

Appendix B

Watermarks on Kōitsu Prints

B.1 Introduction

One of the physical characteristics of the washi paper used in the production of Kōitsu prints is that it is often possible to find a watermark near the edge of the paper – usually in the upper left corner for *tate-e* (portrait) prints and in the upper right corner for *yoko-e* (landscape) prints. Watermarks are designs or motifs ‘embedded’ into the washi paper at the time of its manufacture, and they are usually produced by intentional thinning of the paper pulp in the shape of the design, making it more translucent than its surrounding thicker paper. Sometimes the watermark is hard to find, and it is more easily located by viewing a print against a strong illumination source such as a light or indirect sunlight, or by placing the print on a black surface. We have catalogued the use of watermarks by two publishers of Kōitsu woodblock prints – the publisher Doi Hangaten (see page 43), and also the publisher Baba Nobuhiko (see page 17).

The most commonly encountered watermark is the circular watermark DH-WM-1 by Doi Hangaten (Figure B.1). While there are a large number of Doi prints that contain a watermark, it is probably true to say that there is an equal proportion of prints that do not carry a watermark. It has been rumoured that the existence of a watermark on a Doi print increases the ‘value’ of the print – suggesting that prints without watermarks are inferior in some way, however the authors have seen no valid evidence to support this. In fact, it is not surprising that watermarked and un-watermarked prints exist in similar proportions when one considers the paper manufacturing process. Paper stock used for Japanese woodblock prints is generally acquired in sheet sizes larger than a standard *ōban*-sized print, and this larger sheet usually contains only one watermark in a single corner of the paper. Usually the paper stock is twice the size of an *ōban* print (called ‘double-*ōban*’), and this sheet is then cut into two *ōban*-sized sheets for printing, thus only one of these two *ōban* sheets will contain a watermark. There also seems to be little correlation between the existence of a watermark and a corresponding publisher seal on Doi prints – watermarked prints without publisher seals are quite common, as are un-watermarked prints without publisher seals.

The use of watermarked paper by the publisher Baba Nobuhiko appears to have been very limited, and may have been restricted to only short periods of production, outside of which un-watermarked paper was used. Because the number of print examples containing watermarks is still quite limited, the authors have not been able to investigate the possibility of estimating the printing date of Baba/Kōitsu prints based on the existence and style of watermark, although we hope to undertake such research in the future.