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# PERFORMING URBAN MEMORY THE SUMIDA RIVER AS MNEMONIC SITE IN KIMURA SHÔHACHI'S *TÔKYÔ HANJÔKI* (REPORT ABOUT THE PROSPERITY OF TOKYO, 1958)

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## *Abstract*

In contrast to the West, where cities are given a specific identity and memory by establishing monuments, fixed landmarks and large scale city planning projects, in Japan cities are mainly held together by social practices that are embodied in *meisho* (famous places), topographically or historically important landmarks, and *sakariba*, thriving places of gathering, relaxation and informality such as market streets, theatres, entertainment districts etc. The Sumida River and its bridges in particular were the nodes of the water communication network of Edo and constituted its main *sakariba*. The river's banks and bridges became favourite *meisho* of the city. However, in the course of Japan's modernization, this cultural landscape changed enormously. With the Meiji Restoration in 1868 Edo was renamed Tokyo and became Japan's capital. In the following decades Tokyo was subjected to ambitious modernization and became a testing ground for new forms of city planning. The Sumida River and its banks experienced profound changes in function and appearance. In the space of a century, they were transformed from a pastoral landscape to a highly industrialized area. A large number of industrial facilities were located along the river, and the river itself became heavily polluted. Due to the importance of Tokyo's transformation in the process of Japan's becoming a nation, and stimulated by the ongoing cycle of destruction and rebuilding in the course of a single century, a large and diverse body of texts about Tokyo have come into being. The depiction of the city mainly centres on the matrix of *meisho* and *sakariba*. All these texts are involved in the struggle to record Tokyo's history. An important example of such literature is *Tôkyô hanjôki* (Report about the Prosperity of Tokyo, 1958) by Kimura Shôhachi (1893–1958). In this paper I intend to show how Kimura uses the role of the Sumida River as mnemonic site to report on its state in 1958, while providing access to the different layers of Tokyo's history.

## 1. Performing urban memory: Skylines, *meisho*, *sakariba*

The starting point of this paper is the general question of how images of cities are shaped and how these images relate to memory. In other words, how can urban memory be performed? In general, we are familiar with the idea that cities

are given a specific identity and memory by establishing monuments, fixed landmarks and large scale city planning projects. Famous examples in the “Western world” are the skyline of New York and central Paris with its boulevards and monuments; in East Asia, Hong Kong and the new Shanghai both have world-famous skylines. Building a skyline implies a long-term attempt to construct the image of a city, and with it a nation, as being successful, modern and, of course, unique. Skylines are continuously changing stages for performing power, identity and memory. They are an important tool for narrating a particular version of history and therefore are part of the “imaginary totalization”<sup>1</sup> produced by those who seek to render the city readable and therefore ultimately controllable. In contrast to the examples mentioned above, in Japan we hardly find any similar, magnificent skylines. However, in recent years, attempts have been made to construct a new skyline for Tokyo. The new image of Tokyo includes a new approach to the city. On picture postcards Tokyo is depicted from the seashore, focus being on the island of Odaiba and the Rainbow Bridge, both located in the bay of Tokyo.

Urban memory, however, is not embodied only in skylines and monumental buildings. Just as important as the so-called “hard city” is the “soft city,” the city that is made up of images, illusions and memories.<sup>2</sup> Cities can also be thought of in terms of a relationship between people and spaces. Beyond processes of physical appropriation, there is an interiorization of space in the collective memory and imagination. The following remark by the Italian architect Aldo Rossi throws light on this issue:

One can say that the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like memory it is associated with objects and places. The city is the *locus* of the collective memory. This relationship between the locus and the citizenry then becomes the city’s predominant image, both of architecture and of landscape.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from symbolic urban spaces such as skylines, the everyday place has a representational and imaginary structure.<sup>4</sup> Japanese cities are mainly held together by social practices that are given concrete form in places such as *meisho*, topographically or historically important landmarks, and *sakariba*, thriving places of gathering, relaxation and informality such as market streets, theatres,

1 For this term cf. Rossiter and Gibson 2003, p. 439.

2 The expressions of “soft city” and “hard city” were originally used by Raban, 1988, p. 10.

3 Cf. Rossi, 2000, pp. 172–3.

4 Cf. Fiévé, 2003, p. 153.

entertainment districts etc. *Meisho* and *sakariba* together not only form the basic matrix of urban everyday life but also are predominant mnemonic sites. This can be seen from the fact that, for example, in numerous texts about Tokyo depictions of the city center on the matrix of *meisho* and *sakariba*. The Japanese reading for *meisho* is *nadokoro* which literally means ‘places with a name,’ although the word for “name” also implies “reputation,” and so the word *meisho* is translated as ‘famous place,’ ‘celebrated location’ or ‘place of interest.’ *Meisho* include shrines and temples, waterfronts such as the spaces created at the foot of a bridge, slopes, street corners, and open spaces. Though most urban *meisho* were originally related to religious institutions, they were also known to local people as amusement areas thus combining faith with fun. Each *meisho* had its own special food (*meibutsu*, literally, ‘famous things’), and sideshows and brothels were common features. Because *meisho* refer to places as toponyms for particular spaces and historical periods, in time they function as a structure for history. Very often, a *sakariba* is centred on a *meisho* and vice versa.

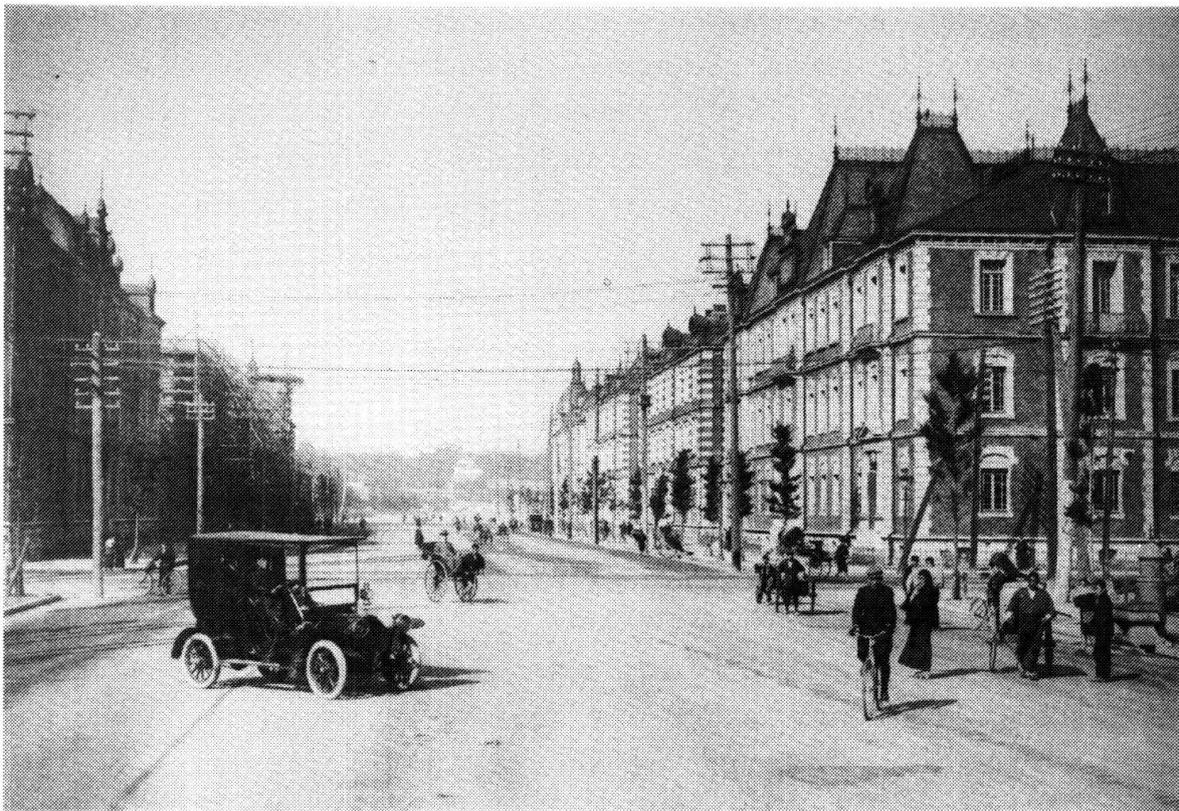
*Meisho* thus constitute a system for the representation of landscapes and cities that changes along with their transformation. With W. J. T. Mitchell, one could say that *meisho* are “both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package.”<sup>5</sup> This means that behind each representation of *meisho* lies a different set of assumptions about Tokyo’s functions as a city and as Japan’s capital. Representations of *meisho* depend on the intentions of the interest groups that create them and the historical junctures at which they come into being. The *meisho* not only contribute to the creation of particular memories but also to the construction of a territorial identity.

This is obvious when analysing representations of *meisho* in present-day Tokyo. For example, Meiji period representations of famous places in Tokyo often support the interpretation that this period marks a break with the past. In fact, due to the transformation of Tokyo into a modern capital, the matrix of Edo’s *meisho*, which mainly consisted of natural landmarks such as hills and rivers where seasonal events and shrine festivals took place, was overlaid with a system of ‘new famous places’ (*shin meisho*) such as European-style monuments, government institutions, museums and parks.<sup>6</sup> Roughly speaking,

5 Mitchell, 1994, p. 5.

6 For a study of the formation of *shin meisho* during the Meiji period cf. Higuchi and Sugiyama, 1982, pp. 511–6.

two different categories of *meisho* exist, the one representing the past, especially Edo, the other representing ‘the new’ or ‘the modern’, i.e., those monuments and symbolic spaces that came into being since the Meiji Restoration in 1868.



*Picture 1:* Marunouchi, the so-called “Little London,” was one of the most well-known “new famous places” of Meiji Tokyo.

The existence of two kinds of *meisho* in Tokyo is linked to two different patterns of city planning: According to Jinnai Hidenobu, the history of Tokyo since the Meiji Restoration has been a history of its transformation from a city on water to a city on land. Edo had previously been called a “city on water.” Its infrastructure and transport system were based on an extensive network of moats, canals and rivers. Under the shogunate most of the produce required by the city was brought in by water.



Picture 2: The city on water in the late Meiji period.

With the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Edo was renamed Tokyo and became Japan's capital. Tokyo became the national centre of manufacturing, finance and consumption, of communication, and of cultural production and representation. Beginning in the 1880s, the network of waterways was gradually replaced by railways and later by highways. Many old waterways were filled in and converted into wide roads to accommodate the growing numbers of motorized vehicles. The amusement areas for which Edo was famous changed also completely. Some of them were designated as 'public parks'. The low skyline of Edo, created by uniform structures such as commoners' houses, warehouses and shops and stalls, was replaced by monumental buildings towering over their surroundings. Due to the growth of Tokyo the matrix of *sakariba* shifted several times. Whereas Asakusa and Ginza were Tokyo's most famous *sakariba* of the 1920s and 1930s, Shinjuku and Shibuya, both in the west of Tokyo, have become the *sakariba* of the 1980s and 1990s.

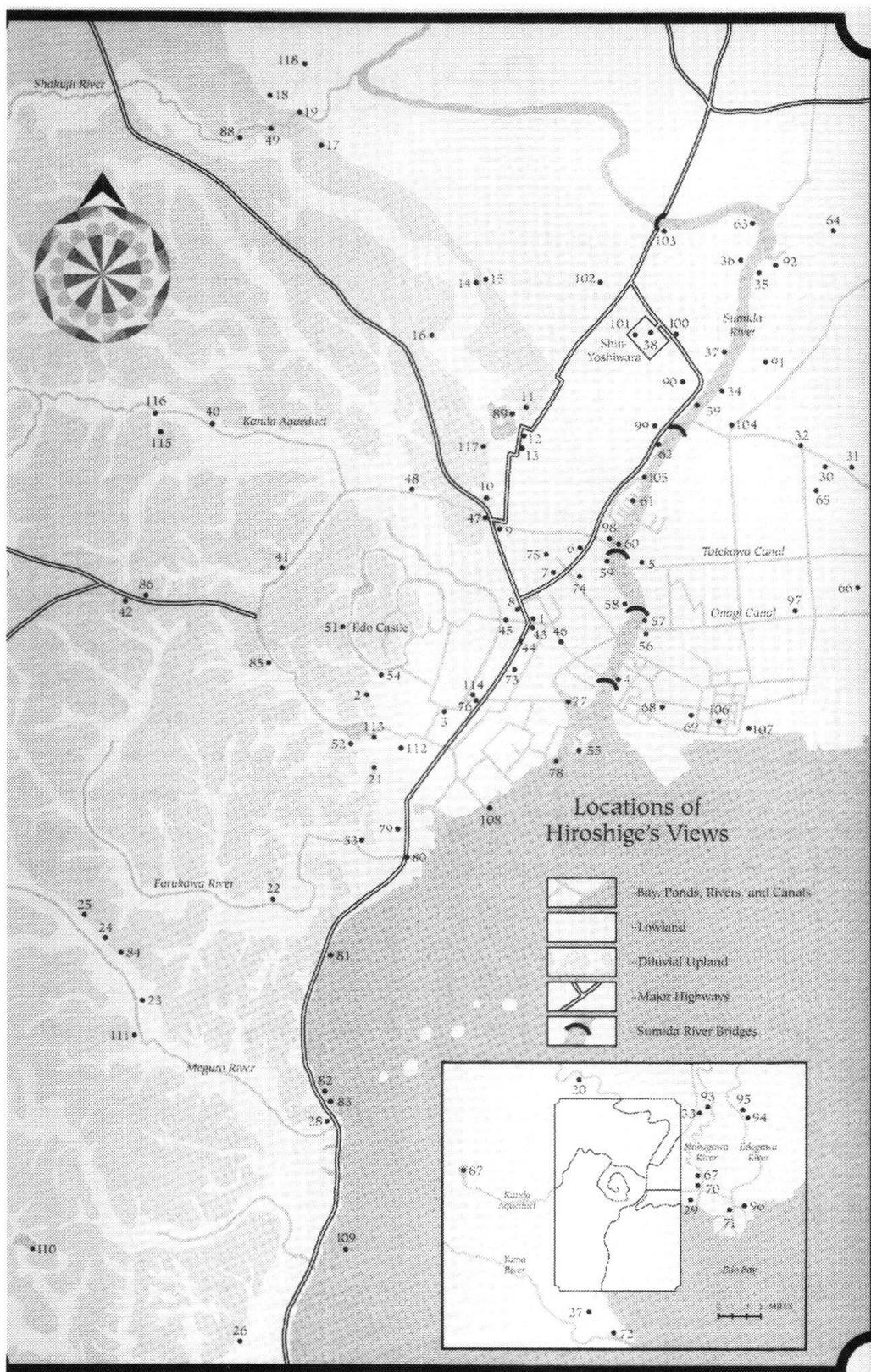
Apart from the Meiji Restoration a number of events pushed ahead the transformation of Tokyo from a "city on water" to a "city on land." The most important ones are:

- the Great Kantô Earthquake of 1923,
- the destruction of the city during the war years of 1944 and 1945,
- the modernization projects in the run-up to the Olympic games of 1964,
- the building boom in the course of the “Bubble economy” in the 1980s.

Each of these events contributed to changes of the matrix of *meisho* and initiated a new stage of the rewriting of Tokyo’s history. A particular reminder of this transformation is the Sumida River, the river that constituted the centre of the “city on water.” From earliest times onward until the present, the Sumida River has been a prominent subject in literature and the visual arts.

## 2. The Sumida River as *sakariba* and *meisho* – performing the “city on water”

The Sumida River flows from north to south through Tokyo into the Tokyo Bay. It is an important topographical element in the Kantô plain. Even today, the river connects with a network of canals providing access to the innermost parts of the city. During the Edo period the Sumida River and its bridges developed into the nodes of the water transport network and the river itself began to be used as an area for relaxation and recreation. A variety of pleasure boats floated along the river, linking the most famous amusement areas, Edobashi and Nihonbashi, with Ryôgoku, Asakusa, and the pleasure quarter of Yoshiwara, while the riversides became favourite locations for restaurants, teahouses, and all kinds of entertainment. The bridges in particular were the nodes of the water transport network and became favourite *sakariba*: amusement areas combining market places and red-light districts, with temporary structures for theatrical performances and seasonal events. Travelling on the Sumida River as well as crossing it marked a transition from a space dominated by the restrictions of feudal society to one located outside its sphere of control. A number of places along both sides of the river became famous *meisho* of the city, evoking the most poetic memories in its residents. The flourishing popular culture of Edo that centered around these areas has been endlessly depicted in the arts and literature.



Picture 3: A map of the *meisho* as depicted in Hiroshige's *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, produced 1856–58.

In the course of Japan's modernization, however, this cultural landscape changed tremendously. Within a hundred years, the Sumida River and its banks were transformed from a pastoral landscape to a highly industrialized area. A large number of industrial facilities were located along the river and the river itself became heavily polluted. Since the late nineteenth century, the transformation of the "city on water" to a city on land has given rise to a critical attitude towards modernization on the one hand, and to a nostalgic rediscovery of Edo-period elements remaining in the midst of Tokyo on the other. In particular the Sumida River and its banks came to serve as a counter world to modern Tokyo. The more this landscape was industrialized, the more it became an evocative symbol of the past. Due to the importance of Tokyo's transformation in the process of Japan's becoming a modern nation, and stimulated by the ongoing cycle of destruction and rebuilding in the course of a single century, a large and diverse body of texts about Tokyo have come into being. A sense of loss of the essence of the "city on water" has been continuously articulated by a variety of Japanese writers. Apart from rather literary, novel-like texts, which mainly appeal to the aesthetic sensitivities of the elite, attempts at capturing Tokyo that are much closer to ordinary views both in their production and their reception can also be found. For instance, a large body of topographical literature (*chishi*) and travelogues on Tokyo also exists. Such texts document the topographical and cultural characteristics of a certain place in an essayistic manner, while providing various kinds of information useful for understanding the city, i.e., its transformation in terms of appearance, structure and function, the rapidly changing realities of its everyday world, and the emergence of new urban phenomena. In Japan their origins can be traced back to the eighth century. Like fictional texts, topographical descriptions do not simply depict reality. They are highly self-conscious constructs that reflect the contradictory and constantly changing images of a particular place. In short, despite the genre, texts about Tokyo are involved in the struggle of writing down the city's history and rethinking Tokyo's and Japan's path to modernity.

### 3. The Sumida River in Kimura Shôhachi's *Tôkyô hanjôki*

An important modern example of such literature is Kimura Shôhachi's *Tôkyô hanjôki* (Report on the prosperity of Tokyo), published in 1958. It belongs to the genre of the so-called *Tôkyô hanjôki* (Reports on the prosperity of Tokyo). Their

origins are rooted in the popular culture of the Edo period (1600–1868). They were very popular from the Meiji Restoration until the 1930s, and some of them enjoy a large readership to this day, but since they are generally not included in the literary category of “novel” (*shōsetsu*), they have so far received only scant attention in Japanese literary criticism and Western studies of Japan. As their name suggests, the *Tōkyō hanjōki* are centered on the word *hanjō* (prosperity), an expression that is used to measure urban success. *Hanjō* relates to the urban sphere of life in material, social, and cultural terms. It is associated with the notion of people gathering consuming and enjoying commodities and entertainment. Very often in these texts the word *hanjō* is used ironically, thus referring to the negative consequences of Japan’s policy of modernization. In such cases, the depiction of Tokyo implies criticism of society, culture, and politics. All these *hanjōki* are far from being mere “guidebooks” (*annai*), publications that help the reader solve practical problems of orientation in the city and explain its important landmarks. The very first *hanjōki*, the *Edo hanjōki* (Report on the Prosperity of Edo, 1832–36), was written by Terakado Seiken (1796–1868). The prototype of the modern *hanjōki* is *Tōkyō shin hanjōki* (New Report on the Prosperity of Tokyo, 1874) by Hattori Bushō. The latest *hanjōki* about Tokyo at the time of this writing, is the *Shisetsu Tōkyō hanjōki* (My Interpretation of the Prosperity of Tokyo, 1984) by the writer Kobayashi Nobuhiko (b. 1932).<sup>7</sup>

Most authors of *hanjōki* lived in Tokyo and witnessed its transformation from a city on water to a city on land. This is also the case with Kimura Shōhachi. He was born in 1893 in Ryōgoku, a central part of Edo’s Shitamachi (low city) located by the Sumida River. When he died in 1958 this area had been completely rebuilt several times. Kimura’s writings focus on the history of Tokyo since the Meiji Restoration, and especially on the changes of lifestyle and customs in the course of modernization. Some of his works contain illustrations he painted himself. Kimura’s best known text is *Tōkyō hanjōki*. Totalling 163 pages, it is a rather short *hanjōki*. It was first published in 77 instalments in the newspaper *Yomiuri shinbun* in 1955, and thus enjoyed a wide circulation. Three years later, the instalments were published as a book. Because it is a highly personal account of a tour around Tokyo in the 1950’s and appeared soon after his death, it is regarded as his legacy.<sup>8</sup>

7 For a study of the *hanjōki* cf. Schulz, 2003 and 2004.

8 Kimura’s *hanjōki* has been published several times. Two different versions of the text exist. The first edition consists of ten chapters and an introduction by the author (cf. Kimura 1958

1955 was a very crucial year in the history of postwar Japan. As part of the so-called “Policy of high growth” (*Kôdo seichô seisaku*), the government promoted the expansion of heavy industries. Tokyo’s industrial areas were greatly expanded. Along the riverbanks and on the shores more industrial plants were built than ever before. In 1955 Japan’s economy had reached the level of the pre-war period. One year later the “White Paper on Economy” (*Keizai hakusho*) announced the end of the postwar period. In the 1960s Japan’s annual growth rate reached ten percent, and the country became the second economic power in the world after the USA.

At first glance, *Tôkyô hanjôki* appears to be a report about Tokyo in the 1950’s, but in fact it can be read as a reconstruction of the city on water in the midst of the city on land. How does Kimura manage this? *Tôkyô hanjôki* consists of ten chapters. The chapters are ordered like a journey through areas where “modern Tokyo” and “Edo,” in other words “the city on land” and “the city on water,” meet and through areas that still seemed to be untouched by modernization. Kimura’s concept of Tokyo is closely associated with the “city on water” both in geographical and in cultural terms. Although as a genre *hanjôki* depict modern Tokyo, they mainly refer to those aspects of the city that are deeply rooted in Edo culture but have been affected by modernization. Similar to earlier *hanjôki* about Tokyo, Kimura’s Tokyo too mainly consists of areas such as Nihonbashi, Shiba, Asakusa, Fukagawa, Mukôjima and Tsukudajima, which all are very famous *meisho* of Edo and even today are often depicted in the literature on Tokyo. The insistence of the *hanjôki* on the earlier conception of Tokyo as a “city on water” becomes further obvious from the fact that most of the spaces described there are either *sakariba*, thriving places of gathering, relaxation and informality or they are *meisho* (famous places). Both types of urban space were often located along the city’s waterways, thus forming the basic matrix of the “Edo of water.” Since the seventeenth century they had belonged to the so-called “eight hundred and eight districts” (*happyakuya chô*) of Edo. “Eight hundred and eight” does not denote the actual number, but rather signifies an indefinite

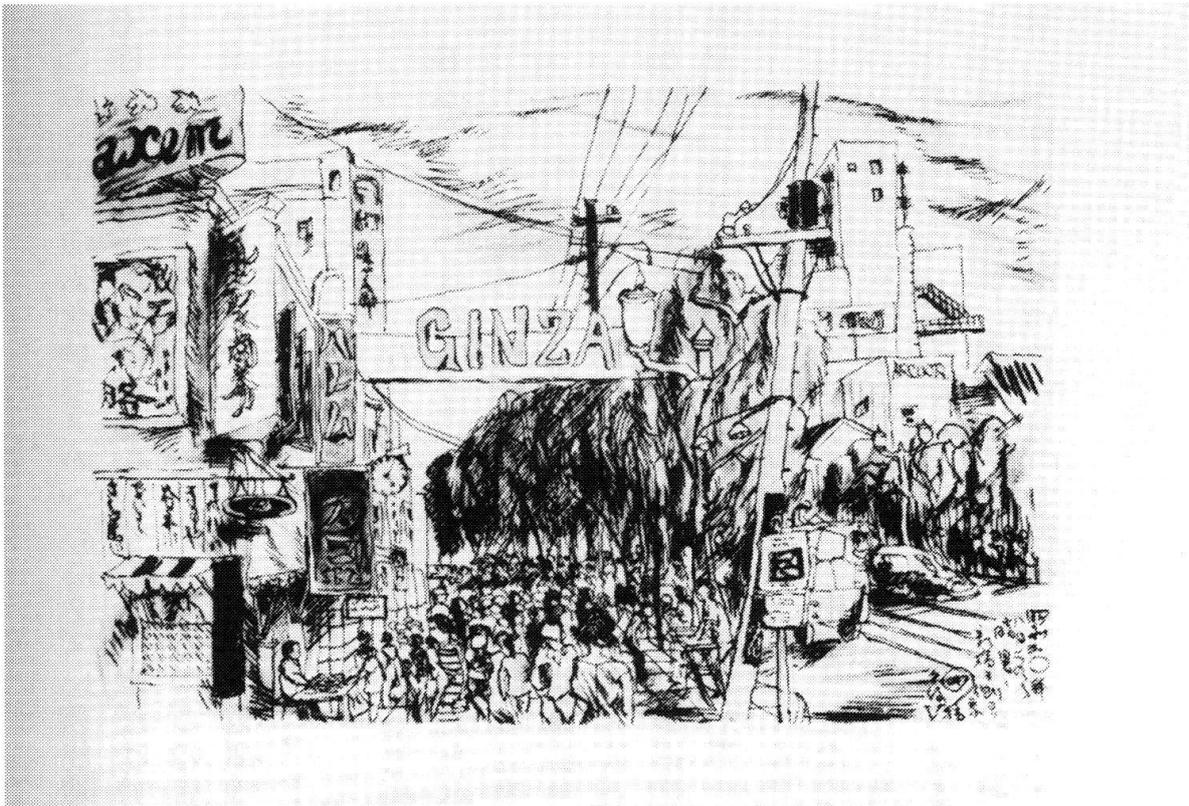
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and 1959). A nine-chapter version has been published in *Tôkyô fûzoku jô* (Book about Customs and Traditions in Tokyo, 1975), a collection of essays (cf. Kimura 1975), and the Iwanami paperback edition of 1993 (cf. Kimura, 1993). In both editions the final chapter, *Sengo jûnen Tôkyô fûzoku* (Customs and Traditions in Tokyo Ten Years after the War), has been removed. This chapter originally has been published in four instalments in the newspaper *Yomiuri shinbun* from 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> August 1955. The ten chapter version of the text only is included in Kimura’s collected works, cf. Kimura, 1982-83a.

number and points to the fact that Edo consisted of a steadily growing number of city districts (*chô*). The *happyakuya chô* were the central area of Edo and later of Tokyo.

In Kimura's *hanjôki*, only the chapter on the Ginza is devoted largely to the depiction of modern Tokyo, i.e., "the city on land." Chapter titles such as *Tsukudajima* (The island Tsukudajima), *Hanabi* (Fireworks) or *Tsukiji – Ginza* indicate that Kimura focuses on areas where elements of Edo's culture and lifestyles were still alive but are endangered because of the advancing industrialization. Kimura's concentration on the city on water is obvious from both the starting point and the last stop of his tour. He intended to begin with an investigation of the remnants of the "city on water":

Instead of beginning my *Tôkyô hanjôki* with the prospering Ginza, my purpose was to start at this lonely old island [Tsukudajima]. This is because I first wanted to look from the coast at the Tokyo "that doesn't move" (*ugokanai Tôkyô*) before investigating the "moving present" (*ugoku genzai*).<sup>9</sup>

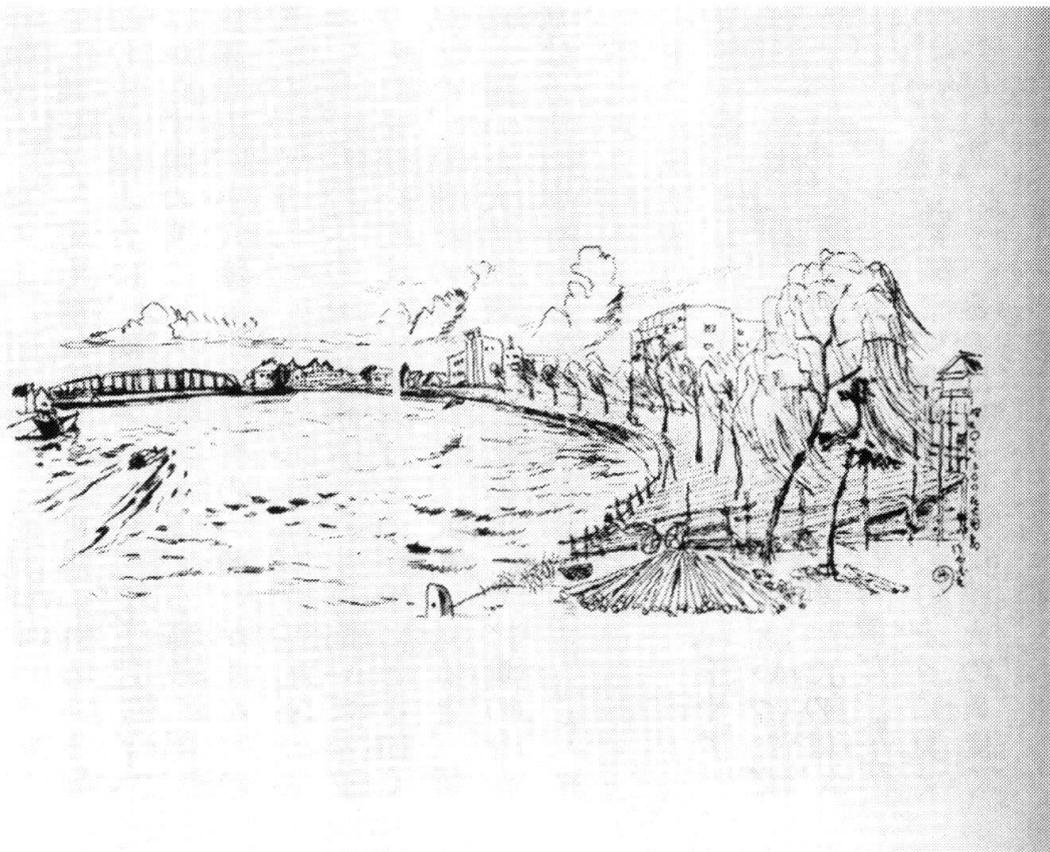


Picture 4: Kimura Shôhachi's depiction of the Ginza in *Tôkyô hanjôki*.

9 Kimura, 1982–1983b, p. 233.

The “Tokyo that doesn’t move,” in other words, the unchanging Tokyo, means the city on water, i.e., those areas where the particular lifestyle and architecture of the Edo period still exist. The “moving present” is none other than Tokyo itself. The Sumida River in particular symbolizes the “city on water.”

In this respect, the first chapter of *Tôkyô hanjôki* reveals something of Kimura’s conception of Tokyo and his view of modern Japan’s history. Kimura entitled this chapter *Sumidagawa ryôgan ichiran*, meaning “A view of both banks of the Sumida River.” This title is an allusion to *Ehon Sumidagawa ryôgan ichiran* (Illustrated View of Both Banks of the Sumida River), a famous series of woodblock prints by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), printed around 1800. With the aim to depict famous landmarks and scenes from everyday life along the Sumida River, Hokusai had set sail in a boat near the small island of Tsukudajima in the bay of Edo and traveled upstream to Ryôgoku and further on to Yanagibashi.



Picture 5: Kimura Shôhachi’s depiction of the Sumida River in *Tôkyô hanjôki*.

More than 150 years after Hokusai, in June of 1955, Kimura took a boat and traveled on the Sumida River. He divided his trip into two parts: Starting from

Ryôgoku he first went upstream to the bridge of Nishi-Araibashi, then he traveled downstream to Tsukudajima. A boat traveling past the attractions of the Sumida River is retained by collective memory as a sort of otherworldly journey. But instead of praising the beauty of cherry-blossoms or temples, as tradition would have it, Kimura focuses on the growing pollution caused by the rapid industrialization of this area, the changes of the landscape and the losses of the past due to the ongoing building process.

Most of the areas where Edo's citizens used to gather and to enjoy the city's entertainment facilities had either changed immensely or even disappeared. Instead of sticking to the official interpretation of Tokyo's post-war history as that of a phoenix-like recovery, Kimura contradicts this view and writes a story of decline. According to him, the landscape along the Sumida River, viewed both upstream and downstream from the boat, looks miserable and dreary. The area upstream looks deserted and takes on the threatening shape of an industrial city. Downstream the scenery is similarly disappointing. Apart from warehouses, there is nothing to be seen anymore. Kimura looks for landmarks that were famous in the past, but only a few of them have survived. He mainly reports the increasing pollution of the river. The water is dirty and stinks. Only oil glitters on its surface. The further he travels upstream, in the direction of the famous pleasure quarter Yoshiwara, the worse the pollution gets.

I turned away from the stink of the river. Maybe the water stinks so badly because the tide was out – was this the particular “body odor” of the Sumida River? Without constantly holding my nose, I was unable to depart on my round trip of the Sumida River.<sup>10</sup>

During his childhood, Kimura used to swim in the river, but now this is impossible. Kimura sums up the desolate state of the river and its surroundings:

If one went for a swim in the Sumida River, the stink of the water would take away one's breath before one even had got wet.<sup>11</sup>

Near the bridge of Saemonbashi, where the Kanda River empties into the Sumida River, there are no fish in the water, and reeds no longer grow on its banks. Kimura mentions plans by the city administration to take measures against the stink of the water. One proposal is simply to fill in the canals and rivers. Kimura is convinced that nobody will carry out this plan because the

10 Kimura 1982–1983b, p. 198.

11 Kimura, 1982–1983b, p. 198.

Sumida River is too essential to Tokyo's identity. For Kimura, Tokyo without the Sumida River is about the same as a kimono without an *obi*.<sup>12</sup>

Kimura ends his trip on the Sumida River at the small island Tsukudajima in Tokyo bay. For Kimura, this island is one of the few places in Tokyo where elements of the culture and lifestyle of Edo still seem to have been preserved, but they are at risk of being unable to withstand the impact of the industrialization of this area. According to Kimura, Tsukudajima was famous for its festivals during the summer, in particular for the dances during the O-Bon festival. But pollution has put an end to old customs. The water is so dirty that the *mikoshi*, the portable shrine, cannot be carried out into the river anymore.<sup>13</sup> Kimura closes this chapter with the remark that in former times Tsukudajima had been famous for its whitebait, a local variety of fish and a *meibutsu* (famous thing, specialty), which was often mentioned in premodern literature. Until recently the inhabitants of Tsukudajima had mainly made a living by fishing and had thus been able to lead a life that was completely different from that of the people of modern Tokyo, but as pollution was causing the fish population to diminish, an essential element of the specific culture of this island would disappear. In the near future the people of Tsukudajima would have to give up their long-established life as fishermen and adopt a lifestyle similar to that of the typical modern Tokyo resident. Tsukudajima would thus lose its status of a counter world to modern Tokyo, as an area where elements of the city of water could be preserved.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion: The recent revival of the Sumida River

Kimura wrote his *Tôkyô hanjôki* against the background of Japan's postwar recovery. At first sight, Kimura seems to be reporting on the pollution of the Sumida River, the disappearance of water routes, and its harmful effects on the people's traditional lifestyle caused by Tokyo's rapid rebuilding and industrialization of the postwar area, but in fact the underlying context is the Meiji period during which Japan's process of modernization was initiated by the politics of "civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*). In this respect, *Tôkyô hanjôki* not only is a critique of Japan's postwar policy of high growth, but also a

12 Kimura, 1982–1983b, p. 202.

13 Kimura, 1982–1983b, p. 215.

14 Kimura, 1982–1983b, p. 222 and 257.

thorough investigation of the other, the dark side of Japan's way into modernity since the late nineteenth century.

What happened to the Sumida River and its *meisho* in the decades after Kimura's report? Does the river still represent Edo, i.e., the city on water? On the one hand, the industrialization and rebuilding of the areas along the river continued throughout the latter half of the 20th century. With it, a number of *meisho* as well as the life style and vernacular architecture that used to represent "Edo" have nearly disappeared. On the other, trends such as the nostalgic recovery of Edo elements in the midst of Tokyo, the so-called "Edo boom"<sup>15</sup>, or guided tours for tourists through the Edo in Tokyo, show that people are very interested in Edo's history and its link with modern Tokyo. In this discourse, Tokyo stands for everything that is modern. It is associated with fragmentation, disruption and uncontrolled dynamism and the nation state, whereas Edo is associated with cultural harmony, tradition and cultural uniqueness. The Sumida River in particular is a very important location and seems to be gaining importance as a mnemonic site for "performing Edo."

To give some examples:

1) The famous "Ryôgoku River Fireworks Display" was the greatest summer event in Edo. In 1739 it was conceived by Tokugawa Yoshimune as a festive offering to the water gods, a desperate means of combating a serious plague that infested the capital at the time. Because of increased traffic volume and the contamination of the Sumida River and other problems in the course of Japan's modernization, the display was canceled after it was held in 1961. Revival of the tradition came in 1978, with the launch site for fireworks moved upstream to the area between Sakura Bridge and Umayu Bridge, and the name changed to "Sumida River Fireworks Display."

15 The first rediscovery of Edo took place from the 1870s through the 1890s, another significant phase occurred during the 1920s and 1930s. The last and until today ongoing wave of "discovering Edo," the so-called Edo boom, started in the 1970s. Cf. Gluck, 1998.



Picture 6: Hiroshige's depiction of the fireworks in Ryôgoku in *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, produced 1856–58.

2) Another example is the monthly magazine *Tôkyôjin*, “The Tokyoite,” founded in 1986. This magazine mainly reports on Edo elements in modern Tokyo and regularly includes special features about the Sumida River.



Picture 7: The title of an issue of *Tôkyôjin* about “Landscapes of longing in Tokyo”.

3) The year of 2003 was celebrated as the 400<sup>th</sup> hundred year of the foundation of the Tokugawa shogunate in Edo. A number of events brought the city on water to the people's mind. In this context, the Sumida River still functions as a space for performing the memory of Edo, thus providing access to the different layers of Tokyo's history. It is very interesting to note that such activities of "performing memory" are not only carried out by ordinary people interested in Tokyo's history but also are part of the politics by the Metropolitan Government to position Tokyo as a world city.<sup>16</sup>

The aim of this paper was to show how in the course of the twentieth century this river came to serve as a performative space for different, not to say competing memories. I want to conclude with the assumption that performing the "city on water" is an essential part of the identity and image making of present-day Tokyo, and because of Tokyo's representational function as capital city, of present-day Japan.

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16 Cf. Iwatake, 2003, pp. 249–51.

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## Illustrations

### Picture 1

TAMAI Tetsuo (ed.) (1992). *Yomigaeru Meiji no Tôkyô. Tôkyô jûgo ku shashin shû*. Tôkyô: Kadokawa shoten, 1992 (photograph 3, no pagination).

### Picture 2

TAMAI Tetsuo (ed.) (1992). *Yomigaeru Meiji no Tôkyô. Tôkyô jûgo ku shashin shû*. Tôkyô: Kadokawa shoten (photograph 9, no pagination).

### Picture 3

HIROSHIGE (1999). *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. Introductory Essays by Henry D. Smith II and Amy G. Poster; Commentaries on the Plates by Henry D. Smith; Preface by Robert Buck. New York, N.Y.: George Braziller: Brooklyn Museum, (1986), p. 8.

### Picture 4

KIMURA Shôhachi (1982–83b). “Tôkyô hanjô ki”, *Kimura Shôhachi zenshû* 4. Tôkyô: Kôdansha, p. 292.

### Picture 5

KIMURA Shôhachi (1982–83b). “Tôkyô hanjô ki”, *Kimura Shôhachi zenshû* 4. Tôkyô: Kôdansha, p. 253.

### Picture 6

HIROSHIGE (1999). *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. Introductory Essays by Henry D. Smith II and Amy G. Poster; Commentaries on the Plates by Henry D. Smith; Preface by Robert Buck. New York, N.Y.: George Braziller: Brooklyn Museum, (1986), No. 98.

### Picture 7

*Tôkyôjin*, No. 5, May 2003.