

# The Wireless Revolution

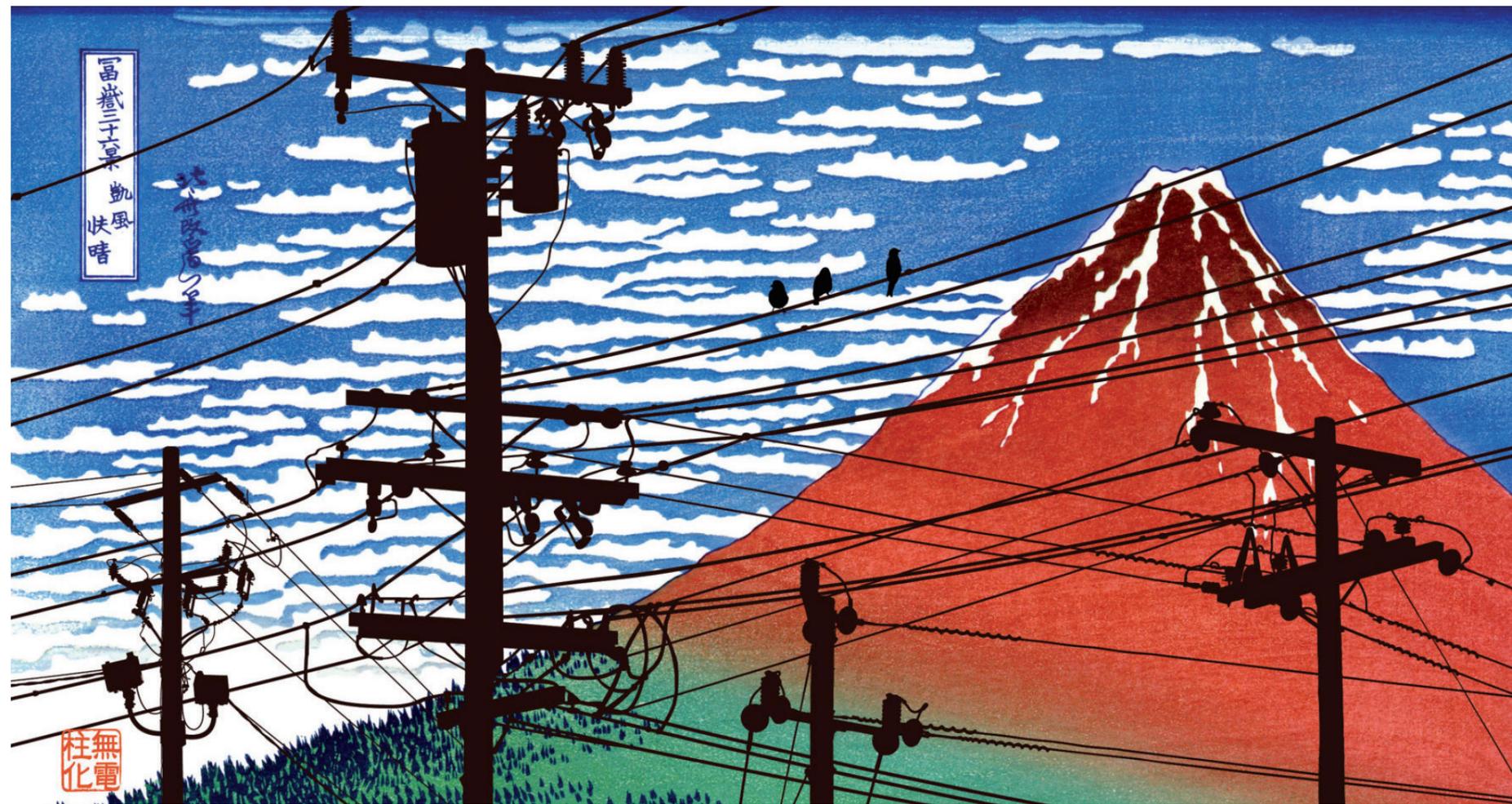
## *Eliminating Tokyo's Utility Poles*

By Tsuguo Murano

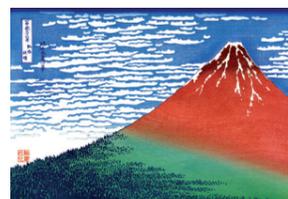
In *A Wireless Revolution*, published in 2015, it was noted that foreign tourists were avidly taking pictures of “wires that criss-cross the landscape like spider-webs.” Writing this was none other than the current Tokyo governor, Yuriko Koike. London and Paris have gotten rid of all utility poles, and Asia’s major cities of Singapore and Taipei are also approaching that goal. In Tokyo, is just 7 percent of the 23-ward area in the central part of the city. How does a city with wires look to foreign tourists?

Since fiscal year 1986, Tokyo has been working to eliminate utility poles to achieve three goals: boost disaster resilience, secure safe and pleasant spaces for pedestrians, and create an attractive landscape. Priority for the removal of utility poles is being given to areas which play a central role in the political, economic and cultural life of the city, contain many planned sites for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, or are particularly popular with tourists. This will be expanded to include areas along major roads that form the crucial network for evacuation, rescue activities, and transportation of relief and that link emergency response centers.

Koike, who took office as Tokyo governor in the summer of 2016, has been passionate about the removal of utility poles since serving as a member of the House of Representatives. From her own experience in the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, Governor Koike has seen that fallen utility poles can obstruct the passage of ambulances and fire engines. In the book, she mentioned that as many as 28,000 utility poles toppled over in the March 2011 earthquake, impeding rescue work. As Tokyo prepares to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020, the



An image of how utility poles impede one's enjoyment of the landscape, here with a humorous depiction of utility poles before Hokusai's famous *Red Mount Fuji*



Hokusai's original print

governor is making the promotion of the elimination of utility poles an urgent issue. She is planning to draft an ordinance to promote the rapid elimination of utility poles.

Removing utility poles will mitigate the damage of road closures, the severing of power and communication lines, and other damage that can result from their collapse during a disaster. Evacuation, emergency response, and the transportation of relief can proceed smoothly, and a stable supply of electricity and communication services can be secured. On streets near major train stations, along with this removal of utility poles, the city is also removing curbs and inclines between sidewalks and roads to create an environment with greater accessibility for everyone.

Let's have a look at an example of utility pole removal. TOKYO SKYTREE, which opened in 2012, is a prominent landmark, attracting many visitors from within and outside Japan. The removal of utility poles around TOKYO SKYTREE was promoted in anticipation of the increasing number of tourists in the area. One reason that many tourists walk there from Asakusa might also be that utility poles have been eliminated along that route. With nothing marring the

view, tourists walking along the street called Kototoi Dori are often seen snapping pictures of SKYTREE using their cameras and smartphones. They probably find a strange allure from the past and future coming together in photos that capture both the quaint neighborhood and this tallest structure in Japan.

Katsushika Hokusai was a renowned artist from the Edo Period (1603-1867) whose woodblock prints greatly influenced some of the most important artists of Europe, including Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, and Paul Gauguin. Among Hokusai's best-known works was a series called the “Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji,” which includes views of Mount Fuji from Edo, the city now known as Tokyo. In olden days, it was easy to see Mount Fuji, which has been added to the World Heritage list. Although this is not so easy now with all the skyscrapers, if the utility poles are removed, the skies over Tokyo will certainly seem higher and more expansive.

Tsuguo Murano is a regular contributor to magazines affiliated with the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper. He primarily covers politics, sports, and film.