

Chapter 5

Shōbidō Published Prints

5.1 Shōbidō Tanaka & Co.

Even though they were in business for over 100 years, details regarding the publisher Shōbidō Tanaka proved to be very difficult to find. We managed to catch a small glimpse into Shōbidō's background when we found a short article covering their history in a town journal titled "Kanda", published on the 12th of July, 2003. Later we were fortunate to obtain a full copy of "Shōbidō 80th Anniversary History Book" published in 1977, where we finally learned their detailed business history [13]. As further research literature we were able to acquire two very rare and informative pre-war published catalogues by Shōbidō, one of which was published in January, 1939 for Japanese dealers, and the other which was published for overseas dealers around the same time period. What follows is an abbreviated history of Shōbidō Tanaka as per the above referenced material:

Shōbidō Tanaka & Co. was founded by Tanaka Ryōzō, who was born in Kyoto in 1874. A young Ryōzō worked at a bookstore in Osaka for a short time and subsequently moved to its Tokyo branch office. Then in April of 1897 he succeeded in opening his own shop which dealt with woodblock prints: "Tokyo Shōbidō Gakyoku" at Kyobashi in Tokyo. His starting funds and stock were meagre at only 30 yen with only one stall containing 600 woodblock prints for sale. In 1898 he moved his shop to Jimbocho in the Kanda area, where he gradually expanded his business line into the more promising postcard category by applying new printing techniques.

Tanaka Ryōzō was able to be acquainted with such shin-hanga artists as Hasui, Shōtei and Kōitsu in the 1930's. By checking various print images illustrated in Shōbidō's catalogues (see Figure 5.1 for an example), we were able to confirm that Ryōzō published 3 landscape mitsugiri prints and at least 24 postcard prints by Kōitsu in the late 1930's without publisher seals [41, 42]. He also published 6 ōban-sized prints by Kawase Hasui using the well-known "Tokyo Shōbidō" publisher seal between April 1930 and January 1931, and he published at least 12 mitsugiri prints in addition to 84 postcard prints and 94 half-postcard prints by Takahashi Shōtei (Hiroaki) with no specific publisher seal [11, 42, 12]. According to their 1977 Anniversary book, they unfortunately lost all the woodblocks and print stock in raging fires due to Allied bombing of Tokyo in March of 1945.

After Ryōzō's passing in July 1946 his business was carried on by Tanaka Teizō, Ryōzō's first son. Teizō successfully continued the Shōbidō business, specializing in postcards, Christmas cards, and other new items. In 1962 Teizō formed a new community group to edit a town journal "Kanda" and acted as one of the key community leaders. After Teizō celebrated the 80th anniversary of Shōbidō's foundation in 1977, Tanaka Sanae took over his office and maintained its business until the very recent date of June 30th, 1999.

The publisher Shōbidō Tanaka should not be confused with the Ueno company Shōbidō – the early name of Watanabe Mokuhan Bijutsu Gaho (Watanabe Woodblock Art Shop) that is still operating in Ginza, Tokyo.

