

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Date : 16/06/2006   |  |
|    | <p><b>Picturing Westernization and Modernization:<br/>A Woodblock Print Collection from Late 19th<br/>Century Japan</b></p> <p><b>Izumi Koide</b><br/>Director, Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship<br/>Shibusawa Ei'ichi Memorial Foundation<br/>Tokyo,<br/>Japan</p> |
| <b>Meeting:</b>   | <b>85 Rare Books and Manuscripts</b>   |
| <b>Simultaneous Interpretation:</b>   | <b>No</b>  |
| <p>WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 72ND IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL<br/>20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea<br/><a href="http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm">http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm</a></p> |  |

**Abstract**

*Before the invention and dissemination of photographic technology, wood-block prints were a powerful medium used to convey information, in addition to their artistic value. First printed with black ink, wood-block print technology in full color, known as nishiki-e, was established in the mid-18th century, reached its height in the following decades, and gradually fell into decline at the turn of the 19th century.*

*Hiroshige (1797-1858) and other famous artists were active when Commodore Perry came to Japan in 1853 leading an American fleet to open the country. As the succeeding decades were full of anxiety, change, and new things, it is easy to imagine that there was a strong demand for the news media to distribute images of unfamiliar and foreign things or events. Responding to such needs, nishiki-e played an important role in reporting and disseminating novelties to people nationwide. During these years, many journalistic nishiki-e were published, and the new Meiji government utilized nishiki-e for educational purposes in the process of building a nation.*

*With the development of photographic technology, however, the role of nishiki-e*

*in visual journalism was replaced by new inventions. Nishiki-e finally disappeared from news reporting at the beginning of the 20th century and became recognized in the artistic world as an object of aesthetic appreciation.*

*The Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship collects nishiki-e depicting new ways of life, changes in society, and economic and industrial scenes from the latter half of the 19th century. The purpose of the collection is to serve as a visual resource for the study of socio-economic life in this era. In addition to collecting and cataloging, we are also undertaking projects making further use of nishiki-e. One example is an image index, a searchable database of index terms and images compiled through selecting, locating and identifying specific items and people.*

*The paper and PowerPoint slide presentation will discuss in more detail the nishiki-e pictures and the Center's projects.*

## 1. Introduction

Woodblock prints from the Edo era were called *ukiyo-e*, because they depicted everyday life, or *ukiyo*. The literary meaning of *ukiyo* is “floating world,” a phrase that may be widely known. While the term *ukiyo-e* reflects to the subjects depicted, the term *nishiki-e* focuses on the use of color in the picture. Woodblock prints were first printed with black ink and developed to full color prints, or *nishiki-e*, in the mid-18th century, particularly during the Meiwa period (1764-1771) under Suzuki Harunobu (1725-1770). This development was based on the evolving economy of craft products and their consumers, a majority of whom were common people, or *chōnin*, including merchants and craftsmen. After a peak in the late 18th century, the first half of the 19th century saw a gradual decline of woodblock prints.

## 2. New Age and Visual Media

For two and a half centuries from the early 1600s until the late 1800s, during the Tokugawa era, Japan followed a foreign policy of seclusion, banning foreign trade and limiting communication with the outside world except for China and the Netherlands through the port of Nagasaki. During the long period of isolation, Japan was generally peaceful, avoiding any major domestic wars. Edo, the capital, (renamed Tokyo in 1868), became the largest city in the world around 1800 with estimated population of one million (compared to 860,000 in London; 900,000 in Beijing; 540,000 in Paris; and 60,000 in New York). In the mid-19th century Japan had developed a well established money economy and even common people could buy cultural commodities like *nishiki-e*. In 1853, when an American fleet arrived in Japan to urge for the opening of Japan’s ports, it was the beginning of a turbulent period for Japan of exposure to modern Western civilization. Change, both rapid and gradual, affected all aspects of Japanese society.

Because modern Western civilization, both material culture and the spirit of modernization, flooded into Japan in the last half of the 19th century, Japan was forced to face unstableness, anxiety, change, and new things. It is easy to imagine that there was a strong demand for the news media to distribute images of unfamiliar and foreign things or events. At that time, Hiroshige (1797-1858), a famous woodblock print artist, and others were active. Responding to the demand, *nishiki-e* depicting *ukiyo* played an important role in reporting and disseminating novelties to people nationwide.

In 1868 the Tokugawa regime collapsed and the Meiji government was established. During the first two decades of the Meiji era, many journalistic *nishiki-e* were published and the Meiji government utilized *nishiki-e* for educational purposes in the process of building a new nation. With the development of photographic technology, however, the role of *nishiki-e* in visual journalism was replaced by new inventions. *Nishiki-e* finally disappeared from news reporting at the end of Meiji and became recognized in the artistic world as an object of appreciation.

### 3. The *Nishiki-e* Publishing System

Plate 1 is “Making *Nishiki-e* in Tokyo” (*Tokyo Nishiki-e Seizō no Zu*), one of the prints in the Greater Japan Products series (*Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* series). You can see various people working at many different tasks in the picture. However, it only shows the printing process.

Before the printing process, artists, or *gakō*, drew original pictures, and carvers, or *horishi*, engraved the blocks. In order to create one color print, one block per color was engraved and then pressed on the sheet of paper. It is said that usually about 200 copies of one picture were printed with each set of blocks, for woodblocks would become worn by and later prints did not gain sharpness.

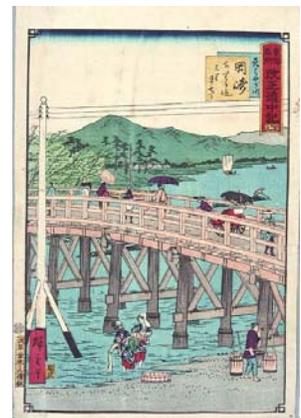
In order to publish *nishiki-e* one had to organize these craftsmen and artists. The publisher needed capital to commercialize his venture and, eventually, *chihon nishiki-e don'ya*, commercial capitalist publishers of *nishiki-e*, emerged. At that time, commerce was institutionalized in *kabu nakama*, or stock-holder associations. Publishing was authorized with voluntary censorship by officers (*gyōji*) of the association. After the *kabu nakama* system was abolished in 1841 (Tenpo 12), *e-nanushi*, a government official responsible for pictures, was placed in charge of censorship and permission for publishing. This continued until censorship for publications was transferred to the Home Ministry, or Naimusho, in September, 1875 (Meiji 8). Retailing of publications was not restricted. Since there was a publishing system with censorship in place, publishing information such as names and dates was printed on the *nishiki-e*.



[Plate 1] “Tokyo *Nishiki-e* Seizō no Zu” (Making *Nishiki-e* in Tokyo), *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue*

### 4. Subjects and Use of *Nishiki-e* in the Latter Half of the 19th Century

Numerous subjects were depicted in *nishiki-e* during the latter half of the 19th century. So-called Yokohama-e portrayed scenes of the newly opened port, such as Westerners, Western buildings, street scenes, etc. Since Yokohama was a port newly opened to the West, it was symbolic of new and foreign culture. Buildings were another group: Western-style buildings, ministry and government buildings such as post offices, hotels, factories, bridges, etc. The third group consisted of newly introduced modern infrastructure, including transportation and communication such as railroads, stations and trains, carriages and horses, *rikisha* (an invention of the late 1860s), iron ships, etc. A particularly interesting symbol is that of electric wires. For example, plate 2, “Okazaki,” a



[Plate 2] “Okazaki,” *Tōkai Meisho Kaisei 53 Eki*

scene from *Tōkai Meisho Kaisei 53 Eki*, (Famous Places in Tōkai: The Revised 53 Stations series), a work from 1876 by Hiroshige III. Including an electric pole and wires as well as a *rikisha* on the bridge, this print represents the new age. Pictures of expositions and fairs comprised another group. In order to promote civilization and develop modern industries, the Meiji government often held nation-wide expositions and trade fairs. Although participants were limited to people from within Japan, holding expositions was something the Meiji government had learned from experiences in participating in international expositions in major cities of the world. Manners and customs were also the subject of prints; new fashions in hair styles, Western-style dresses, clocks, lamps, furniture, popular tourist attraction, etc. Events and news were also an important theme; wars, fires, earthquakes, the first meeting of parliament, etc. The range of subject depicted in *nishiki-e* was so wide and so varied that the history of the latter half of the 19th century can be seen in *nishiki-e*.

In the latter half of the 19th century, *nishiki-e* had practical purposes; the Ministry of Education used *nishiki-e* as teaching materials, early newspapers were published with pictures in *nishiki-e*, and *nishiki-e* were also used as toys, advertisement, maps, and other visual materials as well. There were no letterpresses, lithographs or photographic technology available for publishing at the time. *Nishiki-e* was the major visual media of the time.

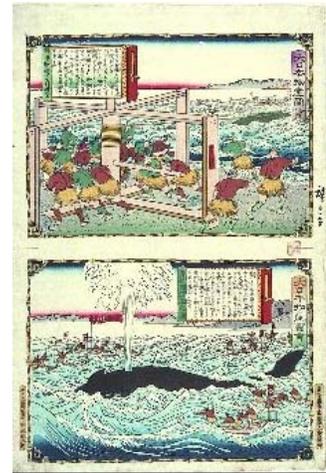
##### **5. The *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue*, the Greater Japan Products series**

The Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship collects *nishiki-e* depicting new ways of life, changes in society, and economic and industrial scenes from the latter half of the 19th century. The purpose of the collection is to serve as a visual resource for the study of socio-economic life in this era. In addition to collecting and cataloging, we are also undertaking projects making further use of *nishiki-e*. One example is an image index; a searchable database of indexed terms and images compiled through selecting, locating and identifying specific items and people.

One of the core prints for this venture is a series entitled the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* (The Greater Japan Products). The following is a closer look at the series, the artist and the publisher.

### 5.1. The Publication

The *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* was published on August 10, 1877. Andō Tokubei was the artist, or *gakō*, and the publisher was Ōkura Magobei. As shown in plate 3, a pair of prints showing regional scenes were printed on large-sized sheet called *ō-nishiki* (approximately A3 size), then they were cut and bound in flat or two-folded book form. Each picture was about 17 x 24 centimeters. An advertisement included at the end of one bound book says “*Dai Nippon Bussan Zue, orihon zen 6 satsu*,” namely that there were 6 books in the series. I have seen some of the bound books, but none of them include the same pictures in the same order; it seems that there was no fixed collection for binding. Higuchi Hiromu, a collector of 19th-century *nishiki-e*, wrote in 1943 that there were 60 pairs, namely 120 pictures, in the series. But so far we only know the 118 pictures included in Richard Lane’s 1990 article in *Kikan Ukiyo-e*.

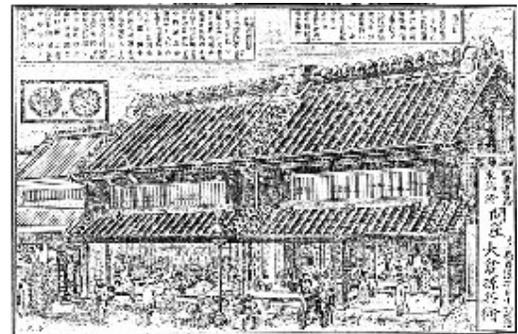


[Plate 3] “Iki no kuni,”  
*Dai Nippon Bussan Zue*

The timing of publication, August 10, 1877, may suggest the purpose of publication. On August 21 of 1877, the first National Industrial Exposition (*Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai*), opened at Ueno Park, lasting until November. The prints were probably published on the occasion of this big event. There is no evidence that the prints were sold on the site of the exposition, like today’s museum shops, however, the publisher’s bookstore in Nihonbashi was not too far from the fairground.

### 5.2. Ōkura Magobei, Publisher

The publisher of the series is recorded as “*Shuppan-nin Nihonbashi tōri 1-chome 19 banchi Ōkura Magobei*.” Ōkura Magobei (1843-1921) was born the son of a bookstore owner, and succeeded to the family’s business. In 1863, when he was selling woodblock prints in Yokohama, he met Morimura Ichizaemon, a famous Meiji businessman. Magobei moved to Nihonbashi before the Meiji Restoration (1868) and opened a bookstore. In a directory of commerce from 1880 he was listed as *shoshi*—a bookstore rather than a *nishiki-e* publisher. As today, bookstores in those days were often also publishers. Plate 4 shows the bookstore in Nihonbashi in Meiji 18 (1885). In the upper part of this image are two lists of publications Magobei dealt with, with the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* listed first. At the center of his shop front, there was a big sign for the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue*. As a publisher Magobei was prolific in news *nishiki-e*; reporting events, wars, etc. He also published regular books such as novels, guidebooks, sample books, playing cards (*karuta*), *sugoroku* (Japanese Parcheesi), etc.



[Plate 4] Ōkura Magobei’s store in Tokyo  
*Shōokō Hakuran-e*



[Plate 5] Ōkura Magobei from  
*Seitō Ōkoku o Kizuuta Chichi to Ko*

Morimura Ichizaemon became a life-long business partner and Magobei greatly contributed to producing fine Chinaware for export, particularly for Morimura's Noritake Chinaware Company. In 1889 Magobei established a paper manufacturing company now the Nippon Paper Company, he later founded Nihon Tōki ceramics manufacturing, Nihon Gaishi insulators, and many others. Magobei was in his 30s when he published the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* and his later life is very interesting in terms of the economic history of the late 19th to the early 20th centuries, but we are not going any further here.

### 5.3. Hiroshige III, Artist

The *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* was drawn by Andō Tokubei in Ogamachi 4 near Kyobashi. It is said that he was probably born in 1842 in Fukagawa in the Eastern part of Edo and that he died in 1894. His father was a carpenter, but he was adopted by the owner of a restaurant. Tokubei became acquainted with Utagawa Hiroshige (I). He is thought to be the last disciple of Hiroshige, before the latter's death in 1858. Tokubei married Tatsu, the daughter of Hiroshige, was given the family name Andō. It is complicated in that there was a Hiroshige II, who was a former husband of Tatsu, and that Tokubei was also himself named Hiroshige II for some time after his marriage. He is now called Hiroshige III, in order to avoid confusion.

He was most prolific for a decade and a half from the mid 1860s. He drew many series of pictures just like his master, who created the famous Tōkaidō series. One of Tokubei's series is "Famous Places in Tōkai: The Revised 53 Stations," (*Tōkai Meisho Kaisei 53 Eki*) of 1876 [Plate 2], in which he often drew electric wires and/or *rikisha* in order to show the new and modern. He also left many so-called *kaika-e*, [Plate 6 is an example] depicting Western-style buildings and scenes.



[Plate 6] "Thriving Commercial Houses of Foreign Countries in Yokohama." Artist: Hiroshige III. 1870

### 5.4. The Pictures

As mentioned earlier, so far 118 pictures of the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* are known. Although Higuchi wrote that there were 120, he didn't leave a definite list. In the series two pictures are devoted to each region, or old "kuni," except the Iyo region, which has four pictures.

Plate 7 is entitled "Shipping Ice from Hakodate" (*Hokkaido Hakodate Koori Yushutsu no Zu*). Each print has a brief explanation, *san*, in a box within the picture. The explanation in plate 7 reads:



[Plate 7] "Shipping Ice from Hakodate"

In the middle of winter when it is colder, ice in the moat of Goryōkaku in

Hokkaido is sawed into cubes of about 20 kan (75 kg); two of them are loaded on a sleigh and carried to the port of Hakodate, where they are packed in a box with sawdust and shipped to Yokohama, Tokyo, and other foreign places before being put in a freezer. In summer they are pulled out and sold.

People depicted here wear Western-style garments, shoes, and hats. It is known that production and transportation of natural water ice succeeded in 1869 for the first time.

Plate 8 is “Making Steamed Flat-fish in Wakasa” (*Mushikare seizō no zu*). The explanation says:

Flat-fish are soaked in salted water for a night after being caught. Place them on sand when half done, cover them with straw mats and steam with warm air. Join two each at the tail by string and dry them. Ship many of them to the Western capital. Small sea breams caught by longline fishing are steamed with salt before being shipped off. These flat-fish and small sea breams are the best among salt-steamed fish.

Plate 9 is “Iron Works in Etchu” (*Etchū no kuni tetsumono zaiku no zu*). The explanation says:

Ironwork is produced in Kametani village in Shinkawa county. Workmen melt and forge iron to make *hibachi*, or brazier, iron kettles, hoes, sickles, etc. Buddhist altar fittings and other works produced in Takaoka are particularly good in quality, with fine carved decorations of birds, animals, and flowers. Among them, vases exhibited at the National Industrial Exposition were outstandingly exquisite and received awards.

These pictures show industrial scenes such as harvesting natural resources, processing crafts, shipping products, etc. in certain regions or countries, and hence depicting local industry. In the history of Japanese drawings particularly for practical use, there were various genres of pictures: *Meisho-e* described famous places such as temples, sight-seeing spots, etc.; *shokunin-e* depicted various professionals and how to make things; *bussan-e* were like pictorial encyclopedia for products; and *hakubutsu-e* were of things. The *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* is a combination of these genres of picture. By presenting images of most regions in Japan systematically with respective local industries, products, and working people, it suggested the variety as well as commonality of the developing nation.

The *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* was very popular as the conditions of remaining copies suggest; worn-out page edges show they were turned many times. The copies were not preserved but were read and re-read and might have been circulated from hand to hand. Although there is no way to know how many copies of one picture were printed, it can be surmised that the number was greater than the usual print. Some



[Plate 8] “Making Steamed Flat-fish in Wakasa”



[Plate 9] “Iron Works in Etchu”

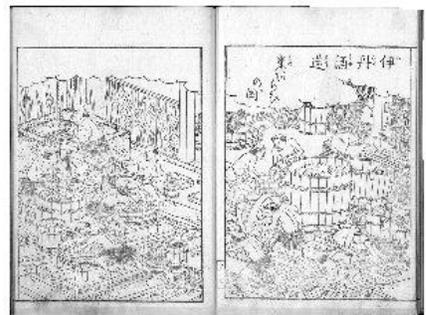
copies with lines more blurred than pictures of other titles suggest the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* might have been printed by worn-out blocks.

### 5.5. Borrowing

The pictures are of all regions of Japan from North to South. Had the artist traveled to each place? The answer to this question is likely no because we can see some pictures of the series are “borrowed” from other pictures, a practice known as *shakuyō*. Plate 10 “Sake-brewing at Itami, Settsu” from the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* series is very much like plate 11, “Itami Brewery, Washing Rice,” from *Nihon Sankai Meisan Zue* (Famous Sea and Land Products in Japan, first published in 1799) in design.



[Plate 10] “Sake-brewing at Itami, Settsu,” *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue*



[Plate 11] Itami Brewery, washing rice, *Nihon Sankai Meisan Zue*

Some pictures were taken from *Nihon Sankai Meisan Zue*, and others were from *Kii Meisho Zue* (Famous Places in the Kii Region) of the mid 19th century. There might exist other “originals” upon which pictures in the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* were based as there were many other regional “famous places series.”

Even the explanations in the pictures were borrowed. The explanation for plate 12, “Watermelon field in Shimōsa,” is: “Watermelons are creepers in the field, particularly rich in Katsushika and Chiba, and the fruit is like a big white gourd, but outside of this is dark green and inside is red, while some are white outside and yellow inside. They are sweet and cool down fever.” On the other hand, *Nihon Chishiryaku Bussankai* (A Guide to Local Geography and Products in Japan) published in 1876, one year prior to the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* says:



[Plate 12] “Watermelon field in Shimōsa”

Watermelon: Products of Shimōsa. Produced in some places in both Katsushika and Chiba regions. A creeper grown in the field, size of fruit is like a wax gourd. Ripen in July and August. Outside is dark green and inside is red; some of them,

of which outside is pale green and inside is red, are called white water melon. Its nature is cool, and it cools down fever. Has sweet taste.

The two examples are almost identical. There is a possibility that an earlier source of information may have existed before the *Nihon Chishi Ryaku Bussankai*, the Guide.

That the pictures in the series are not necessarily original may cause concern to some people. If you remember, however, that there is a long and rich tradition of borrowing in Japanese literature, like the practice of *honka-dori* (writing a new verse/poem while taking some parts from others) for example, we can understand the lack of perfect originality from other angles. We can say that the accumulation of knowledge is represented here.

Regarding the accuracy of the pictures, this series might have used old designs because local industries had not changed much for decades until the early Meiji period in comparison to the immense change in regime and political system. Or, at least it can be said that the images provided here represent common knowledge of the time on regional industry and products. At any rate, the pictures were popular and gave people images of local industrial scenes, even if conventional or imaginary, in the age of “national industrial expositions.”

## **6. Creating Visual Resources for the Study of Socio-Economic Life in the 19th Century**

We at the Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship are working on creating resources for the study of socio-economic life in the 19th century from *nishiki-e* including the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue*. Although some museums and libraries have industrial *nishiki-e*, they usually pick up themes only related to their own focus: a prefectural museum or a subject museum like a textile museum, for example, collects *nishiki-e* only related to their specialty, namely locality or subject. The center’s scope for *nishiki-e* collection is thus wider than most libraries/museums. Creating informational resources for socio-economic life in the 19th century from *nishiki-e* is a unique project. There is no union list of *nishiki-e* from the period yet.

The explanations given in the pictures are a resource for studying local industry. Text data taken from the pictures are made into a database. The data may be linked to present-day local industry to study its history. For example, if pictures of the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* were linked through geographical location on a map of Japan, it would become a visual industrial map of the mid-19th century. If photographs of industrial scenes of later periods in the same region could be linked, it would become a visual resource for studying the history of regional industries.

Another methodology for making resources is indexing. For visual resources like *nishiki-e*, we are currently working on compiling an *ebiki*, or image index. Things and people drawn in the picture are selected, identified, and located in the picture; for example, objects in the picture are marked with a number, names of the objects marked are taken from the explanation in the picture, and checked against various reference books and dictionaries. The indexed terms will be put into a database and pictures will be made searchable by word. Plate 13 shows how we are working toward such an index.



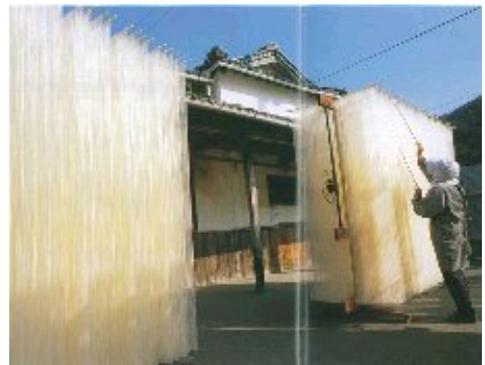
[Plate 13] “Processing Tea at Uji” working for image indexing

Plate 13, “Processing Tea at Uji,” shows the process of making tea along with explanations. This is the Japanese way of making tea. There are Chinese paintings from the 19th century depicting the Chinese way of processing tea. While Chinese paintings do not have explanations in the pictures themselves, comparing Japanese and Chinese tea processing may be an interesting research theme.



[Plate 14] “Making Vermicelli in Noto” working for image indexing

The Resource Center’s *ebiki* image index project is still in an experimental stage. Besides this index and other *nishiki-e* projects, the indexing of published company histories comprises our major field of work at the center. For example, plate 14 is “Making Vermicelli in Noto” in the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* series, and the next photograph [Plate 15] is taken from a company history of Nippon Seifun, a flour milling company, and shows that the old way of making things as depicted in the *Dai Nippon Bussan Zue* is still in use.



## 7. Conclusion

The latter half of the 19th century in Japan was an era of profound changes with the modernization and Westernization stimulated by opening the ports to foreign countries. A collection of

*nishiki-e* is a historical resource that tells many things about people, society, economy, industry, etc. in addition to their artistic value. Not only collecting and describing, but also indexing image and text may be an effective means to make *nishiki-e* valuable as cultural and informational resources.

Furthermore, combining *nishiki-e* with visual resources from later period of time, we may be able to have a better and more complete picture of the socio-economic life of the century and a half since the end of the Edo era until today. These resources for the study of socio-economic life are eventually being formed at the center, and our objective is to provide them to the public, primarily on the Internet.

[Plate 15] Making vermicelli today from  
*History of Nippon Flour Mills Company: 120  
Years of Modern Milling* (2001)

Notes: Images from the collections of the Shibusawa Memorial Museum and the National Institute of Japanese Literature.