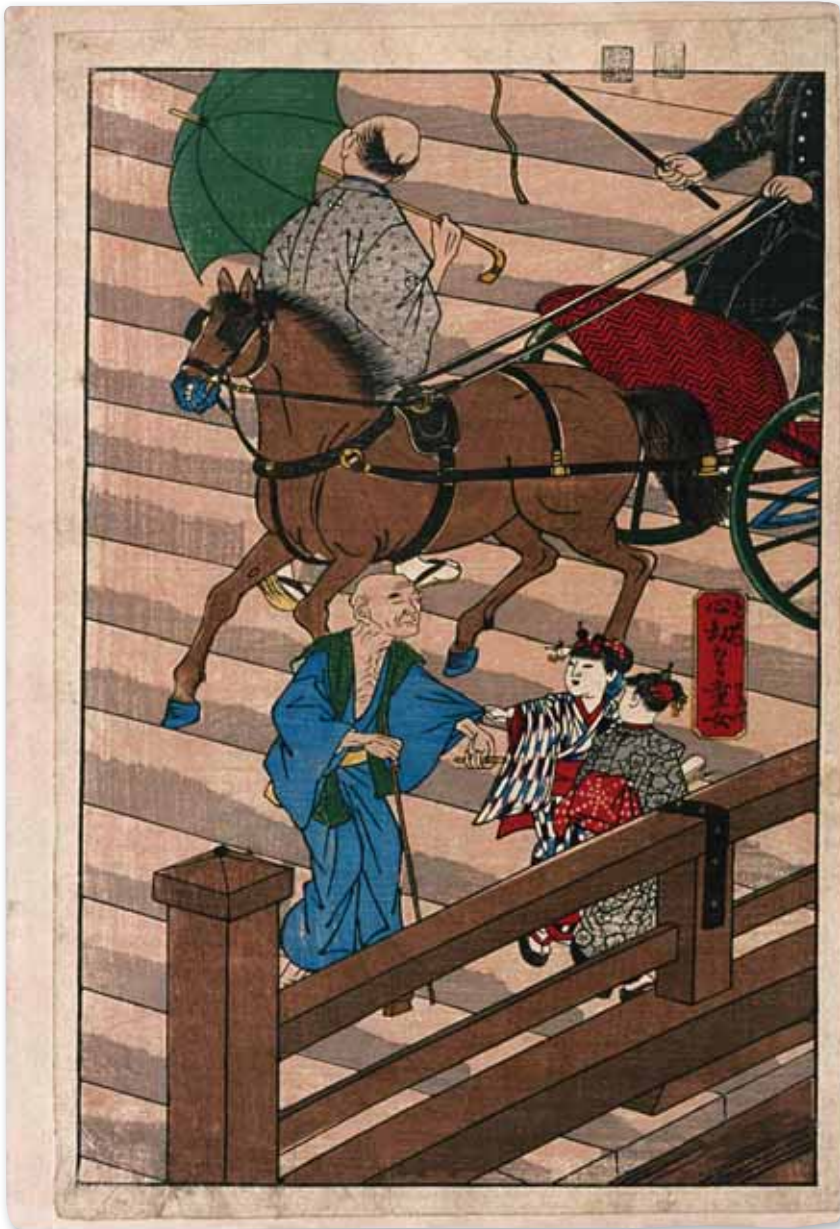
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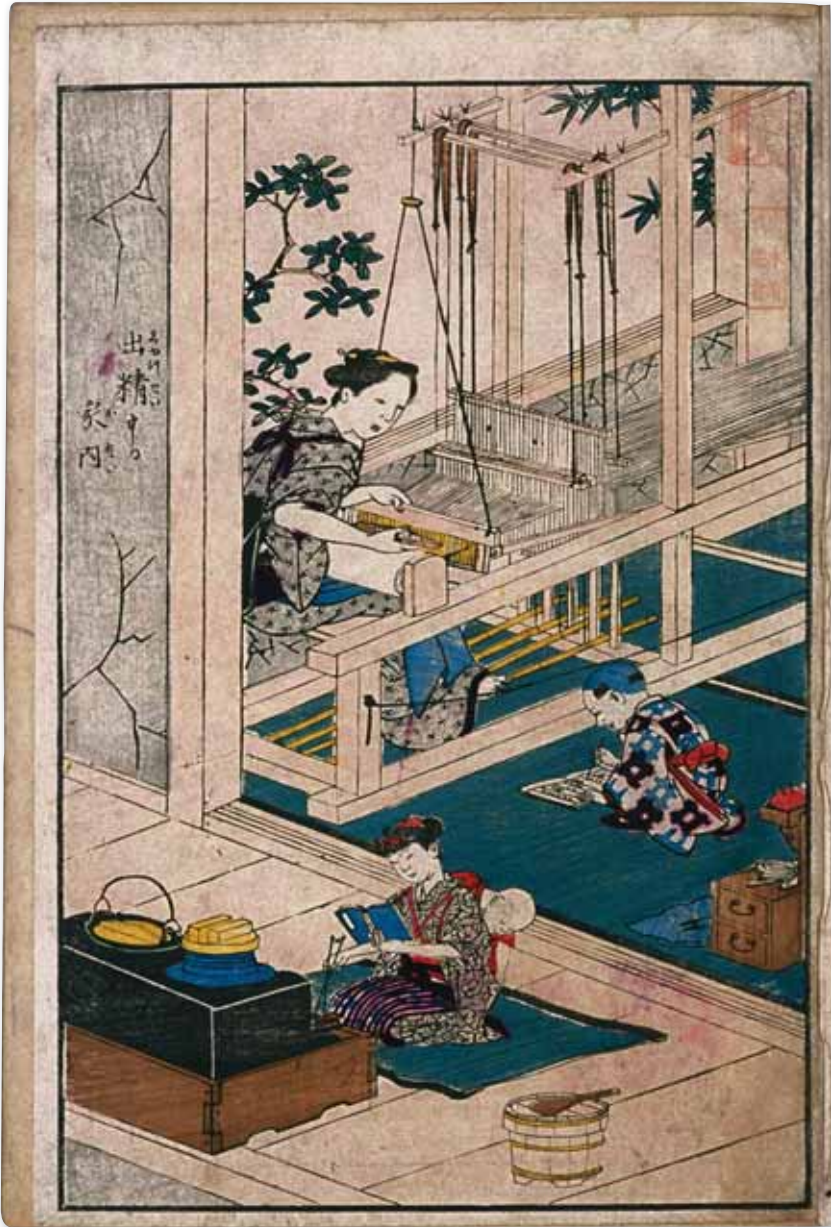
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Figure 1 – *Kind girls*



© Utagawa Kuniteru II (1830-1874), *Kind girls*, 1873, woodblock print; ōban with colours, 38 × 26 cm, Miyaki Yūitsu collection, 10088015236, Tsukuba University Library.

Figure 2 – *Industrious family*



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Figure 3 – *Studying family*



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Figure 4 – *Studying boy*



© Utagawa Kunitaru II (1830-1874), *Studying boy*, 1873, woodblock print; ōban with colours, 38 × 26 cm, Miyaki Yūitsu collection, 10088015236, Tsukuba University Library.

Figure 5 – Boys Masquerading as Chinese

© Okumura Masanobu (1686-1764), *Boys Masquerading as Chinese*, c. 1748, woodblock print; ōban benizurie with embossing, 41.0 x 30.2 cm, Clarence Buckingham collection, 1925.1842, The Art Institute of Chicago.

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Figure 6 – Young children’s exercise instruction chart



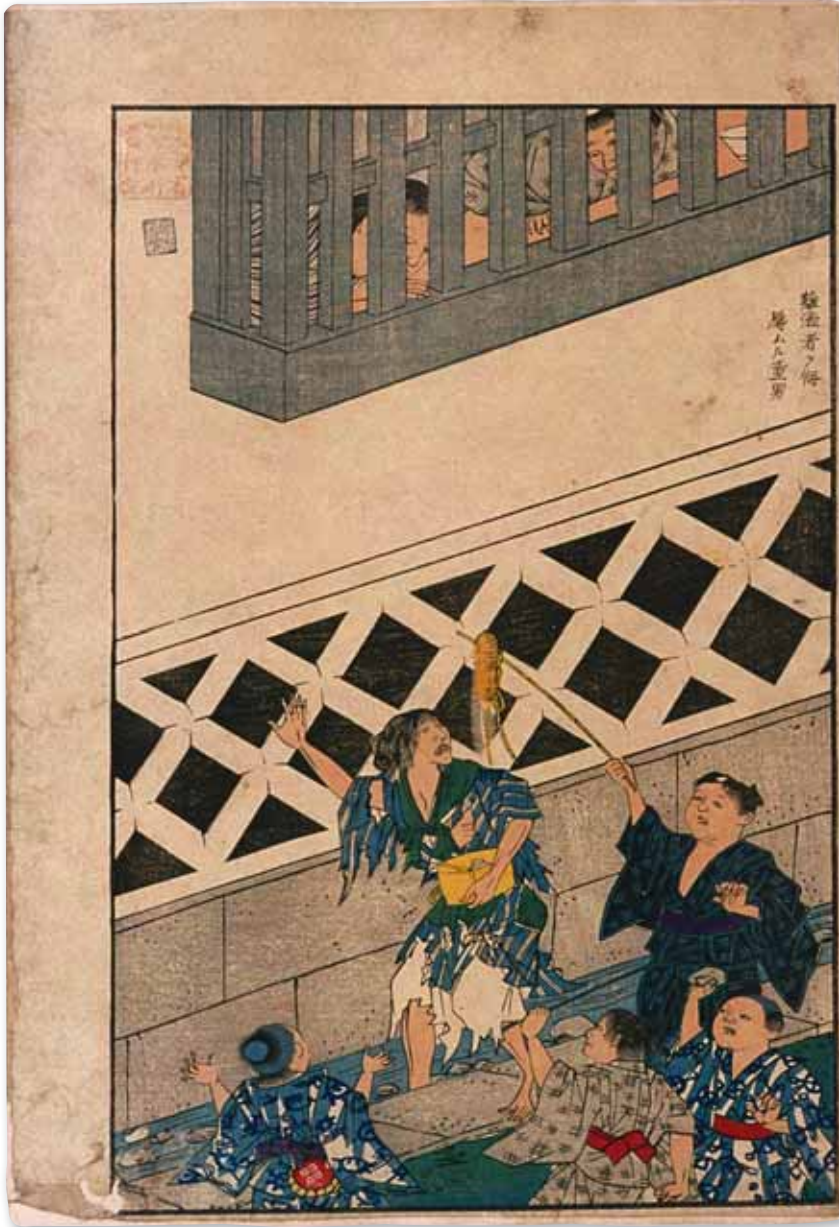
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Figure 7 – *Rough boys*



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Figure 8 – *Boys mocking an unfortunate person*



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Figure 9 – *Cruel boys*



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Figure 10 – *Quarrelsome boy*



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Figure 11 – *School Accomplishments sugoroku board*



© Inoue Yasuji (1864-1889), *School Accomplishments sugoroku board*, 1885, six ōban sheets, approximately 75 × 78 cm, Miyaki Yūitsu collection, 10088015215, Tsukuba University Library.