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“Pride of the Self and Prejudice Against the Other: Daylight Fireworks in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Woodblock Prints”

This paper presents the first detailed English introduction to Meiji-period (明治; 1868–1912) Japanese daylight fireworks (*hiruhanabi* 昼花火) and analyzes the popularity of *hiruhanabi* motifs, especially the figurative paper-balloon fireworks (*fukuromono* 袋物), as depicted in catalogs and colored woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e* 浮世絵) between the late 1880s and early 1900s. The paper demonstrates the centrality of *hiruhanabi* to Meiji Japan’s sense of national pride and technological advancement conveyed through visual and literary materials, tracing the moment when a celebration of Japan’s modernity began to take an aggressive imperialist turn.

In Meiji *ukiyo-e* prints that portray celebratory events, viewers often notice *hiruhanabi* in backgrounds with conspicuous *fukuromono* in various shapes in various shapes of folkloric and auspicious figures falling from the sky. *Fukuromono* was the first patented product by a Japanese, Hirayama Jinta (平山甚太; 1840–1900), founder of the Hirayama Fireworks, in the U.S. in 1883. Discriminatory depictions of decapitated heads of Qing Chinese and European men appear in *fukuromono* designs in a post-1904 exported catalog by the Hirayama Fireworks. In addition to tracing the history and analyzing depictions of *hiruhanabi* in writings, catalogs, and *ukiyo-e* prints, this research explores the ideological message carried by the representation of *hiruhanabi* associated with a growing national pride toward and after the triumph of the Sino-Japanese (1894–95) and Russo-Japanese Wars (1904–05).