

Chapter 4

Watanabe Published Prints

4.1 Watanabe Printing Co., Ltd.

Whenever we discuss shin-hanga print publishers, we have to refer to Watanabe Printing Co., Ltd. and its founder Watanabe Shōzaburō, who was without a doubt the foremost promoter of the “New Print Movement”. He made the biggest contribution to the woodblock print community by exporting a huge number of shin-hanga prints during the first half of the 20th century. To complement the brief overviews of Watanabe Printing Co. found on various websites, we would like to summarize Watanabe’s history and key activities, and expand on issues relating to the Kōitsu-Watanabe relationship.

Table 4.1: Watanabe Printing Co., Ltd. History

Date	Activities and Misc. Remarks
1906	Started Watanabe Printing Shop by Watanabe Shōzaburō at Ginza after his ukiyo-e print dealer experiences with Kobayashi Bunshichi.
1915-20	Devoted to restriking facsimile ukiyo-e prints. New prints for export in ukiyo-e style by Shōtei, Sōzan, Fuyō etc. Trial woodblock prints by foreign artists.
1916-18	New wave prints by Shinsui’s “Before The Mirror” and Hasui’s “Shiobara” series.
1923	Experienced the Great Kantō Earthquake. All prints/blocks destroyed.
1925-	Restarted Watanabe printing business by introducing more popular series prints such as Hasui’s “Twenty Views of Tokyo” and Shinsui’s “Modern Beauties” for overseas customers.
1943-45	Suspended export due to war circumstances.
1946-55	Booming sales of woodblock prints as souvenirs to US occupation forces.
1962	Watanabe Shōzaburō passed away and Watanabe Tadasu took over the business.
1993	Watanabe Shoichirō succeeded due to Tadasu’s death.
2006	100th anniversary of Watanabe Printing Shop’s foundation.

We were very fortunate to obtain a reference book titled “Watanabe Shōzaburō” published in 1974 by Watanabe Tadasu who was Shōzaburō’s son-in-law and successor [10]. This book (shown in Figure 4.1) was very hard to get because it was privately published as a limited edition of only 200 copies and only distributed to Watanabe’s friends and associates. Since it contained valuable information and photographs not seen publicly, we are able to present several photos of Watanabe Shōzaburō and his fellow publishers and dealers of the pre-war period by the courtesy and consent of Mr Watanabe Shoichirō – see Figure 4.2.

