

〒283-8555 千葉県東金市求名1番地 Tel: 0475-55-8812 Fax: 0475-55-3265

URL: <https://library.jiu.ac.jp> Mail: library@jiu.ac.jp



Mizuta Museum of Art, a Unique JIU Resource

国際人文学部 Andrew Horvat

In the eight years I spent teaching at JIU, the part of the library that I and my students have benefited from the most has no books, at least none that either I or my students could have read. I am referring to the Mizuta Museum of Art and its world-class collection of Ukiyo-e paintings and prints. The books that are too difficult for all but experts to read are the Edo Period (1600-1868) illustrated guides for travelers printed from wooden blocks, the same way as the multicolored portraits of Kabuki actors and courtesans, views of Mt Fuji, or urban scenes that form the main body of the Museum's collection. Because of the similarity of production of both books and prints -- pulled from carved woodblocks -- book publishing and print production were undertaken by the same craftsmen and marketed by the same merchants. Perhaps that is why the Museum and the library are to be found under the same roof, much the same as in Tokyo's antiquarian district, Jimbocho, where second hand books and Ukiyo-prints are sold in shops next to each other.

Although I am an avid collector of modern Japanese prints, most of what I know about Ukiyo-e prints, I picked up translating explanations the Mizuta Museum's two curators, Horiuchi-san and Yamaguchi-san, provided for my students in my "Traditional Culture," "Modern Japanese History," and "Newspaper Writing" classes which I taught in English to both international and qualifying JIU students. Class tours of the Museum began in the fall of 2014 with a talk on the Edo kimono by Horiuchi-san for the Tradition class. Thanks to Horiuchi-san's explanations students were able to recognize the differences between the highly regulated formal patterns of the kimono worn by aristocratic ladies and the much freer, asymmetrical designs permitted to the women of the rising merchant class. Armed with this information, students could see easily that even though kimono is widely described as a "traditional" costume, mass produced twentieth century kimono catered to the fashion sense of a new class of working women whose tastes demanded ever changing new designs much the same as Western fashion wear.

It was also thanks to an exhibition devoted to the "hanmoto" (版元) that students were able to gain an understanding of the role of Edo Period Ukiyo-e print publishers who functioned much like modern impresarios, locating talented painters (in some cases even providing them free room and board), managing a workshop where carvers produced woodblocks, printers pulled the prints, and shops that sold the final products. If the print was a

portrait of a famous Kabuki actor, the hanmoto impresario would time its release to coincide with the opening of a play in which the actor had a leading role. Speaking of coincidences, one of my graduate students whose thesis touched on the emergence of children's literature in the early 1900s, benefited enormously from a guided tour by Yamaguchi-san of an exhibition in the fall of 2015 titled "The Lifestyle of the Modern Child - 1920-1930" featuring children's book illustrations by famous print artists.

Even during the pandemic in the fall of 2021 Horiuchi-san, Yamaguchi-san and I were able to provide for students in Europe taking JIU courses online, a museum tour of an exhibition of Ukiyo-e screens and prints focusing on the changing seasons in Japanese art by means of a high-tech video camera attached to a PC with an Internet link. Setting up this audio-visual link required multiple rehearsals as well as an investment in a camera with precision auto focus and glare reduction but as a result, students trapped outside Japan could see a seventeenth century screen and ask questions directly from curators willing to stay beyond their working hours so that students eight time zones away could experience virtually a thrill denied them because of pandemic-related travel restrictions. As of March 31, 2022 I will no longer be teaching at JIU but I will never forget the enormous debt that I owe to the Mizuta Museum and its knowledgeable and capable staff. I hope that both international and local students will continue to benefit from the Mizuta Museum's human and artistic resources.

日本語訳はこちら



水田美術館ホームページはこちら



ようこそ水田記念図書館へ！

東金キャンパス

紀尾井町キャンパス

新入生へのおすすめ 100 冊



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新入生、新生活におすすめの本



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◆開館カレンダー◆

- 平日 9:00-20:00
- 土曜日 9:00-17:00
- 短縮開館 9:00-17:00
- 休館

4月							5月						
日	月	火	水	木	金	土	日	月	火	水	木	金	土
					1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	29	30	31				

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