

“Opening day of the Bank of Japan head office” (by Kiyooki, 1896)



(Collection of the Currency Museum, Institute for Monetary and Economic Studies, Bank of Japan)

This nishikie (woodblock print) depicts the dedication ceremony of the Bank of Japan head office, completed in 1896. Designed by Kingo Tatsuno (1854-1919) and designated as National Important Cultural Property in 1974, this building serves as the current Bank of Japan main building. Tatsuno who graduated from Kobu College (predecessor of the faculty of Engineering of Tokyo University) in 1879, was one of the first Western-style architects in Japan. He was active during the early Meiji Restoration period when foreign architects mostly provided skills for building Western-style architecture in Japan. Known for the design of the red-brick Tokyo Station building, he was also involved in designing the Bank of Japan branch buildings opened during the Meiji period (1868-1912), including the former Otaru Branch building (currently the Bank of Japan Otaru Museum).

The Bank of Japan head office was built where a Kinza gold mint had been located during the Edo period (1603-1867). This vibrant commercial neighborhood featured a bank that had evolved from a ryogae-sho (money changer), with Nihonbashi uogashi (a riverside fish market) located nearby. The head office was placed on the edge of the outer moat of Edo Castle—an area rich in history. This moat was spanned by a bridge called Tokiwabashi (depicted at the far left of the nishikie) leading to the Paper Money Bureau on the opposite shore.

During preparations, Tatsuno, who oversaw design-related issues, visited and studied bank buildings in many countries, such as the United States, England, and Belgium. With its authentic Western stone and brick style, the Bank of Japan head office building attracted considerable attention and numerous visits by dignitaries, even during its construction.

The opening celebration of the head office was held on March 22, 1896, with some 1,800 guests in attendance, including royalty, ministers, foreign ambassadors, and those in banking circles. On that day, guests took in the sight of a building decorated with arches of green leaves (bearing an eye icon representing the Bank of Japan) and national flags.