

Reference Materials : Picture Postcards from Sakamoto Hanjiro's Time in Europe

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The family of Sakamoto Hanjiro (1882–1969) donated an album from his estate to the Ishibashi Foundation in July 2021. The album relates to Sakamoto's stay in Europe (fig. 1). One hundred years ago, on July 31, 1921, when Sakamoto was thirty-nine, he traveled to Europe, where he spent three years in France. The album, which contains 430 postcards, was probably purchased in France. A keen correspondent, Sakamoto left a large number of letters, but this album also contains 106 postcards sent by friends and acquaintances to Sakamoto during his stay in Europe, allowing us a glimpse of the circle of friends with whom he kept in touch. It is also worth noting that other than the postcards delivered by post, the album also contains 324 unused picture postcards without messages.

The unused postcards show landscapes, churches, bridges and other buildings, as well as manners and customs in France. There are postcards of towns in Brittany, a region where Sakamoto was a frequent visitor, as well as portrait photos of women dressed in traditional Breton costume. The postcards are probably keepsakes that Sakamoto bought on his visits or souvenirs received from other people. In any case, by looking at these postcards, we can confirm the landscapes and objects seen by Sakamoto, either with his own eyes or through photographs. It is likely that the postcards he stored so carefully in this album were treasured memories of the time he spent studying overseas, as well as a source of creative ideas during his stay in Europe.

Sakamoto's movements during his time in Europe have been reported in "Sakamoto Hanjiro taiōki ryotei ichiran" (Sakamoto Hanjiro's travels during his stay in Europe), an essay discussing a part of his diaries included in the exhibition catalog for *Sakamoto Hanjiro: Ishibashi Museum of Art Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration* published in 2006.¹ Subsequently, when *Woman with a Hat*, Sakamoto's masterpiece from his time in Europe, was mentioned in the special feature "Ishibashi Collection: Nihon kindai yōga hen" (Ishibashi Collection: Modern Western painting) published in an issue of *Kokka*, the Sakamoto family donated six photographs, including a photograph of the model, and a part of his diaries. The content of the diaries was discussed in Issue 63 of *Kanpo*.² The present donation is an extension of this series of events. Today, the museum is indebted to the Sakamoto family, who felt it would be appropriate to have the postcards from Sakamoto's time in Europe side by side with the works he painted at the time. Since it is important for the museum to continue to introduce contemporaneous references, I would like to take this opportunity to provide an overview of those postcards.

1. The Unused Picture Postcards

The first 324 of the 430 picture postcards in the album are unused. As well as picture postcards of Paris, they include churches and castles, bridges and other structures, landscapes, and seascapes in other regions. The place names written on the picture postcards include Guérande, Le Croisic, Bretagne, Belle-Île-en-Mer, Besançon, Barbizon, Pont-Aven, and Avignon.

There are postcards from Belle-Île-en-Mer, Avignon, as well as Ornans and other places associated with Monet (1840–1926), Picasso (1881–1973) and other painters of the period. There are also postcards from places related to the work of the nineteenth-century realist painter Courbet (1819–1877), and pictures of the home and studio of Millet (1814–1875), a member of the Barbizon School. This suggests that Japanese painters at the time visited the studios and places associated with the work of famous artists as if they were on a pilgrimage. The album contains multiple picture postcards of Belle-Île-en-Mer, but whether Sakamoto himself visited or not is unclear. We know that Sakamoto visited Barbizon, the village adjacent to the Forest of Fontainebleau where the landscape painters Corot (1796–1895), who made a deep impression on Sakamoto, and Millet gathered in the nineteenth century. According to "Sakamoto Hanjiro's travels during his stay in Europe," Sakamoto visited the home of Millet in the village of Barbizon on July 21, 1922.³ There are two picture postcards from Barbizon. One of them shows a row of houses with a description that says "605. Barbizon-Street with J.-F. Millet's house at the time of his death." The other postcard, which shows a woman drawing water from a well beneath a tree and a large house in the background (fig. 2), says "302. Barbizon — Weil and Wacking [Well and Workshop] of the painter J.-F. Millet."

The studio of Courbet is another place we know Sakamoto visited when he stopped at the town of Ornans in the east of France near the border with Switzerland on his way back to Japan. On July 2, 1924, after a send-off by his friends, Sakamoto boarded the night train departing Gare de Lyon in Paris at 21:55 in the company of the painters Hayashi Shizue (1895–1945) and Kito Kamejiro (1897–1952). At four the following morning, the travelers arrived in Besançon, where they stopped at the boarding house of Hazama Inosuke (1895–1977) before going to their hotel. After a stay of about ten days, Hayashi returned to Paris, but Sakamoto and Kito continued to Ornans on July 13. Three days later, Sakamoto visited Ornans a second time on his own to see the home of Courbet. His sketchbook from the time contains a sketch of a house built on the waterfront

(fig. 3) with “Courbet’s house” written on it. In terms of capturing the real aspects of nature, Sakamoto must have felt a great deal of affinity with Courbet, because he stayed in Ornans for five days. Then he said goodbye to Kito and Hazama and traveled to Marseille via Besançon and Avignon to board the Katori Maru for the return trip to Japan.

In addition to the picture postcards Sakamoto probably bought on these pilgrimages to the artists’ studios, the album also contains several picture postcards of towns and ports in Brittany as well as people dressed in traditional costume (fig. 4). Since Sakamoto visited Brittany five times between March and June 1923, I would assume that he bought the postcards on these visits. Around this time, he sketched rows of houses with chimneys in Vannes (fig. 5) and Quimperlé (fig. 6), and Breton landscapes featuring women wearing the traditional white coif and hair ornaments (fig. 7). The album contains picture postcards from Guérande, Le Croisic, Locronan and other areas in Brittany showing similar rows of houses with chimneys (fig. 8). These postcards provide us with clues that allow us to imagine the scenery as it was when Sakamoto saw it.

The album also contains postcards of Cairo with sphinxes and pyramids (fig. 9), the scenery at Port Said, the landscape at Colombo in Sri Lanka, and images of women, which Sakamoto probably bought on his way to France on the Kleist Maru. There are also postcards from the Katori Maru ports of call on the way back to Japan, as well as photographs of the animals at the zoological garden in Paris.

Since we have only just received his album, we have not yet been able to understand all the particulars. The album merits further detailed study.

2. Picture Postcards with Messages

The second half of the album consists of 106 picture postcards sent to Sakamoto by friends and acquaintances during his stay in France. Some postcards were sent from Japan, while others came from his circle of friends in France. Many of them are businesslike messages or trifling exchanges of news. Perhaps they sent postcards in the same way that we use email these days. Seeing that Sakamoto was a good correspondent, I assume that he also exchanged sealed letters separately from these postcards. Yet, the postcards that still remain in this album are very interesting because they afford us a glimpse of Sakamoto’s circle of friends and how they exchanged local information. I have made a list of the senders of the 106 messages (reference). I have also selected four messages from the list to introduce here.

Tosha Katsuji (dates unknown) sent the most postcards. Tosha was a fellow passenger on the *Kleist Maru* when Sakamoto left the port of Yokohama for France on July 31, 1921. Other fellow passengers included the painters Hazama Inosuke, Hayashi Shizue, Koide Narashige (1887–1931), and the literary critic and scholar of French literature Komatsu Kiyoshi (1900–1962). The album also contains postcards from Hazama and Komatsu. In a message sent to Sakamoto in January 1923, Tosha advises him to go to Brittany. It is possible that Tosha’s recommendation was the reason for Sakamoto’s frequent visits to Brittany as of March that year.

Reference: List of the Senders of Postcards with Messages

Sender	Count of postcards	Sender	Count of postcards
1 TOSHA Katsuji	24	23 IDEI	1
2 KOYAMA Keizo	10	24 KATO Seiji	1
3 YASUI Sotaro	2	25 ONO Misao?	1
4 MASAMUNE Tokusaburo	6	26 ANDO Toichiro	1
5 KOMATSU Kiyoshi	8	27 SASSA Shinnosuke	1
6 SATOMI Katsuzo	3	28 TAKAMURA Michitoshi	2
7 KOJIMA Zentaro	1	29 OSHITA Masao	1
8 AOYAMA Yoshio	1	30 NAGAO	1
9 HAMADA Hoko	1	31 ARAI Kan	1
10 YOSHIMURA	3	32 OKADA Tsuyoshi	1
11 KITAZAWA Rakuten	2	33 TOYAMA Goro	1
12 KITO Kamejiro	1	34 TANAKA Mankichi	1
13 HAZAMA Inosuke	2	35 TSUDA Seifu	1
14 SAITO Toyosaku	4	36 SUGIMOTO Masako	1
15 NAKAYAMA Morihiko	2	37 AKASHI Kan-ichi	1
16 MIKI Rofu (Misao)	2	38 MATSUMOTO	1
17 NAGASHIMA Shigejiro	2	39 OKADA	1
18 NOGUCHI Yataro	1	40 Unknown sender A	1
19 NAKAJIMA Jutaro	1	41 Unknown sender B	1
20 S. EBITSU	1	42 Unknown sender C (French)	3
21 EBINA Fumio	1		
22 ITO Kinko KOKITA, ITO (Joint name)	5		Total 106

Tosha Katsuji correspondence (postcard) dated January 7, 1923

I received your letter and enclosed postcard with your news. Thank you for everything. I would definitely recommend a visit to Brittany.

Rome has not been so cold these past two or three days. As I suspected, you will not know the real Raphael unless you go to Rome. I was astonished when I saw Raphael’s Rooms at the Vatican. There is also a wonderful small altarpiece by Sano di Pietro.

I will visit Naples soon. Please send letters c/o the embassy. Take care and don’t catch cold. Give my best to Masamune.

In addition to Komatsu, a fellow passenger on the *Kleist Maru*, other names on the list of senders are Koyama Keizo (1897–1987) and Masamune Tokusaburo (1883–1962), who shared an apartment with Sakamoto in the 14th arrondissement in Paris. The postcards from Komatsu include messages thanking Sakamoto for forwarding his letters to his travel destinations, which suggests that they were helping each other out. One of Koyama’s postcards also informs Sakamoto about an increase in the rent for lodgings. This suggests that messages from his fellow students were an important source of information for Sakamoto, who was not proficient in French.

Koyama Keizo correspondence (postcard), no month or day, 1923

The weather suddenly turned hot and fishing in the daytime is a chore. How is Paris?

I heard from the sister-in-law Juliette, who has come to stay

for the summer, that you've returned from Brittany. I meant to tell you some time ago, but when the manservant for the studio comes in October the rent will increase by 300 francs a year. If you accept this, you need to sign the agreement at the concierge. That's what Juliette was telling you. Perhaps you have already settled the matter, but I thought I'd inform you anyway.

How have you been? I watch my fishing float from around five o'clock every morning. The river is very quiet on a summer's morning. You can catch a lot of fish. Give my best to Masamune.

(Front)

I've enjoyed myself in the month since I got here, but now I want to start drawing a lot more. Anyway, I am suntanned and well, so please don't worry about me.

The postcards from Japan include news about the Nika Association, an art association Sakamoto had helped found. There are two messages from Yasui Sotaro. One message urges him to submit work to the Nika Exhibition and the other informs him of the touring exhibition. The first message lacks a postmark, but since Mejiro station was rebuilt from January 1921 to October 1922, it was probably sent in those times.⁴

Yasui Sotaro correspondence (postcard) dated July 16, year unknown (1922 or 1923) (fig. 10)

Sent from: Takada 1673, Shimotakada-machi, Tokyo-fu

Recently I've been wondering how my friends in Paris are doing. Have you been well?

The Nika Association Exhibition is getting closer. Do you have anything to submit to the exhibition?

There was an exhibition of French modern art in Japan the month before last. There were quite a few works by Bonnard, Roussel, and Guérin. It was a rare exhibition for Japan.

The weather has turned hot. My life hasn't changed. The new Mejiro station looks splendid.

Please take care of yourself.

Yasui Sotaro correspondence (postcard) dated January 18, 1924

Sent from: Takada 1673, Shimotakada-machi, Tokyo-fu

Happy New Year!

It has been a long time.

The Nika was held in Kyoto, Osaka, and Fukuoka. It was very successful.

How have you been?

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to the bereaved family of the Sakamoto for donating the materials and to Ms. Keiko Ogomori for great help in deciphering the correspondence on the postcards.

(Curator, Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation)
(Translated by Ruth S. McCreery, The Word Works, Ltd.)

Notes

1. Sakamoto kept seven volumes of diaries during his stay in France. They have not been published in their entirety, but some passages were itemized by Ogomori Keiko in "Sakamoto Hanjiro taiōki ryotei ichiran [Sakamoto Hanjiro's travels during his stay in Europe]." *Sakamoto Hanjiro: Ishibashi Museum of Art Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration*. Ishibashi Museum of Art, Ishibashi Foundation, Bridgestone Museum of Art, Ishibashi Foundation, 2006, pp. 214–223.
2. The model for Sakamoto's *Woman with a Hat* is introduced in "Kaisetsu: Sakamoto Hanjiro *Bōshi wo moteru onna*," *Kokka*, Issue 1425, Kokkasha, Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc., July 2014, pp. 56–59 and "Sakamoto Hanjiro taiōki no shiryōshōkai," *Kanpo*, Issue 63, Ishibashi Museum of Art, Ishibashi Foundation, Bridgestone Museum of Art, Ishibashi Foundation, 2014, pp. 89–96.
3. Ogomori Keiko, "Sakamoto Hanjiro taiōki ryotei ichiran [Sakamoto Hanjiro's travels during his stay in Europe]." op. cit., p. 217.
4. Hiraoka Atsuko, "A Study on the Changes of Mejiro Station Building: Focusing on the Problem of the Bridge Station in the 1920s," *Life and Culture* (Bulletin of the Toshima City Museum of History), Issue 24, Toshima-ku, Tokyo, 2015, p. 43.

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fig. 3—SAKAMOTO Hanjiro, *Sketchbook in Europe 4*, 1924, 23.6 × 15.5 cm, Private Collection.

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fig. 10—*Postcard from YASUI Sotaro*, Dated July 16th, Year unknown [1922 or 1923], 9.1 × 14.0 cm, Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation, Tokyo.