

Japan from 1868 - The 150th Anniversary of the Meiji Restoration

Rika Wright – Asian Collections, National Library of Australia

The year 1868 represented the beginning of a new era in Japanese society that brought about the modernisation of Japan. To celebrate this anniversary, a display was set up in the Asian Collections Reading Room during May to July illustrating Japan's advancing westernisation during the late 19th century

The dawn of Modern Japan



Due to a number of treaties signed with foreign powers in the mid-19th century, Japan had limited authority in charging import tariffs as well as unequal status in the consular courts. With the aim of revising these agreements and building a 50/50 relationship with allied Western powers, the Meiji government made efforts to establish Western-style national systems, centralising power, and encouraging new industry.

Freedom, Rights, Democracy



The Freedom and People's Rights Movement was a political and social movement for democracy in the 1880s. The Movement prompted the Meiji government to establish a constitution in 1889 and a Diet (parliament) in 1890.

During this time, many political novels were written in order to spread political opinion and enlighten the people.

Change in Everyday Life



Japanese society became Westernised in a very short period. The postal service, the first railway, and the national education system were established in the early 1870s, and the telephone was introduced in 1890.

People cut off the traditional topknot, wore Western style clothing, used the Gregorian calendar, and for the first time beef was introduced into Japan's Buddhist society.

In larger cities, English language signboards, gas lamps and brick buildings appeared.

The following image is an illustration of "Aguranabe" originally published in 1871.

It shows that the waitress and waiter are wearing traditional clothing while the customer, in Western hairstyle and clothing, enjoys reading the news over a pot of beef. The illustration highlights the customer's way of putting on airs of civilisation and enlightenment.



Aguranebe, reprinted in 1968, nla.cat-vn1494540

First Australian Entertainer



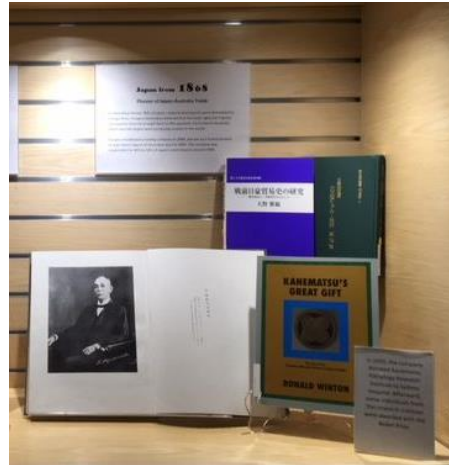
Henry James Black was born in Adelaide and arrived in Japan in 1865 with his family at the age of seven. He became the first foreign kabuki actor and rakugo performer (Japanese theatrical art of comic storytelling that originated in the Edo period).

Black also published six or seven stenographic novels. "Gento" (right hand side) is known as one of the earliest detective stories to use fingerprint verification to solve a mystery.



Left: Nagare no akatsuki nla.cat-vn7582632, Right: Gento nla.cat-vn7582631

Pioneer of Japan-Australia Trade



In the early Meiji Period, 90% of Japan's imports and exports were dominated by foreign companies. Fusajiro Kanematsu believed that trade rights must be brought back into the hands of the Japanese. He turned to Australia, which was the largest wool-producing country in the world. Fusajiro established a trading company in 1889, and set up a Sydney branch to start the direct import of Australian wool in 1890. This company was responsible for 40% to 50% of Japan's wool imports by 1900.

In 1929, the company funded the Kanematsu Pathology Research Institute at Sydney Hospital. Sir John Eccles and Sir Bernard Katz based in this institute were later awarded the Nobel Prize.