

To what extent are the narratives of femininity represented in the medium of print in Japan during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) and Meiji period (1868-1912)?

This discussion will explore the narratives of Japanese femininity during the Tokugawa or Edo period (1603-1868) and how this was portrayed in woodblock print and text. This inquiry was influenced by my interest and research into Japan, which came about due to studies on gendered ideals, and the exploration of Japanese arts, whilst in Material Culture lectures. My aim is to reveal the ideal of the Japanese woman in the Tokugawa period and whether the representations of femininity in print were true. Therefore, correlation between femininity and the medium of print will be explored by examining the actions of women, objects and settings. Conclusions will be drawn by investigating how women are portrayed through print by analysing whether influences, such as the artist and society, have an effect on the representation of femininity.

The time period the discussion will focus on is the Tokugawa or Edo period (1603-1868). The contextual background of the Tokugawa period or Edo (period) will be briefly outlined, as this was a patriarchal, feudal society where women were limited. The genre of art named Ukiyo-e that emerged during the Tokugawa period will be explored, as Ukiyo-e woodblock prints depicted many aspects of Japanese culture including pleasurable activities and beautiful women (Bijinga). Furthermore, the different types of femininity during the Tokugawa period, such as domestic and pleasure, will be explored. The aim is to examine how women were portrayed through the genre of Bijinga and whether they were an illusion constructed by socio/cultural or artist ideals. The discussion will consider whether the Tokugawa prints were based on the artist's own opinion of femininity or if additional influences effected this, such as values. Moreover, femininity is constructed through values of sexuality, which will be explored to show how both domestic and pleasure overlap through Tokugawa representations of beauty. Therefore, the narratives of representations of femininity through print may be an illusion, as they were not based on true aspects. There are also many other influences that construct and affect representations of femininity, such as family, which can lead to the commercialisation and categorisation of women in Tokugawa print. The commercialisation and

categorisation of women through print will be explored, as this explains how women were used as tools to demonstrate Japanese norms and traditional values. Moreover, the theory of the male gaze will also be questioned, as this is a western theory that may not apply to Tokugawa print. While this may seem a valid argument it is not necessary, as the objectification of the male artist and the erotic can be viewed as a Japanese norm of illustrating beauty.

Furthermore, the Meiji period (1868-1912) will be outlined to explain the breakdown of Japanese femininity which was influenced by western society, as this was an era of political, economic and social change. Again the narratives of femininity will be examined, looking at what made a Japanese woman during the Meiji period and how the west began to influence and change Japanese culture.

Women in Tokugawa Japan were constantly changing and the definitions of femininity have varied. In order to understand the narratives of Japanese women in print, the definition of the feminine must be understood. Femininity is associated with passive qualities and emotions, Allen (2007: 220) suggests it is:

1 to do with or like women 2 (in some languages) belonging to the class of words which includes the words referring to women.

The traditional Japanese female is one of the several types of women in Japanese society. Theorist Iwao (1993: 1) states that Japanese femininity is seen by the west as:

The Kimono-clad, bamboo parasol-toting, bowing female walking three paces behind her husband remains the image many Westerners hold of the typical Japanese woman.

This debate attempts to rethink the belief of Japanese women being, according to Iwao (1993, p.1) 'kimono-clad' and 'walking three paces behind her husband.' Therefore the discussion will explore Japanese femininity and how it is represented through print, investigating whether Tokugawa print creates an illusion of Japanese femininity. Many theorists use two periods for a wider understanding of the subject, however, the discussion will focus on the representations of femininity during the Tokugawa period (1603 - 1868) for an in-depth approach. Moreover, the Meiji period (1868 - 1912) will be discussed towards the end of the debate to illustrate the

progression and breakdown of representations of femininity when society and culture change.

The Tokugawa period or the Edo period (1603 - 1868) brought new social change, as the Tokugawa military house headed by the shogun initiated a feudal, patriarchal society. The new military government established domination by constructing a new social order (samurai class, merchant class, artisan class and the peasant class), new military, agricultural growth and new art. During this time Sakoku (Appendix 1) was also put into place which separated Japan from the outside world, therefore only Japanese society could influence Tokugawa culture. At the beginning of this new control, the Japanese people wanted stability after years of uncertainty, therefore artists/authors portrayed traditional themes and styles to restore stability. Subsequently, the new genre of woodblock print flourished, this was named Ukiyo-e which depicted pleasurable activities, warriors, beautiful people and nature. Theorist Epprecht (2013: 7) proposed that:

In Japanese, one uses the term ukiyo-e, “images of the floating world,” as a synonym for woodblock print. David Pollack interprets ukiyo-e as the world of fashion, which for its part, is constantly changing and ephemeral.

This suggests that subjects within ukiyo-e were constantly changing with the Tokugawa socio/cultural influences and styles, as ephemeral suggests that it only lasts for a short period of time. Representations of femininity appeared in the ukiyo-e genre named Bijinga which are prints of beautiful women depicted according to expectations and styles of the Tokugawa period. The theorist Marks (Epprecht, 2013: 12) argues that:

Bijinga are meant to convey the feminine ideal, capturing aspects of beauty, refinement, accomplishments, and romance.

This demonstrates that Tokugawa women were idealised/glamourised in print in order to depict beauty and romance. It may be argued that bijinga was the starting point to how Japanese society began to view women in an idealised way. This was due to the fact that members of society, especially those in the countryside, only had access to images of beautiful women through print. Therefore, bijinga was influenced by the idealised representation of femininity put forward by the artist and political/

cultural expectations of a woman's appearance and behaviour. Tokugawa Woodblock prints were also used to categorise women by depicting them by rank, accomplishment, status or family. Hence, a lack of identity can be seen within Bijinga, as it is the props that give the viewer clues about social positions and individual traits due to the fact that females are depicted according to connoisseurial or beauty expectations of the time. For example, in Hokusai's [*Woman Looking at Herself in a Mirror*](#) (about 1805) depicts a woman looking into a mirror, fixing her hair and coiffure. The viewer's gaze is not on her face, but on her seductive pose, kimono and props which emphasise beauty and luxury. The woman has no individual traits, as her features follow the typical connoisseurial expectations of the Tokugawa period (small eyes and lips) and the luxurious props give clues about her wealth. Moreover, reality and identity may not be shown within Tokugawa print, as artists during this period were not concerned with depicting reality, but creating a luxurious floating world, as a distraction from the uncertainty of real life.

Furthermore, during the Tokugawa period domestic women were one of the two main types of femininity constructed by the political/social influences of the time. Theorist Lindsey (2007: 4) suggests that:

The ideal wife was obedient to her husband and in-laws and used her energy and skills to work toward the economic advancement of the household and her sexuality to produce an heir. This valuation formed fertility values.

This conveys that a domestic woman was expected to be a strong pillar for the family, as she ran a demanding household while being submissive to her husband. Therefore, domestic women were considered to be the matriarch, however, this gender construct depended on class. For example, domestic upper class samurai women faced more restrictions than lower class peasant women. This was due to the fact that samurai women were respectable figures in society who had to follow the feminine ideal to keep their social standing. The restriction and gender construction appeared in Tokugawa woodblock prints, as wealthy domestic samurai women were separated from lower class domestic women through beauty and props. For example, Utamaro's woodblock print [*Young Women Playing with a Young Boy*](#) (1804) depicts a wealthy, young samurai woman interacting with a young child. The woman's upper class status is represented through extravagant kimonos,

which demonstrates that clothes were a tool to show the beauty and status of women in Tokugawa print. Therefore, the kimono was an important aspect of feminine beauty in the samurai class, as this allowed wealthy women to stand out from the rest of society. Hence, not only did the samurai woman have to be a respectable member of society but also represent an idealised beauty. Consequently, the samurai woman was the set model for beauty during the Tokugawa period and other depictions of upper class women, such as the courtesan (pleasure) followed this example. However, courtesan women were also restricted by their beauty and social standing in the pleasure district. Furthermore, many upper class women depicted in bijinga were shown to be taking their time to beautify themselves. This was not depicted in western print of wealthy women during this time, as the viewer is only allowed to see the completion of beauty. Hence, this process of getting ready demonstrates Tokugawa Japan's cultural representations of beauty and wealth. On the other hand, Tokugawa peasant class women to some extent had more freedoms, for example, peasant women worked in the fields and could participate in the arts. However, lower class domestic women were still respectable and had to conform to male authority, such as fathers. Moreover, even though lower class domestic women were not depicted in bijinga, Tokugawa society approved and affirmed domestic feminine values through Confucian ideology and educational texts such as *The Great Learning for Women (Onna Daigaku)* by Kaibara Ekken (1672). Educational texts described feminine knowledge and practice which gave families the opportunity to educate their daughters on elite samurai female values, health and home. For instance, Ekken (1672) states that a woman must have self-control, obey male authority, avoid extravagance, aid economic progression of the household, produce an heir and perform set tasks which included: sewing, cooking, laundry sweeping, raising children (not education, as Confucians believe that a mother will spoil a child) and to stay at home (Davis, 2007: 172.) Therefore, narratives of Japanese femininity were represented through texts, as guidebooks were practical advice for women that conceptualised and set roles, which supported the functioning of Japanese society. This shows that Tokugawa print was used to control women and their behaviour, as Davis (2007: 173) proposed that:

These kind of social controls put into place a rigid code of behaviour and strictly defined the wife as the reproductive unit of the household.

This demonstrates that texts that aimed to shape Japanese femininity were influenced by social controls, such as the gender expectations created by the patriarchal regime and society. Hence, texts written by male authors, such as *The Great Learning for Women (Onna Daigaku)* confirms how much of the feminine (mind and body) were objects of patriarchal authority and control. Tokugawa guidebooks demonstrate the power of male authority over the representations of femininity, as male authors could influence women on idealised life choices, which educate women to protect morals and the order of society.

Moreover, pleasure was another type of femininity constructed by Tokugawa society that conformed to different expectations and was opposite to the domestic values put forward by Confucian ideology. Theorist Lindsey (2007: 4) states that:

The ideal courtesan was sophisticated and spirited, an expert at pretending to love many men while loving none, and offered her sexuality for the economic advancement of the bordello holding her contract. This valuation constituted pleasure values.

This conveys that a courtesan's main role was to use her sexuality to help the economic advancement of the brothel, not to marry a man. Furthermore, pleasure was a part of Tokugawa society and there were different ranks of prostitutes. The highest ranking prostitute was the courtesan and the lowest being [*Moatside Prostitute*](#) (1794-5) and [*"Gun" Prostitute*](#) (1794-5). Pleasure women were confined to districts, such as Yoshiwara and the creation of social spaces suggests the political control of activities. However, beneath the glamour of the ukiyo-e and the pleasure districts was disease, abortions and death, especially with the lowest ranking prostitutes. The high ranking courtesan was the most beautiful, educated and fashionable, but ultimately an object of male desire. Moreover, courtesans came to represent the ideal beauty in Tokugawa woodblock print, as theorist Davis (2007: 69) suggests that:

Gradually, images of high-ranking yūjo came to represent the ideal for the cultural terms of beauty.

This was due to the fact that courtesans (yūjo) were seen to be elegant, fashionable women and their beauty was idealised by Tokugawa society/culture. However, it can

be argued that the courtesan was based on the upper class samurai women who were also depicted as beautiful in print. This puts forward the argument that it was the rich/upper class of Japanese society that represented femininity. However, the artist can also be seen to influence the depictions of these women, as courtesans appear more extravagant with different style kimonos and obi to represent their positions in society. This is shown within the print [Segawa with Sasano and Takeno of the Matsubaya Brothel House \(Matsubaya Segawa\) Model for Fashion: New Designs as Fresh as Young Leaves \(Hinagata wakana no hatsu moyô\)](#) (Kiyonaga, 1782.) The depictions by the artist's within print overlap, therefore samurai and courtesan women look extremely similar, as they both represent the ideal beauty of the Tokugawa period. Subsequently, courtesans were an accepted role in Japanese society and were therefore included in bijinga during the Tokugawa period. For example, the set of woodblock prints, Twelve Hours in Yoshiwara (Utamaro, c. 1794-5) depicts twelve hours of a courtesan's day. This set of prints peer into the private lives of the courtesans, to give the viewer a closer glimpse of these women. For example, [The Hour of the Snake from the set 'Twelve Hours in Yoshiwara'](#) (Utamaro, c.1794-5) was designed by the artist to be an observed private moment, as Utamaro depicts a courtesan slightly uncovered after a bath. Ultimately, *The Hour of the Snake* (Utamaro, c.1794-5) appears intimate and erotic, however, this was not the case, as these sensuous images were a norm in Japanese society, as they represented femininity and beauty. Many of these courtesans would have appeared exotic and unusual to outsiders (in the countryside), therefore prints, such as Twelve Hours in Yoshiwara (Utamaro, c.1794-5) gave others access to beauty and fashion. Theorists, such as Davis (2007, p.125) argues that this was serving the male gaze, objectifying and dominating this set of prints. However, the western theory of the male gaze holds the prints in a too negative light, as it can be argued that the male artist was conforming to Tokugawa Japanese norms and expectations. Courtesans were seen as a cultural representation of feminine beauty, as they were depicted in the latest fashions. For example, [The Hour of the Monkey from the set 'Twelve Hours in Yoshiwara'](#) (Utamaro, c.1794-5) depicts the courtesan (yujo) in the latest layered kimonos which can also be seen viewed as extravagant. This ultra-femininity was popular in bijinga, as it demonstrated luxury which was a large theme of the Tokugawa period. Therefore, clothes/fashion, such as the kimono was viewed

as a sign of beauty in bijinga. Similar to samurai women, the courtesans were depicted during the process of beautifying themselves. For instance, [*The Hour of the Horse from the set Twelve Hours in Yoshiwara*](#) (Utamaro, c.1794-5) depicts courtesan women sitting in front of a mirror fixing their hair. This shows that props, such as mirrors were used as tools to represent femininity and beauty. The woodblock print *The Hour of the Horse* (Utamaro, c.1794-5) suggests that courtesan beauties appeared pleasurable and above status, as the courtesans had time to get ready for clients. This representation of the courtesan in *The Hour of the Horse* (Utamaro, c.1794-5) mirrors the depiction of the print *Woman Looking at Herself in a Mirror* (Hokusai, 1805) demonstrating that courtesan women may have been the base model for Tokugawa beauty. Ultimately, Tokugawa Japanese prints can be viewed as the art of beauty, as there are many depictions, such as the process of getting ready which represent the norm of Tokugawa Japanese feminine beauty.

Moreover, women in Tokugawa Japanese print were represented as aesthetic objects of beauty. According to theorist Szostak (Epprecht, 2013: 19):

Kobayashi Tadashi notes, "We are not shown the uniquely individualised features of particular women in these pictures. Rather, these compositions depict the idealized and appreciated qualities associated with connoisseurial expectations." These expectations could be quite strict, a fact affirmed in the *Hidensho* (Secret Teachings) a seventeenth century guidebook to Kyoto's pleasure quarters.

This shows that femininity was idealised, with no individual traits or expressions and that beauty is the typical aspect of woodblock print which represents the female. This was shown in the Tokugawa period, as women were used as tools to depict an idealised femininity, showing the beauty and Japanese traditions through prints, such as [*Fan Dancer, Country Maiden Autumn Dancer, and Full Moon Blossom – Geisha Dancers from the Niwaka Festival*](#) (Utamaro, ca.1790). Arguably Tokugawa artists, such as Kitagawa Utamaro also affected female individuality through his personal expressions and style. This was due to the fact that Utamaro mainly focused on upper class domestic women and courtesans, overlapping the two values which made them appear similar in style. Hence, this demonstrates that an artist's style/ expression conveys an ideal femininity and leaves no room to show the individuality

of the female. However, Japanese culture believed that self should not be shown on the outside through expression, but on the inside. Therefore, the artist may be demonstrating this belief through generic beautiful faces. Szostak (Epprecht, 2013: 19) argues that during the Tokugawa period, there would have been set qualities or connoisseurial expectations to represent features, such as small eyes and pale skin. Therefore, an illusion of femininity was created in Japanese print, as the artists were depicting women based on idealised qualities and social expectations.

Furthermore, representations of femininity in Japanese woodblock prints were depicted by the artists as an illusion based on the political/cultural influences of the Tokugawa period. Theorist Biswas (2011: 145) suggested that:

Ukiyo-e prints were not just passive records of the passing urbane scene but active agents for creating and reinforcing popular cultural values.

This demonstrates that print was used as a method to show cultural expectations of the Tokugawa period. Therefore, the narratives of Japanese femininity came to represent different aspects and values. For example, luxury and pleasure were the main cultural themes in Tokugawa Japanese society. Consequently, subjects, such as courtesans and samurai women were depicted within ukiyo-e, as they represented the ideal luxury and beauty. Moreover, artists during the Tokugawa period portrayed women in the same light as courtesans and samurai women, as they were models of feminine beauty. This illusion is shown in the woodblock print [*Women Making Top Quality White Sake*](#) (Toyokuni, ca.1795-1801) which depicts four women making sake to serve to the man waiting. Furthermore, it was a Japanese tradition to portray individuals working in woodblock print, however, in the culture of the floating world (ukiyo-e), it was popular to substitute men for sophisticated beauties. The women are depicted by the artist as graceful and statuesque, making them idealised beauties of the time. This suggests that artists, such as Utagawa Toyokuni used *bijinga* to create an illusion, as socio/political influences did not want to depict the reality of Tokugawa life. However, the artist Utagawa Toyokuni goes against other artists during the Tokugawa period, such as Kitagawa Utamaro, as Toyokuni depicts working *Women Making Top Quality White Sake* (Toyokuni, ca. 1795-1801), not high status women which are typically shown beautifying themselves. Although the print is apparently imaginary, women's involvement in work

and family occupations was possible in the peasant and merchant classes, as limitations only existed for women in the Samurai class. Subsequently, the artist was depicting a different view of Japanese femininity and beauty, as the print may have demonstrated femininity outside traditionally passive conceptualisations of beauty that existed in Tokugawa prints. Therefore, an illusion was taking place in Tokugawa print, as it can be argued that domestic women were strong individuals, as Theorist Iwao (1993: 4) suggested they were 'backstage shapers.' Moreover, a domestic woman's main role was to manage the household, hence, Japanese women believed this role gave them strength and equality. This was due to the fact that household management was an important role for the domestic matriarch, as during the Tokugawa period the family system and the home were part of the main structures of society. However, the ideal woman in Tokugawa Japanese print was beautiful and fashionable. Consequently, many artists, such as Kitagawa Utamaro depicted samurai and courtesan women, as they were embodiments of feminine beauty. Although an illusion would have been created in Tokugawa woodblock prints, as the idealised expectations of women were depicted in prints, not strong individuals. Therefore, the illusions and expectations of beauty created by socio/political influences and artists, are a norm in Tokugawa print and influenced the narratives of femininity.

The construction of feminine types by political, social and cultural processes, were influenced by values and rituals. This would affect the depiction of femininity, as theorist Lindsey (2007: 3) suggests that:

Wives and courtesans lived under, if not always by, distinct and idealized values concerning the purpose of their sexuality. A courtesan's sexuality was valued as a type of play to serve the sensual pleasures of clients; a wife's sexuality, while valued for the mutual pleasure it gave her and her husband, was also marked in the early years of a young woman's marriage by hopes of a purposeful fertility to provide an heir for the household.

This conveys that domestic and courtesan women were shaped by distinct values which were mainly sexuality. Fertility values are associated with the domestic matriarch, as she was expected to use her sexuality to produce an heir to ensure the progression of the household. Furthermore, pleasure values are associated with the

courtesan, as she used her sexuality to satisfy clients which supported the brothel. These values and rituals distinguished roles and categorised feminine types in Tokugawa Japan, for instance, a mother could not be sexual and a courtesan could not marry and produce an heir (although she could once retired). However, even though they were separate gender constructs/values, the samurai women (fertility values) was seen as the ideal feminine beauty in Tokugawa print, along with the courtesan (pleasure values.) This suggests that it was the wealthy/upper class of Japanese society that represented femininity in Tokugawa print. However, it can be argued that Tokugawa samurai women made the representation of aesthetic beauty a daily norm. For example, the woodblock print [*Woman Nursing a Baby under a Mosquito Net*](#) (Utamaro, c.1794-5) depicts a beautiful and sensuous domestic woman with a child which keeps to the illusion of pleasure. The woman, similar to many others is depicted with a boy which suggests that the male authority was present in the household. Although some prints do depict girls with mothers, for example, [*Two Beauties. One Holding a Pipe, the Other a Round Fan*](#) (Utamaro, ca. 1797), the majority depict them as assistants to courtesans in prints, such as [*Segawa with Sasano and Takeno of the Matsubaya Brothel House Model for Fashion: New Designs as Fresh as Young Leaves*](#) (Kiyonaga, 1782). Utamaro's *Woman Nursing a Baby under a Mosquito Net* (c.1794-5) is a domestic woman, although she is depicted by Utamaro in the same style as a courtesan. Therefore, this construct by Utamaro goes against gender values, as a domestic woman, especially samurai women could not be sexual. Hence, depicting the female in a similar light to the courtesan demonstrates how two values overlap to show idealised representations in Tokugawa print. Some individuals lived outside gender expectations, such as nuns (celibacy) and geishas. Although geishas did entertain for pleasure through dance and music, they did not share the same pleasure values (sexuality) as courtesans. Moreover, by giving women limited roles that distinguish femininity would preserve Tokugawa patriarchal authority and expectations of women in society.

On the other hand, Tokugawa femininity, gender constructs and roles were centred and shaped around the family system. Theorist Yonemoto (2016: 9) argues that:

The family is far more than a site or setting; if we are to under-stand anything about the complexity of women's roles in the early mod-ern period, we must

begin with the family and its structure, for the family was the single most important institution shaping the life of any person in early modern Japan.

This illustrates that a woman's position in society was established by family, as Japanese individuals lived and worked in the family unit. For example, domestic women were valued as wives, workers and daughters-in-law, not mothers, as household management came before childbirth. Even though an heir was important to keep the household going, children could be adopted. Moreover, other domestic women, such as teahouse girls shown in the print [*Osen of the Kagiya Teahouse*](#) (Bunchō, ca.1772-1781) supported the advancement of the household by working in the family business and using their beauty for advertisement. Pleasure women's roles were also determined by the family; as young girls were sold by poor families so that they received money to support the household. Ultimately gender constructs and roles were decided on by the family, as they supported the economic survival of the household.

Furthermore, woodblock prints commercialised femininity, using beauty as a means to advertise businesses, such as teahouses and brothels. According to Davis (2007: 104):

Bijinga and period guidebooks promoted selected women of Edo as representative beauties of the city. Many were associated with trades or shops, and it seems likely that these pictures, like the images of Yoshiwara yūjo, served as advertisements.

This idea conveys that women were commercialised and used in print as representatives of beauty. Through advertisement, these women were turned into objects of transaction, as they were used as tools to sell the business. For example, [*Takashima Ohisa*](#) (Utamarō, ca. 1790-1791) is a print advertising the Takashimaya teahouse. The woman in the print is Ohisa, a dominant beauty during the Tokugawa period and part of the merchant class. Ohisa worked in her father's teahouse as a waitress which is symbolised by her apron and the crest of the teahouse on her fan. Women of the merchant class were expected to work to aid the family business, which was important for the stability of the household. Subsequently, Epprecht (2013: 111) argues that the value of a teahouse waitress (similar to a geisha) was in her ability to attract customers through her beauty and elegance. Therefore, the

representation of femininity in Tokugawa print was commercialised, as feminine beauty was used as a method to advertise Tokugawa businesses. Therefore, it can be argued that it was not just woodblock prints of upper class samurai and courtesan women that show beauty, but advertisements depicting other domestic women, for example, teahouse waitresses *Takashima Ohisa* (Utamaro, ca. 1790-1791). Furthermore, commercialised prints would influence the views of society and put forward an idealised female, as beauty was an accepted representation of Tokugawa femininity.

Moreover, Tokugawa Japanese femininity was categorised and constructed according to socio/cultural expectations of women. Woodblock print was used as a method to demonstrate the categorisation in Tokugawa society, as Davis (2007: 70) suggests that:

Sheet prints, illustrated books, guidebooks and stylebooks collaborated in the construction of a veritable catalogue of women from nearly all walks of life; these materials were part of a discourse that had long employed the female body as a vehicle for other associations. These precedents and contemporary bijinga were part of a long-running theme in commercial imagery.

This affirms that Tokugawa print was a construct of visual representations of the expectations and categorisations of femininity. Moreover, it was important to Tokugawa culture to be able to distinguish individuals from particular groups. For example, samurai class, shown in the print [*Walking with a Parasol from the series Ten Classes Physiognomies of Women*](#) (Utamaro, 1792-3) were distinguished from the merchant class teahouse girls, shown in the print *Takashima Ohisa* (Utamaro, ca. 1790-1791) and domestic women, shown in the print [*Women Sewing*](#) (Utamaro, c. 1795-6) were distinguished from courtesans, shown in the print [*Somenosuke of the Matsubaya Brothel House – Models for Fashion: New Designs as Fresh as Young Leaves*](#) (Koryûsai, ca. 1778). There are subtle differences in these women, for instance, the samurai woman wore a fashionable, appropriate kimono and a hat which illustrated her samurai status, shown in the print [*Walking with a Parasol from the series Ten Classes Physiognomies of Women*](#) (Utamaro, 1792-3). However, a teahouse girl wore an apron over her kimono to represent that she was a merchant class waitress, shown in the print *Takashima Ohisa* (Utamaro, ca. 1790-1791). This

can be viewed as social categorisation where individuals were placed into groups according to their similarities. Categorisation was even more important in pleasure districts, such as Yoshiwara, as it was necessary to be able to distinguish the ranks of pleasure women. Artists, such as Utamaro took advantage of categorisation and produced woodblock prints that depicted Tokugawa ranks of pleasure women in pleasure districts. For example, the set of prints *The Five Colours of Ink from the Northern Country* (Utamaro, 1794-5) depicts five ranks of pleasure women, these include [*Highest Ranking Courtesan*](#) (Utamaro, 1794-5), [*Geigi*](#) (Utamaro, 1794-5), *Short-term Prostitute* (Utamaro, 1794-5), *Moatside Prostitute* (Utamaro, 1794-5) and “*Gun*” *Prostitute* (Utamaro, 1794-5). There are subtle differences in *The Five Colours of Ink from the Northern Country* (Utamaro, 1794-5), for instance, the *Geiki* (Utamaro, 1794-5) wears the appropriate kimono and her hands are positioned to show that she is trained in dance. The *Short-term Prostitute* (Utamaro, 1794-5) does not have neat and stylish hair, as her hair pins are loosely placed and her different style kimono was not as fashionable as the Geisha in the print [*Young Geisha with a Shamisen*](#) (Utamaro, 1800). By portraying pleasure women in this light, demonstrates that they were categorised into objects of transaction and commercialisation for the purpose of the male. Moreover, the categorisation of femininity in the Tokugawa period was represented through physiognomies of women. According to Allen (2007: 437), physiognomies are the judgments of character or personalities from ‘the features of a person’s face.’ An example of physiognomies is the series of woodblock prints *Ten Physiognomic Studies of Women* (Utamaro, 1792-3.) These three quarter woodblock prints are made to appear as though they are from the artist’s observation, however, Davis (2007: 63) argues that:

While Utamaro’s pictures appeared as though they were based upon his observations, like the creatures shown in the *Insect Book*, they were in fact derived from established classifications of types.

This demonstrates that Utamaro’s Physiognomic prints were based upon classification types and expectations of woman established from educational texts, such as *The Great Learning for Women (Onna Daigaku)* (1672), which were used to preserve order and morals. For example, the two prints [*Woman Holding a Fan from the series Ten Physiognomic Studies of Women*](#) (Utamaro, 1792-3) and [*The*](#)

Engaging Type from the series Ten Physiognomic Studies of Women (Utamaro, 1792-3) depicts a woman holding a fan and the other a mirror. This demonstrates that props were used to give clues about the women, in addition to the moral, passive and beautiful female qualities expected in Tokugawa print. Subsequently, the women's actions or title in the physiognomic woodblock prints give clues about their categorisation. For instance, the print *Counting on her Fingers from the series Ten Physiognomic Studies of Women* (Utamaro, 1792-3) depicts a domestic woman counting her fingers. This conveys that she was from the merchant class, as women were educated to work in the family business. This demonstrates that there are no individual qualities, as the women are turned into objects, categorised by aspects, such as status. Therefore, categorisation creates a false representation of femininity, as it does not show the individual characteristics, but what is idealised by the artist and Tokugawa society/culture. Moreover, it is argued by the theorist Davis (2007: 97) that the artist Kitagawa Utamaro based the women's features and expressions in the *Ten Physiognomic Studies of Women* (Utamaro, 1792-3) on the *Five Female Types from the Illustrated Book: Fist-Time Princesses* (Utamaro and Shuncho, 1790) which depicts five females related to sexual types. For example, *The Engaging Type from the series Ten Physiognomic Studies of Women* (Utamaro, 1792-3) is the upper right female with the similar kimono and the woman *Counting on her Fingers from the series Ten Physiognomic Studies of Women (Fujin sōkaku juttai)* (Utamaro, 1792-3) is the lower right female in the print *Five Female Types* (Utamaro and Shuncho, 1790) with her hand curled under her chin (Davis, 2007: 96-97.) This suggests that Utamaro's physiognomies put women on display as objects of sexuality by the male artist. However, this may not be the result of the western theory of the male gaze, as this may have been a Japanese norm and a way of portraying feminine beauty. Therefore, it can be argued that the narratives of femininity in Tokugawa print were shaped by male artists, such as Kitagawa Utamaro, as they were in charge of representations and categorisations of women. This demonstrates how the influence of patriarchal authority in print and Japanese socio/political expectations and norms influenced the representations of Tokugawa femininity.

The narratives of Japanese femininity in print began to transform/breakdown due to the defeat of the Tokugawa regime and western influence. Imperial control and loyalty were affirmed during the Meiji era or Meiji Restoration (1868 - 1912) which

propelled political/social change throughout Japan. For example, class systems were abolished (samurai were no longer the upper class), the military was reformed, the print was affected (woodblock prints and texts) and the family system was made a part of the political system, as Dales (2011: 14) suggests it was 'the lowest unit in the imperial hierarchy.' Many Japanese individuals were unsettled by the uncertainty, however, these changes were put in place to support the political system, affirm control and to benefit the country as a whole. The medium of print was affected during the Meiji period, as Bijinga had transformed from depicting pleasurable scenes to modern aspects of women, such as expressions of intellect and purity. Theorist Merritt (2000: 127) proposed that:

The new bijinga kuchi-e of the late Meiji years, however, were different in focus and style. Prints of courtesans and geishas were included among them, but they were definitely in the minority. Most of the prints, like Uemura Shoen's paintings, were of idealized women.

This suggests that artists during the Meiji era (including female artists) wanted to depict an ideal femininity which included beauty and aspiration. Women in Meiji bijinga were embodiments of traditional female values and even though they were depicted in the latest western fashions, shown in the print [*Excursion to View the Cherry Blossoms by the Sumida River*](#) (Chikanobu, 1887), they were shown to be taking part in traditional Japanese activities, such as domestic tasks. This demonstrates that as the Japanese culture was transforming with western influences, Japanese artists used the method of print to keep their culture alive by depicting traditional values. However, even though Meiji artists were including traditional Japanese women, courtesans were rarely depicted. This may be due to the fact that Meiji society wanted to represent current aspects, such as domestic femininity and the clampdown on luxury. Theorist Merritt (2000: 127) argues that:

Mindful of the government's sensitivity to Westerners' opinions about the role of courtesans in Japanese society, kuchi-e artists represented women at daily tasks, at festivals, and in seasonal settings.

This conveys that western beliefs had an impact on Japanese print, as the west did not believe in the role of the courtesan. Moreover, Meiji socio/cultural expectations influenced the depiction of women in woodblock prints, as Meiji society became

significantly focused on domestic and fertility values. Therefore, it can be argued that the narratives of femininity represented in Meiji prints are true depictions, as fertility values (motherhood) expected in women were depicted in Meiji woodblock prints. According to the theorist Iwao (1993: 125):

The Japanese woman's consciousness of her role in the family centers on motherhood, the principle sphere of family life.

This illustrates that domestic qualities centred on motherhood during the Meiji period, as Meiji women were defined by the role of a mother. However, producing children had always been a key role for Japanese women, as it meant the family line would continue. These domestic values were depicted in Meiji print, for example, [*Cute: Habits of a Housewife of the 10th year of the Meiji Era*](#) (Yoshitoshi, 1877). The representation of domestic values as an ideal femininity may have been due to the cut down in luxury or the negative light courtesans were perceived in by the west. This demonstrates the transformation of Japanese values by the influence of western ideas. Furthermore, Meiji femininity was shaped by new cultural/socio beliefs, as more educated domestic women were appearing. This illustrates a peak in patriarchal authority, as more educated women and female artists, such as Uemura Shoen began to appear. However, this was still a minority, as many women remained with traditional values and obedient to fathers and husbands, such as teahouse girls. Therefore, Meiji women continued to play a strong role in the background of society, as well as keep to the idealised traditional values, such as beauty. This demonstrates that the narratives of femininity and the representations in woodblock print developed with new socio/cultural influence. Ultimately, Japanese society and artist expectations of traditional domestic values and aesthetic beauty influenced the narratives of femininity in print, due to the fact that this gave them continuity and stability in a changing culture.

Overall, the main issues suggest that domestic and pleasure women were the main types of femininity in Tokugawa Japan, constructed by influences and expectations. The upper class samurai woman (domestic) and the courtesan (pleasure) were the embodiments of Japanese beauty in woodblock print. Although, it can be argued that the samurai woman was the ultimate base model for feminine beauty and the courtesan followed this example. However, based on the research conducted it was

the process of these women getting ready, along with objects, such as mirrors that demonstrated narratives of Tokugawa Japan's cultural beauty and wealth. This highlights that it was the wealthy/upper class of Japanese society that represented femininity, as the ultra-feminine and upper class suggested luxury, which was a large theme of Tokugawa prints. Therefore, lower class domestic and pleasure women were not subjects for bijinga, as they represented true Tokugawa society. The research suggests that Tokugawa women were idealised/glamourised in print in order to show beauty, as the artist during the Tokugawa period wanted to create a luxurious floating world. Moreover, narratives of femininity in Japanese Tokugawa print were objectified, as women were used as objects and tools to depict traditional Japanese values and idealisations. However, the research demonstrates that feminine beauty was shaped by set qualities, such as small eyes and mouth, pale skin and thin eyebrows. This emphasises that the representation of femininity was idealised and conformed to the socio/cultural expectations of women during the Tokugawa period. Arguably beauty as a representation of femininity can be seen as an illusion, as domestic women were strong matriarchs that ran the household. However, idealised femininity and beauty in print can be considered a norm in Tokugawa Japan, as this demonstrates the narratives of femininity taking place. Moreover, with the main issues taken into consideration, the research suggests that Ukiyo-e was ultimately the art of beauty.

Furthermore, the research highlights how the narratives of femininity depicted in Tokugawa print were shaped according to the artist, such as Kitagawa Utamaro and society. Tokugawa femininity was put on display as objects of beauty to depict typical Japanese traditions. Representations of femininity are interpreted by the west as erotic and for the male gaze. However, my research affirms that representations of femininity were a Japanese interpretation of beauty, based on Tokugawa expectations and cultural ideals. Arguably the narratives of femininity in print were shaped by the patriarchal authority during the Tokugawa period, as there were more male artists and authors in society. Texts and guidebooks demonstrate the male authority over the representations of femininity, as male authors could educate women to protect morals and society. Ultimately, the conclusion to be made here is that Tokugawa print was used as a method to control femininity which can be seen as a false representation. This is affirmed through prints, such as physiognomies that

categorised women and were based upon expectations, used again to preserve order and morals. Hence, categorisation can be viewed as a false representation of femininity, as idealised characteristics are used by the artist, such as Kitagawa Utamaro. However, the research shows that it was important to Tokugawa society to be able to distinguish individuals, for example, the ranks of pleasure women in the pleasure districts. This categorisation was depicted through Ukiyo-e, as the prints were used to define status and family. Subsequently, categorisation and social expectation can be seen as a norm in Japanese print and culture to demonstrate the narratives of femininity.

The discussion suggests that feminine beauty was used as a method to advertise Japanese businesses. This highlights that representations of femininity in Tokugawa print were shaped by commercialisation and working women. The Tokugawa artists depicted beauty which would draw in customers, creating an idealised and commercialised representation of femininity. This highlights that it is not just woodblock prints of upper class domestic and pleasure women that demonstrated the feminine beauty, but advertisements depicting working teahouse women. Therefore, this research demonstrates that femininity was shaped around the family system, as teahouse girls supported the family business by using their beauty for advertisement. Hence, I suggest that constructs and representations of femininity in print depended on the family, as commercialised bijinga shows that beautiful teahouse/shop girls supported the survival of the household.

Moreover, the research in the discussion highlights that the influence of the west during the Meiji period had a considerable impact on the representations of Japanese femininity. Meiji print transformed from pleasurable activities to modern aspects of women, such as motherhood. The inquiry suggests that beauty continues to be a norm in Meiji bijinga which represents narratives of modern and traditional feminine values. Although courtesan and samurai women were no longer the main subjects of bijinga, Meiji society wanted to represent current aspects, such as domestic working women. Moreover, Meiji women were defined by domestic qualities and motherhood which was depicted in bijinga. This demonstrates that narratives of femininity represented in Meiji print are true depictions. However, domestic values as an ideal femininity may have been due to the decrease in luxury or the influence of western ideas. The research highlights that the west did not

believe in the role of the courtesan, suggesting that western beliefs had an impact on Meiji Japanese print. This demonstrates that the representations of femininity develop with new socio/cultural influences.

The narratives of femininity represented in Japanese Tokugawa print were influenced by many issues such as beauty, values, society and the artists. Therefore, my research suggests that the main aspect and key narrative of femininity was the representation of beauty through print. However, as I have revealed, many other aspects, such as values and family are equally important in explaining how femininity was categorised and commercialised. The main discussion highlights that the artists and socio/political influences may have had the largest impact, as they were ultimately in control of the representations of femininity. Therefore, what can be concluded here is that the artist and socio-political influences could use bijinga as a method to keep the order of the patriarchal society, by depicting women in the framework of expectations; that beauty was passive and hence feminine.

Appendix 1

Sakoku has many interpretations, however, many refer to the word Sakoku when discussing Tokugawa Japanese foreign policy and international relations. Sakoku according to Kazui and Videen (1982, p.283) means 'closing the country' and is typically used to describe the period 1635-1853 which Tokugawa Japan isolated its self from the rest of the world.

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