

Photography and the Book: Henry Norman's glass negatives from the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections at Cambridge University Library

Noboru Koyama
Cambridge University Library

Edoardo Chiossone contributed to the development of printing in modern Japan. He participated in the design and preparation of Japan's bank notes and postage stamps and has left a series of drawings and etchings of the famous people of Meiji Japan. This year's EAJRS Conference is being held at Chiossone's museum in Genoa. So I would like to read a paper which is related to the history of printing.

I would like to introduce 30 glass negatives from the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections at Cambridge University Library. These glass negatives were taken by Henry Norman in Japan, China, Korea and South East Asia.

1.

Henry Norman was an English journalist and politician of the late 19th Century, and the early part of the 20th Century. For almost four years, from 1887 to 1891, he travelled around the world as a journalist for the Pall Mall Gazette and other publications. The Pall Mall Gazette was an English evening newspaper which started in 1865; it eventually became the Evening Standard in 1923.

Norman arrived in Japan in August 1888 and he finally left Japan in April 1890 although, during the same period, he visited other Asian countries, including Siberia. He took photographs by himself, using dry plates. He published two books, "Real Japan" and "People and Politics of the Far East" in 1892 and 1895 respectively. The photographs he took in Japan and other Asian countries were used in these books. The printing technology used for the insertion of the photographs was the halftone

printing process. The 30 glass negatives of those images are now in the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections. 14 of them were the photographs of Japan and Japanese, and they are related to the first book, “Real Japan”, while the other 16 were used for the second book, “People and Politics of the Far East”.

The negatives were donated by Norman’s widow, Fay Norman, along with other items, including pamphlets on Japan, to the Royal Empire Society before World War II. The Royal Empire Society was later renamed the Royal Commonwealth Society. The library of the Royal Commonwealth Society was transferred to Cambridge University Library in 1993. So now Henry Norman’s glass negatives belong to Cambridge University Library.

2.

These days, photography and printing are treated as separate fields, but in their infancy, photography and printing shared similar processes and were closely related to each other.

We can describe the history of photography by focusing on the development of its photosensitive materials: Daguerreotype, Calotype (or Talbotype), wet plate (or collodion process), dry plate (or gelatin process), roll film and digital photography.

In 1837, Louis Daguerre invented the Daguerrotype. Daguerrotype was used up to the late 1850s. However, due to its being a direct-positive process, it could only produce a single copy of each image.

Henry Fox Talbot invented the Calotype, which he obtained a patent for in 1841. This was a paper negative process, which allowed multiple positive prints to be developed from a single negative. After the introduction of negatives, which could produce multiple copies, photography and printing became similar processes.

The next development in the history of photography was the invention of the wet plate negative. Since a solution called collodion was used for the wet plate, this method is also called the ‘collodion process’. It was introduced from 1850s and lasted probably until the end of 19th Century.

To produce a photograph using the wet plate method required expertise and experience. It also needed a long exposure time.

From 1878 onwards, another method, using dry plates (or gelatin process plates), began to be commercially manufactured. The dry plate method enabled non-experts to take photographs for the first time. Journalists such as Norman, could now take photographs. The dry plate method also introduced comparatively shorter exposure times, allowing photographs to capture more movement than was allowed by the wet plate method, which were more suitable for portraits and scenery. So-called instantaneous photography, which was a 19th century term, was associated with dry plates. For this reason, Norman would sometimes label the images in his books 'instantaneous photographs'.

The next development was the introduction of roll film. In 1888, George Eastman introduced the Kodak camera, which used roll film, and which for the first time enabled the general public, such as tourists, to take photographs easily. One hundred years later, in the late 1980s, digital photography arrived.

3.

I will now discuss the use of photographs for the printed images in books. At first, photographs could only be used indirectly. The technology for directly printing the photographic images didn't yet exist. Rather than printing the images, photographs would themselves be inserted into books or magazines. Alternatively, artists would create printable images based on real photographs.

The first printing method to attempt to print photographs directly was the collotype. Collotype printing was introduced from the 1870s onwards. The quality of the image produced by the collotype was excellent. However, it had the shortcoming that each plate only allowed several hundred images to be reproduced. The photomechanical printing process of the collotype used to reproduce an image was very similar to the production of a photograph.

Due to the collotype's limitation, that it could only reproduce a limited number of copies, larger scale publications such as newspapers, magazines, and mass produced books, started to use the halftone printing

process for the reproduction of photographs from around 1890 onwards. The halftone printing method had become readily available due to the commercial production of the halftone screens from 1890. The halftone process also had the advantage of allowing text and photographs to be printed together on the same page, which was not possible with collotype printing and lithography.

Henry Norman's two books, "Real Japan" and "People and Politics of the Far East", were published in 1892 and 1895, and the new technology of halftone printing was used to reproduce the images from his negatives.

Norman described the use of his photographs in the preface of "Real Japan":

With the exception of three negatives kindly placed at my service by Professor W. K. Burton, of the Japanese Imperial University, almost all the illustrations are from photographs taken by myself. I have to thank Mr. Joseph Pennell and Mr. George Thomson for kind and accomplished help in making a number of them more suitable for mechanical reproduction.

There were two photomechanical processes used in the book, the 'halftone process' and the 'line block process'. The term 'mechanical reproduction' referred to both these processes. William Kinnimond Burton, whom Norman says he borrowed three negatives from, was a notable pioneer of photography in Japan.

So we can summarise the position of Norman's glass negatives at the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections and of his two books, "Real Japan" and "People and Politics of the Far East", in the history of photography and of the printing technology for photographs. Norman took those photographs using dry plates and his photographs were printed using the technique of printing called the "halftone printing process". His first book, "Real Japan" was one of earliest books to deal with Japan which also used the halftone printing process, and this explains the special attention he pays to the printing of his photographs in its preface.

4.

The most impressive photograph in “Real Japan” was shown as the frontispiece of the book. Norman wrote as follows in his book about this photograph.

I have taken a great many photographs in Japan of all sorts of people, instantaneous street-views, studies of dancers and portraits of *geisha*, and although some of them seemed to me rather interesting, my Japanese friends did not care for them at all. But one day I took a picture of a very pretty girl with her arm round a large carved wooden *Daruma*---an effigy of the saint who squatted in such a prolonged inward contemplation of the nature of things that his legs rotted off---and looking teasing into his face with an appealing look, while his fixed gaze over her head seems to be an appeal for help against the temptress. And over this picture at last my friends were enthusiastic. “This is excellent,” they said, “it is delightful---*it is Japanese!*” Actually the fame of this photograph reached the reporters, and a paragraph appeared in the newspapers congratulating me upon it, and giving the name of the owner of the *Daruma*---a very sedate person---who was by no means grateful for notoriety of that particular kind. The picture forms the frontispiece of this volume.

Unfortunately, the negative of this photograph is not one among the 30 glass negatives at the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections.

5.

On 16th July 1888 (Meiji 21), a regular monthly meeting of the Tokyo Press Association was held at the Koyokan (or the Maple Club) in Tokyo, and Henry Norman and Francis Brinkley of the Japan Mail were invited for this gathering. The guests of the Koyokan were entertained by a series of old dances after dinner. Norman was impressed at the entertainment and later returned to take photographs of dancers and performers. The Royal Commonwealth Society Collections includes those photographs. The Koyokan was famous for its beautiful waitresses and maids, and one of them was Mitsuko Coudenhove-Kalergi. [Following this paragraph, four Koyokan negatives are shown]

In “Real Japan”, Norman wrote: “I have taken a great many photographs in Japan of all sorts of people, instantaneous street-views, studies of

dancers and portraits of *geisha*.” The following photographs are those of geishas and dancers. I have included the same or similar photographs to those used for the printed images in “Real Japan”. This is a glass negative about a girl who is writing a letter. [Here I showed both glass negatives and photographs from the book]

“Real Japan” includes the photograph of Mr. Morioka’s garden, and the same photograph is also included in the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections. Mr. Morioka meant Morioka Masazumi who was the President of Nihon Yusen (N.Y.K.), a Japanese shipping company. This is the glass negative on Mr. Morioka’s garden. [Here I showed one glass negative and one photograph from the book]

As for “instantaneous streets-views” Henry Norman mentions, there is a photograph which seems to be a parade of courtesans. This is the glass negative on a parade of courtesans. However, Henry Norman did not use this photograph for his book, “Real Japan

Instead, he used an illustration made by the line-block printing process, which was based on one of his photographs. The line-block images were also known as line cuts. We could see the name of George Thomson in the illustration and the name of George Thomson was mentioned in the Preface to “Real Japan”. He thanked George Thomson for his kind and accomplished help in making a number of the photographs more suitable for mechanical reproduction.

This is a glass negative on Jinrikisha. Whether an Englishman on the photograph is Henry Norman or one of his associates is unclear. The glass negative of jinrikisha was not used for “Real Japan”, but the image of the photograph was used for a small illustration of the book, ‘Real Japan’. When Aizu-Bandaisan erupted in July 1888 (Meiji 21), Henry Norman went to Fukushima-ken to see the volcano and he used a Jinrikisha for transport.

6.

Sixteen among the thirty glass negatives in the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections were used for his second book, “People and Politics of the Far East”. There are 11 negatives on China, including images of

the Chinese borderlands, and two of Malaya and one negative each for Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. I will show you these 16 negatives.

This is the approach to Beijing, outside the walls.

This is the Examination Halls in Beijing.

This is the photograph of the Tsung-li Yamen (or Foreign Office) in Beijing. The inscription over the central doorway, “Chugai Teifuku” in Japanese, “Chung wai ti fu” in Chinese may mean “May China and foreign countries alike enjoy peace and happiness”. This inscription was used for Henry Norman’s book, “People and Politics of the Far East”.

This is a photograph of the Observatory in Beijing.

This is a photograph of the Great Wall of China.

This is also the Great Wall of China.

This is a magistrate’s yamen or magistrate’s office in China.

This is a private cart in Beijing. This lady was a friend of Robert Hart who was Inspector-General of Chinese Customs.

This is from top of a wall in Beijing.

This is a photograph of a French sentry guarding the frontier between Tongking in Vietnam and China.

This is a gate of the Fort, Monkay (Mong Cai) in Vietnam, which is situated on the Vietnamese-Chinese border.

This is a palace court-yard in Bangkok.

This is a belle of the jungle in Malay.

This is a Malay drama performed in front of the Sultan.

This is a photograph of the boys band in Manila.

This is a photograph on Korean dancers.

7.

In 1879 (Meiji 12), Edoardo Chiossone travelled in Ise, Nara, Kyoto and Nikko in order to study art works and monuments for about five months with Tokuno Ryosuke, the Director of the Printing Bureau and other photographers, technical experts, etc. They took a total of 510 photographs and produced 200 drawings. Then, as the result of this project, *Kokka yoho* was published in 1880 (Meiji 13) and in 1883 (Meiji 16). *Kokka yoho* consists of probably six or seven volumes and *Kokka yoho* was accompanied by a five volume photo album. I do not know whether the photo album was a printed one or just a photo album. If it was printed, then it was printed later.

Chiossone's and Tokuno Ryosuke's travels of 1879 were not well-known, but they were important for the studies of Japanese art and also Chiossone himself. Furthermore, the publication of *Kokka yoho* was important for the history of modern printing in Japan, particularly for the printing of art works. The printing methods of *Kokka yoho* were described as *tashoku-zuri sekihan* (multicoloured lithography) and *shashin sekihan* which could be translated as photographic lithography in English. However, *shashin sekihan* does not imply that photographic images were transferred directly into the printing method of lithography. It means that they were transferred through the artist's hand. The direct use of photography for lithography was possible only from 1890s onwards. So, in the time of *Kokka yoho*, it was not yet possible to print photographic images through lithography.