

## Retrieval Chart: Woodblock Prints by Ando Hiroshige

As your teacher shows each image, record what you observe in the center column of the table below. As you study the images, make notations about structures and technology, human activity, and trade and commerce.

<b>Image Title</b>	<b>What Do I Observe in This Image?</b>	<b>How Do These Observations Help Me Understand the Tokugawa Period?</b>
<i>Nihonbashi</i>		
<i>Shinagawa</i>		
<i>Goyu</i>		
<i>Okazaki</i>		
<i>Seki</i>		
<i>Clearing Weather after Snow at Nihon</i>		
<i>Surugachō</i>		
<i>The River Bank by Ryōgoku Bridge</i>		
<i>Fireworks at Ryōgoku</i>		

After you have studied all nine images, think about how your observations support and extend the ideas about the Tokugawa Period provided in Quotes 1 and 2. Write two or three sentences in the righthand column of the table explaining how evidence from the prints helps you better understand the Tokugawa Period.

### Quote 1

The flourishing of the Gokaidō [five major highways] was largely supported by the alternate residence system (*Sankin kōtai*) whereby feudal lords (*daimyō*) were compelled to travel annually to Edo, where they kept their families and residences. The formal travelling procedure required many followers and a display of wealth demonstrating their high status. Various categories of inns . . . were built at each station to accommodate the *daimyō* processions. Many local merchants and carriers were employed to serve them. Consequently, the regions close to the roads benefited economically from the flow of people and trade. The Gokaidō, and especially the Tōkaidō, became sites of social diversity, where people from different classes and regions met.

From Jilly Traganou, “The Tōkaidō—Scenes from Edo to Meiji Eras,” *Japan Railway and Transport Review* No. 13, [http://www.jrtr.net/jrtr13/f17\\_tra.html](http://www.jrtr.net/jrtr13/f17_tra.html).

### Quote 2

In this prospering commercial center [Edo], economic power resided with the wealthy townspeople. Artistic patronage and production no longer belonged only to the ruling elite but reflected diverse tastes and values. A new urban culture developed, valuing the cultivation of leisure that was celebrated in annual festivals, famous local sites, the theater, and pleasure quarters. The rich urban experience and the landscape of the time were documented by *ukiyo-e*, or “pictures of the floating world,” including woodblock prints like Hiroshige's *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. Since they could be purchased inexpensively—one print cost the same as a bowl of noodles—refined images became accessible to a wide audience.

. . . The series, actually comprising 118 prints, remains not only the last great work of Japan's most celebrated artist of the landscape print but also a precious record of the appearance, and spirit, of Edo at the culmination of more than two centuries of uninterrupted peace and prosperity.

From *Exhibitions: Hiroshige's One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, Brooklyn Museum, <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/online/edo/places/>

## Tokugawa Period Travel

At the end of a long period of civil war, the Tokugawa clan emerged in 1603 as the pre-eminent political family in Japan. The Tokugawa ruled Japan from 1603 to 1868, a period known as the Great Peace. The first Tokugawa ruler, or *shogun*, established a new capital in Edo (today's Tokyo). Edo was the Tokugawa family's traditional domain. To centralize power and assert authority over rival regional lords, or *daimyō*, the Tokugawa shogunate issued and enforced social laws. These laws were based in part on Confucian ideals of the well-ordered society, in part on shrewd political strategy. Some of the laws had unintended consequences.

The Tokugawa government required *daimyō* to travel from their domains to Edo every other year to pay tribute to the shogun. The *daimyō* thus lived in their domains one year, and in Edo the next. Their wives and children were required to stay in Edo. This tactic, known as "alternate attendance," helped keep the peace and control the *daimyō*'s wealth and power. Because the *daimyō* never stayed for more than one year in their domains, they were unlikely to unite with neighboring *daimyō* against the Tokugawa government. The *daimyō*'s attendants, samurai who traveled with him, were required to leave their families in the domain. The costs of maintaining two elaborate homes, one in the country and the other in Edo, and of traveling back and forth to Edo, with a large retinue of samurai attendants, diminished the *daimyō*'s wealth.

The continual movement of *daimyō* and their attendants from the countryside to Edo required a network of highways and waterways linking the main cities of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka, as well as smaller cities and towns along the way. The Tokugawa government maintained five major highways. The Tōkaidō Road, which linked the ancient capital, Kyoto, with the new capital, Edo, was one such highway. As they traveled the highways, the *daimyō* processions, often numbering in the hundreds of people, stopped to eat and rest at teahouses, restaurants, and inns that catered to the travelers. Thus, the *daimyō* processions helped to foster the growth of local markets and regional specialties of food, drinks, arts, and crafts. Travelers from the domains brought information, souvenirs, and regional artwork to Edo. They also spread information, art, and souvenirs of Edo on their return journey to the provinces.

By the middle and late Tokugawa period, common people also traveled the network of roads linking the cities and countryside. Because of the demand for skilled builders, craftspeople, and courtesans to provide services to the *daimyō* and their attendants in Edo, people moved along the system of roads from the countryside into the capital. Agricultural and other goods produced for sale in the countryside moved along roads and waterways into Edo and other cities. In addition, common people traveled along the major roads to visit shrines and places of religious importance all over Japan.

One result of the increasing travel throughout the Edo period was the creation of a more linked and integrated culture and society. People who had formerly been isolated in villages and small towns had chances to travel and to interact with travelers. Changes taking place in cities were transmitted to other areas via travelers. In turn, people across Japan began to feel their association with other Japanese and to recognize commonalities of culture.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. How did the demands of travel impoverish the *daimyō*?
2. Why were common people also traveling more during this period?
3. How did travel during the Tokugawa period contribute to economic and social change in Japan? Think about the development of a sense of shared culture as you answer the question.

## Publishing and the Arts in the Tokugawa Period

At the end of a long period of civil war, the Tokugawa clan emerged in 1603 as the pre-eminent political family in Japan. The Tokugawa ruled over Japan from 1603 to 1868, a period known as the Great Peace. The first Tokugawa ruler, or *shogun*, established a new capital in Edo (today's Tokyo). Edo was the Tokugawa family's traditional domain.

As the arts of war gave way to the arts of peace during the Tokugawa period, a publishing industry flourished in Edo and other major cities. In an increasingly urban, literate society, the demand for printed information—novels, poetry, maps, guide books, and woodblock prints—was high. The famous poet Matsuo Bashō published poems and prose about his travels around Japan. Jippensha Ikku's novel *A Shank's Mare Tour of the Tōkaidō*, a comic story about two traveling samurai, was a best-seller in 1802. The popularity of Bashō and Ikku's works prompted painters and print artists to illustrate the places made famous by their writings. One example is Hiroshige's print series of the 1830s, *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road*. Another celebrated print series of the time, Hokusai's *Thirty-six View of Mt. Fuji*, depicted Japan's revered mountain from many viewpoints and in a variety of weather and light conditions.

Woodblock prints depicting the vibrant urban culture of the period, as well as the landscape of the countryside and the open road, depended on a sophisticated publishing industry for their production and distribution. Woodblock prints were mass produced. Production involved four people: the artist, who drew the design on paper; the carver, who carved the design onto cherry wood blocks, one for each color of ink; the printer, who applied color to each block and transferred the print to paper; and the publisher, who financed the production of the prints and advertised and sold them to the public. Color woodblock printing as developed in this period was a major technological innovation, producing prints that were more advanced than anything available in Europe at the time.

People from all walks of life bought and collected woodblock prints, which were very inexpensive. A woodblock print cost about as much as a bowl of noodles. Travelers to Edo bought prints as souvenirs of the city, returning with them to the countryside and other parts of Japan. These prints helped to advertise what was popular in Edo: famous actors, department stores, women's makeup, courtesans, restaurants and teahouses, boating and viewing fireworks along Edo's main waterways, and other aspects of the "floating world," the shifting urban scene. Woodblock prints depicting this world were known as *ukiyo-e*, or "art of the floating world."

Toward the end of the Tokugawa period, large series of prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige of famous places and scenes of Edo, Mt. Fuji, and the Tōkaidō and other roads were hugely popular. Because of their popularity, the publishers of these series produced them in large runs of 500 or 1000 prints per image. Sometimes, second and third editions of these series were printed.

Because woodblock prints were purchased and distributed widely throughout Japan, they served an important and unexpected role in unifying the Japanese people. On one level, woodblock prints spread information about the country of Japan among Japanese people, wherever they lived. People in small villages could learn about life in the larger cities through the detailed prints. Because prints often included place names, names of publishers and artists,

as well as other written tidbits about contemporary life, the increasingly literate commoner population, both urban and rural, could read prints for clues about their changing society. In this way, the prints both shaped and reflected the growth of literacy during the period. On another level, the woodblock prints contributed to the viewers' knowledge of Japan's geography. Geographic landmarks—the most obvious being Mt. Fuji—were repeated in woodblock prints so often that they formed a core identification for Japanese people: these images became clearly recognizable symbols of their country. In these ways, woodblock prints contributed to a sense of a shared culture and country called Japan.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Who might have purchased woodblock prints during this period? For what purpose?
2. How did woodblock prints help link the city and countryside during the Tokugawa period?

## Tokugawa Period Economy and Society

At the end of a long period of civil war, the Tokugawa clan emerged in 1603 as the pre-eminent political family in Japan. The Tokugawa ruled over Japan from 1603 to 1868, a period known as the Great Peace. The first Tokugawa ruler, or *shogun*, established a new capital in Edo (today's Tokyo). Edo was the Tokugawa family's traditional domain. In order to centralize power and assert its authority over any rival regional lords, or *daimyō*, the Tokugawa shogunate issued and enforced social laws. These laws were based in part on Confucian ideals of the well-ordered society, in part on shrewd political strategy. Some of the Tokugawa government's rules and regulations regarding the four social classes—the samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants—had unintended consequences.

The hereditary samurai class was officially the highest social rank in the Tokugawa class system. During the preceding era of civil wars, the samurai had served their regional lords, or *daimyō*, as warriors. Now in the "Great Peace" of the Tokugawa period, the government required samurai to move off of the land and into castle towns. There, they served their *daimyō* as bureaucrats and attendants. To show their elite position, the samurai were permitted to carry swords and wear luxurious fabrics, such as silk. By law, however, they could not engage in trade or farming. Thus samurai found it difficult to profit from peacetime pursuits. As a result, many samurai, though high in status, grew poor during the period.

With the movement of *daimyō* and samurai into regional castle towns, Japan underwent a period of rapid urbanization. Building roads, houses, and government structures required skilled labor; workers required housing, food, and other services. Businesses sprang up to supply the needed materials and goods. Castle towns grew dramatically during the period, as they became regional centers of trade and government administration. To aid economic growth, the Tokugawa government established a monetary system, with standardized coins. This system greatly simplified trade among regions of the country. By 1700, Osaka, a port city and commercial center, had a population of 400,000; by the same year, Edo's population had grown to 1 million, making it one of the largest cities in the world.

Meanwhile, the three lower classes profited handsomely from a growing population and growing urban centers. Farmers, who made up 90 percent of the population, became increasingly well-off during the period, as more land was made available for agriculture, farming techniques improved, and food production grew. As cities developed and expanded, the urban demand for goods other than food allowed farmers to produce silk and other products in small-scale rural factories. Artisans supplied the skilled labor to build the great castle towns and to maintain and build the roads, bridges, buildings, and infrastructure of an urbanizing society.

The merchant class, officially at the bottom of the Tokugawa social structure, benefited greatly from the period's economic growth and rapid urbanization, growing prosperous and powerful during the period. The samurai, whose incomes were still paid in fixed amounts of rice, had to trade their rice for cash with the merchants, who controlled this exchange. They became increasingly indebted to merchants, whom they borrowed from to maintain an upper class lifestyle they could no longer afford. During the Tokugawa period, merchants grew wealthy selling the products and services desired by commoners and samurai alike. The merchant class

created a new style of life and art, flaunting their wealth and power, enjoying the theater, hosting boating parties on city waterways, and frequenting restaurants and teahouses. Their lavish lifestyle was celebrated and recorded in woodblock prints of the period.

The Tokugawa shogunate established policies and practices that allowed for a remarkable period of peace and prosperity. Its policies also undermined the power of the samurai class and unintentionally provided an opportunity for the lowly merchant class to emerge as a dominant force in the shaping of Japan's urban culture.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. How did life change for samurai during the Tokugawa period?
2. To which social class in Tokugawa society would you prefer to belong? Why?