

Column 6: What People in Edo Saw Through “One Hundred Famous Views of Edo”

The series “One Hundred Famous Views of Edo” by Utagawa Hiroshige, who is recognized as a master of Ukiyo-e landscapes, depicts places that were rarely chosen as subjects for paintings. Basically, most of the ukiyo-e prints depicting landscapes of Edo were souvenirs for visitors. However, the subjects of the paintings in the series New Famous Views (IV-56, “Cherry Blossoms on the Banks of the Tamagawa River”) are unfamiliar to visitors, except for those who had been living in Edo for a long time. Furthermore, his ukiyo-e prints featuring motifs (such as Shiba Atagoyama, etc.), which include the history, tradition, and customs of Edo, are also part of the series One Hundred Famous Views of Edo. As a result, it seems that these ukiyo-e prints were created to sell to customers who had been living in Edo for a long time and were interested in the town’s traditions.

Recently, another view has emerged that these ukiyo-e prints were created to pray for Edo’s recovery from the Ansei Edo earthquake, which caused heavy damage to Edo. The series One Hundred Famous Views of Edo was published in February 1856, four months after the earthquake, and at that time, there were still aftereffects. The ukiyo-e prints of the new famous views included in the series featured locations that escaped the earthquake’s damage, and areas that recovered quickly. However, there is nothing in the series that suggests the damage of the earthquake. Accordingly, these ukiyo-e prints may not always depict the real world; instead, they reflect the intentions of various people, including owners, publishers, customers, and painters. People in Edo who saw the ukiyo-e prints in the series One Hundred Famous Views of Edo likely saw a version of Edo as it should be.