



BOATING IN  
THE FLOATING  
WORLD

Rhode Island School of Design

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# BOATING IN THE FLOATING WORLD

ukiyo-e prints

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## FOREWORD

### **BOATING IN THE FLOATING WORLD**

The student-curated exhibition “Boating in the Floating World” focuses on images of boats in ukiyo-e prints as represented in some works from the collection of the RISD Museum. Boats were occasionally depicted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century celebrity-focused figurative genres. Fairly often they appeared in *bijinga* – images of beauties, rarely in *yakusha-e* – portraits of kabuki theater actors, sometimes in compositions derived from literature, history or lore. Nautical motifs became much more pronounced from 1830s with the powerful upsurge of the landscape genre that is believed to have been triggered by the increasingly available Berlin blue – a non-fugitive artificial pigment of deep, saturated hues. Views of well-known places, widely familiar both as nature sites and scenes of ordinary life became shown in different seasons, time of the day and weather conditions. These landscape images were easily relatable to a broad variety of print viewers and, additionally, carried new profundity hidden within everyday motifs.

The exhibition includes works by four artists. Chōbunsai Eishi (1756-1829), in his mid-1790s work, merges *bijinga* with elements of landscape genre. Although the RISD Museum collection misses the left sheet of this tripartite composition, the available two sheets form a coherent image that can stand on its own. The majority of works chosen for the exhibition are by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), ukiyo-e preeminent masters of landscape images. Five prints by Hokusai date to 1830s and are comprised by three sheets from *36 Views of Mt. Fuji* and two sheets from *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, Explained by the Nurse*. Eight prints by Hiroshige include four prints from his first *Fifty-three Stations of Tokaido* series, two prints from *The Eight Views of Omi*, both sets dating to 1830s, one print from his 1850s upright series *Sixty-odd Views of Japanese Provinces* and one triptych of the boating beauties designed approximately at the same time. Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), the foremost master of *musha-e* – warrior genre, is exemplified by a triptych dating to late 1840s – early 1850s. Based on a historical subject matter, this work expands the variety of boats represented at the exhibition.

In the process of thorough investigation of the selected original prints, students deepened their understanding of various aspects of Japanese traditional life, history and culture. Students learned about boats used for work – for fishing with nets or lines, in a lake or in the open ocean; boats for delivery of products from all over Japan to the storehouses of Edo; here belongs also timber rafting. Equal attention was given to boats for recreation – pleasure boats for watching the fireworks on a summer night or for relishing music and dance at a party. Examined were vessels transporting passengers between places – short distance light ferryboats and long-distance magnificent ships, watercrafts for a free-will travel of a pilgrim or for a mandatory journey of a daimyo. Boating brought along practical skills of shipbuilding and navigating, opened up ever-changing vistas, introduced new spans and angles of vision, enabled chance encounters – en-route and upon arrival. Spurred by human inquisitive spirit, reaching other countries could result in manifold international ties, or threaten with an invasion.

Such observations and thoughts have been on the mind of twenty-eight students who took art history curatorial course Ukiyo-e Prints (H 791) at RISD during fall semester 2018. As a part of their assignment, students selected the prints, explored them thoroughly, wrote research essays on individual prints and came up with introductory essays on relevant general matters. On the basis of their findings, they put together an exhibition script and discussed display strategies. Students also wrote biographies of artists, compiled a glossary of terms and composed educational wall labels.

As art students, many tried their hand at design tasks that go into putting together a museum exhibition. Some students designed the catalogue cover and made the book; others worked on a poster and an invitation card, or came up with souvenir products. According to the accepted museum practice, the class held a symposium to mark the exhibition opening. Students who worked on this curatorial project are willing to share their recently acquired knowledge with the exhibition visitors and the catalogue readers.

Elena Varshavskaya, course instructor

## **BOATS AND HUMANS**

By Victoria Liang

Boats are tools, symbols, a connection between humans and nature, or windows that frame the world, the list goes on. Boats play a very important yet subtle role in the human world. They support our lives in a variety of ways and have been for thousands of years. This is especially true for Japan.

There was a frequent use of boats inter-provinces as well as inter-islands. In the Edo period, boats were a part of people's lives especially in the city of Edo itself where ukiyo-e prints thrived. Edo was built on the water – spirals of moats and networks of canals, connecting to the Kanda, the Sumida and the Edo rivers, created a system of navigable waterways. Edo was a waterfront city, facing the Edo Bay, to where many essential products were delivered from all over Japan. This explains why boat was such an important part of people's lives there.

Boats are tools. They contributed immensely to the development of human society, culture, history and economy as they were invented before bicycles, cars, and airplanes. They carry passengers and cargos, connect spaces separated by water, and allow people to harvest resources that support their lives.

Boats are symbols. As symbols of culture, they act as gateways into people's lives, and construct such beautiful sceneries in ukiyo-e prints. As symbols of distance, they elicit a sense of longing arising from parting with family, friends or lovers. As symbols of human existence, they manifest someone's presence, whether it is the flirting presence of courtesans on pleasure boats, or the menacing presence of war boats.

Boats are a connection between human and nature. They enable human activities within the range of an otherwise dangerous natural element. Humans use boats to negotiate with the vastness and unpredictability of nature. They are a middle ground between nature and the human world. This special place causes people on board to act and feel as if they entered a different dimension, where time can feel faster or slower.

Boats are a window. Once a person steps into the space of a boat, the way in which the person looks at the world is suddenly determined by the boat. The boat becomes a frame of the world, inviting people to sit and enjoy the view that they would normally ignore. People on a passenger boat would be able to appreciate the beauty of the



passing landscapes. Participants of the Sumida river summer fireworks event would enjoy an individualized view of the fireworks.

Scholar Michelle M. Damian states the unrecognized significance of watercraft in the archipelago landscape of Japan at the beginning of her study *Archaeology through Art: Japanese Vernacular Craft in Late Edo-period Woodblock Prints*. She mentions that documents on the Japanese watercrafts are scarce. Thus, scholars rely heavily on looking at ukiyo-e prints. Looking at ukiyo-e prints is looking through the eyes and hands of ukiyo-e artists. As a result, their perspectives add layers of meanings to the dynamic relationship between boats and humans. It is hoped that this exhibition provide visitors with multiple perspectives towards boating and guide visitors into the floating world of Edo Japan.

**THIRTY-SIX VIEWS OF MOUNT FUJI**

KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI

## HOKUSAI'S THIRTY-SIX VIEWS OF MOUNT FUJI: AN INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Muroya

In the exhibition *Boating in the Floating World*, there are three prints from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* by Katsushika Hokusai on display: *Abridged View of the Tago Coast near Ejiri on the Tokaido*, *At Sea off Kazusa*, and *Nihonbashi, Edo*. For the purposes of establishing a conceptual basis for the selected works in the exhibition, this essay will briefly outline the visual themes that are common across *Thirty-Six Views of Mt Fuji* as they reflect the philosophical condition of Hokusai, with particular attention paid to the how universality emerges as a characteristic feature of the work.

### The Mountain: Universality and the Individual

At the age of 70, Katsushika Hokusai created a series of landscape prints titled *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, which in fact totals 46 *oban* (large-scale) prints, each depicting a different scene from various locations surrounding Japan's venerated mountain. The series is widely considered to be the pinnacle of Hokusai's career for its popularity and lasting worldwide influence on the art of the modern landscape. While it may be argued that Mount Fuji only plays a nominal role in *Thirty-Six Views* (Muneshige Narazaki calls the actual view of the mountain the "merest pretext" for Hokusai to explore the relationship between nature and man),<sup>1</sup> it is important to note, for the sake of beginning to understand the philosophical underpinnings of the series, Hokusai's preoccupation with the mountain that prompted *Thirty-Six Views*, and later, *One-Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*.

In his survey of *One-Hundred Views of Mt Fuji*, Hokusai's next and final work after the success of *Thirty-Six Views*, Henry D. Smith II details the personal significance Fuji had to Hokusai.<sup>2</sup> Not discounting its importance as a cultural symbol, Smith argues that the depths of Hokusai's fixation with the mountain as a subject did not primarily come from a sense of nationalism or an adherence to the mountain-worshipping cult known as *Fujikō* as some have speculated; rather, it is primarily a product of Hokusai's obsession with the fundamental reality of aging, his personal perspective on growing old, and a desire to attain immortality. In his own writings, Hokusai voiced his desire to achieve a divine state

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<sup>1</sup> Muneshige Narazaki, *Hokusai: the thirty-six views of Mt. Fuji* (Tokyo: Palo Alto, Calif. : Kodansha International, 1968)

<sup>2</sup> Henry Smith II, *One hundred views of Mt. Fuji* (New York: George Braziller, 1988)

in his art by the age of 100, and often identified himself as “old man” in his signatures. Because of his evident obsession with aging and immortality, Smith holds that Hokusai’s reasons for taking on Fuji as a subject for his prints in the final twenty years of his long life were fundamentally religious: according to an ancient Taoist narrative, the mountain contained the secret to everlasting life.

This philosophical groundwork is particularly relevant for *Boating in the Floating World*, as part of the exhibition’s purpose is to illuminate how visual themes in the selected ukiyo-e prints resonate with notes of universality. Looking at Fuji in each of the three exhibited prints from *Thirty-Six Views*, one can get a sense of Fuji’s role beyond its status as a national symbol; although it is never the overwhelming focus of any of the three compositions, its presence nonetheless presides over the activities happening in the foreground. Just as it must have seemed to Hokusai, Fuji’s aura is unchanging, ageless, and infinite, providing the perfect counterpoint to the transience of the people and their activities taking place below. As will be discussed further, the selected prints from *Thirty-Six Views* are concerned with this balance of forces: how an individual, fleeting as his or her existence may be, navigates a boundless and unending universe.

Analyzing *Thirty-Six Views* pictorially reveals even more about how universality plays a role in the prints. Researcher Christine M. E. Guth interprets the use of perceptual devices employed by Hokusai in her essay *Hokusai’s Great Waves in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Visual Culture*. In discussing the Mount Fuji, Guth points out that its depiction through the use of western illusionistic perspective was essential to creating a sense of shared, or universal viewership:

Although each angle of vision differed, by regulating the totality of experience of Mount Fuji through the use of illusionistic perspective, Hokusai offered a universal framework that in effect revised and reshaped the lived space of Japan.<sup>3</sup>

Guth’s argument brings up a vital question that lies at the center of *Thirty-Six Views*: what is the role of individual viewership, and where does Hokusai find the balance between providing an empirical window into the world and playfully reconstructing reality to transcend its material nature? It seems Hokusai remains suspended in the indefinable

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<sup>3</sup> Christine Guth, *Hokusai’s Great Waves in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Visual Culture*, in *The Art Bulletin*, CAA, Vol. 93, No. 4 (December 2011), 473

area between the material and the cosmic, and what he attains through the balancing of both realities produces what we experience as universal.

### **The Water: Universality across Borders**

In an exhibition titled *Boating in the Floating World*, it makes sense to discuss water, the natural elements that predicate the need for boats. This is especially true for *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* where the water takes on special meaning when considering its material significance.

One of the most intriguing visual constants in *Thirty-Six Views* (not including the additional ten prints published after the original thirty-six) is the heavy use of the pigment Berlin (*bero*) blue, which had a characteristically saturated and powerful hue. Hokusai used it both in depictions of sky and water as well as in the key block from which the outline is printed. In the essay *Hokusai and the Blue Revolution in Edo Prints*, Henry D. Smith II makes an in-depth argument for the expressive power of the *bero* blue in *Thirty-Six Views* in relation to its commercial popularity which reached its height in the 1830s.<sup>4</sup> In the preceding decades, starting around 1810, *bero* pigment had been made more widely available by Chinese and Dutch traders. During this time, Chinese-style monochromatic landscapes that used *bero* as its primary pigment began to gain popularity and were called *aizuri-e*.

Contrary to the previously-held belief that the publication of *Thirty-Six Views* had begun in 1832, Smith argues that the series began around 1830 as *aizuri-e* prints, and that the prints can be chronologically grouped based on their usage of *bero* blue, the earliest ones being the “pure” *azuri-e* which use the pigment exclusively and the later ones becoming progressively more experimental in the usage of pigments other than *bero*.

Interpreting the symbolic meaning of blue in *Thirty-Six Views* highlights the series' connection with water, for which the blue is characteristically used by Hokusai. Smith regards water, as it is depicted in the series, as a symbol of life and rebirth which would have been salient concerns for Hokusai in his quest for eternal life; conversely, Hokusai's

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Smith II, "Hokusai and the Blue Revolution in Edo Prints," in *Hokusai and His Age: Ukiyo-e Painting, Printmaking and Book Illustration in Late Edo Japan*, ed. John Carpenter (Leiden: Hotei, 2005), 235-269

philosophical preoccupations provide a convincing reason for beginning the series as *aizuri-e* prints, given the color's connection to water and, by extension, rebirth.

Turning once again to the research of Guth, whose writing broadens the scope of analysis of water in Hokusai's work, we are invited to consider how Hokusai's depictions of water, specifically waves, were indicative of a growing interest in international concerns and the country's "shifting geopolitical circumstances" and its "new maritime reality." Guth writes that the foreign material quality of the *bero* pigment-- not to mention its popularity-- speaks to the extension of cultural interests beyond the shores of Japan, related especially to trade with the Chinese and the Dutch. While the prints of *Thirty-Six Views* are nominally tied to the nation of Japan, the repeated occurrence of water and its disruption by external forces embodied by the image of the wave (most visible in *Tago Coast near Erjiri*) provide a symbolic depiction of universality as it extends beyond the borders of Japan. It was by water -- figuratively and literally-- that a globalized culture should begin take root.

In the discussing *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* as a case study for exploring themes of universality as it is experienced by the individual and across cultural borders, hopefully a groundwork has been laid for the consideration of boats within all of the selected prints of the exhibition. In some sense, boats are the mediating factor that allows man to sit upon a metaphorical sea of experience by which he would otherwise be swallowed; how one goes about navigating that incomprehensible expanse is the universal question.

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Katsushika Hokusai, 1760-1849

*Abridged View of the Tago Coast near Ejiri on the Tokaido Road* (Tōkaidō Ejiri Tago-no-ura ryakuzu)

Series: *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (Fugaku sanjūrokkei)

Signed: From the brush of litsu, the former Hokusai (Saki no Hokusai litsu Hitsu)

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi, publishing house Eijūdō

Date: ca. 1830-1833

Size: 24.8 x 36.7 cm

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke, 20.1199



## ***Abridged View of the Tago Coast near Ejiri on the Tokaido Road*** **from series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji***

By Chaeri Park

Two fishing boats, graceful yet solidly crafted, are steering across the rolling waves, right to left, with an almost natural ease. They are *oshiokuri-bune* – “push-through-boats,” a fishing or transport vessel usually found in open waters.<sup>5</sup> Nearly filling the breadth of the observers’ span of vision, the boats must be rather far away from the shore, closer to which two more miniscule boats of the same type are floating.

The distant view of the land, dominated by the gently concave conic shape of Mt. Fuji, is simple yet busy with multiple manifestations of life forms of nature and humans. Designed by Hokusai for the print series *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*, the composition *Abridged View of the Tago Coast near Ejiri on the Tokaido Road* provides a condensed, yet comprehensive overview of the vast area visible from the place where the artist located the boats (and hence the viewer) – somewhere in the middle of Suruga Bay. Suruga Bay is a bay in the Pacific Ocean. It is separated from the Ocean by Izu Peninsula. Timothy Clark, Keeper of Japanese Art at the British Museum, notes that the two geographical places indicated in the print’s title are located at the opposite sides of the Suruga Bay: Tago Coast is at its eastern shore while Tokaido’s Ejiri Station is at its western shore (Fig 1). Mt. Fuji is situated directly at the north – the direction towards which the viewer of the print will be thus looking.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 1. Tentative location of the boats in the print, according to the print title. Google Maps.

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Damian, *Archaeology through Art: Japanese Vernacular Craft in Late Edo-period Woodblock Prints*, East Carolina University, MA Thesis, 2010, PDF, no page, Glossary

<sup>6</sup> Website of the British Museum

[https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=787330&partId=1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=787330&partId=1)  
Curator’s comments (Timothy Clark).

Even though the view is abridged or simplified, as follows from the print's title, it contains countless precise details about the flow of life occurring in that place. The view is at once universal, showing the magnificent Mt. Fuji rising above the clouds about sixty miles away, and concrete, with all the particulars of human activities portrayed at the foreground. The details one can observe in life never – this is true not only about the fishermen and the boats but about tiny, almost ant-like villagers working at the distant shore. It is known that Hokusai was interested in optical instruments that made their way from the Netherlands to Japan at that time. As if combining the view available through the telescope and through the microscope, Hokusai captured in his compositions the world in its totality.

Following the viewer's perspective, let's observe the print from bottom upward. The rough sea at the foreground is rocking the boats with considerable strength. Both boats seem to be manned by the same number of people, seven in each. On the boats the crews are distributed in the same way: four men closer to the stern are oarsmen, two other men are seen closer to the center of the boat (just hinted upon aboard the further boat), and one more man is standing at the boat's prow. Hokusai represents most people on the boats in detail. The rectangular rowlocks are clearly depicted protruding from the hull next to the stern of the boats. The oars are securely fixed as the oarsmen row forcefully with their well-known, precise and coordinated movements. The viewer can appreciate their effort, seeing their torsos and heads bent backwards, their faces up, their arms outstretched with sleeves making identical folds. It is not quite clear what the two men to the left of the oarsmen are doing because they are shielded by the boat's side. However, probably Hokusai's contemporaries understood this easily as similar things are happening on the other big fishing boat. Despite the strong waves, one person on each boat is fishing: a fisherman is standing at the boat's prow very close to the stempost and is bending forward with an obvious effort is drawing out a heavy net. Since there is a likewise bent figure of a man standing at the same place of the other fishing boat, we can assume that this other person is a fisherman as well. We can speculate that he is also fishing with a net not visible for us from the other side of his boat.

All fishermen are wearing the same garb typical for their occupation. They have loose robes and water-repellant straw skirts *koshimino*; their legs are protected by *kyahan*

– gaiters clearly seen on the fisherman with the net. If the outfit worn by fishermen is traditional, the color is likely to be Hokusai's choice. Deeper green for the robes and gaiters and brighter green for the skirts matches the dots of green (weeds?) at the joinery of the boat parts. The same two green tones are liberally used for the vegetation on the shore and at all other wooded areas. Thus Hokusai establishes visual connection between the humans and the landscape elements throughout the composition.

The rough waves surrounding the boats are dynamically rendered; by controlling the line weight and gaps between each pair of lines, it is hard to recognize that only Prussian blue ink is used for the waves. The closer the wave is to the viewer the more detailed it is and the bigger is its depiction. By the size of the waves, we can estimate the distance between the sea and the shore. By leaving a flat space in-between the land and the sea, Hokusai further emphasizes the distance. Judging by the calculations about the position of the boats suggested by T. Clark (discussed above), the boats are indeed far away from the northern shore of the Suruga Bay where Mt. Fuji is located.

The curved and rising high stemposts of both *oshiokuri-bune* lead the eye of the onlooker to the shoreline beyond the white area of what is understood as distant waters with no waves in sight. The coastland is rendered in even gray color. The shoreline is shown as a succession of soft-lined coves described with a mildly zigzagging line. In its undulating configuration, the shoreline resonates with the sea waves below and with the supple outline of vegetation beyond the coastland village, with the mist formations, and one more woodland strip above, establishing subtle structural relationships throughout the composition.

A coastland, rather broad on a closer look, is set off in gray color and is filled with activity of thirty something people. They are involved in traditional salt-making on the seashore. As the description of the print by T. Clark goes, tiny figures rake the flats and carry baskets of salt to kilns dotted along the beach.<sup>7</sup> Due to the minute size of the people on the shoreline the figures seem indistinguishable at first. It is hard to define what they are doing or what the structures next to the figures are.<sup>8</sup> But if the image is enlarged, it

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<sup>7</sup> Website of the British Museum:

[https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=787330&partId=1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=787330&partId=1)  
Curator's comments (Timothy Clark).

<sup>8</sup> Cocor, Laura, and Kaori Brand. "Preserving Japan's Sea Salt Making Tradition." *Our World*, 9 June 2010, [ourworld.unu.edu/en/preserving-japans-sea-salt-making-tradition](http://ourworld.unu.edu/en/preserving-japans-sea-salt-making-tradition).

turns out that Hokusai took an effort of rendering specific features of salt making (Fig. 2). Some tiny figures can be seen raking sand on the shore for salt production, other carry baskets on shoulder poles; perhaps, the baskets are filled with kelp, a kind of seaweeds that were burnt for production of salt.<sup>9</sup> The scattered tent-like structures are salt-kilns in which the kelp was burnt. Truthfulness, authenticity of all workings of life, large and small, assertively visible and almost invisible, obviously matter for Hokusai in his holistic picture of the world that he sees at any locality. The Edo period was a time when salt production and salt trade were an important activity throughout Japan. Izu peninsula has a characteristic of high humidity and limited sunshine.<sup>10</sup> Despite these natural conditions that limit production of salt, the tax policies of the Edo period (1603-1868) that were practiced by ruling local authorities, the Kago Clan, played a crucial role in shaping the peninsula's identity as a salt producing area.



Fig. 2. Katsushika Hokusai. Abridged View of the Tago Coast near Ejiri on the Tokaido Road. Detail.

Behind the shoreline with the scene of salt-making, there is a village where the salt-makers must be living. Reed or straw-thatched huts are similar in shape to the salt-kilns, creating continuity of small triangular shapes. The houses are scattered through the area with light-green grassy hills and dark-green wide-crowned trees. The thatched roofs of the houses are of the same yellowish color as the large opaque area of varying height stretching across the horizontal plane of the composition. This large yellowish shape creates an opaque area, acting as a boundary between the coast and Mount Fuji. This shape is a traditional representation of mist, known as *suyari-gasumi* or the spear-mist. According to Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System (JAANUS), this convention was used in Japan-style painting style of *yamato-e* from the time of its appearance during Heian period (8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> cc). From the 13c artists began to depict mist bands with a cleanly rounded head, often crisply outlined, as in the current case. It is this kind of mist is called

<sup>9</sup> Website of the Honolulu Museum: <http://honolulumuseum.org/art/8987>

<sup>10</sup> Schiller, Tom. "Sea Salt 塩." *OISHI SO JAPAN*, [www.oishisojapan.com/home/2016/12/14/japanese-sea-salt](http://www.oishisojapan.com/home/2016/12/14/japanese-sea-salt).

the spear mist, to differentiate it from the amorphous and translucent *kasumi* of earlier times. The mist tends to indicate the division between the foreground, middleground and background to create depth. It appears not only as a pictorial element but has definite functional purposes. It often suggests changes of scene and passage of time.<sup>11</sup> Beyond the mist there is still another strip of vegetation rising up from the left of the print rightwards along the mist's gross outline and corresponding to the angle of Mt. Fuji's left slope. This light green wooded area establishes numerous correlations within the composition. It echoes the vegetation area below. The two have comparable shape and are of the same colors but whereas below darker tones dominate, above lighter green here lighter green is predominant contrary to the predominance of darker greens prevail. By flanking the mist area, the green shapes diverge, the upper going further up and the lower – further down, roughly reminding the outline of Mt. Fuji.

Contrasted with the foreground where fishing boats cope with the rough waves and with the middle ground where people are farming salt – another gift of nature, Mount Fuji looms as a quiet and static figure. In this it resonates with the fog that is often used to represent quiet, peaceful and ideal space. The relative scale of the waves, the four boats and people on the shore clearly suggest long distance; however, the artist, ignoring naturalistic perspective, draws Mt. Fuji as holding a gigantic presence. Most of the shapes in this print cover a certain part of the print. For instance, the trees in the background start from the right side of the print and end before reaching the left side. On the other hand, the mist is drawn all the way from right to left, almost separating Mt. Fuji from the other elements, which gives an impression of its sacredness.<sup>12</sup> The peak of Mt. Fuji is covered in snow and this makes it the lightest and the brightest area in the print. The snow extends down to nearly a half of its visible surface. The border of the snow-covered area is rendered as an exchange of dots – blue dots of the mountain color are scattered over the white of the snow and the white of the snow over the blue of the mountain body.

The print doesn't seem to show particular interest in rendering three-dimensionality of the represented world. Still, certain depth of space is captured. Description of the waves especially has a great volume and depth. Each line weight is

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<sup>11</sup> Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System. "Kasumi." 渥美財団, [www.aistf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/k/kasumi.htm](http://www.aistf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/k/kasumi.htm).

<sup>12</sup> The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, HOKUSAI AND HIROSHIGE – Great Japanese Prints from the James A. Michener Collection, Honolulu Academy of Arts: The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1998 Page 82. Cat. 33

used differently and as it goes farther from the viewers' perspective, it eliminates color and details. The use of color is reduced to few kinds – blue, green, yellow, gray, and white.<sup>13</sup> Overall use of blue and green grabs attention. 'Bero' or Berlin blue is used as the main pigment for some outlines instead of black. As other *Thirty-Six Views*, the print is issued in semi-*aizuri*, where blue color is used in different shades with the sparing addition of other light colors. The *bokashi* gradation of blue in the sky, created during the printing process, echoes the blue in the water and the blue of Mount Fuji, unifying the different planes of the composition. The traditional stylized clouds create a misty atmosphere that frames this exceptional depiction of the mountain – separate the immovable mountain from the ever-moving realm of humans and unite the two realms at the same time.

This print serves as an example of compositional unity devised sensibly and with true virtuosity. The shapes of the clouds and the ground mirror each other so that the form they make looks symmetric. The mountain and the boats are emphasized by Hokusai who relates them to each other by nearly equating the curve of the boats' stempost and hull with the gentle arc of Mt. Fuji's slopes. Moreover, the combined area covered by the boats seems the same as the area taken on the print by Mt. Fuji. This commensurability of Japan's sacred mountain and man-made objects is a claim of equal significance of Japan's sacred mountain and humans (Fig. 3).<sup>14</sup> The Mt. Fuji is depicted as bigger than it actually could be seen from the presumed location of the boat, indicating that Japanese thought of it as a spiritually significant feature of the landscape, one that dominated literature and prints. In fact, it was perceived as deity through history – from its earliest mentions in *Manyoshu*, 8<sup>th</sup> century poetry collection up to the establishing the Fuji cult during Edo period.<sup>15</sup> Hokusai is known for his own spiritual preoccupation with Mt. Fuji to which he devoted not only the series *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji* and the additional ten prints but also a three-volume publication *One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji*, dating to the same 1830s.

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<sup>13</sup> Henry D. Smith II. *Hokusai and the Blue Revolution in Edo Prints*. Pdf. 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Suggested by instructor Elena Varshavskaya.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Clark, *100 Views of Mount Fuji* (Turnbull, CT: Weatherhill, 2001), 9

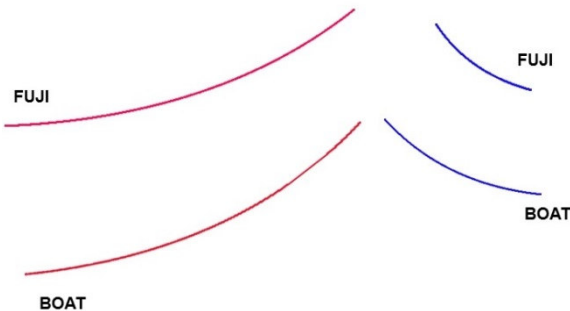


Fig.3. Mt. Fuji arcs and the boats' arcs

Each component of the scene is depicted in a different scale conveying the components' importance. In the mid-ground, tiny people on the shore rake the ground and carry salt water and kelp in from the shore to collect and produce salt. In the foreground the boats and the waves are more in focus than people aboard. On a closer look, however, the fishermen dominate within the boats. This distinction between background and foreground suggests that the artist wants to show all forms of life present simultaneously, inextricably intertwined and equally important. Here both Mt. Fuji and the fishermen are of comparable size, indicating the fishermen have as much spiritual power and beauty as the mountain. Hokusai shows these fishermen having dared to go into the sea in the boats that they learned how to design and to make so that they would carry those fishermen through the rough waters. Doesn't this alone make these little people as grand, powerful, and magnificent as the perfect Mt. Fuji? Through the choice of place from where to show the view, the choice of entities to portray, ranging from infinitely large and infinitely small, through subtle coordination of all elements of the composition, Hokusai unassumingly underlines the equal grandness of humans and nature.

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Katsushika Hokusai, 1760-1849

*At sea off Kazusa (Kazusa no kairō)*

Series: *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjūrokkei)*

Signed: From the brush of litsu, the former Hokusai (Saki no Hokusai litsu hitsu)

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi, publishing house Eijūdō

Date: ca. 1830-1833

Size: 26 x 38.3 cm (10 1/4 x 15 1/16 inches)

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1188

***At Sea off Kazusa (Kazusa-no Kairō)***  
**from series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji***

By Jonathan Muroya and Mallika Nanda

Hokusai's *At Sea off Kazusa* places its viewer on the shore of the city of Kisazaru in Kazusa Province, overlooking the still waters of Edo Bay to a distant Mt. Fuji in the West. In the image, two identical pale-red cargo boats prominently occupy the center of the viewer's gaze. The wind fills their large white sails, supported by a single vertical mast, and a green thatched roof covers their cargo on the upper deck. Within the foremost ship, the faces of three sailors, crowded against one another, can be seen through a small window in the hull. The conditions for sailing appear perfect as the tranquil waters stretch undisturbed (save for some mild waves) across a horizon that is curved as if to represent the curvature of the earth, and the clear sky above transitions from blue to white in horizontal bands, free of any threat of rain. A thin strip of green land on the opposite shore shows a hint of a fleeting afternoon light on the hills, while numerous tiny sails dot the horizon to the left. Looming behind it all is Mt. Fuji itself, represented as only a small, snow-capped pyramid peeking above the horizon. But despite its relative modesty, one keenly feels the presence of the mountain permeating the scene of daily life.

The inscriptions in the upper left include the title of the piece, *Kazusa-no kairo (At Sea off Kazusa)*, the series title *Fugaku sanjurokkei (Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji)*, and the author's signature, *Saki no Hokusai litsu hitsu (From the brush of litsu, the former Hokusai)*.

**The Horizon: Dissociating Vision**

Possibly the most intriguing feature of *At Sea off Kazusa* is the distinctive curve of the horizon, a unique design among the other prints of the series. One possible explanation for it is that Hokusai was exhibiting his scientific understanding that the earth is round, as had recently been made known to the people of Edo by Dutch reports.<sup>16</sup> Another

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<sup>16</sup> Narazaki Muneshige, *Hokusai : the thirty-six views of Mt. Fuji*. English adaptation by John Bester (Tokyo: Palo Alto, Calif. : Kodansha International, 1968), 90

possible explanation is that the curve in the horizon reflects some peculiarity in the actual geography of the bay at Kazusa. Ando Hiroshige's illustration of *Kurodo Bay in Kazusa*, made as a part of the artist's own series of views of Fuji after the death of Hokusai, depicts a similar curving horizon. Perhaps both artists sought to convey the experience of witnessing such an expansive vista. By swelling the middle and allowing the ends to trail downward, the image emphasizes that the horizon is not a terminating edge but simply the limit to what our human eyes are able to perceive of an infinite expanse. Water does not simply end where sky begins, but both continue ever into and out of the picture plane.

In either case, it becomes clear that in *At Sea off Kazusa*, Hokusai is concerned with the manner in which the image and the artist commands the viewer's eye, and he composes the picture with an acute awareness of what we see and how we see it. When investigating the curve of the horizon, one may consider how the decision to distort the viewer's "lens" affects how the audience engages the scene; to illuminate this, we turn not just to the figurative lens, but the literal one.

The catalogue for *Hokusai: Bridging East and West*, supervised by Kobayashi Tadashi, dedicates its first section to Hokusai's various ways of viewing, relating certain visual characteristics in the artist's work to optical technologies brought to the inhabitants of Edo through trade relations with the Dutch. As demonstrated by their depictions in various works by Hokusai ranging from 1804 to 1848, the Dutch technologies of the telescope, microscope, and magnifying glass would have been very familiar objects to Hokusai, so much so that he likely was knowledgeable not only of their basic functions but of their inner workings, too.<sup>17</sup> Hokusai's intimate involvement with Dutch trade is further corroborated by Timon Screech in his volume *The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan*, where he writes of Hokusai's visit to Nagasaki, the trade center of all Japanese international relations, to make commissioned works for Dutch officials as well as drawings of the Dutch hostel.<sup>18</sup>

While explicit references to these technologies appear throughout Hokusai's work, the most profound examples of their influence exist in the compositional choices made in many of Hokusai's images, including *At Sea off Kazusa*. Kobayashi Tadashi makes the

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<sup>17</sup> Kobayashi Tadashi, *Hokusai: Bridging East and West* (In Commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Artist's Death), exh. cat., Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Inc. (Tokyo, Japan, 1998), 185-191

<sup>18</sup> Timon Screech, *The Lens Within the Heart: The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 17

argument that Hokusai was mindful of the effect of looking through a telescope when he composed views of Mt. Fuji. Applying the principles of a high viewpoint to the *Great Wave off Kanagawa*, he writes, “We could now imagine ourselves to be on another boat on the wild sea ourselves. There is, however, another possibility: it could also be imagined that we are getting the close view of the wave from the safe coast, using a telescope instead.”<sup>19</sup> We can compare this interpretation to *At Sea off Kazusa*, where a similar viewpoint is constructed: no land is hinted at in foreground to ground the viewer while the horizon bends as a way to focus the viewer’s gaze towards the center where the boats are perfectly framed. Keeping in mind the extent of Hokusai’s contact with Dutch optical technology, it is difficult to ignore the telescopic effect thus created and the dissociation of sight resulting from the interposition of a lens.

The broader cultural and implications of viewer dissociation relate to what Muneshige Narazaki calls “new individualism,” a relatively modern worldview that began to emerge in Edo society. *At Sea off Kazusa* represents Hokusai’s unconventional approach to landscapes by considering the consciousness of nature and the consciousness of man, or his viewer, as distinct from each other. As Narazaki puts it, “[Hokusai] recognized nature as a force outside man which each man experiences and creates with his own senses and his own intellect.”<sup>20</sup> Here, Hokusai rejects the traditional approach to Japanese landscapes as emotive representations of a state of being in favor of a greater concern for the universal aspects of nature, offering the viewer an objective “lens” into the world which is to then be uniquely experienced and interpreted by each individual.<sup>21</sup> *At Sea off Kazusa* represents this humanistic communion between nature and the individual, or “new individualism”, by taking the idea of a lens to an almost literal level, distancing the viewer from the world, and thus highlighting his or her own unique consciousness.

### **The Sailors: Internalizing Vision**

The various ways in which Hokusai took viewership into account can be further examined in a study of the sailors, visible as tiny, uniform, insect-like specimens through a window in the hull of the foremost vessel. Here, Hokusai highlights the notion of a lens

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<sup>19</sup> Kobayashi Tadashi, *Hokusai: Bridging East and West*, 185

<sup>20</sup> Narazaki Muneshige, *The Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, 25

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25

capable of *internalizing* sight, or peering into an entity and the metaphysical concerns that accompany such a manner of seeing.

In Timon Screech's essay "Hokusai and the Microscope", he points to two main epistemological influences in Hokusai's work that I argue guided his inclusion of the window and sailors in *At Sea off Kazusa*. The first influence comes, once again, from Dutch-Western scientific practices, a body of knowledge known as *rangaku* to inhabitants of Edo. Through technologies such as the microscope (an apparatus no doubt familiar to Hokusai as it is the eponymous subject of his 1804 print), *rangaku* practices introduced the notion of an objective, scientific gaze which allows one to peer closely into a specimen through a magnifying lens and discover a multitude of entities therein. Screech writes, "It was swarming collectives, not unities that a microscope revealed... the lens could elucidate group concerns, such as how a singular body could act as host to a myriad of smaller lives." In depicting the figures as a swarm of bodies within the boat and granting the viewer visual access to the boat's interior through the window, Hokusai draws a parallel between the observation of insects through the microscope and perception of humans as subjects under study by the viewer, and in doing so he creates a broad, universal view of humanity.<sup>22</sup>

The same can be said for the peep box, or *nozoki-karakuri*, a small Dutch entertainment device which contained minute images of cities visible through a magnifying lens, used to accompany a sort of narrative performance. This introduces a theatrical quality to the notions of internal vision and the scientific gaze; on one level, peep-box scenes depict daily life yet on another level are highly demonstrative in their authority over what is shown and how they are seen.<sup>23</sup> These no doubt had an influence on Hokusai as he composed the *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*; as Narazaki writes, "The prints are intensely theatrical: the figures are on a stage, as it were, and the natural scene is stage-managed by the artist so as to provide the perfect setting for them".<sup>24</sup> Hokusai exercises his authority over what the viewer sees and the manner in which this vision is presented. Looking once again to *At Sea off Kazusa*, the image calls attention to itself as a *display*: the boats are emphatically placed in the center of the page, the sailors' faces are visible

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<sup>22</sup> Timon Screech, *The Lens Within the Heart: The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 336

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Narazaki Muneshige, *The Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, 25

through the hull, the mountain peers through the ropes of the mast, and far-off ships are visible from miles away. While the viewer may be granted an “objective” lens into the world, that which is framed within the lens is nonetheless organized in a highly demonstrative fashion. One might say that being granted both dissociated *and* internalized sight imparts a degree of omniscience to the viewer, save for the fact that the viewer remains subject to what is presented by the artist.

The second epistemological perspective which Screech highlights in “Hokusai and the Microscope” is the philosophy of ancient Daoism, which may help to illuminate the metaphysical significance of *rangaku* technologies in Hokusai’s work. Based on its depictions in the earlier work of Hokusai and other Edo period illustrators, the microscopic lens was seen as more than just a tool for medicine and science but as a metaphor for the idiomatic Daoist debate over whether internalizing one’s vision would allow one to see into and assess the moral fibers of a human being. According to Screech, “By borrowing the authoritative apparatus of the clinic, the psychology and the elusive inner workings of human beings could be notionally pried apart”.<sup>25</sup> In the context of Daoist philosophy, the microscope is symbolic of an interiorized mode of seeing, and the body is the vessel of the inner self: “Humanity is represented here by the seat of consciousness, the guts, or, more politely, the heart”. Hokusai parallels this metaphor in *Kazusa*, where the world, as if seen through a peep box, is presented through a dissociated and penetrating internal gaze that makes visible the universality human experiences.

Fabienne Delpy in *Human Figures in Hokusai’s Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* theorizes Hokusai’s usual style for human representation. He believed that representing human attitudes and gestures was through the “non-representation of faces” and body-parts.<sup>26</sup> Hokusai uses this style to render the unspecified faces of the sailors in the window of the deck house of the *bezai-sen* vessel. In his series, Hokusai focuses on representing Mount Fuji from different angles and perspectives which he does through the creation of ‘imaginary itineraries through various provinces’- in the case of *At Sea of Kazusa*, Kazusa was a province in the area of modern Chiba prefecture. His “approach to the themes of mountain and landscape through itinerancy is related to the general context of the Edo

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<sup>25</sup> Screech, *The Lens Within the Heart*, 330-334

<sup>26</sup> Fabienne Delpy, “Human figures in Hokusai’s Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji,” *Andon* 68 (Spring 2001):7.

period, in particular to the growing importance of travel".<sup>27</sup> Witnessing travelers was another subset of Hokusai's motif of representing human figures engaging in everyday activities and scenarios. The *36 Views of Mount Fuji* often observed viewers, or placed the viewer of the print as the traveler looking at Mount Fuji and the scenery- in prints where there was no representation of travelers.<sup>28</sup>

Although boats did not usually carry passengers, the cargo ships that transported manure, such as *bezai-sen*, a large coastal trading vessel, had deckhouses *yagura* which "enclose the interior rudder workings as well as living space for the 166 crew".<sup>29</sup> We see the wide expanse of the sea towards the horizon in *At Sea Off Kazusa*, from the level of view of the crew members whose faces are seen peering out of the opening/window in the hull.

In his series, Hokusai juxtaposed Mount Fuji to the human figures to show a "correspondence between the mountain and the figure," to give those latter "a kind of greatness".<sup>30</sup> *At Sea of Kazusa*, however, conveys the dominant position of humans over Mt. Fuji by scale and placement of the two trading vessels that symbolize objects of human creation. We could denote this stylistic move by Hokusai to represent the geographical location of Kazusa from Mount Fuji and his emphasis on the motif of travel and travelers. It could be assumed that Hokusai based his perspective of observing the travelling sailors on the boat from the estuary of the Obitsu River in the city of Kisarazu, which allows one to see Mt. Fuji across the Edo Bay.

Hokusai has a subtle sense of humor in his representation of human figures, where he "uses stylization and simplification in order to reach the figure's real essence and to make it more persuasive".<sup>31</sup> Figures represented as "not individualized but shown as elements of a group", can be reflected in Screech's observation of the representation of the figures as an 'insect colony'.<sup>32</sup> We can speculate that the colony of figures acts as a singular body over which the viewers' gaze acting as the 'magical lens' of the microscope,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Michelle Damian, *Archaeology Through Art: Japanese vernacular craft in late Edo-period woodblock prints*, MA Thesis, East Carolina University, 2010, PDF copy, 165

<sup>30</sup> Delpy, "Human figures in Hokusai's Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji," 26

<sup>31</sup> Delpy, "Human figures in Hokusai's Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji," *Andon* 68 (Spring 2001): 28

<sup>32</sup> Screech, *The Lens Within the Heart*, 336



“can conduct a painless vivisection”,<sup>33</sup> allowing a gaze into a living body. Daoist philosophers in regard to the Dutch rationale, believed in observing bodies that were ‘alive and in a vibrant state of existence’, unlike the Western anatomists that used a “dead body”<sup>34</sup> - a concept in the Daoist philosophies about “internalizing sight”. Hokusai uses the concept of the “probing lens” of the microscope (viewership of the print) to reference the “swarming collectivities not unities that the microscope revealed”.<sup>35</sup> Observing the figures in *At Sea off Kazusa*, “the lens could elucidate group concerns, such as how a single body [the vessel] could act as a host to a myriad of smaller lives” (the sailors) Delpy speculates that Hokusai’s objective here was to bring the viewer’s attention to the “anonymity and mystery” of the “numerous functions”, of these “faceless people”.

Hokusai’s style of representation for the figures also concerns the “integration of these figures in landscapes”.<sup>36</sup> Finally, Delpy quotes Celeste Adams of University of Michigan art museum, regarding the ‘harmonious combination of landscape and human figures- “Such paintings may be regarded neither as figure nor landscape works, but as paintings of life which man and nature coexist, inseparable”.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Boats: Transforming Vision**

Two coastal trading vessels, or *bezai-sen* (the closest one being the primary focus of attention), dominate the scene as they make their way determinedly across the bay. It is to these ships that the viewer’s attention is immediately drawn, while the surrounding vista, in its simplicity, serves to elevate the presence of the boats in passage. Even Fuji, in spite of its grandeur, sits quietly behind the action, a distant echo of the larger and more impressive “mountain” formed by the ropes on the mast of the foremost vessel, a strikingly vertical shape which grounds the composition and provides balance to the motion of sweeping curves and spirals in the hull and sails. The gesture of the boats, which reverses the curve of the horizon behind it, is imbued with a sense of determination and duty which penetrates the placidity of the surrounding vista.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 331

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 336

<sup>36</sup> Delpy, “Human figures in Hokusai’s Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji,” 33

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Through a concentrated use of line, Hokusai closely observes the technical construction of the *bezai-sen*, which Michelle M. Damian details in her essay, *Archaeology through Art: Japanese Vernacular Craft in Late-Edo Woodblock Prints*. Damian points out the black hanging discs at the end of the stemposts (the vertical post at the front of the bow) which, in addition to being functional bumpers, were used to denote trading vessels.<sup>38</sup> These, along with the covered cargo occupying the upper deck, would have acted as important and recognizable symbols of the merchant class that was both the subject and audience of many works in the ukiyo-e tradition (a significant feature of *ukiyo-e*, especially when considering the broadening intellectual interests of the middle class in Edo society). Indeed, during the Edo period, merchant vessels such as these were the only ships which travelled on large, open seaways, while passenger ferries and pleasure boats were used mainly on rivers and canals.<sup>39</sup> From this, one can make the case that for Hokusai's audience, the very geography of Kazusa Bay itself (being a large open seaway) would have been closely associated to the activities of work and daily life taking place within the image.

While the *bezai-sen* and, by extension, merchant life may be the immediate subjects of *At Sea off Kazusa*, it is important to note that, rather than setting the harsh realities of labor against the transience of pleasure, Hokusai manages to embrace both industry and leisure simultaneously in his depiction of the working class. The stillness of the waters, the steady rhythm of the lines creating gentle waves, the absolute balance struck in the distribution of sweeping curves and emphatic linearity, and the framing of the action at a distance, all place the viewer in a position of "floating" through a proverbial landscape, not necessarily tied to the literal reality of cargo shipping. As was previously discussed, much of what accounts for this universality is the authority of vision that Hokusai asserts through both dissociating and internalizing the viewer's sight. Because of this, *At Sea off Kazusa* attains a profound universality that transforms scenes of working life into a celebration of life itself, and this ability to transform our vision -- to quickly change what we see and how we see it -- is not unlike that of a boat in transit.

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<sup>38</sup> Michelle Damian, *Archaeology Through Art: Japanese vernacular craft in late Edo-period woodblock prints*, MA Thesis, East Carolina University, 2010, PDF copy, 93

<sup>39</sup> Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, website.

## The Floating World

In the context of our exhibition, we could say that boats occupy a similarly liminal space as the one occupied by the viewer; Hokusai places the viewer in a space removed from the material world and plays off the wide range of changing perceptions that such displacement might incur. To be upon water is to be in flux, to exist outside of “normal” life, to be surrounded by an overwhelming natural world to which you are subject, to float.

At its core, *At Sea off Kazusa* represents an engagement with individual consciousness that is centered on the act of *viewing*. Imagine that Hokusai himself has invited you to come aboard his boat and together you sail into the expansive Edo Bay. Once you’ve sailed a fair distance from the shore, he tells you to look back to the town and all its inhabitants going about their business, and he asks, “What are you able to see?”

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Katsushika Hokusai, 1760-1849

*Nihonbashi – the Bridge of Japan - in Edo* (Edo Nihonbashi)

Series: *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (Fugaku sanjūrokkei)

Signed: From the brush of litsu, the former Hokusai (Saki no Hokusai litsu Hitsu)

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi, publishing house Eijūdō

Date: ca. 1830-1833

Size: 25.6 x 37.3 cm

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke, 20.1210

***Nihonbashi – the Bridge of Japan – in Edo***  
**from series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji***

By Sonia Wang

In the bustle of the early morning, a throng of busy people fills the Nihonbashi Bridge as the boats are delivering stock and goods to the many warehouses and shops lining the Nihonbashi River. The contrast of the bridge overflowing with people and the placid calmness of the Nihonbashi River emphasizes the significance of the boats that are now in focus of attention as the main characters of the daily life spectacle. In the far background two towers of Edo Castle are rising above the clouds and the soaring peak of Mt. Fuji is watching quietly over the ordinary busy day of the metropolis.

The viewer is immediately greeted with a compact body of people in the direct foreground. A large densely packed crowd of people moving in all directions is depicted in a very tight and cramped space on this bridge. Amidst the sea of people we catch glimpses of merchandise held up high to avoid the rush of people pushing past. A cart on tall wheels is carrying a huge load of packaged goods is moving right to left; a package wrapped in green *furoshiki* is being carried by a man facing the viewer - he is approximately in the middle of the bridge. Someone is carrying a tall bundle of lumber. As we move further to the left, we see a bare-backed man carrying his load on a shoulder yoke and still another one, also with a shoulder yoke, to which a box is affixed. Hokusai masterfully captures the appearance and dynamics of a crowd, the elements of which are at once disconnected while at the same time briefly belonging to the fluid, ephemeral community. There are more than twenty-five individuals on the bridge, providing a representative picture of common population at the time. These people are very closely packed together and only the tops of their heads are seen, along with a few backs of the figures. Their turned away heads as well as concentrated looks of those who are facing the viewer suggest a sense of self-absorption; they are too engrossed in their own business to pay attention to anything else. This device emphasizes the kind of life and bustle you would find in a large city, and thus encapsulates the atmosphere of Edo.<sup>40</sup> Hokusai places the observer right there – perhaps on the bridge, thus inviting a scrutiny of this incidental

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<sup>40</sup> Fabienne Deply, "Human Figures in Hokusai's 36 Views of Mount Fuji," *Andon* 68 (Spring 2001): 31

gathering of ordinary Edo dwellers. Some heads appear cleanly shaven, some are sporting topknots; there are people wearing headbands *hachimaki* while others have wrapped their hand-towels *tenugui* around their heads. Many are shown in their wide round hats *kasa* traditionally worn by all kind of travelers. Here the circles of *kasa* hats are creating a distinct visual rhythm that runs across the bridge along the bottom edge of the print. The few faces that are visible carry a variety of expressions; some people appear content and accustomed to the everyday struggle of crossing the bridge, whereas others are depicted more tense.

The Nihonbashi Bridge is almost completely concealed behind the crowd of people attempting to make their way across it. The only parts of the bridge that are recognizable are the handrails and the lone ornament, the *giboshi* that is situated in the very center of the bridge. Although the bridge is obscured by people, the commotion and bustle is indicative of this particular location in Edo. The Nihonbashi Bridge was an iconic center of transportation in Edo, as a starting point of five official roads leading out of the capital to the provinces.<sup>41</sup> It was built in 1602 and spanned about 154 feet<sup>42</sup>, though only about a third of it is visible in this print. The Nihonbashi Bridge also symbolizes a sense of connection, both literally and metaphorically. While it does serve as a means of mobility and connection between places, it connects people of all different classes together, “On the bridge are those noble and humble, high and low...”<sup>43</sup> Without regard for status or family, the bridge equalizes all those who step on it. Everyone has the same objective in mind; they are all simply trying to make their way across the bridge as quickly as possible.

The viewer’s eye is then carried away into the depth of the composition along the Nihonbashi River with most communication affected by boats. The boats are either delivering the cargo or have already delivered it and are moored at the warehouses and businesses while being unloaded. The figures on the boats and along the backs of the buildings are also turned away from us like people on the bridge. Those few who are facing the viewer have little to no articulation of their expressions. Like the figures on the

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<sup>41</sup> Marcia Yonemoto, *Nihonbashi: Edo’s Contested Center* (East Asian History, 2000) 51. These five roads were the Tokaido, linking Edo and Kyoto; the Nakasendo (or Kiso kaido) traversing the Japan Alps and central Japan and ending in Kyoto; the Koshu kaido - from Edo northwest through Hachioji, connecting the Nakasendo; the Nikko dochu, leading northeast to the shrine to Ieyasu in Nikko, and the Oshu dochu, leading to the far northeast. The improvement and expansion of this impressive transport system was one of the great achievements of Tokugawa rule. *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *The Nihonbashi in Edo*, Honolulu Museum of Art

<sup>43</sup> Marcia Yonemoto, *Nihonbashi: Edo’s Contested Center* (East Asian History, 2000) 59

bridge, many of these laborers are hunched over and preoccupied with their work. Some are strenuously poling their boats along or across the river; others are unloading and transporting merchandise. However due to their sparse placement in the print, the feeling of agitation prevalent on the bridge transitions to a methodical, almost soothing ambiance as we move deeper into the conventional space of the print. Consequently, we witness how the sense of physical chaos in a group setting is juxtaposed with a calmer and more composed atmosphere of a smaller and more intimate group of entities.

There are a total of eight wooden boats depicted in the Nihonbashi River. They are long and narrow and clearly able to support the weight of at least two people as well as a large quantity of miscellaneous merchandise. The few boats that are pulling in and out of the shops are both manned by two people; with only one person pushing the boat along the riverbed. The rest of the boats are docked against the backs of the stores and its boatmen are in the midst of unloading their merchandise with assistance from a team of people. Seven of the eight boats are possibly *oshiokuri-bune*, given their distinctly high prow. These fast cargo boats were initially conceived for fishing but are also used to transport rice, vegetables, charcoal, and logs.<sup>44</sup> The bottom right boat, on the other hand, is perhaps a *kari-bune* - a gathering boat.

These boats represent the idea of connections and relationships. They act as a connector between a few different groups of people, including merchants and suppliers. The boats are seen transporting stock to the merchants (presumably from suppliers), bridging the gap across people from all over. Through the act of transportation, they bring various people together and unite them under a mutual desire, in this case the desire for well-being. The relationship between the two people on the boat itself also contributes to the idea of connection; the boatmen demonstrate the give and take of between two parties and the co-operation required in order to successfully complete their mission.

The buildings that line the river are a mix of stores, wholesalers, storage buildings, and a few houses.<sup>45</sup> Many of these structures appear to be two-storied. From our perspective we are limited to only seeing the somewhat random back entrances. Instead of the presumably well-maintained and pristine front entrance of the store, these back

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<sup>44</sup> Julyan H.E Cartwright, Hisami Nakamura, *What Kind of a Wave is Hokusai's Great Wave off Kanagawa?* (The Royal Society, 2009)

<sup>45</sup> *The Nihonbashi in Edo*, Honolulu Museum of Art

entrance loading stations give a sense of viewing something not for show and lend a real, genuine experience of what the business district would look like to a local.

The Nihonbashi River, taking up a major part of the lower third of the print's surface, is vanishing into the distance just underneath the second bridge and then disappearing beyond our line of sight and into the Sumida River. The Nihonbashi River is depicted in a tranquil state, calm and uninterrupted with the boatmen gliding through serenely. Both sides of the river are faced with stones, presumably for structural support of the banks and to stop water from flooding into the streets. The Nihonbashi River was an integral part of Edo's transport system; it was a part of a larger network of rivers and canals that were used to transport people and goods.<sup>46</sup>

The use of the Western-style perspective is a key element in the composition of this piece. This print has been very clearly divided into a foreground, midground, and background. The boldly cropped figures at the bottom of the composition furthers the sense of chaos of on the bridge in the foreground and at the same time encourages and invites the viewer to engage with the print since the scene is shown from the standpoint of a viewer. The use of one-point perspective is clearly established in this piece by diminishing the scale of figures as the depth of field increases, and the lines that are featured in the architectural structures along the river all converge at the vanishing point beneath the distant bridge in the mid-ground. The general use of directional lines also guides the viewer's eye in a diagonal direction starting from the bottom right corner of the print to the top left corner where Mt. Fuji is located, emphasizing its importance and significance within the print.

At the very back of the picture space we see two towers of Edo castle in the distance. The castle is located quite far away from the ferment of the city center, and this only serves to reinforce the contrast between the quiet elegance of the castle and the city teeming with life. Despite the castle's detachment from the city, we can still make out the stacked multiple-level roofs with intricate roof adornments. The base of the castle is obscured by a vast area of green; the forest only broken up by soft horizontal mist bands *kasumi* that seem to almost touch the upper areas of the sky. According to Japanese Architecture and Arts Netusers' System (JAANUS), *kasumi* appears not only as a pictorial

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<sup>46</sup> *The Nihonbashi in Edo*, Honolulu Museum of Art



element but has definite functional purposes. In landscape painting, *kasumi* can divide the foreground, midground and background to create depth. In narrative painting they can suggest changes of scene and passage of time.<sup>47</sup> The *kasumi* mist plays both roles here: it separates the lower two thirds of the print's height that belongs to the realm of humans from the upper third that appears as the heavenly realm with Mt. Fuji being the only form present there. The castle's submergence in magnificent nature conveys a sense of majesty. The grandiose character of the castle is uninterrupted as it towers over the forest and seems to almost climb towards Mt. Fuji, symbolizing the shogunate's unlimited power. The hidden nature of Edo castle also implies a mysterious and ominous tone and once again alludes to its origins as power. Edo castle was rebuilt following the Great Fire of Meireki in 1657<sup>48</sup> and was intended to serve as a physical reminder of the power and control that the shogunate wielded.<sup>49</sup> Due to the spiraled city plan of Edo, the towers of Edo castle would be easily visible from all points in the city; far in the distance but always watching and domineering.

Arguably, the most recognizable feature in this entire print is Mt. Fuji. Located in the top left corner, Mt Fuji is unassuming in its presence and is depicted with a traditional coat of snow. Like Edo Castle, its cloud-bordering boundary is also shrouded by forest and a mass of clouds and the base is obscured. It towers above everything, the town as well as Edo castle. Mt. Fuji expands the perspective and draws us in deeper into the vastness of the scene and of the world. Though its significance in this print is not overly apparent, the articulation of specific details leads the viewer's eye towards it. Like the aforementioned perspective lines, there are a few objects that also create lines towards Mt. Fuji such as the plank of wood in the foreground on the bridge, the prow and the bow borders of some boats and even the poles that the boatmen are using. These devices create a very specific viewing hierarchy, as we start amongst the chaos on the bridge and we are drawn into a less densely populated area with the boatmen, then the man-made serenity and beauty of Edo Castle, and finally the awe-inspiring grandeur of Mt. Fuji. The linear story of this print implies the idea of often unnoticed natural beauty. As we humans are so preoccupied with

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<sup>47</sup> *Kasumi* (JAANUS)

<sup>48</sup> Yonemoto, 53

<sup>49</sup> Yonemoto, 61

everyday menial tasks, we get caught up in our own troubles and forget to acknowledge the natural beauty that we have become so accustomed to.

Throughout this print there are numerous colors, but the prevalent color is blue. It is used for the sky, the river, Mt. Fuji, people's headgear and hair, and it is also used as the line-work in this entire print. This particular pigment of blue is called 'Berlin blue'. Berlin blue was considered the pigment best suited for woodblock printing; prior to Berlin blue there weren't many blue pigments available and the ones that were happened to be too coarse and had various drawbacks.<sup>50</sup> For example, blue pigments were typically made from the petals of dayflower, but when turned into ink it proved to be sensitive to light, and humidity eventually turned in brown.<sup>51</sup> Thus when Berlin blue was introduced into Japanese prints, it became incredibly widespread and many artists strived to feature it in their prints and make the most of its transparency and resistive qualities.

The line-work is fine and light in weight. It is not overly expressive or whimsical. Rather, it is explicitly descriptive of this scene and very carefully articulates all the subtle human mannerisms as well as some of the objects' peculiar and more delicate features. It creates a sense of delicacy and demonstrates the level of attention and care that this print was created with.

The horizontal orientation of the print series to which this print belongs is a very much thought out decision. It pulls us into the scene that envelopes us. It creates an immersive experience and presents a welcoming invitation into a scene of the everyday life with its mundane cares, as opposed to a vertical print orientation that seems to imply more timeless abstracted vistas.

Nihonbashi was the center of Edo, both geographically and metaphorically. It was a culturally significant location not only for Edo but for Japan as well, believed to be "the point of origin of all of Japan's roads".<sup>52</sup> It was the a lively business district and given Edo's incredibly dense population, it comes as no surprise that Nihonbashi was constantly teeming with swarms of people going about their daily matters. Nihonbashi was initially conceived as a space where the shogunate could 'display its authority'.<sup>53</sup> But despite the

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<sup>50</sup> Henry D. Smith II, *Hokusai and the Blue Revolution in Edo Prints*, 237

<sup>51</sup> Smith II, 238

<sup>52</sup> Yonemoto 50

<sup>53</sup> Yonemoto 50

commoners' reclaiming of the space as their own, the Nihonbashi Bridge still served as a reminder of the shogunate's power and this creates a sense of balance and connection between these two factions. Its importance and significance to the everyday lives of the commoners eventually led to its cultural significance to people all across Japan; it became ingrained in Edo and Japan's culture and came to be recognized as a symbol of Edo.

Hokusai's intense fascination with universal concepts translates into this print with thinly veiled messages of connections and the lack thereof. Although the boats represent the concept of human connections and relationships through the act of working together towards a common goal, the Nihonbashi Bridge signifies a disconnection between the people in their lack of interaction and reciprocal acknowledgement. At the same time Nihonbashi Bridge can be considered a unifying power consolidating people in its tight space. Most important of all however, Nihonbashi itself is a metaphor for the long-standing connection between the shogunate and the common people that appears divinely endorsed by the eternal Mt. Fuji overlooking this harmonious arrangement. Throughout this print Hokusai is constantly linking and juxtaposing concepts, places, and people with his compositional and representational solutions. Thus, at its core *Nihonbashi in Edo* fully embodies the notion of connectedness of the world, and an image of a boat can be considered its all-encompassing symbol.

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**ONE HUNDRED POETS, ONE POEM EACH, EXPLAINED BY THE NURSE**

KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI

## **UNIVERSALITY OF NATURE - HOKUSAI'S PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH to series *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, Explained by the Nurse***

By Cindy Zhang

This exhibition includes two prints from Hokusai's series *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, Explained by the Nurse (Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki)*.<sup>54</sup> The series was designed by Hokusai in ca. 1835-1838, in the prime of his talent and was the last extended print series by the artist. Hokusai based this series on Japanese celebrated classics - an anthology *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, for the Mt. Ogura Villa (Ogura hyakunin isshu)*. This collection of Japanese courtly poems *waka* dates back to 13<sup>th</sup> century and included poems composed from the 7<sup>th</sup> century on. It was put together by Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241), prominent poet and scholar, on request of his son for the purpose of decoration of the residence of the latter's father-in-law. Due to some yet not quite clear circumstances, publication of Hokusai's print series had been never completed. Only twenty seven prints were published although Hokusai created sketches for all the poems in the anthology. The intriguing addition of "the old nurse" in the title served perhaps as a justification of a free approach to the topic, unrestricted by any references coming down from the past.

When everyone celebrated the new culture and new technology, expressing new aesthetic and new philosophy, Hokusai stood on the traditional side. Although he benefited from the advanced knowledge in science and technology that was becoming more and more available at the time, Hokusai conveyed old-time, traditional Japanese spirit through his artworks.

The most important feature of Japanese culture was appreciating nature. Japanese people worshiped the power of nature since their Neolithic age. Although this print series is based on literature classics, Hokusai found a way to express the universality of nature in his *Hyakunin Isshu* series or maybe even to focus on it. Both of the works selected for this exhibition illustrate Chinese elements, yet Hokusai still conveys Japanese ideology. The depicted boats carry not only humans' physical bodies, but also their

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<sup>54</sup> The introductory paragraph is based on the information provided on the website of the Honolulu Museum of Art, website <http://honolulumuseum.org/art/9010> and Roger Keyes, Hokusai's Illustrations for the "100 Poems," in *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 10, The Art Institute of Chicago Centennial Lectures (1983), pp. 310-329

reminiscences of the past and their longings. Since the two countries share the same sky and the same sea, the boats can potentially connect people who are estranged from home and filled with nostalgia to their homeland.

Hokusai limited the space occupied by the figures, yet placed them in the vast environment. Through the arrangement of this kind, Hokusai's characters perfectly merge with the nature. Thus the man's mind became a current flowing in the ocean or a cloud drifting in the sky. The man broke the temporal and spatial boundaries by sinking in the nature and becoming one with its powers.

Hokusai limited his presence in the prints of this series to a minimum. He took an old nurse's view to illustrate *Hyakunin Isshu*, because the old nurse represented a detached but profound viewer of the cycle of the nature and the life. Both prints considered here don't have an intentional idea, so the viewers could always interpret these prints differently, in their own ways. This discreet, evocative approach conveyed Hokusai's philosophy: the meaning of life is in the nature. Since the nature is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent, people cannot fully understand nature. Therefore the meaning of the life is too complicated to be fully understood. Knowing his limit, Hokusai expresses the humble idea through open-ended illustrations. Thus, Hokusai created his images but did not dictate how to understand them. He became a part of nature, offering everything but insisting on nothing.





Katsushika Hokusai, 1760-1849

*Chūnagon Yakamochi* (Chūnagon Yakamochi)

Series: *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each Explained by the Nurse* (Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki)

Signed: By Manji, the former Hokusai (Saki no Hokusai Manji)

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi, publishing house Eijūdō

Censorship seal: *kiwame* (approved)

Date: ca. 1835-1836

Size: 24.3 x 36.4 cm (9 9/16 x 14 5/16 inches)

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1227

Poem: *When I see the whiteness/ of the frost that lies/ on the bridge the magpies spread,/ then do I know, indeed,/ that the night has deepened.* (Translated by J. Mostow).



## ***Chūnagon Yakamochi***

### **from series *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each Explained by the Nurse***

By Max Hertz

In the vast waters extending far and wide, five boats are floating along a jagged coastline scattered with small structures, with a distant village on the lowland next to a mountain at the horizon. In the foreground are two of the boats. The two closest to the viewer appear large in size and with many details. The nearest boat partly obstructs the one further away. Both boats have a softly curved hull and are pointed to the right of the print. The boat, which is closer to the front of the picture plane and stretches across nearly three-quarters of the print, has a set of three tiered box structures on top – perhaps, cabins. The boat that is obstructed is smaller and has a horizontal half-cylinder roof. Both boats are black, blue, red, pink, and white. Colors are used in the following way: the main bodies of the boats are black, the edges are red, small horizontal pieces of wood and the box-shaped and half-cylinder superstructures are blue, windows are pink, and small outline lines are white. The overall shape and decorative elements of the boat have pronounced curves. Unlike the smaller boat, the large boat has a set of two masts, one in the center of the boat and one in the rear part of the deck. The back mast extends to the very top of the print while mast on the right reaches up to three quarters of the picture height. Both masts are yellow in color and have three slightly sagging greenish-blue ropes attached from the top end of the mast down, in a gentle slope, to the deck. On the boats in the foreground are five figures, all wearing a blue dress, a large pink collar with white edges, and a red hat with a black rim. On the stern of the larger boat is a small entrance space leading to the topmost tiered structure, which has a blue top and sides, and a red back. The back of the box structure has two yellow doorways spanning the entire wall and the side has a small

rectangular pink window. On the overhanging entrance space are two figures. One of them is seated on the deck while the other is poking half of their body out of the leftmost doorway of the box structure. They both have their backs turned towards us, their glances directed at the promontory. The person on the right is sporting a green skirt as well as the blue coat, light-colored collar, and hat that all five figures are wearing. Furthermore, they both have long braids – this is a queue, an official man's hairstyle that Han Chinese had to wear under Manchurian rule (1644-1911). It is an interesting detail because the poet whose poem Hokusai illustrates lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Hokusai, on the other hand, following ukiyo-e's characteristic concern with the modern, depicts China of his own time. Underneath the overhanging balcony with the two figures is a large rudder, a portion of which is shown above the water. Two more people are at the other end of the larger boat – on the bow. They are also dressed in the same manner as the other two people on the boat, but the one closest to the bow, is shown sideways so that his boot is visible. He has his right arm stretched out as if pointing at something. The other figure on the bow is standing, with his left arm likewise stretched out; he seems to be pointing in the same direction. All four of the figures on the larger boat are facing away from the viewer, looking towards the coastline in the near distance – just above the two boats on the picture plane. Similarly, on the smaller boat just behind the larger boat, another figure dressed in a blue dress, white collar, and red and black hat is huddled looking off towards the coast. The two boats in the foreground are in a band of blue water with ripples represented by slightly curving thin lines of black, with fuzzy white beneath them. Above the band of blue water is a broad expanse of white, presumably still water.

At the bottom right edge of the white vastness, just above the larger boat and the two figures on the bow, are three small black birds – two to the right of the bow mast and

one to the left. The species of the birds is unclear; it also seems unclear in which direction they fly – away from the people or towards them. Also predominantly in the band of white is the jagged coastline. The portion of land juts in a triangle-like shape. This craggy promontory seems to be pointing from the left side of the print to the right, across over three-quarters of the image. The promontory is filled with a series of large irregular rock formations, varying from top to bottom from a pale pink to a dark brown. Stippled across rocky cliff landscape are dozens and dozens of small black dots. This varying density of dots adds agitation to the surface of the craggy cliffs that themselves create an intensive rhythm of irregular serrated shapes as they follow each other in succession. Within, around, and atop the rocks are turquoise plants with black outlines. Towards the bottom left of the print, one section of the rock cliff is coming into contact with the blue band of water. At this point, just behind the obstructed boat, is a large splash of white water. Small beige hut structures are seen through openings in the rocky landscape. The structures are small and rounded at the top, with triangular dark gables at their fronts. Further away among the cliffs – into the depth and to the right – larger houses are seen with dark blue roofs, presumably made of colored tiles, a common and important feature of Chinese architecture. Just beyond to the right of the jagged landscape in the band of white water are the other three boats. All three boats are close to each other and look the same. They are all facing to the right of the image. The three boats are mostly red and pink with a small amount of light turquoise. The top edge of the boats is red, while the lower portion is pink, and the front and very bottoms of the boats are turquoise. They each have one yellow mast with two slightly curving ropes attached to its top end and affixed somewhere on the boats. The shells of the boats are relatively flat with an upturned pointed bow. Atop each of the boats is a rounded triangular beige hut-like superstructure with dark gable-shaped

openings on one end, similar to the tops of the buildings scattered throughout the coastline.

Above the three boats, another stretch of blue water leads up to large, distant body of land on the horizon. The coast of the lowland extends right to left for about one fourth of the composition as repeating capes, forming a long horizontal stretch of pale pink with a mass of green plants above it. Towards the right side of this stretch of land are a series of white structures. To the left, further in the distance, a mountain rises above, in a rhythmic continuation of the capes. The mountain is a flat pale pink shape with a black outline. Its double-peak passes through a streak of white clouds. Distant clouds span the width of the entire print, above and behind the jagged coast, behind and around the mountain in the distance and above the white structures. Additionally, around the mountain there are more masses of green trees and plants. Echoing the jagged promontory in the foreground in both shape and span, this distant stretch of land speaks to the recurrence of similar forms throughout the world.

Above the white structures are two boxes called cartouches. Within the cartouches are Japanese characters saying the title of the series (on the right) and the poem which the print is thematically inspired by (on the left). The series is called *One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets, Explained by a Nurse. One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets* is a famous poetic anthology compiled by Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241).<sup>55</sup> Composed in the thirteenth century, it became one of most widely known literary classics. Imperial poetic anthologies had a long tradition in Japan. The first anthology in Japanese history, dating back to the 8th century, called *Man'yōshū* – Collection of Ten Thousand

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<sup>55</sup> Minneapolis Institute of Art. *Poem by Chunagon Yakamochi*. Accessed 10/16/18  
<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/66437/poem-by-chunagon-yakamochi-katsushika-hokusai>

Leaves, is partly credited to Otomo Yakamochi (718-785), to whose poem Hokusai's print in question is dedicated. On the print he is called Chunagon Yakamochi. Chunagon is the position of a Second Rank Councilor, held by prominent statesmen and is known as a man of letters. Yakamochi, born to the prestigious Otomo clan of military leaders and fellow poets, was a *waka* poet.<sup>56</sup> *Waka* poetry commonly followed a 5-7-5-7-7 metre and translates to "poetry in Japanese" as opposed to *kanshi* - poems composed in Chinese.

The presence of this writing in the *One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets* print series is, self-evidently, of the utmost importance. For the interpretation of these poems, Hokusai uses the perspective of a created character, an uneducated wet-nurse. This decision allowed Hokusai to make seemingly simple-minded interpretations and gave greater freedom in his renditions. This is clear after looking at the translation of the poem:

Kasagi no	When I see the whiteness
Wataseru Hashi ni	Of the frost that lies
Oku shimo no	On the bridge the magpies spread
Shiroki wo mireba	then do I know, indeed,
Yo zo fuke ni keru	That the night has deepened.

(Translated by Joshua Mostow<sup>57</sup>)

The poem and the print share only one possible relation – the presence of birds as potentially magpies. Moreover, the print prominently describes the snow, none of which is present in the print. While obscure, the poem may be related to the Chinese legend of Vega and Altair. Altair was a herdsman who fell in love with Vega, a weaver maiden. One day, Altair's herd, while he was distracted, ate all of the flowers in the heavenly fields. To punish Altair, the Gods decided to separate him from Vega with the Milky Way, allowing

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<sup>56</sup> Wikipedia. *Waka (poetry)*. Accessed 10/17/18  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waka\\_\(poetry\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waka_(poetry))

<sup>57</sup> Mostow, Joshua. *Pictures of the Heart: The Hyakunin Isshu in Word and Image*. U of M Center For Japanese Studies, 2015, 158

them to meet once a year by way of a bridge formed by magpies. In the end, the two lovers, two stars, must part by dawn. In Japan, the myth is largely celebrated as the Tanabata, or Star, festival and continues being celebrated today following a widespread gain of popularity in the Edo period. Ultimately, it is likely that the meaning of the poem and its relation to the print are not of great importance here. If the birds were truly magpies and it were important to Hokusai, then he would have made them clearly magpies.

In all, Hokusai's print depicts a vast scene of a Chinese landscape - foreign to Hokusai and his Japanese contemporaries. However, it is clear that Hokusai was not entirely foreign to China as he depicts not only their boats, attire, and landscape, but also pulls from their traditions of representation. The tradition, *shanshui* - mountains and waters, called *sansui* in Japanese, is a style used to depict not just a specific locality, but an endless image of the world. "It includes the highest (the mountains), the lowest (the waters) and animals and human presence (uniting heaven and earth)."<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, *shanshui* style does not care whether the artwork is true to what we see in nature, but rather is concerned with what we think about nature.<sup>59</sup> Hokusai keeps true to this as his scene exaggerates features like the promontory and seeks to simply and clearly represent China.

One way Hokusai takes artistic liberty is in the limited choices of color: orange, blue, turquoise, and black (but of a broad tonal variety). Like his decisions regarding rendering nature, he brings us, the viewers, into the landscape with just enough colors to impart on us the essential characteristics of the world. With this, Hokusai details the time of

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<sup>58</sup> Varshavskaya, Elena; Private communication with instructor, 10/8/18

<sup>59</sup> Siren, Osvald, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles*. Ronald Press. Pp. 62, 104.

day in a transitory state – dusk or dawn, and signals an identifiably Chinese color palette in the manmade structures.

Moreover, the viewer understands that the print illustrates China, from the overall configuration of the boats and their structural detail and design as well as from the color. Secondly, the figures aboard the ships, from their attire and queue hairstyles, are clearly Chinese. The identification of China is also expressed in both the forms of nature and in their rendering. The Chinese had highly developed methods of illustrating various features in the landscape. Hokusai's print uses some of these methods within the craggy structure and dotted texture of the cliffs.

Along with distinctly representing the landscape as a philosophical *shanshui*, Hokusai's *Poem by Chunagon Yakamochi* similarly aspires to show the world as a whole and all at once. Hokusai is doing this by rendering near and far simultaneously through different viewpoints and perspectives. This is clear in the print's detailed representation of the promontory, the distant view of the soft land in the background with a mountain, and, lastly, the horizon. The motifs in both the background and the foreground are the same, but are stylistically treated differently. They are rendered differently, not because they are actually different, but because we would see them differently - things close up appear in more detail and things far away as just simply silhouettes. These choices highlight Hokusai's focus on humankind's place in the world as both an active and passive observer.

The active observers, those depicted within the print, are introduced in a characteristic way for Chinese philosophic landscape. Humans are ever present, whether it is the literal depiction of a person, or of manmade objects such as buildings or boats. Hokusai takes part in this tradition by spending tremendous attention to the detail of the boats. Another way the landscape shows the omnipresent nature of humanity is through

the literal vastness of human presence. Both near and far, the promontory and the landscape in the distance, all the way to the horizon, are filled with dwellings. Furthermore, the focus on these objects and their presence within nature makes the claim of equality between man and nature - that man's creations are on par with nature and its elements.

Another one of man's creations, writing, is an integral part of, not only this print in particular, but of East Asian visual art. The coexistence of word and image are not just common, but are traditionally expected. If in a painting the two art forms, made by the same materials and instruments – ink, silk or paper, and brush, interact with one another simultaneously, texts in prints are often separated by cartouches. The cartouches allow the text to be legibly set off from the rest of the image as the frames are rigid and geometric, unlike the natural forms, buildings, and boats within the print. The geometry of the cartouches also references the format of paper commonly used for poetry writing. Tall and narrow strips, called *tanzaku*, commonly held an individual poem in an anthology.<sup>60</sup> Thick square sheets of paper, called *shikishigata*, on the other hand, are used for calligraphic poems or paintings and are often affixed to the upper portions of screens or sliding door panels.<sup>61</sup> Although the geometry sets the cartouches and the writing within them apart from the rest of the print, they are still clearly related. One major way in which they do this, other than both being on the same overall piece of paper, is by sharing the same colors as the rest of the image. The *shikishigata* cartouche in particular, is colored in the same gradient-like manner as the background landscape. The coloration of the landscape and the

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<sup>60</sup> Definition: Shikishi. JAANUS (Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System), Accessed 10/12/18  
<http://www.aist.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/s/shikishi.htm>

<sup>61</sup> Definition: Shikishigata. JAANUS (Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System), Accessed 10/12/18  
<http://www.aist.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/t/tanzaku.htm>



cartouche is an example of *bokashi* – a technique of hand applying a gradation of ink to the wood block to give the work an illusion of depth or light.<sup>62</sup>

All features of Hokusai's print, *Poem by Chunagon Yakamochi*, discussed above testify to his preoccupation with the universalities of the world - the theme that seems to pervade all his work. Some of these universalities are woven into the poem – the passage of time, from day to night, of seasons, hot to cold, waiting and longing, love accompanied by nature, the magpies. The broadness of life experiences presented within the poem are what influences Hokusai. The ambiguity of both the poem and the print allow the viewer to find themselves within the work and within the world, echoed by our common experiences. Furthermore, the print's focus on China is more philosophical than representational. The poem was written by Otomo Yakamochi, one of the most revered Japanese poets in history. Why then, does the print represent a view of China? On one hand, Hokusai may have chosen Chinese boats and imagery because Yakamochi grew up on Kyushu Island in Dazaifu - the gateway for Chinese influence in Japan.<sup>63</sup> But perhaps Hokusai represents the foreign country – China, as a larger means of saying that humanity and its essence is the same no matter where you are. That nature and our relation to it, at its core, is constant. The terrain may change, the clothes may change, and the boats may change, but the way people live, interact, and experience the world, is universal.

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<sup>62</sup> Newland, Amy Reigle. *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*. Hotei Publishing (2006)

<sup>63</sup> Paula Dee and Paula Doe, *A Warbler's Song in the Dusk: The Life and Work of Otomo Yakamochi (718-785)*

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Katsushika Hokusai, 1760-1849

*Abe no Nakamaro* (701-770)

Series: *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each Explained by the Nurse* (Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki)

Signed: By Manji, the former Hokusai (Saki no Hokusai Manji)

Publisher: Iseya Sanjirō, publishing house Eijūdō

Censorship seal: *kiwame* (approved)

Date: ca. 1835-1836

Size: 24.9 x 37.5 cm

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1228

Poem: *As I gaze out, far/ across the plain of heaven,/ ah, at Kasuga,/ from behind Mount Mikasa,/ it's the same moon that came out then!* (Translated by Joshua Mostow)

## ***Abe-no Nakamaro***

### **from series *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, Explained by the Nurse***

By Cindy Zhang and Samantha Ng

The misty sky depicts a night scene where a man garbed in a majestic ochre-colored robe with blue roundels is perched on top of the hill overlooking the dark sea. He is holding a fan whilst posing in a very mannerly way. His facial expression emanates a sense of calmness and longing as his body is stood firmly on the ground and facing the land, yet his head is turned sideways while staring into the watery expanse. Two men clad in military dresses have walked up the hill to catch onto him find themselves bowing down to the exceptional scholar and intellectual as he finishes his poem. These two persons have split off a group of five people standing with their backs towards the viewer next to the curtain under tall fluttering banners. However, the protagonist's attention doesn't appear to be focused on the soldiers' grand gesture, his eyes are guiding the audience into the dark, nebulous sea. The boats appear to float on top of the shaded areas of the cerulean waters as if gliding towards the reflection of the moon. The man's undivided focus on the sea and the poem written on a square inset on the same path almost distracts us from the great surrounding around him, the intricate and beautiful Chinese land and infrastructure that is unfolded just in front of us and the protagonist. What is so urgent and yielding that causes this mysterious figure to cease contemplation of the beauty of the natural landscape to merely ponder about over the great eastern sea? While the focus is well-aimed at the center of the print, there are so many more intricate details around the scene that clues us into the mysterious and inexplicably urgent scene in Hokusai's print.

The man in Hokusai's print is Japanese scholar and *waka* poet of the Nara period, Abe-no Nakamaro, an intellectual that has been sent to China for overseas travel for academic studies (701-770). During the 7th to 9th century, it was not uncommon for Japan to send a lot of scholars to Tang Dynasty China to learn more about Chinese culture and civilization. The infrastructure around the protagonist and the designs illustrated by Hokusai clearly resemble the Chinese traditional architecture, perhaps imperial. The distinctive curled roofs of the buildings, the blue tiles piled in descending order, the striped military camp curtain surrounding the grassy hills presents a cozy, secluded environment. All elements together constitute a hallmark of Chinese architecture. This testifies to the fact

that Abe-no Nakamaro is in a country not of his own. Another indicator that Abe-no Nakamaro is on his international travel is the soldiers clad in Chinese style-armors. The uniforms tied with fabric to waist represent a common style familiar from the Tang Dynasty. This further supports the fact that he is in China.

The direction of his head leads our glance towards the reflection of the moon and the poem almost above it in the top right corner. The poem is an original written by Abe-no Nakamaro,

Ama no hara	As I gaze out, far
Furi-sake-mireba	across the plain of heaven,
Kasuga naru	ah, at Kasuga,
Mikasa no yama ni	from behind Mount Mikasa,
Ideshi tsuki kamo	it's the same moon that came out then!

(Translated by J. Mostow<sup>64</sup>)

The poem expresses a deep longing and nostalgia for his homeland, Japan. As he stares off sideways into the sea, we can't help but notice poet's focusing on the reflection of the moon in the water and realize the vagueness of its existence and the elusiveness of its representation of the reality and the significance of its meaning for Abe-no Nakamaro. Taking into consideration that Abe-no Nakamaro never made it home from China, the moon's reflection prefigures a sorrowful fate of the Japanese poet. One can speculate that the moon symbolizes the maternal comfort in his subconscious mind and his inescapable doom of reality suggesting that the moon was simply a visage just as his dreams returning home. Reminiscences of the presence of the similar natural phenomena (in this case, the moon) here and back home underline the principle unity of the world across borders). According to Machotka, "Instead of the real moon, the main object of the text, Hokusai rendered it only as a reflection in the water." Interestingly, in the extant preparatory drawing the moon is still in the sky. By this compositional device Hokusai evoked a melancholic atmosphere of the poem, where the moon is not real but faint and fragile as the poet's memory".<sup>65</sup> This indirect approach to depicting the subject conveys implicit Japanese aesthetics. The "falling moon" illustrated the sadness of the loss, capturing a preserved emotion of the main character. He missed his homeland, Japan, yet could not

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<sup>64</sup> Mostow, Joshua. Pictures of the Heart: The Hyakunin Isshu in Word and Image. U of M Center For Japanese Studies, 2015, 161

<sup>65</sup> Machotka, 94

fully express his nostalgia in front of other people. Additionally, the moon serves as another identity of Abe-no Nakamaro. The reflection of the moon and black sky could indicate the misfortune of the poet's trip. According to the history, Abe's boat faced strong typhoon and lost contact with other boats for many days. The rumor of his death spread to his Chinese friends, including famous poets. To commemorate their dear friend, each of them wrote a poem for him. Li Bai, one of the greatest poets in Chinese history, illustrated Abe-no Nakamaro as the fallen moon to render the poet's precious lyrical gift and to express sadness of losing a fellow poet.<sup>66</sup> In this print, the reflection of the moon conveyed both Li Bai's illustration and *mono-no aware*.

The two boats sailing off in the distance are also emblematic of the two failures he endured trying to travel back to Japan. As you may have also noticed, the interesting visual hierarchy set in Hokusai's print. While Nakamaro is on top of the mountain with the Chinese soldiers and infrastructure depicted lower than the Japanese poet denotes a slight sense of superiority. Despite the immense respect he has received in China, he still yearns for his own home. No honor or respect in a foreign land will fill the void of his yearning. Abe no Nakamaro was sent to China at the age of sixteen among other young students to study from Tang Dynasty, one of the most thriving cultural and political powers in the world at the time. During his time in the capital of Tang Dynasty, Chang'an, he adopted a Han name and customs. His intelligence and knowledge enabled him to be rewarded with a long period of positions in the high office of royal library of the Tang Dynasty. Thirty-five years after his service in the foreign government, embassies from Japan persuaded him to return to the land of his birth. The soldiers at the bottom of the print are there perhaps to arrest Nakamaro for the Chinese Emperor found out that he was sent to discover the secrets of the Chinese calendar. There he was stranded on top of the mountain to starve.<sup>67</sup> The print also refers to his attempted returning mission from Tang to Japan in the year of 753. At the night before his departure, he created this poem to recall his life in the foreign country and express his nostalgia. However, the ship drove off to Annam (present day Vietnam) and he later became the military governor of Annam. He remained in Tang until his death. The print captures the night before his departure in 753, when his friends, including famous Chinese poet Wang Wei, came to him with a gesture of farewell and a

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<sup>66</sup> Tucker, Jonathan. *The Silk Road: China and the Karakorum Highway: A Travel Companion*. London: Tauris, 2015, 62-3

<sup>67</sup> Henri Joly. *Legend in Japanese Art*. London/New York: John Lane Company, 1908. xlviii

wish of good fortune. Abe no Nakamaro, true to the Japanese tradition, contributed a poem in his native language to this event – this poem is believed to be the one on the top right corner.

The beautiful poem was also included in *Hyakunin Isshu*, a poetic anthology which is referred to in English as “One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each”. The anthology was a collection of one hundred poems in the form of *tanka* – a thirty-one-syllable verse created by one hundred poets, one poem each. It was compiled by Fujiwara-no Teika (1162-1241), Japanese preeminent poet, scholar and calligrapher of Heian and Kamakura periods. It is said that the anthology was put together on the request of Fujiwara-no Teika’s son, Fujiwara-no Tameie (1198-1275), for decoration of the residence of the latter’s father in law. The full name of the anthology is was *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu*. Ogura is a small place outside Kyoto. It is situated in the right-hand side of Kyoto where the aristocracy used to live – to the right of the imperial palace. The compiler of the anthology, Fujiwara-no Teika, was born in Ogura district of Kyoto. Even more important it is that the anthology was assembled to be used as a decoration of a house built in Ogura district. It is noteworthy that there were other compilations of *Hyakunin Isshu*. Most of them were inspired by the form of *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu*, but included different works. Due to the authority of Fujiwara-no Teika, *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* is the only official anthology that people generally refer to. *Hyakunin Isshu* is a collection of *waka* poems. The term *waka* means Japanese poems, in contrast to classical Chinese poetry. *Waka* used traditional themes in Japanese culture and was closely connected with the concept of *mono-no aware*, Japanese aesthetics which appreciates the sadness of the transience of things.<sup>68</sup> The anthology *Hyakunin Isshu* consisted of poems by people prominent in Japanese culture, including emperors and courtiers; Fujiwara-no Teika was also a courtier. It is particularly significant that Japanese ideology and Japanese spirit that are represented in those poems became exceedingly popular during Edo period, during which the art of ukiyo-e flourished.

*Hyakunin Isshu* was a common theme among ukiyo-e artists. It wasn’t missed by Hokusai, one of the most important ukiyo-e artists. In fact, it became a theme of the major series undertaken by Hokusai in his later career. The first information on Hokusai’s prints

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<sup>68</sup> “Mono no aware” and Japanese Beauty. Suntory Museum, temporary exhibition, 2013. [https://www.suntory.com/sma/exhibition/2013\\_2/display.html](https://www.suntory.com/sma/exhibition/2013_2/display.html)



from this series was the advertisement included in the introduction to a novel by Tamenaga Shunsui (1790-1844) by the publishing house of Nishimura Yohachi (1762-1835).<sup>69,70</sup> Nishimura Yohachi's publishing house Eijūdō (hall of eternal life) issued five prints of Hokusai's *Hyakuni Isshu* series in 1836. Hokusai continued to produce sketches for the *Hyakunin Isshu* series until the publishing house bankrupted in 1836.<sup>71</sup> Publication of the series then was overtaken by another publishing house but was soon discontinued too, perhaps due to the economic crisis that negatively affected all publishing in Edo.<sup>72</sup> *Hyakunin Isshu* was the last major serial work by Hokusai.

Hokusai called his print series *Hyakunin Isshu Uba ga etoki – One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each Explained by the Nurse* because the artist chose to present old poetic classics through the eyes of an old nurse. Here, the nurse refers to an old woman who once was hired to nourish another woman's child by breast-feeding this child. Practice of delegating responsibilities of raising children to wet nurses had been established in Japan at least from Heian period (8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> cc).<sup>73</sup> The direct and prolonged contact between the wet nurse and her ward/nursling resulted in particularly close and long-lasting relationship between the two; the wet nurses enjoyed respect of the nurslings and maintained considerable authority in their firsthand instruction about the surrounding world.<sup>74</sup> Since the nurse was not a character belonging to the anthology of poems, she represented an entity detached from the subject yet offered an intelligent and individual view of those stories.

Another noteworthy aspect of Hokusai's images of the *Hyakunin Isshu* series is that he magnified *mono-no aware* through narratives. *Mono-no aware* is an aesthetic ideology which appreciated the transient nature of life; the sense of beauty elicited by things was regarded as particularly poignant due to the evanescence of things, brevity of

<sup>69</sup> Ewa Machotka, *Visual Genesis of Japanese National Identity: Hokusai's "Hyakunin Isshu"*. Brussels: P. Lang, 2009. 73-74

<sup>70</sup> [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/term\\_details.aspx?bioid=145341](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/term_details.aspx?bioid=145341)

<sup>71</sup> Keyes, Roger, and Hokusai. "Hokusai's Illustrations for the "100 Poems"." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 10 (1983): 311-29. doi:10.2307/4104343.

<sup>72</sup> Machotka, 74

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Conlan. Thicker than Blood: The Social and Political Significance of Wet Nurses in Japan, 950-1330. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (June 2005), pp. 159-205. <https://0-www-jstor-org.librarycat.risd.edu/stable/pdf/25066766.pdf?refreqid=search%3A184cb8860567faa3965dbe11e344018b>

<sup>74</sup> On the role of nurse in Hokusai's series see Keyes, Roger, and Hokusai. "Hokusai's Illustrations for the "100 Poems"." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 10 (1983): 316-317 [https://0-www-jstor-org.librarycat.risd.edu/stable/4104343?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=keyes&searchText=hyakunin&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Fgroup%3Dnone%26amp%3Bacc%3Don%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3Bfc%3Doff%26amp%3BQuery%3Droger%2Bkeyes%2Bhyakunin&refreqid=search%3A6fb0e0afef9f9214f87fbaeba4a1d832&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://0-www-jstor-org.librarycat.risd.edu/stable/4104343?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=keyes&searchText=hyakunin&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Fgroup%3Dnone%26amp%3Bacc%3Don%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3Bfc%3Doff%26amp%3BQuery%3Droger%2Bkeyes%2Bhyakunin&refreqid=search%3A6fb0e0afef9f9214f87fbaeba4a1d832&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

their existence. This concept originated during Heian period when Japan looked for its identity and refuse external influences for the first time. This aesthetic philosophy flourished again in Edo period because it conveyed nativism, a big concern of the philosophers of the time. While major ukiyo-e genres, *bijinga*, *yakusha-e* and *musha-e* were information oriented, Hokusai chose to focus on poetic content and bring together the old and the new as he composed a scene for each poem. The poems themselves had carried the appreciation of brevity of the moment, yet Hokusai's illustration augmented the simplicity of the evoked feeling by thoroughly developed and intricate visuals. In this way, Hokusai created highly original images, unique in their complex visual interpretations of the poems, deriving from various aspects of Japanese traditional heritage: no wonder these compositions turned out to be Hokusai's most significant contribution to the formulation of the idea of Japanese national identity.

According to Roger Keyes, the print dedicated to Abe no Nakamaro was in the second batch of *Hyakunin isshu* prints. It followed Hokusai's format as it had been already established in the first batch of prints of this series. The prints were printed on the large-size horizontal sheet. In the upper right corner, the frames of the title and of the poem overlap slightly with the square poem cartouche superimposed over the elongated cartouche of the title. Both shapes have poetic connotations. The elongated shape of the title reminds of *tanzaku*, small vertical poem card (ca. 36cmx6cm) that may be decorated with color designs. During Heian period small rectangular pieces of paper were used for poetry anthologies.<sup>75</sup> The slip used for writing a poem is of square shape. It is known as *shikishi* – a square sheet of paper used for calligraphically written poems.<sup>76</sup> Often these papers were exquisitely decorated – the square shape with a poem that appears on Hokusai's print is adorned with gradient used for mist-like formations shown against yellowish-beige background.

The image itself is carried out in the typical Hokusai's style. It is characterized by the choice of images and their arrangement allowing the story to be told in a subtle way; the print is distinguished also for precise shapes and vivid color. Based on Machotka's analysis done in the first chapter of *Visual Genesis of Japanese National Identity: Hokusai's Hyakunin Isshu*, the success of Hokusai's *Hyakunin Isshu* was not an accident.

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<sup>75</sup> (C)2001 Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System. <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/t/tanzaku.htm>

<sup>76</sup> (C)2001 Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System. <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/s/shikishi.htm>

Hokusai's *Hyakunin Isshu* series brought together *Hyakunin Isshu* and ukiyo-e, two icons of Japanese culture; although originating in different times, the two were at their peak of esteem again during late Edo period. As has been noted above, *Hyakunin Isshu* was a 13<sup>th</sup> century anthology of Japanese poetry, originally composed for aristocracy; whereas ukiyo-e presented Japanese daily life for commoners during Edo period. As Japan approached the modern era, various influences such as Chinese Confucianism, western culture, and native culture thrived and competed. Presence in Japan of influences of multiple cultures, proliferation of intellectual and artistic currents urged Japanese people to identify themselves. Therefore, a study of nativism, Kokugaku, flourished during later Edo period, spreading native aesthetics, philosophy, and literature around Japan.

Both art forms, classical anthologies and ukiyo-e prints, were popular among the common people. *Hyakunin Isshu* earned the acknowledgement from academic authorities because of the fame of Fujiwara Tenka as a scholar. In addition, the anthology was compiled chronologically, becoming a textbook for beginners in poetry. The academic value facilitated recognition of the work, and later, the Tokugawa clan pervaded it. The family even asked Kano Tan'yu, the official artist who worked for the shoguns, to illustrate *Hyakunin Isshu*.<sup>77</sup>

Since the Tokugawa clan enabled a breakthrough for low-born people, particularly in the city, it became a leader in various pursuits that common people wanted to follow. Thus, when Tokugawa clan promoted *Hyakunin Isshu*, it naturally became the favorite literature among the citizens.

Ukiyo-e as the main form of visual arts of townspeople during Tokugawa period significantly elevated *Hyakunin Isshu*'s popularity. Due to the development of printmaking, the anthology could be mass produced. Since *Hyakunin Isshu* was open to any kinds of interpretation, it stimulated different pictorial references. Thus, with the help of images, various versions of *Hyakunin Isshu* appeared. Although traditionally, people restricted visual representation of a poem in order to keep the original concept of the poet, *Hyakunin isschu* was meant to have visual expression. Since the poems covered versatile themes and individuals, they became the subject matter for ukiyo-e images. For example, if the poem mentioned the beauty, it could be a *bijinga*. If the poem appreciated nature, it could

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<sup>77</sup> Machotka 20

be a landscape. The illustrated *Hyakunin isshu* did not appear until the 17th century, yet when people broke the tradition, it suddenly thrived.

Hokusai was not the first person who illustrated *Hyakunin Isshu*. The founder of ukiyo-e, Hishikawa Moronobu created images on this topic in the 17th century; artists of the Utagawa School also worked on this theme. What made Hokusai's version stand out was his approach. Unlike other artists who infused *Hyakunin Isshu* with their interpretation, Hokusai left most room for others to interpret, keeping the tradition of protecting the original meaning of the poems.

Hokusai's print Abe-no Nakamaro illustrates the story of renowned Japanese poet and scholar. He is shown as a Japanese courtier in an eloquent setting of a Chinese landscape on a hilly shore, overlooking a vast body of water. The poet is being honored by the officials on the grounds of the military camp next to the fluttering banners. But Abe no Nakamaro is oblivious of honors he is receiving. He is shown from the front, but his face appears sidewise with all attention focused on the reflection of the moon floating in the boundless waters. These are the same waters that extend from China to Japan and wash the shores of his missed homeland. Next to the floating reflection of the moon there are two boats. They are moored for the night and are motionless in the immovable waters of bay. The very presence of the boats suggests a possibility of traveling over the distance. The boats become symbols of connectedness, of unity and equivalence of here and there.

Hokusai is familiar with the representational conventions of a Japanese person at a Chinese palace. Hokusai's mastery of visual storytelling through precise details gives life to Nakamaro's poetry. The artist pays respect to the Japanese poet and scholar whose legacy transcends distances and cultures and perhaps, as the poet hopes, is bound to return to Japan as well.

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**FIFTY-THREE STATIONS OF THE TOKAIDO ROAD, HŌEIDŌ EDITION**

UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE

## The Tokaido Road in Hiroshige's Eye

By Jen Chenyu Zhang

Throughout the Edo period, transportation in Japan was confined to foot travel, and the Tokaido highway was the most important route of the country. The transportation stations along the Tokaido Road played a major role within the politics of Edo-period life as spaces of public performances, symbolism and imagination. Stations become a celebrated subject matter in ukiyo-e art, in which representations of those stations overlaid material presence with cultural significance. The symbolic significance of these stations and the popularity they enjoyed owed much to the way they were depicted by the artists of Japan.

It is without doubt that the best-known artwork devoted to the Tokaido is Hiroshige's first series of prints *Fifty-Three Stations of Tokaido Road* known as the Great Tokaido. The series that comprises altogether fifty-five prints (fifty-three stations of the road and its start- and end points) was issued by the publishing house Hōeidō of the publisher Takenouchi Magobei with some participation of another publishing house, Senkakudō of the publisher Tsuruya Kiemon. The publication dates to 1833-1834. This series became one of over twenty sets of prints dedicated by Hiroshige to the Tokaido Road throughout his career. It was previously believed that the inspiration for the series is rooted in Hiroshige's journey of 1832, when he was believed to have escorted the shogun's gift horse to the Emperor and traveled from Edo to Kyoto. Soon after this supposed trip, he published the series. Recent scholarship, however, calls this into question as lacking contemporary evidence.<sup>78</sup> This series of prints had immediately captivated the public's eye and is considered the first Japanese artwork that shows a harmonious combination of landscape and figures, a union of temporality of man and the eternity of nature. Unlike the ukiyo-e prints of earlier decades that rarely focused on capturing the landscape, in his prints, the landscape changed from being the background to becoming the picture itself. In Hiroshige's eyes, the everyday landscape is translated into intimate and lyrical scenes that poetically reflect the ordinary life and things that are mundane.

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<sup>78</sup> Timothy Clark, *100 Views of Mt. Fuji* (Trumbull, CT: Weatherhill, 2001), 59

One visual skill that Hiroshige develops in the series is his capturing of man in nature. The theme of his prints is always simple activities that were familiar to most of common people of Edo period Japan. Hiroshige masterfully displays his expertise in depicting details. This referred not only to the representation of an individual figure, but to rendering of human interaction and to showing how humans exist in nature. By capturing moments of daily life, Hiroshige makes the viewers to pause temporarily and envision themselves as commoners of that period.

Another unique aspect of Hiroshige's first Tokaido series of prints is the system of devising diagonal compositions that establish major transitions from foreground to background, while spatial continuity suggests limitless expanse of nature. The soft curving lines of figures and of organic shapes found in natural objects provided Hiroshige an opportunity of creating sceneries which suggest fragile and impermanent quality of human existence, compared with the eternal existence of ever-changing nature. In the exhibition's four prints selected from this series, the boats are carriers of our perception. These boats lead our eyes both into the center of the print and to the edge of the horizon. There the boats find themselves in the vast sea, where the mountains and trees continue. As our eyes are reading through the scenes that are bound only by the edge of the print, our imagination travels past the pictorial borders, proceeds further and continues to visualize the world beyond. The essence of Hiroshige's depiction of the Tokaido Road is that there is always some form of incompleteness in things shown that implies a greater world our imagination must be aware of. Landscape and people inhabiting it and functioning in it easily and habitually are a part of the eternal world order. Hiroshige's views become the medium in which our imagination thrives.







Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797-1858

*View of the Embankment at Kanagawa, (Kanagawa, dai-no kei), Station # 3*

Series: *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido (Tokaido gojūsan no uchi)*

Signed: Hiroshige-ga (picture by Hiroshige)

Publisher: Takenouchi Magohachi, publishing house Hōeidō (Hoeido Tokaido)

Date: ca. 1833-1834

Size: horizontal *ōban*, 23 x 35.6 cm

Polychrome woodblock print nishiki-e, horizontal *ōban*

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 41.080.4. FIRST VERSION.

## ***Rokugo Ferry at Kawasaki, Station # 3*** **from series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido***

By Yihan Wang

A ferry crossing over the Tama River is busy. The boat carrying six passengers is sailing from Shinagawa towards Kawasaki.<sup>79</sup> As the passengers chat and smoke on this floating boat, a group of people gathers on the shore, waiting for their arrival. Each character has been brought to life by Hiroshige's natural touch of his observation and drawing. All travelers have distinct characteristics that set them apart.

Nearest to the foreground is a group of three male passengers. The person who seems to be a merchant<sup>80</sup> is standing and smoking. He appears relaxed, while the two workers busily pack their luggage, preparing for take-off. The one with a *hachimaki* headband, who has his arms and legs bare, is presented as a typical porter. The other man in a hat standing next to him is most likely traveling by himself. His patterned cloak indicates he is a commoner rather than a worker. Judging by her layered and patterned kimono, the lady sitting with her back to the viewer seems to be relevantly wealthy. The fact that she is formally dressed may suggest that she is heading to Kawasaki Daishi, a large Buddhist temple in the area.<sup>81</sup> Another lady is smoking and casually chatting with the seated lady. She is wearing a dyed *tenugi* hand-towel as a headwear, tied into the *katsuramaki* – a common style of binding the cloth around the head used by women since the Muromachi period.<sup>82</sup> The man standing beside them is carrying only a small bag, and seems to be traveling with the ladies. Apparently, he is a samurai, as he has two swords with the scabbards sticking out from his cloak. All details together indicate that these people are short journey passengers. It is notable that the samurai is turning towards the shore, staring at the palanquin. The boatman is poling the boat towards the shore, pushing the pole with his entire bodyweight.

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<sup>79</sup> Mori Yoko, *Tokaido Landscapes: The Path from Hiroshige to Contemporary Artists*, (Shizuoka, Japan: Nohara, 2011), p15

<sup>80</sup> Adachi Woodcut Prints, *Utagawa Hiroshige Tokaido Gihoki 3rd: Kawasaki Rokugo Gunta*, <https://www.adachi-hanga.com/ukiyo-e/items/hiroshige015/> (18 October 2018)

<sup>81</sup> Adachi Woodcut Prints, *Utagawa Hiroshige Tokaido Gihoki 3rd: Kawasaki Rokugo Gunta*, <https://www.adachi-hanga.com/ukiyo-e/items/hiroshige015/> (18 October 2018)

<sup>82</sup> Asahi Newspaper, Kagura Package: Commentary on Daijirin's Third Edition, <https://kotobank.jp/word/%E6%A1%82%E5%8C%85-231931#E5.A4.A7.E8.BE.9E.E6.9E.97.20.E7.AC.AC.E4.B8.89.E7.89.88>, (18 October 2018)

At the front of the riverbank, there is a group of people and a horse. Everyone in that distant group is depicted in rather a quick and sketchy manner but with remarkably precise details. The horse is bending down its head to scratch its knee while the horse's leader is indifferently holding the rein. Two men in red cloaks are standing calmly behind him. They might be the owners of the cargo that the horse is carrying. At the other side of the horse there is a palanquin with a female sitting in it. Palanquins were typically carried by two strong men; one palanquin bearer is standing at its right, his round traveler's hat resting on the palanquin roof. The other palanquin bearer is the person squatting at the shore and fixing his shoe. Further to the right there is a traveler dressed in red who is paying transportation fee to the ferry clerk seated on a platform in the ferry office.

The ferry boat belongs to the *uma-watari-bune* type<sup>83</sup> or boats for transporting horses. Such boats are characterized by non-pointed prow and stern and by the flat bottom. The left edge of the boat leads the eye to the other shore where a rafter is standing on a big raft of logs. He is either about to depart or has just arrived – this remains unclear from the image itself. His figure serves as a visual correspondence to the ferryman in the big boat and adds to the variety of vessels included by Hiroshige in this composition. All these multifarious details introduce a sense of liveliness to this otherwise static group on the shore. With this group's wide range of occupations, Hiroshige is depicting a world where people are brought together and connected in a natural and harmonious way by the necessity to use a ferryboat.

Hiroshige mainly used primary colors in this print. Blue is used both for the sky and the water, acting almost like the props for the stage. It is echoing itself in the organization of the representation from the top of the print to the bottom, thereby making the color composition cohesive. Green is created by mixing yellow with black. Together with yellow, the two colors act as an indication of the light source. The yellow is glittering from the middle to the bottom of the composition, serving as a directional guide for the viewer's eyes. The red is a maroon orange, which is a unique choice different from the bright red used in many other prints of this series. It is a more realistic depiction of the sun setting, for it has a great degree of warmth. The spaces in between the reds have created a sense of breadth, thereby giving the print a lighthearted rhythm. The red highlights the main actions. Its path is a zigzag formation, traveling from the distant part of the sky to the foreground where characters act and things

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<sup>83</sup> Michelle Damian, *Archaeology through Art: Japanese Vernacular Craft in Late Edo-Period Woodblock Prints*, MA Thesis in Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology, East Carolina University, 2010, 102

happen. Hiroshige's color choice is highly evocative emotional-wise. It brings a sense of security and deep relaxation to the viewer.

This print is equally interesting from the point of view of color value. Black is used as silhouettes of the foliage. The largest area of black is situated at the mid-ground between the trees. It functions in correspondence with yellow and green, to further emphasize the sense of light. Together, they indicated the shadowed areas, suggesting that light source is located back in space. Black is also an important factor in adding to the value variation. It is what makes the yellow and the red in particular pop out and light up. The way the black is divided into a broken and dotted strip gives enough room for breathing while acting as a weight. Hiroshige used white across the entire print in the upper third of the composition, separating the sky from land and water while establishing the background. It takes up almost one third of the entire print. This empty space thus created is a significant concept shared by many East Asian cultures. Its philosophical origin is derived from Daoism, whose essential take on nothingness is that it retains the whole universe. Applied to art, this idea can be translated as less is more. In this case, the white space is a more subtle, implicit and restrained expression for depicting the sky, than if colors were used. The white also contrasts with the black in the densely packed mid ground, which signifies solidity. The large area of emptiness balances the composition, as it reduces the feeling of commotion from an overly colorful and complex central part of the composition. In other words, the white acts as a guide, leading viewers' eyes to the busier part of the composition, where the main event is happening.

The way Hiroshige composed his print is almost cinematic. The print is divided into thirds horizontally, with each section assigned to a different ground in space. The boat drifts into the composition from outside of the frame, pointing at the mid-ground. The boat is positioned carefully to function as an invitation, leading the viewer into looking at the mid-ground. The boatman's pole is placed as a device for blocking the viewer from looking away from the focus point in the center. The pole creates a diagonal with the leaning boatman. This adds a sense of tension as well as liveliness to the otherwise expressly horizontal composition. The diagonal of the boatman is again pulled back by Hiroshige's placement of a rafter in the distance, which too is a diagonal. Linked together, the boat, the people on the shore, and the scattered houses create a zigzag line heading deep into the space and pointing at Mount Fuji. The trees on the shore function as verticals that contrast with the horizontals. They too

diminish in density as they recede into space in the direction of Mount Fuji. The mountain is left white preserving the color of the paper sheet and thus it serves as the composition's brightest area, marking itself as the secondary focal point.

Hiroshige presented a poetic view of a sunset scene from an everyday life of the post station. The scene depicted is highly atmospheric. It is the artist's sensitivity to color and light that gave this print a great sense of freshness and warmth. At the right-hand side Hiroshige placed the magnificent Mount Fuji in the distance, and at the other side closer to the viewer he portrayed everyday life as a contrast. Rather than focusing on the universal concept of human's role in nature, Hiroshige seems more interested in the coexistence between human and nature, their relationship, and the harmony they create together.

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Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797-1858  
*View of the Embankment at Kanagawa, (Kanagawa, dai-no kei), Station # 4*  
 Series: *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido (Tokaido gojūsan no uchi)*  
 Signed: Hiroshige-ga (picture by Hiroshige)  
 Publisher: Takenouchi Magohachi, publishing house Hōeidō  
 Date: ca. 1833-1834  
 Size: 23 x 35.6 cm  
 Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*  
 Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 41.080.4 FIRST VERSION



Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797-1858  
*View of the Embankment at Kanagawa, (Kanagawa, dai-no kei), Station # 4*  
 Series: *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido (Tokaido gojūsan tsugi no uchi)*  
 Signed: Hiroshige-ga (picture by Hiroshige)  
 Publisher: Takenouchi Magohachi, publishing house Hōeidō  
 Date: ca. 1833-1834  
 Size: 22.5 x 35.1 cm  
 Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1256 SECOND VERSION



***View of the Embankment at Kanagawa, Station # 4***  
**from series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido***

By Junsun Ko

A small seaside post town of Kanagawa, the third station on the Tokaido highway, lives its usual life. Utagawa Hiroshige opens the viewer to a vernacular landscape of a sweeping bay adjacent to a hillside. Travelers of various kinds walk uphill past tea houses and inns as women working for those establishments are trying to drag them in. Various boats move through the waters of the bay, some towards the sea while others approach the town, coming from afar. Openness of the receding seascape evokes the feeling of the infinity of space. The vastness of the view combined with zooming in into the close-up details together with the clarity of colors make the image lively and vivid.

A diagonal of houses rising from the center of the print's bottom line towards the upper right-hand corner of the sheet clearly divides the scene into two unequal parts – narrow strip of land on the right and limitless expanse of water on the left. Following right-to-left direction of reading that is traditional for Japan, the viewer is invited first to examine the land part of Kanagawa town shown on the right. The structural element that divides the print is the arrangement of houses that are vertically aligned on the steep hill. Hiroshige utilizes different contrasting colors within a limited palette of muted earth tones to articulate the adjacency of each of neighboring teahouses. There is little variety in the structure of the buildings but their height, width, sometime the shape of the roof ridges, visible parts of the gables slightly differ, creating a certain pace-like rhythm. Juxtaposition of these various tea houses also creates a competitive atmosphere to help lure customers into their establishments. The teahouses are ornamented with *chochin*, paper lanterns that hang down at the entrance; many have the signboards with shop names sticking out to appeal to the customers and inform them. Another visual element that Hiroshige utilizes to depict the teahouses is the bird's eye view allows a widely encompassing view of the hill as if the viewers were situated above the steep street. Hiroshige chooses the high vantage point yet obscures the physical location of the viewer in order to depict the daily lives and relationships between the travelers and the teahouse women. This perspective is not structured with an idea of creating an illusion of real three-dimensional space. If one

considers the viewpoint in which these houses are looked at in the Western one-point perspective or two-point perspective, these visual details would be impossible to see.

Another crucial method for visualization of a continuous movement comes from the paused motion of figures that are heading up the hill. Hiroshige was not always concerned with individual and detailed portrayal of groups of figures since the broad reality of human existence was his theme. Thus, even the least detailed treatment of human figures when they are reduced to just dark blobs or simple color shapes, are still suggestive enough to let us guess the activity of figures. People moving up the hill, all with their round hats usually worn outside, belong to usual types of travelers one would expect to meet on the Tokaido road. The three figures have just started their way uphill are a family on a pilgrimage. The mother is holding a child by hand and the two are followed by the father of the family. All three are carrying miniature shrines on their backs with sixty-six copies of lotus sutra to be taken to the places on their route.<sup>84</sup> By using objects of the daily Japanese life, the artist provides clues for viewers that were recognizable to anyone at the time of print publication. As the travelers move further up the hill they are greeted by female figures. These service women stepped out in front of the tea houses to attract or even grab customers. There are two travelers in the print whom are being pulled by the service women to enter the establishments. However, the motion of raising one's hand while trying to break away from women's pull with the other render a sense of resistance to receive such service. The facial details of the figures also help depict expression and attitude shown by the figures. For example, the open mouth of the traveler being dragged into the tea house represents a sense refusal or because of the woman's strength which calls for laughter. These certain examples capture the societal attitude towards bothersome services at the inns along the highway. In the distance at very top of the hill one can see more travelers coming from behind it. They are not yet noticed by still another service woman waiting in front of her inn in anticipation of the catch. Emotions and activity can be felt more with these subtle and simple details that give liveliness to the figures.

To the left of these lively moments of human interaction is the vast expanse of the bay. The major elements of the scene on the left-hand side of the embankment are

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<sup>84</sup> Sasaki Moritoshi. 'Utagawa Hiroshige's Hoeido Edition of the Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road.' Solving the Riddles of Ukiyo-e book series (Nazotoki ukiyo-e sōshi); Machida-shi: Machida Shiritsu Kokusai Hanga Bijutsukan, 2010, p. 16

variations of boats that are sailing out towards the sea and returning to the shores of Kanagawa. The way Hiroshige depicts the distant scale of each of the different boats helps the viewer realize the different functionalities and type of the boats. The boat that sails off or is anchored closest to the viewer, which also stands out of all of them for its size, complexity and amount of details, is called *bezaisen*, a boat used as a cargo/trading vessel. The *bezaisen*, one of the largest and common merchant ships of this time, reflected feudal-era efforts by the Tokugawa shogunate, the ruling military government of the time, to restrict interactions with and access to foreign trade. The structure of the *bezaisen* includes a large stempost and rudder, the design of which ensured the ship wouldn't stray very far from the coast. The unfastened planks along the deck allowed for quick and easy access to goods and cargo space. It is not surprising to find representations of *bezaisen* in the range much further than the largely Edo-based fishing prints<sup>85</sup>. It was during this period that trade routes were firmly established between Osaka and Edo, and the *bezaisen* were the vessels for this trade. These cargo vessels were unloaded from the larger coastal vessels and transferred the load to smaller boats to transport it further inland. In the middle of the print are transport/fishing boats. Also termed as *watari-bune*, these were the workhorse vessels, often doubling as residence as well as fishing and transport boat, and were one of the largest kinds of riverboats. They were relatively flat, drawing little water. Masts could be removed and propped over the boat, doubling as a central post to hang a covering over to create a roof. In a second version of this print, the depiction of *watari-bune* could perhaps be considered a subdivision of "shipping", transporting people instead of goods. Creating a separate category focuses more on the idea of people on the move, a less passive action than commodity shipping. It also gives further insight into human interaction on the ferries. In this particular print, these boats are operated by a single figure. To maneuver this particular boat, the figure in this print uses a wooden pole called *ro* that utilizes the socket *ireko* and the pivot post *rogui* that help maneuver the *ro*. One hand of the poleman rests on the end of the *ro*, the other grips the handle perpendicular to the loom. A rope, knotted in the center, extends down from the handle to somewhere below the base of the picture. The motion used to

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<sup>85</sup> Pamela Boles and Stephen Addiss, "Hiroshige's Tokaido Prints in the Context of Yamato-e, the Traditional Painting of Japan," in *Tokaido, Adventures on the Road of Old Japan*, ed. Stephen Addis, (Lawrence, Kan. : University of Kansas, Spencer Museum of Art), 94-95

manipulate the *ro* as “a forward-and-back lean on the balls of one’s feet, using the large muscles of the thighs more than the arms and shoulders”.<sup>86</sup>

In the distance at the horizon line in center of the print two cliff can be seen that set above the extension of the sea. The hill on the right is Cape Noge. Noge meaning “headland,” suggesting that it extended out towards the sea. People who lived near this cliff were mostly fisherman. On the contrary, the left hill has another name – it is known as Honmoku, shaped by the pounding waves of the sea. Shoguns and their warriors kept their horses on the pastures of Honmoku.<sup>87</sup>

One of Hiroshige’s visual techniques utilized within this print is the internal division. Hiroshige’s internal division makes our eyes less ready to accept the form of the print as a visual limitation; the asymmetrical composition and absence of borderline and thus incomplete forms suggest a greater space that can be seen. Thus, if we look within this particular print the left two-thirds of the print we have a peaceful view of the natural landscape: departing boats, limitless water, open sky, and two hills, with cartouches of the title and the signature with seal floating lightly over the scene. Then the diagonal placement of two successions of the boats carries our eyes in two diverging directions. One line of boats – the one that adjoins *bezaisen* – consists of boats parallel to the hull of *bezaisen*. This sequence of boats extends into the center of the print and is somewhat inclined rightwards. The smaller boats of this sequence are characterized by rather tall and curved stemposts and in this they create visual correspondences to the shape of *bezaisen*. The other diagonal of vessels stays on course with *bezaisen*’s prow and develops in the left direction toward the horizon – this line is created by sailboats coming towards the shore under full sails. These two diagonals are complemented by the already discussed diagonal placement of the figures on the right that suggests further space to the upper right of the print. By setting strong diagonals, Hiroshige has created an effective visual play that emphasizes the contrast between direct movement, which leads out of the print, and allure the of relaxation, which causes the viewer as well as the traveler to pause for a moment. Another type of division that Hiroshige utilizes in the print is contrasts in formality<sup>88</sup>. Within

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<sup>86</sup> Michelle M. Damian. ‘Archaeology Through Art: Japanese Vernacular Craft in Late Edo-period Woodblock Prints.’ Department of History, Chair: Dr. Bradley Rodgers, 2010, pg. 138

<sup>87</sup> Kunio Francis Tanabe, ‘Memories of old Honmoku.’ The Japan Times, Accessed 10/04/2018.

<sup>88</sup> Pamela Boles and Stephen Addiss. ‘Hiroshige’s Tokaido Prints in the Context of Yamato-E The Traditional Paintings of Japan.’ pg. 79

the print there is a strong contrast of architectural lines, often diagonals with the softly curving lines of the figures or the natural presence of the hills and sea provided in the left two thirds of the print. It creates an opportunity for dramatic visual difference. It also helps suggest the visual language of the fragility and impermanent quality of human existence.

This print series was first published by two publishing companies Senkakudō and Hoeidō. However, after the eleventh print, Senkakudō withdrew from the print-publishing business. Hoeidō completed the remaining prints in the series, for a total of 55 prints published by 1834. This series established Hiroshige's reputation as a landscape artist, opening up numerous opportunities to collaborate with a wide variety of different publishers for the rest of his long, successful career. The interesting aspect of this print published by Hoeidō is that it has two variations; by comparing the two versions we see the changes in details and the representation of structures. In the first version<sup>89</sup> there seems to be much livelier rendering of the figures, particularly in the details of facial expressions of the shown figures. For example, the open mouth of the man being dragged into the tea house creates more emotions and activity expressed in the first version. However, the second version<sup>90</sup> lacks quality in detail, facial details of the female or male figures are absent. Secondly, the changes in the amount of boats also differentiate in the first version and second version. The first version shows the presence of a small lighter watercraft that is pulling close to the *bezaisen* at anchor to carry more people to the distant boats, while in the second version this small vessel is absent, with the changes in the boats to the right and to the boats going further in the distance of the sea. The difference of steepness of the hill and representation of structures also greatly changes the perception of the two versions. The first version has a sharper angle in the representation of steepness of the roofs; the whole right part of the composition seems to be more elongated to emphasize the idea of height and steepness. The second version has a much less exaggerated quality in the representation of the roofs that are shown flatter, and more texture details shown by hatching can be seen on the roofs compared to the first version. Colors are also quite different: the first version utilizes a much more vibrant and saturated

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<sup>89</sup> Utagawa Hiroshige, 'View of the Embankment, Kanagawa.' Series: Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido, RISD Museum Collection, Gift of Gustav Radeke, 20.1256, 1833.

<sup>90</sup> Utagawa Hiroshige, 'View of the Embankment, Kanagawa.' Series: Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido, RISD Museum Collection, Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 41.080.4, 1833.

palette while the sense of void and faintness is more pronounced in the second version of the print.

Utagawa Hiroshige's *View of the Embankment (Kanagawa, dai no kei) / The Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road* presents the activity of humans and natural environment. The contrast between these two is shown by utilizing a split composition that helps us distinguish the structural and organic/nature and human qualities of the print. The movement and interaction of smallest figures is meticulously expressed in their short-stop actions, and interaction between these figures helps the viewer understand the social culture of Japan at that time. At the same time the movement of boats carried throughout the sea evokes a sense of journey; variations in the forms of the boats conveys to the viewer the different functionalities these boats are capable of. Hiroshige was able to create a balance between these spatially divided aspects of life, thus creating a print that emulates reality and encompasses the complete vision of his scenery.

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Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797-1858

*The Tenryu River at Mitsuke* (Mitsuke, Tenryūgawa zu), Station # 28

Series: *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido* (Tokaido gojūsan tsugi no uchi)

Signed: Hiroshige-ga (picture by Hiroshige)

Publisher: Takenouchi Magohachi, publishing house Hōeidō

Censorship seal: *kiwame* (approved)

Date: ca. 1833-1834

Size: 22.7 x 35.2 cm

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1269 – SECOND VERSION



***The Tenryū River at Mitsuke, Station # 28***  
**from series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido***

By Victoria Choi and Mac Wang

Taking up half of the entire frame of Hiroshige's *The Tenryū River, Mitsuke* is a white sand bar that splits both the Tenryū River and the composition in half. The sand bar is economically and effectively rendered with a soft shade of gray in the foreground, speckled with black dots, and a sweeping dark gray in the back. Most of the central space is left untouched. Two ferry boats have just entered our view from the bottom right corner, and are resting upon the shallow waters near the sandbar. The ferryman from the right boat came over to his fellow ferryman's boat on the left and is now standing next to him. The pole that was used to propel the boat across the river is placed habitually, as it seems, at the boat's floor. This slender pole sticks out from the boat and intersects with the second pole, held by the other ferryman, squatting. The long poles served for propulsion of boats in shallow water when the current was too fast for fording, such is the case for the Tenryū River. This type of ferryboat is called *watari-bune* ("crossing-over" boat) and was used specifically for ferrying human passengers.

While the two ferrymen are taking their break, we follow the gaze of the ferryman on the left to witness a group of passengers that are a part of a *daimyō* procession - they are either in the process of, or are getting ready to cross the other branch of the river. The Tenryū River is known for being separated by sandbars that require passengers to change boats in order to continue their journey. Mitsuke, the post station near the Tenryū River, is the twenty-eighth of the fifty-three stations of the Tōkaidō Road. The post station name literally means "with a view," being the first place from which Mount Fuji is visible to travelers coming from Kyoto. Beyond the colorful group of travelers on the sandbar are more ferryboats, more passengers, more ferrymen, and more poles. That distant part of the scene recedes into barely recognizable abstractions, and fades into the silhouettes of a misty forest. Lastly, a crisp gradient from white to blue sends our eyes into infinity.

The two ferrymen at the foreground are the viewers' entry point of entry into the depicted scene. Lightly dressed, the ferryman on the left is depicted in a green outfit, with a *tenugui* (hand towel) on his right shoulder. The same ferryman is smoking - one can see his long and thin tobacco pipe, a *kiseru* (smoke pipe), that he must be holding in his

mouth. Though the man's face is not visible for us, our general knowledge of the world allows to easily understanding of this detail. The squatting ferryman on the right is depicted in a blue shirt (in the second state of the print considered here) covered in *shibori* style tie dye decorative patterns. Both ferrymen are wearing *kasa* ("hat"), here most likely a *sugegasa* (sedge-woven hat).

The ferryboats depicted in detail at the foreground, as previously mentioned, are *watari-bune* used to carry passengers across shallow water. "One of the distinctive characteristics of these ships comes from the fact that many landings did not have a permanent dock or pier. Ferries would beach directly onto the shore, and passengers would embark over the bow. Most of these boats therefore have at least one if not both blunt ends, with no visible stem-post".<sup>91</sup> *Watari-bune* is used specifically to cope with the natural conditions of the Tenryū River, whose strong current required ferries, not porters, to cross. The lack of infrastructure demanded the ferryboats to be dragged ashore, as passengers and ferrymen use the bows on either end of the boat for landing. To propel the ferryboat, a long pole is used. We get a rough view of the astounding length of the pole, in comparison to the standing human figure next to it. Poling is a common boating method that is especially useful in shallow water, and is the only method represented in this print.

Moving further into the composition to the area closer to the group of people at the far end of the sandbar, the scene grows much busier with the crowd compressed into rather a tight space. In their overall appearance, the people in the crowd bear similarity to the ferrymen: they are wearing the same kind of conic sedge hats, *kasa*, and their outfits are of darker greenish-bluish tones. However, their coats are longer, their legs are covered and they carry their luggage with them. Within the crowd there is also a loaded packhorse and its two drivers on both sides of the horse. They are bare-legged and seem to be clad in straw cloaks, their lighter figures differing from other men in the group. It is not quite clear from the picture if they belong to the *daimyō*'s train or are traveling on their own and just happen to be also in need of crossing the river. While this small group of travelers is waiting on the sandbar, others are in boats, both going towards and coming from the post station. Two more ferryboats can be seen further to the right, their forms reduced to simple wedges and thin straight lines for the poles.

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<sup>91</sup> Michelle Damian, *Archaeology through Art: Japanese Vernacular Craft in Late Edo-period Woodblock Prints*, MA Thesis, East Carolina University, 2010. PDF copy, 67

Among the most important travelers at river crossings were *daimyō* processions *gyōretsu* that were a part of the *sankin kōtai* or alternate attendance system. This arrangement required *daimyō*, powerful regional lords, to leave their domains and come to Edo and stay there for a year at a time; the other year *daimyō* had to spend at home caring for local matters. *daimyō* families stayed in the *daimyō*'s permanent residence in Edo at all times. Thus, the families served as hostages that would secure the *daimyō*'s loyal behavior. First perceived only as a symbol of loyalty to the authorities, the *daimyō* processions quickly evolved into a cultural performance, taking on distinct and almost ritualistic forms. Due to the military nature of a *daimyō* power, during such official journeys they were accompanied by their massive arm force, often superbly mounted, as a representation of the *daimyō*'s wealth and prestige. "Even fairly humble *daimyō* were accompanied by 1000 men, while the most powerful *daimyō*, had 4000 retainers".<sup>92</sup> The *daimyō* were at first accompanied by a troop of armed soldiers, but later these journeys became grand, vivid processions. The road became a metaphorical stage: the members of the retinue the players; the implements carried the props; and, the crowd lining the road its audience. In this print, however, the procession seems rather modest, perhaps many have already reached the other bank of the river that disappears into the thick mist or maybe due to the harsh conditions of Mitsuke as a post station. Still, the performative nature of the procession is captured with the two ferrymen and the print's viewers being its audience.

In the background towards the far bank of the second branch of the river two layers of forested areas are emerging through the heavy mist. The mist suggests that the time of the scene is early morning.

### **Interpretation**

The print is arranged in three stages, where Hiroshige masterfully combined, in a manner not so different from a theater director, all the characters and objects into an active performance. Starting with the two ferrymen at the extreme foreground, they are the first two characters introduced to us. The ferryman's heads are concealed by their hats; instead we see their backs, and this indicates that they are looking in the same direction as the

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<sup>92</sup> Jilly Traganou, *The Tōkaidō Road: Traveling and Representation in Edo and Meiji Japan* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 77

print viewers. These silent figures guide us into the world captured by Hiroshige two centuries ago. Every single element in the foreground is steady and quiet: the ferry boats have just gone through the shallow water of the first stream and now they are safely ashore. The poles are no longer being aggressively driven into the earth, they bear no weight as they rest on the boat and in the hands of the ferryman. Even the water is gently bathing the sandbar in a calming rhythm. The two motionless ferrymen are frozen in spectatorship, their casual postures (the smoke pipe helps too) tell us that they are taking a hard-earned break, that they are comfortable with the environment. Hiroshige's perspective in this scene could be a result of his experience during his trip on the Tōkaidō road, where he served as a retainer of the procession group and was tasked to sketch ceremonial events, if this really happened.<sup>93</sup> This would explain the peculiar point of view presented in the print, since Hiroshige, being a retainer on the road himself, could empathize with the restless lifestyle of the ferryman. Or he could easily create an imaginary scene freely designing a composition that answered the artist's interest. Hiroshige was particularly attracted to the contrasting large-scale objects at the foreground and small and blurry elements seen at the distance. Additionally, Hiroshige is known for his warm humanness with a touch of irony in depiction of his commoner characters in the simplest life situations.

The vertical pole, held by the squatting ferryman, reaches all the way to the top of the print and splits it in half, achieving a delicate balance of the opposites. The long pole, combined with the slightly curved but mostly horizontal shape of the sandbar, creates a diagonal intersection that dictates the rest of the composition. The other pole, rested on the boat at bottom right, points directly to the standing ferryman, and connects to his sight line. Hiroshige was using all these visual cues to lead us from one frame to the next. The sandbar in the center serves as a backdrop for the two ferrymen, while effectively indicates the distance between the foreground and the mid-ground. The sand bar sits on a slight diagonal, sweeping across the middle section of the frame. The line from the pole and the edge of the sandbar create "a system of horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines," which

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<sup>93</sup> According to T.Clark, "in recent years scholars have become increasingly skeptical as to whether Hiroshige actually made the journey under such circumstances and at that time," Timothy Clark, *100 Views of Mount Fuji* (Trumbull, CT: Weatherhill, 2001), 59.

“established major divisions against which the human drama could be played in visual term”.<sup>94</sup>

On the far end of the sandbar are groups of travelers that are depicted simplistically. The passengers in the mid ground are packed with action and noise, no wonder that they drew the attention from the two ferrymen. In the scene depicted in this print, the mid-ground is the stage of performance, and the ferrymen are the audience. However, Hiroshige decided to push the main performance further back, thus creating two layers of spectatorship: we, the audience of the print, first read the scene as an artistically recreated reality of Edo Japan; but as we go deeper, we join the ferrymen on a foggy morning near the Tenryū River.

### **Composition**

The print consists of the vast landscape of the Tenryū River and people engaging in a river crossing. Boats, being both metaphorical and physical connections between nature and men, are placed meticulously to create the optimal visual tension. Two boats are placed in the utmost foreground of the print, the other five are scattered across the other end of the sandbar. The drastic size difference between the two groups of boats expands the space between the foreground and the mid-ground, dramatizing the immense presence of nature, and the miniscule stature of men. These two big boats act as one collective image offered to the viewer, and the other boats act in equal and opposite weight to this presentation. If the print had an imaginary line cutting across the bottom left to the top right, there is a prevalent parallel created between the foreground and the background. The foreground includes the two reflective characters with their two boats, and the contrasting mid-ground shows the busy crowd. There is a surprising peacefulness between what lies in front, which represents serenity, and what lies behind, which represents commotion. Another aspect of the print that helps to further strengthen the dynamics of simple versus complex, or known versus unknown, is Hiroshige's use of color to animate the figures is in juxtaposition with the use of black and white.

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<sup>94</sup> Pamela Boles and Stephen Addiss, *Hiroshige's Tokaido Prints in the Context of Yamato-e, the Traditional Painting of Japan*, in *Tōkaidō, Adventures on the Road in Old Japan*. Ed. Stephen Addiss. (Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas, Spencer Museum of Art, 1980), 76

## Color

Consideration of color will start with the most essential colors, black and white. In this print, Hiroshige showed his sophistication in utilizing shades of gray and boldly reserving the paper's white space. The black, or shades of gray, can mark the outlines of the boats and humans while at the same time they help represent obscurity of the scenic horizon and the forest in the background. Crisp black outlines, a visual feature of many ukiyo-e prints, help define the detailed figures and objects. Hiroshige's early training in *fūzoku-ga* (pictures of manners and customs) can be vaguely spotted here. The subtle gray gradients, a total departure of the crisp outlines, are liberally employed to create atmospheric plains and spaces. The most noticeable use of the white space in this print, the central sandbar, is undoubtedly a bold yet justified decision: a plain white midground is the perfect backdrop for the two main characters (ferryman), while also offering a glaring contrast to the business at the other end of the sandbar. Amazingly, the depth of fields in the print is achieved with a fairly limited color palette. The fact that Hiroshige did not favor intense hues makes the print ever more tranquil. Hiroshige applied neutral colors to precisely define shapes. No color stands out too prominently in the piece. From the viewer's perspective, the color scheme seems timeless and everlasting. The pigments used in this print are water-based vegetable dyes and, of course, Prussian blue, resulting in a cold and naturalistic tone.

## Line

When analyzing Hiroshige's work, there has to be special consideration given to the linear perspectives and their role in the print. It is believed the artist had a clear and definitive understanding of his pictorial elements and their linear relations, performing certain structural functions rather than solely distributing areas of color. The artist's placing of the boat's pole towards the middle acts as a spatial divider, highlighting edges of interlocking places and establishing a combination of horizontal and vertical lines. This leads the viewer to believe the piece can be characterized by having precision of placement and exact relative positioning, as well as having an extension of each area of color defined by fine, black contour lines. The linear contours that are surrounding, defining and separating each area of color help make the descriptive details, gestures, and the

movements of the figures more apparent. The spatial dynamics and tensions become articulated from purely linear interaction.

## Printing

The way Hiroshige depicts the morning sky is through a set of *nishiki-e* specific and innovative techniques, including shading and color gradations. The morning sky has a seal of the gradient of black from dark to light. It is impressive that the printer was able to maintain uniformity in the appearance of such gradation. Hiroshige managed to simplify the sky in this piece, but also, he still gave texture to his work and the illusion of depth. Furthermore, Hiroshige was also known for using the technique of *bokashi* printing. *Bokashi* is a technique reserved for Japanese woodblock printmaking, and its intended or desired effect is to establish a variation in the light and dark values of one individual color, or sometimes, a multitude of colors. It works through the hand application of an ink gradation onto a moist wood-printing block, which is different from the traditional technique of evenly inking the same block. The process is intricate, laborious, and most likely time-consuming, as the printer has to repeat the hand-application process for each sheet being printed. When giving a thought as to whether or not this work was a typical print creation for Hiroshige, it is a typical Hiroshige print, and it does use the standard *bokashi* style that Hiroshige had become known for mastering. Both Hiroshige and Hokusai were excellent at creating, from 1830s on, of *ukiyo-e* prints that used the *bokashi* process and both artists came up with works that were exemplary within the time period of *bokashi* style. It can also be concluded that this work is similarly typical of Hiroshige's earlier works. The reasoning behind this is that this work still uses the *bokashi* technique of the faded Prussian blue hues and blue dyes to make it appear as if the skies and water have depth. However, in his later works, such as in *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, Hiroshige had tweaked the *bokashi* process to make the color scheme and subject matter slightly different. In *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, *bokashi* is used to highlight sunrises instead of bodies of water or the naturalistic elements of sky, and also, there is a red, yellow, and blue color scheme, whereas in this earlier work, there is no prominent use of red outside of the print's stamp.

## Format

This print, following the same format across all the Tōkaidō series, is in horizontally oriented *ōban* size. The dimension of our print is 22.7 x 35.2 cm (8 15/16 x 13 7/8 inches), with a margin at all sides where the censorship seal is placed. The horizontal *ōban* format is ideal for the kind of landscape depicted in the print, as it roughly mirrors the viewpoint of a human eye. The multiple horizontal sections are also strengthened with this particular format, and the vertical space is optically compressed even more.

## Typical Hiroshige?

Both the artistic style and the subject matter in *The Tenryū River, Mitsuke* are typical to the early period of blooming of Hiroshige's talent in 1830s. Stylistically, the ferrymen and boats at the extreme foreground is a signature of Hiroshige. This allows him to place the viewer at sometimes unachievable vantage point, thus creating a visceral experience for the viewers: while at one point they might be standing comfortably among the crowd, the next second they are peaking through the branches of a plum tree. Hiroshige's obsession with details and common objects is also evident in the two, more carefully depicted ferrymen, as we previously mentioned. From the smoking pipe to the hand towel, every detail is included to further the development of the character and to increase believability of the scene through recognition of plain and common objects. Another Hiroshige signature feature is his mastery of diagonal lines: everything in this print is situated at an angle. Hiroshige even eliminated the last possible horizontal line, the outline of the water, by merging it into the rising mist. Adding to these busy diagonals are objects, in this case boats, moving toward and away from the viewer, again, in the manner typical for Hiroshige.

But beyond the superficial, Hiroshige's artistic message is also present in a more profound way. Known for his depiction of life of Edo Japan, Hiroshige looks and represents his subject matter with unparalleled truthfulness and empathy. The realism Hiroshige was after is not one that pursues a photographic replication of the scene, as "his interest in landscape representation is artistic rather than informative".<sup>95</sup> Hiroshige's realism is deeply rooted in his understanding of Edo Japan, and in the lives of the characters he portrayed

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<sup>95</sup> Jilly Traganou, *The Tōkaidō Road: Traveling and Representation in Edo and Meiji Japan* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 169



and with whom he can often empathize with. His astute understanding of the mood of the people is often manifested in the nature landscape; rain and snow are often exaggerated to reflect the experience of human. In this print, the mist is intensified and becomes the overpowering presence that sets the mood of the scene: serene, longing, with a flash of melancholy.

## Conclusion

When we started studying the print, we were trying to determine from whose perspective we were looking at the image. Were we the ferrymen, anxious passengers, or simply a part of Hiroshige's artistic imagination? Regardless, the viewer still can taste the moist in the air, sense the bustling atmosphere of the river crossing afar, and watch as the morning mist slowly rises and takes over everything it touches.

Do we have an answer now after observing Hiroshige's print for a while? We tried to consider every detail represented in order to understand the zeitgeist of Edo Japan, and slowly, moving on with every object, we managed to establish a connection with a scene depicted centuries ago. Hiroshige's great contribution to the art of ukiyo-e is his ability to harmoniously combine the nature and human elements into one perfectly coherent yet simple composition. In *The Tenryū River, Mitsuke*, we get a scene that highlights human's deep understanding of nature.



Fig 1: Tenryū River, photograph

Reproduced (Fig. 1) is a black and white photograph of the place that Hiroshige depicted in the print but this time there are no ferrymen, no passing boats, no daimyō

procession is seen in the mid-ground; in fact, there hasn't been a daimyō in 150 years, and even the forest looks a lot less alive than before. What haven't changed are us and our dependence on nature that is still the same. Referring back to the topic of this exhibition – that of “boat” or “boating,” it can be interpreted metaphorically as a representation of how we navigate the world. What Hiroshige managed to capture in this print, is the intimacy between us and nature, and how our means of navigation is always integral to our identity. The ferrymen whose life is intertwined with that of nature are the ones to deeply understand its subtleties. It all makes sense now as we are led into the print by two resting ferrymen, caught in a brief moment of isolation, on the deck of a boat or in a dimly lit museum gallery, appreciating their endless endeavor of boating in the floating world.

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Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797–1858

*Ferryboats at Arai* (Arai, watashibune no zu), Station # 32

Series: *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido* (Tokaido gojūsan tsugi no uchi)

Signed: Hiroshige ga (picture by Hiroshige)

Publisher: Takenouchi Magohachi, publishing house Hōeidō

Censorship seal: *kiwame*

Date: ca. 1833–34

Size: 22.7 x 35.2 cm

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke, 20.1270 SECOND VERSION

## **Ferryboats at Arai, Station # 32** **from series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido***

By Jen Chenyu Zhang and William Mitchell

Two boats are crossing a narrow passage Imagiri of the vast Hamana Lake at a left-to-right diagonal as they head to Arai Station on the Tokaido Road. Further away is a *gozabune*, an ornate and colorful boat of a daimyo; his big vessel is followed by a small ferry boat *watari-bune*, carrying the daimyo's attendants. The breadth of the waters seems boundless as it stretches from side to side of the landscape and goes up to the horizon line in the left quarter of the view. Hiroshige stages this scene of the Arai station of Tokaido with a journey of a daimyo and a group of his attendants. Despite the intense political and social significance of the subject matter, Hiroshige creates a setting that is simple yet complex, serene yet active. The smooth gradation of colors and vivid color palette create a tranquil and optimistic mood. The diagonal arrangement of boats and their foreshortening together with the distant diminutive view of the post station and mountainous landscape in the background, create a visually engaging composition.

The *watari-bune* that is the boat closest to the viewer is just entering the picture frame from the bottom left – the stern of the boat is still out of the frame. Such *watari-bune* ferry boats are known to have no visible stempost with at least one if not both of its ends blunt.<sup>96</sup> In the boats there are at least eight people. All seated man are wearing similar garments, some have *kasa* on their heads, a type of traditional Japanese sedge hat worn by Japanese when traveling, including samurai retainers and foot soldiers. The passengers are seated in very relaxed poses, some are taking a nap with their heads lowered down or leaning against the boat side. One man is yawning, while stretching his left hand in the air and clenching his fists, right hand behind his head, his mouth wide open and nostrils enlarged.<sup>97</sup> The two ferrymen are standing on the edges of the boat sides, facing the opposite directions as they are pushing the boat with all their strength at the long poles *ro*, used for propulsion of ferry boats at ferry crossings. The poles are parallel to each other as they are entering the water at different sides of the boat. The two ferrymen

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<sup>96</sup> Michelle Damian, *Archaeology through Art: Japanese Vernacular Craft in Late Edo-Period Woodblock Prints*, MA Thesis, East Carolina University, 2010, p.67

<sup>97</sup> Sasaki Moritoshi. 'Utagawa Hiroshige's Hoeido Edition of the Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road.' Solving the Riddles of Ukiyo-e book series (Nazotoki ukiyo-e sōshi); Machida-shi: Machida Shiritsu Kokusai Hanga Bijutsukan, 2010, p. 76

are both wearing short sleeved shirts tied at the thigh length and are bare legged, suggesting the warmth of the weather, and the sweats from ferrying boats exerted along the journey. On their feet they are all wearing straw sandals that are convenient for boat sailing. The beige sailing canvas of the ferry is folded in half, suggesting that they're getting close to the shoreline. To a tall post a flying banner is attached, colored in blue and white, with the character of bamboo printed in white. The banner is almost blown by the strong wind, showing the two white strips on the other side of the cloth. Inclusion of the character for bamboo is frequent in Hiroshige's prints and refers to the prominent print publisher in the city of Edo who issued this print series. The name of this publisher is Takenouchi Magohachi<sup>98</sup> where the first name "take" is written in the same way as "bamboo".

The ornate boat moving forward under a full sail in front of the *watari-bune* is the daimyō's *gozabune*, which is the luxurious ocean and river going boats used by regional military lords. Subordinate only to the shogun, the daimyo were the most powerful feudal regional military rulers during the Edo period. In order to control the daimyō and maintain power, the shogun developed a military service system called *sankin kōtai*<sup>99</sup>, or "alternate attendance", where the daimyo were obligated to alternate their residence between the capital city of Edo and their domain. The expenses of such journey to and from Edo each other year often were enormous and cost significant portions of the daimyo's resources, keeping them from consolidating power within their domains. Daimyo traveled with their family crests marking conspicuously the entire train of retinue that could number many hundred people. The transportation means were lavishly ornamented with large representations of their family crests. The *gozabune* shown in the mid-ground of the print is one such example.

The sides of *gozabune* ship are surrounded by a military curtain *jinmaku*.<sup>100</sup> The curtain's outer part is of ochre color with broad blue stripes running horizontally in the middle. Inside this outer curtain there is another one in different color; the inner curtain is

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<sup>98</sup> Davis, Julie Nelson., et al. "The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints." *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, Edited by Amy Reigle. Newland, vol. 2, Page 492, Hotei Publ., 2005.

<sup>99</sup> "Sankin Kotai." Samurai-Archives. Accessed November 02, 2018. [https://wiki.samurai-archives.com/index.php?title=Sankin\\_kotai](https://wiki.samurai-archives.com/index.php?title=Sankin_kotai).

<sup>100</sup> 日本歴史地名大系 : JapanKnowledge Select Series. Accessed November 02, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070825113418/http://rekishi.jkn21.com/>.

white and is marked with large family crests shaped as circles with specifically arranged leaves and shoots of bamboo grass rendered in blue. The design is known as *maru-ni shinozasa*<sup>101</sup> – “bamboo grass inscribed in a circle.” Although the design is well-known and had been repeatedly used by various military clans as a symbol, it is yet unclear which daimyo crest exactly Hiroshige had in mind when depicting this family crest so clearly and right in the center of the composition. Some amateur historians hypothesize that this is a substitute for Tokugawa *aoi* hollyhock crest that wasn’t allowed to be represented.<sup>102</sup> Other interested individuals speculate that it is a reference to the clan of Ōzawa daimyō who had their residence not far from Arai station also on Hamana Lake. Though Ōzawa crest is different but the clan leads its lineage from Minamoto Yoritomo who used a bamboo grass crest of *sasarindō*.<sup>103</sup> Despite all the speculations and potential evidence, the meaning of the depicted crest will have to remain unresolved for now.

Within these curtains one can see eye-catching implements typical for a daimyō procession. These implements include fur-sheathed spears on extremely tall poles and a battlefield standard shaped as a ring with extended ribbons streaming violently in the air; between the two curtains there is also a cloth-covered spear and a parasol wrapped and tied up. The daimyo processions are described as great spectacles and here the theatricality of the accoutrements is rendered quite brightly and intriguing. The daimyo *gozabune* is visibly distinguished – in physical size and in ornamentation--from the rest of the boats in this crossing. While we are not able to see any figures on board, we are able to identify it as the daimyo boat because of the extravagant ornamentation. Hiroshige deliberately hides the passengers from view. He instead decides to create the aura of the daimyo significance by establishing the context – using the setting of a post station, the nearby and distant boats, and the figures--and ties together our interpretation of the scene with the daimyo accoutrements and a crest of the family. In this interpretation, the entire subtext of the scene is alluding to the existence of this wealthy and politically and socially powerful lord during a highly regulated so that it became almost ritualistic procession.

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<sup>101</sup> "Maru-ni Kawari Shinozasa, Kakuda, Tokyo Tour 2017." Japanese Patterns of Design. Accessed November 02, 2018. <http://www.patternz.jp/kamon-japanese-family-crest-artisans/maru-ni-kawari-shinozasa-kakuda-tokyo-tour-2017/>.

<sup>102</sup> "ヒロシゲの家紋。" 家紋高校生. Accessed November 02, 2018. <http://blog.livedoor.jp/hanbenokamon42/archives/35838814.html>.

<sup>103</sup> Sohitsu gojūsantsugi / Sandai Toyokuni, Shodai Hiroshige ; kanshū Machida Shiritsu Kokusai Hanga Bijutsukan ; kaisetsu Watanabe Akira, Ōta Kinen Bijutsukan Shunin Gakugeiin. Tōkyō : Nigensha, Heisei nijūsan, 2011. P. 76

Hiroshige communicates all the facts discussed above without ever directly depicting the daimyo's presence. Hiroshige is asking the viewer to consider the context. Further ahead continuing the course of daimyo ships are two more ferry boats that are already approaching the lake shore with the village and the post station.

All four boats are directing our eye towards the right mid-ground of the print with the shore-side checkpoint, Arai Sekisho<sup>104</sup>, one of the major checkpoints on the Tokaido Road. Although the checkpoint currently has no boats stopping by the shore, the direction of the boats suggests that the Arai checkpoint is their destination. On the shore are approximately seven people, varying in height and mass. Six people are lining up along the village fence at some distance from it, while one is standing alone on the right side. A one story high Japanese style check house is located on the right side of the print. The house has a long rectangular window open on the front, with three layers of round curtain hanging from the top. The curtains all have very vague patterns on it. The long window has an exterior gallery, supported by five poles rising from the ground. The roof of the check house is slanted and covered with straw. There seem to be six people standing at the second-floor gallery, overlooking the four people in front of the building. Next to this house, there are two smaller check rooms, one in the back, and one on the side. All have slanted rooftops covered in straw. Hiroshige used very rough marks outlining the silhouette of seven people lining up, three people walking towards the two-floor checkrooms. A barrier-like structure and a gate in the left-hand side of the post station separate the landing space from a larger village. With their rooftops represented in gray, small village houses are closely situated next to each other. There are about forty-three houses visible to the viewer, while the villages continue along the bottom of the mountain range, extending towards the left and the right, disappearing into the dark gray mass of the closest mountain. The trees are only growing beyond the fence getting much denser among the houses of the village and across the bottom of the mountain range. The mountain in the further ground is represented in a lighter gray color, with less vegetation on the mountain peak. The mountain closer to the viewer is more overgrown than that in the background, with some trees growing in the valleys between the mountain summits. While the mountain at the fore is shaped with the representation of trees, giving a sense of volume and depth,

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<sup>104</sup> "Arai Checkpoint Sekisho." Arai Checkpoint Sekisho | JapanVisitor Japan Travel Guide. Accessed November 02, 2018. <https://www.japanvisitor.com/japan-museums/arai-checkpoint-sekisho>.



the mountain further behind is depicted mostly with lines. With lines shaping a succession of summits, some dotted vegetation towards the bottom, the mountain in the depth appears more flattened than the one in the front. The land continues from the print's right edge towards the left as a close and distant shoreline, crossing most of the picture frame and finally disappearing into horizon towards the furthest left of the composition. There are three more ferry boats scattered along the shore. In the farthest background, on the very left close to the horizon line two sailboats are moving under full white sails and two more are suggested as tiny gray silhouettes.

While the boats are active and moving; they represent a temporary presence in the scene, the landscape, and the checkpoint station, the village and distant mountains in the background, are a constant and a part of the Tokaido Road. This dichotomy in the reality of the subject matter creates a visual contrast between the moving figures and the static landscape. While Hiroshige distinctively compared the nature of static and the still in the subject matter, the juxtaposition of moving and nonmoving become one towards the most distant sea. As our eyes move towards the mid-left part of the print, the boats are sailing further in to the distance; the silhouettes of the boats start to blend harmoniously into the landscape and disappearing into the limitless ocean.

The surface of the water takes not less than a half of the print's surface. The water is depicted with a gradation in color from dark to light and then back to dark toward the shores, the contrast between pale and saturated gives a sense of depth and movement. This wide-ranging gradation of color uses techniques called *bokashi*.<sup>105</sup> The *bokashi* is a technique that Hiroshige uses to give a strong horizontal articulation across the print. The lake is uniform in the color fade, which is achieved with a specific technique called *o'bokashi*,<sup>106</sup> also known as broad gradation: it consists in brushing through the prints' woodblocks with different amount of color pigment. Similar technique is used again in the sky, but with two different colors applied. This was likely done in two separate layers, one laid on top of the background layer. This technique is called *ichimonji mura bokashi*<sup>107</sup>, whereas the brush moves in an irregular motion along an uneven edge of the gradation as

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<sup>105</sup> Davis, Julie Nelson., et al. "The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints." *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, Edited by Amy Reigle. Newland, vol. 1, Hotei Publ., 2005.

<sup>106</sup> Davis, Julie Nelson., et al. "The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints." *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, Edited by Amy Reigle. Newland, vol. 1, Hotei Publ., 2005.

<sup>107</sup> Davis, Julie Nelson., et al. "The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints." *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, Edited by Amy Reigle. Newland, vol. 1, Hotei Publ., 2005.

the horizon hits the sky. The light brownish *ichimonji mura bokashi* is varying its width and shape horizontally across the ocean and the land. The sky is dramatically changing color from brownish to beige, a technique called the *ichimonji bokashi*, also known as the straight-line gradation, mostly used for the fading of sky in Hiroshige's prints.

The color used in the gradation of the sky--a bright orange to a dark brown--seems to signal either dawn or dusk. The overall colors used in this print add to the simple serenity of the scene. This beauty in simplicity is something that is typical of Hiroshige in his landscape prints. He uses shading techniques to give a sense of volume only minimally on the edges of rocks and trees. The tiny figures on the shore are obscured by minimal detail and shadow, giving a sense of distance and uncertainty. The closer figures are depicted with outlines and a flat area of color in typical *yamato-e* style. Rather than rendering the figures in the detail of a frozen pose, he uses minimal line-work on the bodies, and emphasizes the movement of their actions. Even these figures in the foreground seem small when compared with the rest of the scene, not because of their relative size, but because of the way in which they are rendered. Hiroshige wants us to consider the larger context: of the daimyo, of the procession, of the Arai station, of the Tokaido Road, and of the whole of Japan.

The mood of the setting seems quiet, yet in motion. The combination of the landscape and the movement of the scene make the procession of the daimyo almost seem as though it is a natural process itself. The soldiers pushing the boat forward, the flowing decorations of the daimyo boat, and the foreshortening of the landscape all have a natural movement across the image. The placement of the procession within this scene is one that is natural, and makes the procession seem an almost mundane fact of life; something one would see any ordinary day along the Tokaido road.

The composition has a strong visual power across the print. The boats in the foreground are in motion diagonally toward the checkpoint in the distance, forming a strong directional pull across the image. Our attention is immediately focused on the figures in the boat, captured in a moment of lull on their journey. The boat is being pushed forward, closely following the daimyo boat, whose banners and streamers also point forward toward their destination. This scene depicts a story of the procession of a daimyo crossing between stations along the Tokaido Road. Although there are no direct diagonal lines

leading our eye across the print, the movement of the boats implies a direction. The boats carry our eyes into the center of the print, to the top right toward the destination of Arai station, and back again to left toward the horizon. In the distance we see the Arai station. Hiroshige illustrates the figures to suggest an active location, but one that is still out of reach. As the defined architectural lines of the village rooftops blend into the soft curvy lines of the landscape, the direction of the village draws our eye further into the background and towards the left side of the print. Further in the distance, the coastline begins to vanish into the horizon, drawing our eyes back again across the print.

The overall composition creates a stage on which to view the constantly moving and active culture of the Tokaido Road. The print can be divided into three distinct areas of specific psychological states, and they are unfolded in front of our eyes. In the foreground relaxed soldiers create a humorous and human atmosphere. The second atmosphere is that of a strict and orderly station, meant to restrict forbidden passage, including weapons and contraband, and wives of the daimyo. This shoreline creates a sense of tension, not only of the military nature of the checkpoint but of the unfolding story happening before us. Hiroshige captures an attendant in the middle of a yawn, probably under the immense pressures of being a part of this procession. On the official journey daimyo attendants bear serious responsibilities and rigorous arrangements. However, instead of depicting attendants on their daily duties, Hiroshige chooses to capture a moment of tranquility in the midst of official duties, calms down the atmosphere. Finally, the furthest coastline draws our eyes to the infinite expanse of the horizon, conjuring thoughts of the further stations of Tokaido, and the further sites and experiences of Japan. We are caught in a daydream, given a glimpse of the larger reality, as our eyes are finally resting on the boats seemingly floating on the horizon line. As the three atmospheres/psychological states differentiate from each other, the story-teller, as well as the viewer, seems to be standing on the boat just behind the ferry boat, or still on the other side of the checkpoint, witnessing the changing dynamic across the lake to the Arai shore line, and eventually to the limitless horizon.

Hiroshige masterfully draws our eyes across the image, using small details to cause our attention to hang for a moment in that spot. The details are carefully placed within spaces of interest in order to tell a story. As this story unfolds, we catch glimpses of

a day in life on the Tokaido Road. Hiroshige does not to depict an elaborate and detailed scene fitting of a daimyo, but rather chooses to capture a more human and simple perspective of the people. This relatable view allows us as the viewer to consider the landscape as one that is inhabited and traveled by people similar to us. One might imagine what else can be seen while traveling between the stations of the Tokaido.

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**EIGHT VIEWS OF OMI PROVINCE**

UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE

## Hiroshige's *Eight Views of Omi*: Boats in Landscape

By Iain Wall and Jane Gorelik

Although borrowed from the traditional Chinese artistic formulae, the subject matter of Utagawa Hiroshige's "Eight Views of Omi" series is a fundamental example of Japanese masterful reinterpretation of the foreign motif. These prints show how sentimentally-poetic lens could be applied for rendering simple motifs of ordinary life that is happening in the surrounding natural world. Within these works, there exists no note of awe-inspiring beauty. Thus, a major aspect of Hiroshige's philosophical approach would be the grandeur of simplicity, a means through which the modest harmony of the natural world can be perceived as profound. *Sailing Boats at Yabase* and *Descending Geese at Katada* are two prime examples of this notion, with both works hinting at the setting sun upon fishing boats sails in Lake Biwa and over its various surroundings.

Along with this sensitivity to the natural world, the presence of sailing boats is another common feature across Hiroshige's work. Boats hold a deep significance to the Japanese. Hiroshige portrayed a number of different types of sailing boats throughout his work, but the *Eight Views of Omi* series speaks to the simplest kind, the fishing boat. The artist finds a certain lyricism in the ways in which common people go about their daily lives— working, traveling from village to village, fishing, and so forth. Not only did Hiroshige view the relationship between humanity and nature as something intrinsic and cyclical, he saw sailing boats as a poetic stand-in for the exploration of such philosophy. Through *Sailing Boats at Yabase* and *Descending Geese at Katada*, Hiroshige approaches boating as a means of human's aligning their existence to that of the natural world.



Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797-1858  
*Descending Geese at Katada (Katada Rakugan)*  
Series: *Eight Views of Omi (Omi hakkei no uchi)*  
Signed: Hiroshige ga (picture by Hiroshige)  
Publisher: Yamamotoya Heikichi, publishing house Eikyūdō  
Date: ca. 1834-1835  
Size: 22.5 x 35.1 cm  
Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*  
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1279

Poem: *Flying across numerous peaks/ and getting really close to Koshiji,/ Yet, the wild geese cannot resist/ descending at Katada.* By Konohe Nobutada (1565-1614), translated by Matthi Forrer.



***Descending Geese at Katada***  
**from series *Eight Views of Omi***

By Elizaveta Lazarchuk (visual analysis) and Jane Gorelik (conceptual analysis)

**Visual Analysis by Elizaveta Lazarchuk**

Vast blue waters of Lake Biwa spill over the breadth of space in front of our eyes and extend into the depth along the distant shore. The approaching night has blackened the topmost part of the sky but the rest of it is still lit in yellow sunset haze. A receding sequence of light gray clouds leads the eye downward along the curve of the hills into the setting mist beyond the base of the remote mountains. Two lines of geese are descending for the night. Boats sail across the water to and away from Katada village nestled among the trees on the low shore. Far away on the right, tiny white rectangles of departing sails can be discerned, almost disappearing into the mist at the horizon line. Subtle visual rhythms pervade the forms of nature and of human life, conveying the world's harmonious unity subtly expressed in this evening hour.

**Boats at the Foreground**

Hiroshige places the largest of the boats in the center of the print's bottom line at an angle so that the vessel's hull lies parallel to the imagined right-to-left diagonal. This is a sailboat with its three triangular sails outstretched. It is heading away from the land into the lake maybe for the night fishing. Moving away from the temple, the boats mirror the directional movement of the geese above. On all three boats there are people involved in usual fishermen activities. The figures are rendered with quite remarkable precision in spite of the tiny size of all elements of the image. This exactness of portrayal refers to men's appearance and their movements shown with expertise. Dressed plainly in shirts and pants as village boatmen were, some of them are wearing large round hats *kasa*, usually put on by Japanese commoners when outside. There are two men in the sailboat; one is controlling the rudder while the other is busy arranging something fishing-related on a big tray. Of two men in the second boat, one is pulling the fishing net out of the water. The only person on the third boat is poling his boat towards the shore. Only the front boat has a gray sail, detailed in cross hatching, while the other two present a lack thereof. The

white hats of the fisherman contrast the blanket nebulous shadow and further direct the eye across the page along with the delicate white waves.

This succession of boats, including vessels themselves, the gear and men aboard create a coordinated succession of forms. This refers to the narrow trapezoids of the hulls, multiple triangles of the sails with their unusual diagonal hatching, the half-drawn out net and the side-views of some hats as well as the interplay of circular motifs in those hats that are shown from the back.

### **Ukimido – the Floating Hall**

The next form that continues the same directional line is somewhat unusual – it is a piece of architecture that seems to hover above the water. This is Ukimido – “The Floating Hall” of the Mangetsuji – “The Full Moon Temple,” located on the shores of the Lake Biwa. The Ukimido houses one thousand Amida Buddha statues within its small space. The place of worship is built between the elements, a physical connection that is the platform in the water and the bridge leading into it, a path between the mundane and the sacred. The platform and the bridge are supported by slender pillars. The Floating Temple pavilion is not tall. Its thatched pyramidal roof is joining the "conversation" of triangles with the boats, sails and the drawn fishnet on the same diagonal. The straight lines of the pillars are echoed by the reeds extending from the shore into the water and almost reaching the boats creating an additional path for the eye of the beholder. The walk over the bridge brings along the change of the environment when the pavilion visitors find themselves suddenly surrounded by an open space, not the habitual land environment. This bridge journey, brief as it is, allows pavilion visitors to get attuned to the spiritual experience within.

### **The Shore: Temple Grounds and Silhouettes of Wooded Areas**

On that same diagonal line, emerging from the trees are the temple grounds. Three structures, in opposition to each other, are rendered in light grays like the nature surrounding them. The temple proper is rendered in considerable detail with stairs leading to the open door. A fence runs along the shore, defining the boundaries of the temple. It fades into a bridge that leads towards a floating hall built on a platform over the lake.

Echoing the jagged rhythm of the of the boats and of the roofs of the buildings, extending to the right are dark gray serrated silhouettes of clustered trees with their branches and other details suggested by black lines over the solid shape. This shadowy uneven shape stretches in the left-to-right direction for about two thirds of the print's length. Behind the dark silhouetted strip of trees there is another strip, similarly notched but of a lighter hue and extending to the right even further. Thus, bordering the shores of the lake Biwa, trees occupy almost the entirety of the horizon line, extending all the way to the left end of the composition. Solid grays of these wood strips are occasionally broken with spots of lightness emerging in a gradient captures the depth of the perspective. These two undulating stretches of darker and lighter shades of gray establish a distinct horizontal directional force. They lead the eye to the mountains into the rolling evening fog. Approximately in the center of the composition, one can see a cluster of light-gray roofs and slightly spread out rocks, marking the beginning of the shore of the closest cove.

### **Moored Sailboats**

Over there, not far from the shore there are two more boats; they are sailboats at rest, their tall slender masts firmly established and resonating with the mast of the boat on the foreground. These two boats seem to be anchored down and lack a trace of human presence.

### **Distant Sailboats Sailing**

Further away to the right in the distance, what seem to be emerging from the behind the deep blue waters along the horizon line, is a group of eight small boats under white sails gliding against the tree-line and rightmost mountain. They blend into the white and blue of the waters, with the wind blowing the vessels away from the shoreline. A chain of three boats is closer to the viewer and can be seen better; deeper into the space, yet even more obscured, are another two lonely boats. Almost indistinguishable in their grays from the trees at the foothills of the mountain, their sails catch the fading daylight reflected in the water. Unlike the mountain silhouettes above, the dark tones of the boats sink into the analogous value of the water.

### **Evening Skies, Geese, and Mountaintops**

The evening is approaching, and the daylight is beginning to fail. The very top of the print is filled with a black bar of the darkening nightly sky, its edge soft and blended in comparison to the rest of the forms in the print. Starting out with pure ebony, the shades of black gradually fade to a lighter gray until it changes into a pale peach of a sky. Five gray clouds break off of the black mass of the top, drifting down obliquely from the center of the upper edge of the print leftwards. Against the clouds two flocks of geese are flying down looking to settle for the night. Their formation is echoing the course of the clouds' movement. The two skeins of geese cut in from the top of the clouds in a right-to-left diagonal direction.

The dark dash line of the geese guides the eye down from the already blackened sky across the cloud bank beyond the highest mountain top, rendered in the same color to the lower bluish mountain. The flock flies in two orderly lines - the rightmost skein descends in a uniform train while the one to the left becomes disjointed in the middle.

The lower four geese in the closer flock appear against the top of the blue mountain, partially blending into the detailing of the hills. The birds almost repeat the curvature of the sketchy black spot-and-line shapes rendering of the craggy formations on the blue mountain to the right and to the left of them. These irregular black areas with distinct linework and hatching articulate the edge of the blue mountain and suggest the roughness of terrain. The three shorter lines and one longer mark on the left stay within the blue gradient before it disappears into the white mist (the lightest part of the print). The wrinkled folds on the right extend further forward and cut into the white mist enveloping the base of the blue mountain. The mist stretches out left and right. On the right another mountain rises from the same haze – it is taller and of similar gradual shading but instead of blue, it is in the same tone of gray as the five clouds on its left.

### **All-pervading Unity of Humans and Nature: Mountains, Waters, Flora and Fauna along with Naturalness of Manmade Objects**

The repeating forms and color tones throughout the composition continue in a gradual flow from the top to the bottom and across the horizon. The eye keeps coming

around the depicted scene, never quite escaping the composition, feeling enveloped by the world created within.

Emotional serenity of the print is rooted in the captured harmonious relationship of the human and nature in its every manifestation: mountains and waters, flora and fauna, present here as geese. All man-made objects – the sailboat in the forefront, the architectural details of Ukimido and of the bridge leading to it make the viewer appreciate the amount of thought and skill that went into their construction. These objects are so smartly and tightly crafted that this lends them similarity to the natural objects around them: they display almost mountain-like solidity; at the same time, they are so light and look so effortlessly comparable they become comparable with the birds completing their descent.

All entities depicted play a strong compositional role in the structure of the print guiding the eye across the space from a close-to-the-viewer position into the depth, mirroring the path of the geese flying down in the distance, emphasizing horizontal expanse of the space; all participate equally in creating an evocative effect. Fishermen performing their daily jobs and the geese ready to descend at night create an organic relationship between the elements that Hiroshige chose to include in this image.

### **Poetically Ordinary – conceptual analysis by Jane Gorelik**

In the upper left corner of *Descending Geese at Katada*, a square cartouche contains verses by poet and high-ranking noble, Konoe Nobutada (1565-1614) - it tells the viewer that while the geese ultimately plan to reach Koshiji, they couldn't resist descending at Katada:

Flying across numerous peaks  
And getting really close to Koshiji,  
Yet, the wild geese cannot resist  
Descending at Katada

(Translated by Matthi Forrer<sup>108</sup>)

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<sup>108</sup> Translated by Matthi Forrer, *Hiroshige* Munich, New York: Prestel, 1977

When writing *Eight Views of Omi*, Konoë Nobutada took inspiration from the Chinese painting and poetry topic *Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers*. Nobutada is reworking the Chinese poetry to fit Japanese locales - thus the *Eight Views of Omi* conveys universal themes through specific places.

*Eight Views of Omi* originated from *Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers*, popular subject among Song and Yuan dynasty landscape painters. Originally, the eight themes were linked to specific locales where the two rivers merged. These depictions spread across Japan in the 14th and 15th centuries. It was poet Konoë Nobutada who linked the traditional eight themes to specific views around Omi, a locale in the Lake Biwa area.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps the geese and the viewer are of one mind, both drawn to this moment of peace. Tired tones blanket the scene as the warmth of day fades, yet the comfort of returning home triumphs over the evening gloom. The quiet mist and calm water beckons the viewer to rest. Shadows stretch across a tired land and the weight of the day is lifted. The print is a moment of serenity, a deep breath in a busy world.

Appreciation for Hiroshige's prints transcend time and space - perhaps because it appeals to something deeper than we realize. "...[*Descending Geese at Katada*] implies a poetic metaphor for order and hierarchy, as the geese's inclination of flying in a V-shaped configuration implied retaining ranks".<sup>110</sup> Perhaps an instinctive inclination to order draws the viewer to *Descending Geese at Katada* - the directional movement mirrored across the horizon creates a compositional balance, while the repetition of color offers unity. Through color and composition, Hiroshige creates an intricate and satisfying sense of balance and order. This tranquility appeals to us innately - so desperately needed in a world muddled with the arbitrary and erratic, yet so orderly in Hiroshige's images.

Hiroshige explores this concept further through the juxtaposition of the geese and the boats. Mirrored across the horizon, the compositional offsetting of the geese and boats creates a visual equilibrium between the two metaphorically contrasting elements. Both embody contradicting aspects of humanity, represented in the elements' relationship to the landscape. The geese are heading to Koshiji, but they couldn't help but land in Katada.

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<sup>109</sup> Allen Hockley, *The Prints of Isoda Koryusai: Floating World Culture and Its Consumers in Eighteenth-Century Japan* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2003), 55

<sup>110</sup> Jennifer Baker. *The Eight Views: from its origin in the Xiao and Xiang rivers to Hiroshige*. MA Thesis. College of Arts at the University of Canterbury Art History and Theory in the School of Humanities. 2010.PDF, 22

Their simple forms contrast the carefully rendered gradation of the mountains and sky, small in comparison to the grandeur of the stretching land and rolling water - The presence of the geese is fleeting and incidental. Below the skeins, the boats cut through the water in a practiced and repeated act of permanence. Humans innately seek control and order, hoping for consistency and thus permanence in the face of a fleeting life. It is through routine that forever is achieved. Yet still, shadows swallow the land as day turns to night, another moment lost to the nebulous passage of time. Like a flock of geese passing over a mountain, human life is but a single moment of many. However, unlike the geese, our impact isn't limited to our mortality. It is no accident that the people are depicted in boats - creation allows for permanence in the face of life's brevity. After death, a person lives on through what they leave behind. The boats, the village, and structures built by human hands are the closest to permanence we can achieve in an impermanent world. They will carry on the person's legacy, just as Hiroshige's prints have carried on his. Through these intrinsic themes, appealing to both the viewers' conscious and subconscious, Hiroshige achieves universal relatability.

Within the small moment depicted in *Descending Geese at Katada*, the viewer finds a universal sentimentality. This same universality can be found in all themes of the *Eight Views of Omi*, its imbedded foreign – Chinese - origins transcending language and spatial boundaries.

When deciding where to set these poems, Nobutada chose Omi - perhaps for the grandeur of Lake Biwa or perhaps for political reasons. Lake Biwa, Japan's largest freshwater lake, is known for its scenic beauty. One of Japan's greatest travel attractions, it has been the subject of much Japanese poetry - most famously *Eight Views of Omi*. The name of the lake was established during the Edo period, credited to the lake's resemblance of a stringed instrument called the *biwa*. Legend connects the name to the goddess Benzaiten:

The lake is the Pure Land (a pure land is the celestial realm of a buddha in Mahayana Buddhism) of the goddess Benzaiten because she lives on

Chikubu Island and the shape of the lake is similar to that of the *biwa*, her favorite instrument.<sup>111</sup>

The mystic of legend and the beauty of the lake spoke to Nobutada in the same way it still does to modern day viewers. However, there are implications of political and personal significance in the choosing of the Omi Providence. Nobutada had personal connections to Omi:

It was Nobutada's great-grandfather, Konoe Masaie, who selected the locations of the Eight Views of Ōmi.... The Konoe family had been landowners in the Omi Province for several generations therefore traveling in this area was commonplace for family members.<sup>112</sup>

Historians believe that the setting of Omi was a political move as well. Shortly after composing the poems, Nobutada commissioned folding screen paintings with inscriptions for scrolls with a Lake Biwa theme on the eight-year anniversary of the death of warlord Oda Nobunaga.

...the timing of the folding screen's creation certainly suggests that Nobutada produced poems upon the Eight Views of Omi to honour Nobunaga, thereby imparting political significance onto this subject. Furthermore, as Nobunaga's Azuchi Castle was located on the eastern shores of Lake Biwa, the location of the Eight Views of Ōmi would have been an appropriate tribute to him.<sup>113</sup>

On the other hand, Jennifer Baker from the College of Arts at the University of Canterbury offers a different interpretation in her Master's Thesis. Citing visual metaphors rooted in the work of Du Fu (712-770), one of the greatest Chinese poets of Tang Dynasty, Baker theorizes that the geese symbolize exiled officials wishing to return home. "Du Fu used migratory geese as a metaphor for a noble and loyal official, separated from friends, family and colleagues, similar to a wild goose separated from his flock".<sup>114</sup> Through the lens of this interpretation, the dark hues seem colder, the silhouettes sharper and more foreboding. In the dying rays of sunlight, the geese hover above a land swallowed by

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<sup>111</sup> Yoshihiro Kimura (2001). *Biwako -sono koshō no yurai-* [Lake Biwa, the origin of its name]. Hikone: Sunrise Publishing. [https://wikivisually.com/wiki/Lake\\_Biwa](https://wikivisually.com/wiki/Lake_Biwa)

<sup>112</sup> Jennifer Baker. *The Eight Views: from its origin in the Xiao and Xiang rivers to Hiroshige*, 93

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 94

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 22



shadow. Cutting through clouds heavy with melancholy, they are lost in the cold indifference of a world far from home.

Black clouds hang heavy over a late-day yellow sky. Mountains descend into gradient, their cool, dark tones melting into the warm horizon. Shadows stretch over the village, the promise of stability secure in their interiors. Mirrored across the horizon, boats approach the viewer in a right-to-left slant, reflecting the diagonal rhythm of the geese above. The directional movement of the descending skeins offset the stillness of the scene, kineticism in a world of quiet. The dark tones of the boats sink into the analogous value of the water while the white of the waves offer a pop of contrast in a blanket of nebulous shadow. The boats glide across still waters - delicate waves ripple in their wake, their crests evocative of the mountains above. Harmony saturates the scene like the fading haze of day, a tinge of melancholy rolling in with the evening fog. The fishermen's labor is contrasted by the leisurely calm of Lake Biwa; the hardships of life juxtaposed by the beauty of it. As day eases into dusk, a life of toil is soothed by soft shadows and gentle majesty. The piece captures a moment of simplicity; commoners going through their daily motions, a slice of everyday life. Yet it is depicted with a highly sophisticated reference in mind, based on Chinese poetry. Despite the simplicity of the scene represented, the piece is highly cultivated, steeped in intellectual, metaphorical, and political implications. Calm falls over the viewer - an intrinsic need is met, a universal sentimentality is reached - and we are reminded of what it means to be human.

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Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797-1858  
*Returning sails at Yabase (Yabase kihan)*  
Series: *Eight Views of Omi (Ōmi hakkei)*  
Signed: Hiroshige ga (picture by Hiroshige)  
Publisher: Yamamotoya Heikichi, publishing house Eikyūdō  
Censorship seal: *kiwame*  
Date: ca. 1834-1835  
Size: 22.9 x 35.4 cm  
Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*  
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1276

Poem: *The boats that come with swelling sails to Yabase have been chased by the wind along the coasts of Uchide.* By Konoe Nobutada (1565-1614), translated by Matthi Forrer.

***Returning sails at Yabase***  
**from series *Eight Views of Omi***

By Iain Wall

A fleet of fishing boats is approaching the shoreline of a nearby village, adrift and blown from far off mountains by a calm wind. It is easy for viewers to be engrossed in the immediate beauty of Utagawa Hiroshige's work, and "Returning Sails at Yabase" is obviously no exception to that notion. One is instantly captivated by the gentle harmony with the way Hiroshige portrays the natural world through this landscape print, not as something with haste or urgency, but rather, a slow depiction of man traveling across the water solely by the force of the wind on sails. In this depiction, Hiroshige employs the use of boats not only as a means to convey his visual narrative, but also to serve as a metaphorical vessel transporting viewers into the serenity of the floating world.

Taken from the series *Eight Views of Omi*, this print captures a western perspective of Lake Biwa, with the composition focusing upon a maritime gesture. A large part of the scene is allocated for the lake and skyline, with only the bottom right corner portraying the shoreline, and with it, the contrasting human presence. It is important to note, however, that the village Yabase is not an overpowering unnatural form. Yabase in the way it is rendered is in agreeance with its surroundings and does not stand out or seemingly oppose the natural aesthetic Hiroshige is presenting. On the contrary, its many houses and docks simply meld into the lines of grass and trees that mark the shoreline.

The horizon line is centered within the middle of the print's height, dividing the composition almost equally into the lake and sky. With this division comes a perspectival suggestion, as the fishing boats seemingly diminish in size and grandeur as they blow ever-nearer to the horizon, their intricacies abstracting into simple geometric squares. Above the horizon line lies the skyline, a relatively open portion of the piece except for the two mountain ranges. The bottom-most mountain range is silhouetted and seemingly connects with the horizon line, blending into Lake Biwa with ease. Behind lies a much larger mountain in scale, whose uppermost edge is the only part articulated, with a wash of color diffusing as your eye moves back towards the horizon. This gradation of the large mountain further suggests the utilization of perspective as well as is implicit of the existence of a shroud of fog or mist surrounding the large mountain. This mist, with its

absence of color, along with the crisp upper-edge of the smaller mountain range below, help outline the perimeter of the larger mountain, and thus allow for its space.

Besides the aforementioned, the skyscape remains void of major details allowing viewers to focus upon its atmospheric vastness and thus, get a sense of the enormity of the natural world. Hiroshige's use of color is especially important in producing this atmospheric skyline, in that the colors he uses are indicative of the time of day, a setting sun setting a mood for the print. This transitional time of daylight is reflected in the orange gradient, or *bokashi*, that feathers the uppermost edge of the print, simultaneously producing a vignette effect. Through this, Hiroshige not only wants to imbue a natural feeling to his work, but he is consciously recounting the rich Japanese artistic and literary tradition focussing upon the sunset, evoking a certain poetic sentimentalism.

When compared to this vast sky, Lake Biwa could be seen as an area teeming with activity, but there is no antagonism between these two regions. Though Lake Biwa and the surrounding shoreline are composed of a number of color washes and contain boats, houses, trees, and waves, all rendered in varying levels of detail, this difference does not suggest a hectic atmosphere, rather it enhances the natural sense of harmony. The quiet repetition of thin, small marks within the water creates a sense of gentle movement, and this feeling is also evident in the diagonal linework used to render the grassy shore. Within Lake Biwa there are a number of fishing boats clustered together in different distances from Yabase's docks, once again showing Hiroshige's mastery of perspective. Of the boats closest to approaching the shore (positioned just beneath the center of the print), their sails are already down, and viewers get the sense that they are being settled for the night (the small repeated lines/markings in the water suggesting a slow sway). To the left and slightly above of these ships is another group of farther out boats, their sails full and rectangular in shape as they are blown by the wind.

It is important to note the sense of scale Hiroshige employs and how he utilizes this perspective to frame the relationship between humanity and nature. Though the fishing boats near the shore are average in size, their general position in the center of the composition gives them a larger sense of importance and thus physicality. This natural grandeur of the boats, drifting west and east across Lake Biwa, in turn, serves to diminish the presence of man, who in relation appears almost as if they were ants scurrying along

the many docks of Yabase. In this representation, Hiroshige portrays the natural world as something so equally awe-inspiring as it is simple. That's not to say that Hiroshige depicts man as something entirely separate from the natural world, as the various locations of the boats, their differing distances from Yabase, suggests the cyclical nature of their movement and thus, symbolizes the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world. Hiroshige depicts boats at disparate locations within the lake (three boats already moored on the right, four boats settling their sails towards the center, and so forth) as well as at different stages of lowering their sails. In this multiplicity of depictions, Hiroshige portrays the act of boating in a plain and honest way, and humbles the work as whole. There exists nothing frilly or exaggerated in his representations, Hiroshige simply portrays the simple and deep harmony of the Japanese landscape, and that is where the miraculous power of his work lies. While the print speaks to *Returning Sails*, there also exists two boats with masts facing the opposite direction, suggesting their movement further into Lake Biwa and that they are actually sailing away from Yabase. Through the addition of such boats, Hiroshige also presents a dynamic of two-sided movement and further proves the interrelation of man and nature.

Aside from Hiroshige's visual artistry in rendering the modest, yet beautiful working life of fishermen aligned with the life of nature on the shores of Biwa Lake, this print has a specific theme it follows, denoted by a number of visual markers. This theme is announced in the two cartouches present in the upper right-hand corner of this print, a feature common for ukiyo-e prints at large and one that is of primary significance for understanding a print's original message. The rightmost, red, oblong cartouche holds the title of the series of the work. Besides this tall and narrow form there is a much larger, square shape that contains the poem. The shapes of both cartouches are important as they are specifically related to poetry: with paper of the elongated form used for this purpose being known as *tanzaku*, and the square form's name being *shikishi*. Other usual markings include the artist's signature, the seal of the publishing house and a censorship mark, all appearing on the left side of the composition.<sup>115</sup>

The orange and blue sky-colored *shikishi* reads: "The boats that come with swelling sails to Yabase have been chased by the wind along the coasts of Uchide". It is

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<sup>115</sup> (C)2001 Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System. <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/s/shikishi.htm>; <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/t/tanzaku.htm>

important to note however that this is merely one such translation of the poem presented within the print; there exists a number of translations and with them comes slightly altered wordings and interpretations. In addition, this kind of poem (known as *waka*), which speaks to the imagery depicted within the print was not uncommon and, in fact, belongs to a rich artistic tradition that will be explored at a later point.

While this encapsulates a majority of the formal characteristics of the piece, there still remains another equally, if not more, important component of this piece that remains to be examined throughout this essay, and that would be the conceptual or philosophical approach Hiroshige took along with the cultural/historical context for the work as both are pertinent to viewers who wish to fully engage with the work, but more-so they are essential if one wishes to have a holistic understanding. In this wood block print, Hiroshige depicts a series of sailing boats returning to Yabase, drifting from Lake Biwa and a mountain-filled skyline, but that is merely the literal. Beneath this surface level perception of understanding, there exists a more rich cultural and philosophical significance Hiroshige was exemplifying.

The subject matter of the print is in itself a significant aspect of how Hiroshige conveyed his philosophy. Boats were not uncommon within his repertoire and, within the context of this piece, their placement in the composition serves a metaphorical importance. The fishing boats, setting sail from Uchide carried only by the wind on their sails, act almost as a bridge or link for man and viewers into the harmony of nature. Outside the boat, man is depicted in relation to Yabase, but once engaged with the vessels, the presence of man diminishes and the piece shifts viewer attention to the limitless yet soft and understated power of the Japanese landscape. In this sense, boats not only serve as a form of transportation, carrying the fishermen from Uchide to Yabase, but through carrying out their livelihood, boats transport the fisherman into a wealth of fulfilling experiences, something serene and spiritually enlightening. In going about their lives in relation to the natural world, boats are an entrance into a developed appreciation. Through his choice of subject matter, Hiroshige shows that the modesty of ordinary existence is inherently a happy one, one that only needs to be discovered.

Another critical facet of this print that deserves analysis would be the role of appropriation present within the image and to what effect it serves. Unlike western

tradition, it was common practice during the time for artists to openly trace or reappropriate the creative property of other artists without any kind of acknowledgement; that's not to say this is a phenomenon exclusive to Japan, however, what largely differed was the societal attitude on the matter—with the act of tracing, or borrowing another's work, being a means of showing one's deep respect as well as their mastery of the medium.

From the gazetteer (Fig 1), the influence of such guides on Hiroshige's rendering of boating and human imagery is clearly evident, but it is important to note however these panels served merely as a departure point for Hiroshige—who in turn expanded upon this imagery and, when placed within his landscapes, produced not only an entirely new composition, but also a new purpose and effect, speaking to sensualism rather than geography.<sup>116</sup>

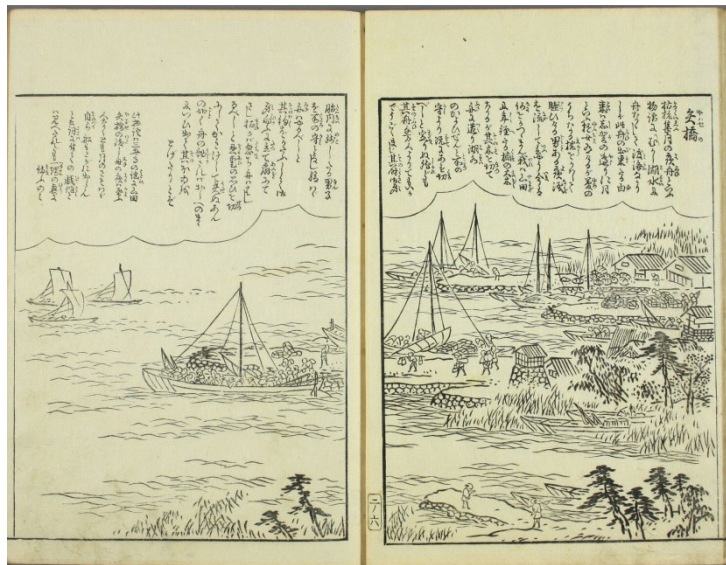


Fig 1: Page from Illustrated Guide to the Ise Pilgrimage (Ise sangû meisho zue 伊勢参宮名所図会), 1797, by Shitomi Kangetsu (1747-1797)<sup>117</sup>

On a formal level, while this print is representative of a singular view of Omi (an eastern view of Lake Biwa) and is contained within just one panel or frame, the impression it gives off to viewers is much more grandiose, as the seemingly endless landscape extends off into the unseen. Within the work there are a number of qualities that serve to produce this effect of limitless space, the first of which being the internal divisions Hiroshige places within the work, specifically the separations between the lake and the sky as well as

<sup>116</sup> Existence of this source is indicated on a blog page: <http://sakamitisanpo.g.dgdg.jp/yabasebune.html>

<sup>117</sup> <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/96980>

Yabase from the lake. These divisions, while one would think they would produce the opposite effect, work in conjunction with one another to create this illusion. While the division between the skyline and lake is created with a horizontal line, the division between Lake Biwa and Yabase is created with a curved or diagonal line. These contrasting divisions not only allow for a sense of perspective, but also lead viewers into imagining the continuation of the landscape. By juxtaposing these elements, Hiroshige creates an atmosphere internally that seems to expand externally, outside of the panel. This effect is also supported on a conceptual level, as part of a series Hiroshige allows viewers to discover the different views of Omi and the poetic feelings they are evocative of. In this way, the singular panel that is this piece works in harmony with the rest of the series to produce a continued landscape narrative. When viewers look at this print they are merely at experiencing one of the different moods of nature that became associated with this locality, and through careful observation they are transported into the beauty of the Japanese countryside. By looking at such works, Hiroshige is not implying a physical traversal of viewers, rather a psychological trip through which they explore different sentiments. The exact inspiration for such a series of prints will be discussed more in depth at a later point in relation to its cultural significance.

As this print is part of a larger collection of works, taken from the *Eight Views of Omi* series, its presence within Hiroshige's body of work is not unusual or atypical of his artistic output. On the contrary, rather, as Hiroshige was known to have produced a number of series throughout his prolific career, such as his series depicting *The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō*. The phenomenon of a series, or group of inter-related works, was not exclusive to Hiroshige, in fact, it is a cultural tradition originating from the Chinese that was fully shared by the artistic customs of the Japanese, with the eight views format being known as *hakkei*. In addition, Japanese art at times took direct inspiration from such thematic groupings that took their shape in China. As time progressed, however, inspirations dwindled to merely the conceptual approach; the formal qualities of Japanese art became something distinctly Japanese. *The Eight Views of Omi* series draws inspiration for its format and construction from an earlier Chinese series known as "*The Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang*". In fact, subject matter was another facet of Chinese art that the Japanese incorporated into their artistic customs, with sailing boats being a common



theme across works. The Xiao and Xiang Rivers were a ubiquitous element of Chinese landscape painting during the Song and Yuan dynasty and depictions of these rivers spread to Japan during the 14th and 15th centuries. It was during this time that the Japanese poet Konoe Naomichi (d. 1544) appropriated this traditional concept of eight views and repurposed it into *waka* poems describing specific views of Omi. In addition to his poetic feats, Konoe Naomichi himself was a government official, and was well-versed in calligraphy and painting. The poems that appear on the prints by Hiroshige belong to another well-known poet and calligrapher, Konoe Nobutada (1565-1614). His poems are the earliest extant from among those dedicated to the *Eight Views of Omi*.<sup>118</sup>

Though one may argue this piece holds a large significance within Hiroshige's body of work, the cultural place it holds within the artistic tradition of the ukiyo-e format is far more apparent. With the aforementioned Chinese influence on the formation of Japanese art, came the introduction of the *yamato-e* style, one that deeply influenced Hiroshige's work. *Yamato-e*, coming from the word *Yamato* (a poetic interpretation of Japan), is an early style of Japanese painting characterized by its narrative-based scroll paintings, a format originally adopted from the Chinese artists. *Yamato-e* differed from the formal works of Chinese intellectuals however, in that it took a more sentimental approach in regard to how it depicted natural forms.<sup>119</sup>

The influence of *yamato-e* on Hiroshige's work is clearly evident within this piece on a number of levels. Firstly, the fact that the Japanese established their own national equivalents to the Chinese Eight Views is essential for reference to the *yamato-e* style. *Yamato-e* style was used in Japan exclusively to treat Japanese subject matter – Japanese landscapes, Japanese history, Japanese literature, portraits of Japanese prominent individuals, etc. The Eight Views of Omi were equally atmospheric, misty, and evocative of the poetic moods as the original ones, but they also possessed distinct, soft-shaped rolling hills that were a feature of the Japanese national style of landscape painting; In addition, the usage of color was certainly the *yamato-e* tradition; strong

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<sup>118</sup> Baker, Jennifer. *The Eight Views: From Its Origin in the Xiao and Xiang Rivers to Hiroshige: College of Arts at the University of Canterbury Art History and Theory in the School of Humanities: ARTH 690 Masters Thesis*. Master's thesis, College of Arts at the University of Canterbury, 2010.PDF, 93

<sup>119</sup> Hiroshige's association with the *yamato-e* tradition with its colorfulness and figurative images is discussed in the following article used in the current paper: Boles, Pamela, and Stephen Addiss. "Hiroshige's Tōkaidō Prints in the Context of Yamato-e, The Traditional Painting of Japan." In *Tōkaidō, Adventures on the Road in Old Japan*, 74-85. Lawrence, Kansas: University Of Kansas Spencer Museum Of Art, 1980, 75-88

narrative component, clearly expressed in the activities of people, shown with warmth is still another essential feature of *yamato-e*. On a more general level, upon the format of the work and how, although it is a singular panel, in the broader context of its belonging to a series, it pieces together a continuous-narrative of sorts that extends beyond the borders of the piece.

“Returning Sails at Yabase” by Utagawa Hiroshige while in a literal sense depicts a fleet of fishing boats approaching the barren shores of the village, Yabase, and their departure from Lake Biwa and the surrounding mountainscape, on a deeper level it communicates Hiroshige’s deep appreciation for the serenity of the Japanese environment. Through deliberate formal choices, joining together the legacies of Chinese philosophic landscape tradition and *yamato-e*, Hiroshige is able to convey the enormity of the natural world and its limitless beauty. Hiroshige displays the simplicity of human life as synchronized with the eternal and magnificent life of nature and its essential part. Using boats as metaphorical vessels, the artist transports viewers into the harmony of the floating world.

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**FAMOUS VIEWS OF KYOTO**

UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE

## Famous Views of Kyoto: a New Look at the Origin of Meisho-e

By Olivia Kim

In the earlier years of the *meisho-e* tradition - tradition of visualizing famous places in word and image, Kyoto was the center of attention. Kyoto has been a place of tradition and face of Japan for more than 1000 years, its name literally meaning “the capital city” when translated. Printed works dedicated to the historical city were popular in the late 1700s when *meisho-e* were first introduced with such works as *Miyako Meisho Zue* (1780), a series of illustrated books compiled by Akisato Rito (1776-1828). The guidebooks were filled with detailed information on the history, legends, and local products of various temples, shrines, and famous places in Kyoto.

However, as the political focus of Japan shifted away from Kyoto to Edo, people became more interested in the new capital. This proved particularly evident during the later years of Edo period. Hiroshige’s numerous series of prints dedicated to the fifty-three stations of Tokaido reflect the trend very well, as it is a visual representation of the journey from Kyoto to Edo, a final product of the collective interest that artists and people of the time period shared.

*Famous Views of Kyoto* (1834) goes against the trend and returns to the root of *meisho-e*, turning its focus back to the thousand-year old capital, but with a modernizing touch of Hiroshige’s style. Whereas the original images from *Miyako Meisho Zue* were precise and to the point, focusing on the landscape and delivering information on the locations, Hiroshige introduced a narrative element to the scene, imbuing emotional qualities to the imagery. Although all of the places present within the series have already been depicted by his predecessors, Hiroshige has arranged his composition innovatively. He sought to give in his prints both a more human perspective, and through sensitive coloration to enhance the lyrical possibilities suggested by these ten *meisho* views. By giving the traditional language of *meisho-e* a new context, Hiroshige turns the old into something fresh, giving a new look of appreciation to the origin of *meisho-e* tradition.



Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797-1858

*Cherry Trees in Full Bloom, Arashiyama (Arashiyama manka)*

Series: *Famous Views of Kyoto (Kyoto meisho no uchi)*

Signed: Hiroshige-ga (picture by Hiroshige)

Publisher: Kawaguchiya Shozo, publishing house Shōeidō, Eisendō

Censorship seal: *kiwame* (approved)

Date: ca. 1834

Size: 21.9 x 35.4 cm

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, horizontal *ōban*

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1285

## ***Cherry Trees in Full Bloom at Arashiyama*** **from series *Famous Views of Kyoto***

By Olivia Kim

After a long and chilling winter, spring has finally arrived in Kyoto. Two cargo men are sailing down the river on a log raft while enjoying the sight of cherry blossoms in full bloom, gazing into the mountain that has turned into a shade of pink and white. The man on the left with the striped clothing polls away with a relaxed expression and a pipe in his mouth. The other man on the right has stopped his hands from polling, stealing a peak at the cherry blossoms. The two of them are wearing a typical workers' outfit: the *hachimaki* and the *tenugui* on their heads, their simple shirts tied high at the front for convenience, and gaiters that cover their shins. The colors of their clothes, blue and pink, resonate with the overall color scheme of the print. The poles, which are almost parallel to each other, and the geometric shape of the boat in an otherwise organic composition draws the attention of the viewer even more.

Rafters just like how the two in the print played a major role in constructions. Since it was easier for the lumbers to be carried by waterways, guilds of rafters worked to provide the lumber that was used within major cities. They would work in cooperation with lumbermen, where the lumber was made into rafts and floated down the river, and were picked up by other work crews downstream to be used in lumber yards in the city. Then the wood would be sold to be used in construction sites.<sup>120</sup>

The smoke coming from a small pile of hay in the center of the raft is also done using bokashi technique, creating a mild rhythm and movement that doesn't disrupt the image. The linear depiction of currents on the bottom right corner is quite unusual and draws the eye as well as suggests the rapidness of the current, creating a contrast between the graceful petals.

On the center and right of the print is the wide river in beautiful "Hiroshige blue," a specific shade of blue made of synthetic pigment called Berlin blue (more commonly known as Prussian blue) that Hiroshige and his colleagues predominantly used in their landscape prints. The edges of the river are completed with *ichimonji-bokashi*, a printing

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<sup>120</sup> Totman, Conrad D. *The Lumber Industry in Early Modern Japan*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 94.

technique that allows the colors to create a gradation. River is called Hozugawa, a narrow passage that is a part of a wider river called Oigawa. In 1606, Ryoji Suminokura, who was a merchant, initiated a large construction in which he built canals in major rivers around Kyoto in order to make transportation of wood more convenient; Hozugawa was one of them.<sup>121</sup> Rivers were the main means of transporting lumber that was needed for construction of buildings of premier significance such as temples in principle cities, and most of the wood that was used in Kyoto came from the city of Tanba, located northwest from the old capital.<sup>122</sup>

Hozugawa runs along the Arashiyama, a mountain that is covered in thick pine forest and its famous cherry blossoms and maples. Further along the river, a bridge called the Togetsukyo is also famous as a scenic site in Arashiyama. The bridge runs across the Oigawa, and to this day, people from all over Japan visit the bridge to enjoy the nature of Arashiyama, especially during spring when the cherry blossoms are in full bloom. Wealthy tourists would also go on boat rides on the river, accompanied by courtesans and seasonal delicacies. The site continues to enjoy popularity ever since Hiroshige's times. As Hozugawa gained its reputation as a must-see in Kyoto, in 1885, commercial cruise services became readily available for tourists. In 1991, the renowned writer Soseki Natsume took part in the occasion and wrote in his book *Gubijinso* (1991) about the magnificent rock formations along the Hozugawa and how impressed he was with the skillful boatmen, in great detail.<sup>123</sup>

Scattered in the print's left half, the cherry blossoms bring life into the otherwise cold and calm print with its vivacious pink and white colors, along with dynamic strokes that represent the delicate flower petals. When the first breath of spring wakes up the trees, one by one, they slowly open up the delicate petals that have been waiting for this moment for so long. Some petals are depicted as a body of pink color while others are carved out to create white spots and are scattered around to resemble snowflakes, with small pink dots added to detail the flower body. They create a harmony of shapes and colors with the dark pine trees around them, making the scene more dynamic and adding

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<sup>121</sup> "文学と保津川." 保津川下りホームページ. Accessed October 25, 2018.

<https://www.hozugawakudari.jp/about/history>.

<sup>122</sup> Totman, Conrad D. *The Lumber Industry in Early Modern Japan*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 90

<sup>123</sup> "文学と保津川." 保津川下りホームページ. Accessed October 25, 2018.

<https://www.hozugawakudari.jp/about/history>.



depth to the composition. The details on each branch are depicted with black simple lines, making sure not to overwhelm the petals. Patches of green grass can be seen by the riverbank, suggesting the changing seasons.

The mountain covers the top-left half of the print, almost creating a perfect diagonal composition with just the mountain and the river. All the viewers are allowed to see is the mountain full of cherry blossoms and the river that flows beneath it. Hiroshige places the viewer so close to the scene as if to invite the viewer to be one of the people who are looking at the flowers. Starting from the bottom corner where the green diagonal turns into deep blue of the river, the raft, the poles the workers are holding, the mountain, the narrow path, even the tree branches all form a very powerful diagonal composition that is quite rare even among Hiroshige's other works renowned for inventive use of diagonals. The repetition of warm yellow colors also brings harmony to tie the image together despite the blue of the river being the strongest in the composition.

As the Arashiyama, a mountain on the western outskirts of Kyoto, turns into a shade of pink and white, spectators of all ages and backgrounds stare in awe as they admire the magnificent sight. On the narrow path by the riverbank, people are carrying out their usual ordeals. The closest and left-most observer seems completely immersed in the cherry blossoms' beauty. With a bottle of liquor in one hand and pipe in another, he looks out to the river where the cherry blossoms are in full-bloom, dancing down the river. From his outfit, he seems like a merchant, but even merchants need a day off on a beautiful day like this. The two figures that are above the merchant are carrying rakes and baskets full of herbs and vegetables on their backs. The figure in blue clothing appears to be a woman, so they might be a couple on their way to sell their daily harvest. Another pair placed near the end of the path is formed by two men that have stopped below the trees to have a better look at them. One of them has a hand up as if to touch the petals, with a seemingly delighted expression. The garments of all of the seven characters present in the prints share the blue and pink hues that predominantly are used in the print.

For the Japanese, cherry blossoms are more than just pretty flowers. The cherry blossom represents the fragility and beauty of life, and serves as a reminder of the overwhelmingly beautiful yet tragically short nature of life. For a short period of seven days a year, people are reminded of how precious and transient life is when they see the

brilliance of the cherry blossoms. The deep cultural connection the Japanese feel for the cherry blossom is what makes them admire the flowers so full of life. Hiroshige invites the viewers to join in the festival together, allowing them to experience the culture behind the ceremony.<sup>124</sup>

Although the *Famous Views of Kyoto* is not as well-known as Hiroshige's other magnum opus such as the *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road* or the *Eight Views of Omi*, perhaps it is for these reasons that *Mount Arashiyama in Full Bloom* is special within the *Famous Views of Kyoto* series. Hiroshige captures the fleeting nature of life and the passing of time with the delicate cherry blossoms, and the addition of the simple floating raft on the rapid river as well as the narrow path makes the symbolism all the more prominent.

The *Famous Views of Kyoto* series takes design hints from another series of prints dedicated to the city of Kyoto called *Miyako Rinsen Meisho Zue* by Oku Bummei<sup>125</sup> as it was a common practice for the ukiyo-e print designers to do.<sup>126</sup> As always in such cases, Hiroshige adds his own touch of a big artist. This time Hiroshige replaced what would usually be pleasure boats in other designers' prints with a simple raft carrying two workers instead of courtesans.<sup>127</sup> As usual, Hiroshige finds the beauty in the trivial nature shared by the characters present within the print. Little details such as these might be the reason that *Mount Arashiyama in Full Bloom* is beloved as one of the best print among the series, surpassing its role of a simple guidebook. The print is also known as the Flower of the Snow-Moon-Flowers of the series.<sup>128</sup> Snow-Moon-Flowers, or *setsugetsuka*, is a popular theme in the art of Edo period that features elements snow, moon, and flowers, which refers to the seasons of the year. It shows that the theme of time is present throughout the whole series.

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<sup>124</sup> "日本人が桜を愛でる理由は、大和心が桜の散りゆく姿と共鳴するから." 和のころ.com—和の精神・日本文化を伝えるサイト. November 22, 2017. Accessed October 19, 2018. <https://wabisabi-nihon.com/archives/19670>.

<sup>125</sup> Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System. "Meisho-zue." Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System. Accessed October 25, 2018. <http://www.aist.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/m/meishozue.htm>.

<sup>126</sup> Shirahata, Yozaburo. "The Printing of Illustrated Books in Eighteenth Century Japan." *International Research Center for Japanese Studies*, March 30, 2001, 75-80. doi:10.18411/a-2017-023.

<sup>127</sup> "Arashiyama Manka / Kyoto Meisho No Uchi." British Museum. Accessed October 25, 2018. [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=786718&partId=1&searchText=arashiyama&page=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=786718&partId=1&searchText=arashiyama&page=1).

<sup>128</sup> "浮世絵 歌川広重 京都名所之内 あらし山満花." 竹筥堂. Accessed October 19, 2018. <https://takezasado.com/?pid=56913605>.

As it is characteristic of Hiroshige, he takes the true nature of his subject and fabricates a fantasy that is better than reality. In *Mount Arashiyama in Full Bloom*, Hiroshige's desire to capture the delicate and ephemeral beauty of passage of time and seasons achieved to successfully immortalize the moment, turning the print into a time capsule and allowing the viewers to experience the snippet of time through the artists' eyes. He too was no different from the enchanted spectators spellbound by the cherry blossoms after all.

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**FAMOUS PLACES IN THE SIXTY-ODD PROVINCES OF JAPAN**

UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE

## **Boats around Japan: Famous Places in Hiroshige's *Sixty-odd Provinces***

By Daniel Lee and Hye Jin Cho

Japanese people and boat have been together since the early centuries, developing a close relationship. Boats have been playing an important role in letting people interact with nature. *Famous Views of Sixty-odd Provinces* captures the interaction between human and nature especially well. Through the series, Hiroshige brings the viewer to observe the primeval, elemental aspect of the relationship between humans and nature by focusing on the mundane life of Japan. The boat was essential transportation for Japanese people because the country is a group of islands surrounded by water. Moreover, Japan has a long history of fishing, and on the whole, numerous people worked in maritime industry throughout Japan's early history, so the boat was a means of supporting people's livelihood.

The series is carried out in a vertical format. The verticality of the prints appears intertwined with the cultural and historical aspects of contemporary Japan as exemplified by the view of Tosa Province. It is believed that Hiroshige was inspired by Chinese hanging scroll format to make his depictions of landscapes more effective and aesthetically accomplished. The vertical format allows the viewers enjoying the cinematic effects achieved by sweeping diagonal compositions of the prints. Additionally, a scholar of Edo period Henry D. Smith II presumes that the decision of creating vertical prints was influenced by the political change of those days when Japan was losing its stability as it was forced to finish its policy of self-imposed isolation; also, perhaps, Hiroshige was in search for a new selling point.

It is a known fact that Hiroshige did not rely on his direct observations of the places he depicted in the series but based his designs on the illustrations from the guidebooks. However, he reinterpreted the borrowed motifs by his artistic vision in this series. Placing the copied fragments into the space afforded by the vertical orientation of the print and making them seen in a new perspective brought along a new meaning. Such innovative reuse of the already existing visual elements contributed to this series' becoming one of Hiroshige's greatest achievements.



Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797–1858

*Tosa Province: Bonito Fishing at Sea* (Tosa, Kaijō katsuo tsuri)

Series: *Famous Places in the Sixty-odd Provinces [of Japan]* ([Dai Nihon] Rokujūyoshū meisho zue)

Signed: Hiroshige hitsu (by Hiroshige's brush)

Publisher: Koshimuraya Heisuke, publishing house Koshihei

Censorship seals: *aratame* (examined), Year of Hare, 9th month

Date: 1855, 9th month

Size: 36.1 x 24.7 cm (14 3/16 x 9 11/16 in.)

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, vertical *ōban*

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1374

## ***Tosa Province: Bonito Fishing at Sea*** **from series *Famous Places in the Sixty-odd Provinces***

By Daniel Lee and Hye Jin Cho

Across the vast blue waters of the rolling sea stretching far away to a distant mountain five busy fishing boats are afloat at an angle to each other. Their receding zigzagging path leads the viewer's eye to where the waves hit the horizon to the right of the mountain. Two sailboats are coming from there under full sails, their farness making them look small. It is either daybreak or dusk. Most of the sky is still light, only its borders are softly colored with a purple gradient at the top and orange-toned progression above the horizon. The placement of the fishing boats on the powerfully articulated diagonals and the portrayal of undulating waves not only makes the construction of this print more unusual but also sets things in perspective to give the viewer a tour of the whole print. Another thing that catches the eyes is the fishermen's facial expressions. They suggest a story beyond the picture as if the fishermen have been waiting eagerly for this season.

### **The Boats**

The fishing boats appear to be of the type known as the *hacchoro*, a traditional eight-oar boat that was used for pole and-line fishing of bonito. In the print, Hiroshige doesn't illustrate the oars on the sides of the boat suggesting that because fishing was in progress, the boat was simply being carried away by the natural motion of the waves. However, in *Fishing-boats Hooking Bonito in the Chosi Bay*, by Shotei Hokuju (active 1789-1818) depicted is the *hacchoro* and its eight-oars in use by fisherman in their initial paddling out to the ocean. The *hacchoro* was specifically adapted to coastline and open water environments. This was necessary firstly because of the migration routes of bonito – though close to the coastline of Tosa, they were located deeper in the open waters of the ocean. Secondly, the steampost of the *hacchoro* extends well above the sheer strake, a construction decision allowing the boat cutting through biggest waves more effectively. Lastly, most open water boats required several crew-members to operate it as illustrated in the print (Fig 1)<sup>129</sup>.

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<sup>129</sup> Tokyo National Museum: <https://image.tnm.jp/image/1024/C0009517.jpg>



Fig.1. *Fishing-boats Hooking Bonito in the Chosi Bay*, by Shotei Hokuju (active 1789-1818)

Fishermen activities appear very real – they are wholeheartedly involved in their occupation and obviously know what they are doing. Facial expressions of fishermen are emphasized by small marks, making their reactions psychologically believable. Through their countenance, postures, and movements Hiroshige renders excitement of these fishermen. The fishermen are shown as intimately familiar with their trade, and invite thinking about the relationship of man and water.

Hiroshige's precise renderings of the process of fishing were not modeled on direct experiences but on illustration in printed gazetteers, particularly the genre known as *meisho zue* ("views of famous places"). These printed guidebooks depicted the beauty of Japan in other places outside Edo, but also provided insight into the everyday life of the citizens in these places. It is believed, Hiroshige based at least twenty-six prints on the designs from the eight-volume series of guidebooks by artist Fuchigami Kyokkō (1753-1816) called *Exceptional Mountain and Water Landscapes* (*Sansui kikan*, ca. 1800).<sup>130</sup> In the current case, a different gazetteer was used (fig. 2) – a book *Illustrations of the Noted Products of Mountains and Sea* (*Nihon sankai meisan zue*) by artist Shitomi Kangetsu (1747-1797).

The resulting effect is fascinating (fig.2). Hiroshige's image is so believable that it is difficult to imagine that he did not actually visit the place that he depicted in this print. Illustrated book by Shitomi Kangetsu contains numerous pictures of local specialties of various areas of Japan. Hiroshige depicted the scene almost identically. The number of fishermen, objects on the boat, including the barrel in its center, and the structure of the

<sup>130</sup> Jansen, Marije, and Mark Poysden. *Hiroshige's Journey in the 60-odd Provinces*. Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2004.



boat are all matching with the Hiroshige's print. However, the composition in Hiroshige's print is much more interesting and has a deeper artistic meaning. Having borrowed precise portrayals of fishermen at work, Hiroshige used those portrayals creatively. By placing the lively images of fishermen within a vertical landscape composition, which was Hiroshige's preferred format at the time, the artist turned them into a part of a broad picture of human interaction with nature.



Fig.2. *Noted products of Mountains and Seas (Nihon sankai meisan zue)*, by Shitomi Kangetsu (1799, v.4) <sup>131</sup>

### **Waves - Fishing - Abundance**

Unlike Hiroshige's works, which usually portrayed calm and straightforward water, here he elaborated the intense waves, adding bolder texture and curves to water. Hiroshige described the waves of the print in his distinct style. The beautiful curves and the delicate split space of the waves are in harmony. We can feel a sense of liveliness of water at a distance. Furthermore, correspondence between the passionate expression of the waves and the energy of working fishermen makes the print even livelier. The waves feel expressly active in their fluidity, probably representing success of fishing and the abundance of nature's offerings.

<sup>131</sup> Shitomi, Kangetsu (蔀關月). Part of: *Nihon sankai meisan zue* (日本山海名産圖會). Library of Smithsonian Institution <https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/nihonsankaimaisv4shit>

## **Line and Color: Fishermen, Boats, and Waves**

The lines used in this print to describe boats, the fisherman and the faraway mountain, are rather fine and light-weight. Different lines, however, were used for rendering of the waves. Undulating darker lines of various widths serve as a separating device, adding contour definition to the waves and making their representation unique. The print's predominant color is blue: Hiroshige used two different shades of blue lending liveliness to the waves. People on the boats collectively act as the main character in this picture. Animated as they are, their clothing is plain and mostly of one green color, making them less vivid than the water that commands the viewer's attention. Thus, perhaps we can say that it is primary the waves that expresses Hiroshige's message or at least the waves reinforce tremendously the message rendered by the succession of boats and fishermen deeply involved in their occupation.

## **Japan and Four Seasons**

Located in an archipelago that covers several climatic zones, Japan experiences the best of all four seasons. In Japanese arts and culture, the changes of seasons are celebrated by certain activities, and also embedded in the Shinto belief system.<sup>132</sup> The most significant seasonal change is when cherry blossoms are in full bloom, announcing the arrival of spring. Similarly, when bonito fish migrate from the north to the main island of Japan, it is considered as a sign that summer is here. For fishermen, summer in Edo is a season of increasing fish populations, a time of harvest. In print, Hiroshige depicted the fish in large size; some fishes are almost the same size of a fisherman's forearm. Also, commercial considerations were important - larger fish cost more. Through this, it marks the height of the harvest in the middle of summer.

## **Japan as Archipelago**

Forming an archipelago, Japan is comprised of four main islands (Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu) and by several thousand of smaller ones. Though relatively large in total land area, Japan is still an island country washed by the sea all around. The

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<sup>132</sup> Department of Asian Art. "Seasonal Imagery in Japanese Art." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. October 2004. Accessed October 2018. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/seim/hd\\_seim.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/seim/hd_seim.htm).

sea plays an enormous role in Japanese culture, history, society, art, and identity. Therefore, boating has undeniably been a necessity for everyday life. Boats were, of course, a mode of transportation on the islands' inland and open waters, but were also vital for shipping, fishing, and recreation along the inland waterways.

### **Fishing in History**

Fishing has been a practice by humans since the earliest prehistoric times. In Japan, fishing began during its Neolithic period, the Jomon era (ca. 10,500–ca. 300 B.C.). The Jomon people were semi sedentary who survived solely by gathering, fishing, and hunting.<sup>133</sup> Through time fishing gradually progressed from its primitive beginnings to a complex industry with the development of knowledge and skill. During the Tokugawa period fishing was closely tied to social and economic factors, with the innate nature of survival and cultural significance of fishing somewhat forgotten. In this print however, Hiroshige is able to depict this forgotten side of fishing by focusing on the everyday and human side of fishing. In this way the artist was bringing the viewer back to the primitive side of human nature.

### **Tosa Providence and the Necessity of Boats**

Tosa Province represented by Hiroshige on this print, was part of the Shikoku Island, the smallest and least populous of the four main islands in Japan. In Tosa Province the use of boating was a necessity due to the geography of the land. Boating was the only method of transportation for people and goods between Tosa and other regions of Japan. Located in near the sea and a quite mountainous area where rice cultivation was not suitable, the seafood was a major local specialty. Fishing and other maritime activities became part of its main industry. Therefore, people regarded boat as a necessary mean of living to make money because most of the income comes from fishing.

### **Bonito Fishing and Japanese Cuisine**

Fishing, being crucial for Japanese cuisine, has an ingrained history in Japan's culture, and economy because of the country's location in on one of the most productive fishing areas in the world, and its geography supports this industry. During the Edo period fishing was flourishing while Japan's food culture was in transition. Bonito (*katsuo*) fish, a

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<sup>133</sup> Department of Asian Art. "Jōmon Culture (ca. 10,500–ca. 300 B.C.)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. October 2004. Accessed October 2018. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jomo/hd\\_jomo.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jomo/hd_jomo.htm).

highly prized delicacy, played a significant role at this time, especially in the Tosa province. Belonging to the family of the tuna, scombridae, bonito is a medium sized fish often enjoyed raw or dried (*katsuobushi*). The latter was most common at the time. Developed from smoke drying in 1674, dried bonito's origin can be traced back to a well-known anecdote in the Tosa province. The story has it that a fisherman from Kyushu, named Jintaro, shipwrecked in a storm and washed up on the shore of Usanoura, Tosa. Hungry, Jintaro tried smoking some of his skipjack tuna over a wood fire, dramatically improving its flavor. With its origin in Tosa, bonito's history in the province continued and prospered as Tosa became renowned for bonito fishing. During the migratory runs of bonito as the fish passed near the coast, every port in Tosa sent out boats to catch as many bonito as possible. In 1840, it is estimated that two million were caught and brought to port.<sup>134</sup>

In the print, Hiroshige illustrates how bonito fishing was done at the sea by depicting the first catch of bonito of the season, *hatsu-gatsuo*. Bonito is traditionally fished one by one with the fishermen are using a pole instead of nets or other equipment, since it is believed to minimize the damage and stress resulting in a more flavorful fish. A method is still implemented today in the commercial fishing of bonito. The fishing process first begins with one fisherman or two fishermen at each end of the boat releasing small fish or other types of bait to the sea luring the bonito that is attracted to the bait due to its a predatory nature. Following this, fisherman in the middle of the boat uses their poles to catch the fish. Once caught, the fish is stored in large containers of water placed in the middle of the boat. Today, despite technological advancements the process is still largely the same, the only difference being in the fish storing system.<sup>135</sup>

### **Efficiency of the Format - Verticality of Prints**

All the multiplicity of visual, cultural, historic aspects of Hiroshige's *Tosa Province: Bonito Fishing at Sea* discussed above, are communicated most efficiently in this vertically oriented composition. The implementation of vertical print came very late in Hiroshige's life. This format first appeared in series the *Famous Views of Sixty-odd Provinces*, which Hiroshige began only one month following Commodore Matthew Perry arrival and

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<sup>134</sup> Roberts, Luke S. *Mercantilism in a Japanese Domain: The Merchant Origins of Economic Nationalism in 18th-century Tosa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdKhXcZaSA>

completed three years later. Henry D. Smith II, one of leading scholars of Edo period Japan, in his article *Hiroshige in History* presumes that such decision occurred due to the sudden change in the political landscape in Japan, coupled with the recent turbulent times plagued by natural disasters and national crisis. Smith suggests Hiroshige was in search for a new selling point for his prints.<sup>136</sup> (Smith II, Henry) With this particular version featuring all of the illustrations in a vertical format is generally a high bird's-eye-view. Another argument is that Hiroshige, known already for his daring and inventive use of composition and perspective, was experimenting with new formats and new techniques of composition. Historically as well the vertical landscapes came from the deeply entrenched tradition of Chinese hanging scroll in Japanese art. This influence can be easily detected in various late Hiroshige landscapes

This verticality allowed Hiroshige to experiment with the radical juxtaposition of near and far. By setting a dramatic and close-cropped foreground object like a bird or flower against a distant landscape, Hiroshige took to form this near-far contrast yielding to a more striking depth perspective. Therefore, also creating a cinematic effect of “moving pictures, in which the artist effectively ‘pans’ across the picture surface in the manner of a movie camera”.<sup>137</sup> This effect is further emphasized by Hiroshige selection of places where there is a basic sense of motion. In *Bonito Fishing at Sea*, this effect is achieved by contrasting of the bonito fishes in the foreground, followed by the meticulously captured boat in the foreground and a succession of boats beyond it, all these are set against the high horizon line and mountain in the back. Bonito fishes in the foreground are not particularly large – they don't illustrate Hiroshige's device. Maybe the foreground boat can be used as an example – it crosses the entire width of the print and is by far larger than the mountain in the back. Though it is not a strong example, it still can allow talking of this kind of approach. Smith argues that such striking cinematic composition is the result of Hiroshige's adaptation to the new changing and unstable times in Japan. Maybe additionally Hiroshige came to favor more panoramic views – views from afar as he was growing older and seeing things in more philosophic light.

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<sup>136</sup> Henry D. Smith II. *Hiroshige's Last Landscapes: A World Turned on End*. In “Utagawa Hiroshige. The Moon Reflected. Later woodblock prints in the British Museum,” curated by Julian Opie with assistance of Timothy Clark. Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK, 2008

<sup>137</sup> Forrer, Matthi. *Hiroshige*. Munich: Prestel, 2017.

Besides the juxtaposition of near and far, this verticality allows the landscape vista to be differently represented. With a narrow horizontal space to work, Hiroshige doesn't contain his illustrations within the boundaries of a vertical print. Instead, he allows the fishing boats to pass through the left and right boundaries breaking the frame of the print. Thus, illustrating only the main part of the boat, the artist is leaving the viewer to picture rest. This effect also adds to the overall cinematic motion of such prints as this was mentioned before. On the other hand, the vertical format allows high stretch of the foreground that takes here at least four fifth of the print's length; the result is articulation of spatial depth by means of the foreground that is rare/unique in landscape art.

Through the variety of line weight used for various elements of the image, vivid colors and fine gradations, his technically-inventive way of describing waves, Hiroshige invites our eyes into the print. He kept developing his artistic style through some experiments to maximize his intention of showing the composition more effectively. Although he did not visit the location that his print shows, he presents the role of boat for Japanese working class and their life pattern and culture. Not only the boats were regarded as essential transportation due to Japan's geographic features, but the boats on this print are also considered to be the primary means of maintaining a livelihood. Furthermore, the fishermen's faces are filled with joy and satisfaction as if they have been waiting for the summer, the season of the best profits of the year. Additionally, the teamwork harmonizes individual roles played by all people involved. Altogether, they seem to have a keen relationship with the sea being experts who have been fishing for years and individuals whose life was intertwined with the life of the sea and even more than that – with the life of nature at large.

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## **PLEASURE BOATS**

CHÔBUNSAI EISHI and UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE



Chōbunsai Eishi, 1756-1829

*Beauties boating on the Sumida River* (Bijin nōryō zu)

Signed: Eishi-ga (picture by Eishi), on each sheet

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi (Eijūdō)

Censorship seal: *kiwame* (approved)

Date: 1790s

Size: 37.2 x 48.9 cm (14 5/8 x 19 1/4 inches), two sheets

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, central and right print from a vertical *ōban* triptych

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1133

## ***Beauties Boating on the Sumida River*** \*

By Qihang Li and Ziyang Peng

The ornate pleasure boat, carrying its *bijin* passengers – stylish Edo beauties, is sailing on a peaceful inland river. The sky, without having the cloud, seems very clear and bright. A woman who stands on the back of this boat raises her arm, trying to hide the implicit sunlight or maybe dancing. The river runs slowly, with the water undulating gently in the breeze. Numerous tufts of green reeds can be seen here and there above the water surface. Far away from the boat, the bank is seen at the other side of the river. The ground surface where bank and water are engaged is covered by low green vegetation for miles. Trees of various types grow behind the bank. Some trees are large while others are small, indicating the depth of space. Buildings are hidden within the plants in the distance. The houses' wooden roofs and shrine gates are clearly shown on the land. At the same time, some half-hidden buildings of beige color are hard for viewers to define. Or are they fields with yellowish ripe crops? Chobunsai Eishi, designer of this print, chose not to specify. As the viewers are looking further, the horizon opens up, leaving continuous space for a clear sky.

In the triptych by Eishi, a group of seven young and beautifully attired women are traveling in a boat on a river along a flat river bank. The main part of this triptych depicts activities of courtesans during their ride on a wooden, well-crafted and painted pleasure boat called *yakatabune* – “roof boat,” for its tent-like structure covered with a Chinese-style curved roof.<sup>138</sup> However, not all the figures and not the entire boat are rendered within the two sheets available in the collection of the RISD Museum. The prow and two women upon it are represented on the missing sheet.

The boat is heading from right to left as it passes by the viewer very closely, inviting attention to countless details rendered by the artist. On the left, two women are looking ahead – they are the closest to the boat's prow which is absent in the RISD imprint of this composition. The left-most person is a young girl. This can be assumed by her

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<sup>138</sup>Yakatabune /屋形船/ (やかたぶね) are a kind of privately owned Japanese boats. Palace boats of the shōgun from the Heian through the Edo periods were very lavishly decorated.

Yakatabune have tatami mats inside and Japanese low tables that resemble an upper class Japanese home; in fact, the term means Home-style Boat. Such boats were intended for entertaining guests in the old days.

\* This design by Eishi is now identified as a *mitate* of a *shirabyōshi* dancer Shizuka Gozen, mistress of Minamoto Yoshitsune, forced to dance for his elder brother and detractor, shogun Minamoto Yoritomo (1147-1199). For details see catalog *Striking Chords: Music in Ukiyo-e Prints*, pp. 136-139, paper "Shizuka Gozen's Dance and Song in Ukiyo-e Context," J. Ahn et al.

hairstyle which is rather plain and in this it is different from the hairstyle of other women. Her hair is flowing down in straight strands as well as her bangs and sideburns and she is wearing no hair accessories. She is dressed in an orange patterned kimono with a lighter off-white under-kimono visible around the neck area. Her orange kimono has only a few simple patterns of yet unidentified flowers while her *obi* sash is sparingly adorned with a different floral design. Her *obi* sash is particularly wide and its greenish color is the same as the color of kimonos of two other ladies' traveling on the boat. As she is the only person wearing an orange kimono and because of her uniquely simple hairstyle, her identity should be different from others. She might be a teenage apprentice of one of the courtesans – a *shinzō* (a courtesan's teenage apprentice). Next to the girl a woman in a black kimono is playing a drum. She is the only one dressed in black which is the color of her *haori* – a traditional Japanese hip- or thigh-length jacket, worn over a *kosode* (a short sleeve kimono) by both women and men. *Haori* often were boldly decorated and were an aesthetic statement. Here, the pattern of this courtesan's *haori* seems like the oak leaves which might imply the seasonal signal provided by the artist: this should be autumn or late summer.

Three ladies are sitting under the roof. The woman on the left is facing two women on the right, both sitting in a similar posture, one behind the other. Their knees are bent and right-folded. The woman on the left tilts slightly forward as if in a conversation with the woman in front of her who happens to be in the middle of the boat. There is a tray with food between them. The woman in the middle leans on the *kyōsoku* (armrest) while holding a flat traditional sake cup (*sakazuki*) and maybe offering it to her interlocutor. Her hairstyle is the most complex one. It is of *sagegami*, style with her long hair tied together going down as one strand. Her hairdo is adorned by a comb with two flower hairpins *hanakanzashi* at its either side. Her attire is also the most gorgeous. She is wearing at least three layers of garments. The innermost kimono is white. Over it she has a kimono of orange color – similar to the color of the kimonos worn by other women in front of her and behind her. On top of her orange kimono there is a jacket *haori* that is adorned with the pattern known as *sasarindō* – five leaves of bamboo grass turned downwards and three gentian flowers looking up. It is noteworthy that such combination of the two plants (bamboo grass and gentian flowers) forms a well-known family crest in Japan. The

*sasarindō* crest boasts a distinguished history, once having been used by the first shogun of Japan, Minamoto Yoritomo. As a crest, it is traditionally represented as a silhouette, sometimes with outlines. Interestingly, when shown on the woman's kimono, it is printed in two colors, green for the bamboo grass and off white for the flowers, becoming a descriptive floral textile pattern rather than an established emblem. Particularly remarkable it is that the same design appears to be the major decorative motif of the party: it decorates the gable of the boat roof and the curtain that runs under the roof along its perimeter. There the *sasarindō* motif is slightly different in configuration, with the stems gathered together in a kind of a column – such version of the pattern is known as *uzumi-sasarindō*. At this exhibition, there is a print by Utagawa Hiroshige that represents Arai post station on the Tokaido Road from Hiroshige's famous series *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road*. The print shows a daimyo procession taking a boat across the lake (*Ferryboats at Arai*). The daimyo camp curtain spread around the boat sides is decorated by the daimyo crest that happens to be almost the same *sasarindō* pattern.

Here, in Eishi's composition, two more ladies appear further to the right towards the stern of the boat. The woman next to the roofed compartment but outside it is sitting in the same sidewise manner as other seated members of the company. The rightmost woman is standing, her head slightly up and her arm raised gracefully as if in a dance. There are more patterns on the kimonos and sashes worn by these two women.

In the full triptych version of this composition,<sup>139</sup> there are two more courtesans standing on the prow. The left-most woman is standing at the bow while looking to the right at all other women. She is holding a small fan in her left hand and she is raising her right hand. The swinging sleeves of her *furisode* – long-sleeved kimono of an unmarried person – are large, thus showing a dynamic state of dancing. Her *furisode* and the *haori* she wears over it have a clear contrast of color. The swinging sleeves of her *furisode* and the hem have flower pattern of large chrysanthemums. Her *haori* bears images of cranes opening their wings to form a circle – *tsuru no maru*, and of pine saplings. Her black obi is adorned with shapes outlined in white and representing flowers and three scales of “tortoise shell design of Bishamon style - Bishamon kekkō. The second woman is holding a

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<sup>139</sup> The decision was made to discuss the leftmost sheet of this triptych missing in the collection of the RISD Museum in order to preserve the integrity of the artist's work. For this purpose electronic copies of Eishi's triptych at the MFA and UPenn were used. <https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/party-of-ladies-in-a-pleasure-boat-502274>

traditional Japanese hand drum *tsuzumi* in her left hand, and moving her right hand to strike it from the bottom upwards; her elegant gesture looks like a branch of a willow. Her kimono has flower patterns in its lower part and scattered images of small bridges used for a *koto*, Japanese traditional string musical instrument. The very light green color of her kimono and deluded orange of the *obi* are matching nicely but seem faded. The hairstyle of the woman with the hand-drum is similar to those of most of women in this boat. All women aboard the pleasure boat boast elegant serene beauty; their figures are described with smooth fluid lines capturing the women's composure and refinement.



Fig.1. Chobunsai Eishi (1756-1829), *Beauties Boating on the Sumida River*, polychrome woodblock print, *oban* triptych. MFA, 11.14119-21.<sup>140</sup>



Fig.2. Chobunsai Eishi (1756-1829). *Beauties Boating on the Sumida River*, polychrome woodblock print, *oban* triptych. Upenn, Kislak Collection.<sup>141</sup>

The elegant style of Eishi's treatment of the theme of beauties and scenery was quite popular in the late Edo period. Although most of the figures were either courtesans or professional entertainers - geisha, the women in his works were not at all obsequious and

<sup>140</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, Boston <https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/party-of-ladies-in-a-pleasure-boat-502274>

<sup>141</sup> Upenn Kislak Collection <http://web.sas.upenn.edu/japaneseprints/chobunsai-eishi-pleasure-boat-triptych-with-beauties-ca-1792-93/>

were not supposed to be. Women employed in the entertainment business during Edo period were trained carefully from an early age of six or seven. They had advanced skills in reading and writing, singing and dancing. Eishi's appreciation of elegance might be related to his origin from a wealthy samurai family. The courtesans' types in his prints popularized slim and graceful figures, in which heads were one-twelfth of their height attesting to the feminine elegance. The beauties in his *bijinga* – images of beauties – stretch and stand tall, and their movements tend to be quiet. Their bodily shape is always elegant, and the line describing them is smooth and round. In 1790s, the prime of Eishi's talent, *bijinga* genre was at its peak. Great innovations in capturing feminine grace and, later, subtle psychological states were introduced by Torii Kiyonaga and then by Kitagawa Utamaro. Eishi worked in a similar style. Kiyonaga's beauties tall, stately and dignified are often married women of a higher social status. Eishi likes to show women in a state of composure and thus he tends to suppress the movements of his characters to condense the beauties' grace. Holding the detached dynamics, with the subdued expressions, his views on women naturally permeate female images in his works.

*Bijin* or contemporary stylish women represent one of the most popular art themes at that time. First, images of glamorous women were welcome as being in line with the floating world attitude expressed in ukiyo-e art with its appreciation of the pleasurable aspects of life. In addition, idealized depictions of women from different classes were an expression of the changing world. What's more, male artists and print designers wanted to explore women's inner world through their own perspectives. In this print, there is obviously some hierarchy among the represented women in that the central woman looks like the protagonist. She not only sits in the center, but also has a "princess" hairdo and is dressed lavishly; also, she is the only one who is drinking sake. All those specific features point to her singular identity. Could she be a courtesan of note participating, together with her retinue, in a splendid boat-ride parade? Or maybe this is a case of cultural allusion that implies some hidden reference to a classical source?<sup>142</sup> Maybe elegant and fashionable beauties, most of whom are dressed and coiffured as courtesans of the day are imagined to take upon roles of someone from a higher culture... Known as *mitate*, witty juxtaposition of classical and contemporary were highly appreciated by print buying public adding layers

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<sup>142</sup> Timothy Clark, *Mitate-e: Some Thoughts, and a Summary of Recent Writings*, (1997), Impressions, Japanese Art Society of America, No. 19, 7-26

of meaning to the image and making communication between print designers and their public much richer and more complex and sophisticated. *Mitate* prints often represent cultural riddles the meaning of which is difficult to reconstruct now. Eishi was known for his *mitate* prints. Though the represented scene cannot be fully understood at this time, it certainly conveys the atmosphere of sophisticated pleasurable pastimes, exquisite skill in dance and music, elegance and aestheticism in personal adornment that went into the entertainment culture of the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Edo period Japan.

In this composition of two sheets, only a part of the boat is depicted and the boat's shape and structure differ from those that are often represented in ukiyo-e prints. Within those two sheets, the bottom part of the hull is painted in black, while the upper edge of the hull is punctuated with black line and linear notches. Light yellow brown is applied to the remaining area of the hull. It may be considered as the wood's original color, because this color is very similar with the color of other wood structures in the boat. The hull of this boat is relatively shallow, corresponding to the purpose of the boat, which is not intended for a long journey, but for excursions and amusement activities. The deck, including the area where passengers sit, is covered by wooden planks, without tatami or any other soft materials. Within two available sheets of the composition, the boat sitting area is divided into three parts, and each part is separated by a linear wooden ridge.

A superstructure is built in the middle part of the sitting area. Unlike the permanent reinforced structure of the sturdy wooden piece, four long and thin square pillars are used to support the roof. Therefore, superstructure in this print is more referenced as a semi-permanent leisure space. The roof also shows the sense of lightness and delicateness. Its structural elements are well crafted and have an elegant shape. Wood is not used to cover the roof, for neither wood texture nor a seam is shown. Fabric, such as canvas, perhaps is used. This material reinforces the concept of lightness. The style of the roof is closer to Chinese tradition than the roofs on other Japanese boats are. The outer extended ends of the roof turn upward. Also, the boat's canopy is curved to elegant arcs. Black is also used in the roof structure. Linear strips of black color are carefully placed, in order to emphasize the roof edges and the ridge pole. Yellow-green is applied along the ridgepole as the background for circular patterns. A *sasarindō* pattern is painted at the front gable of the roof. Meanwhile, curtains adorned with the same pattern are hung at the superstructure



brims. The curtains have two layers, which are overlapping with each other. However, only the curtains at the upper layer have *sasarindō* patterns, while the layer under it is just of one solid color. All the curtains are lifted and do not have mechanisms for pulling down. A pair of curtain braids is placed below the *sasarindō* pattern, as an ornament. Therefore, the curtains were more likely used as decorations rather than as functional pieces. Light brown red becomes a main color of the curtains, while *sasarindō* patterns are rendered in white, creating a sense of contrast. Also, the light brown red color increases the elegance of the atmosphere, emphasizing a sense of feminine delicacy in this scene. It is obvious that this watercraft is more ornate than the general boats in ukiyo-e prints. Its shape and style directly indicate the status and wealth of the characters, perhaps invented.

Eishi's strategy was to depict varying changes in motions of the river. He elaborately portrayed different water movements with thin black linear markings. At the foreground of this scenic view, where hull bottom and river come in contact with each other, organic shaped waves are placed. The waves are drawn to look three-dimensional and thus create a sense of movement and fluctuation, in order to convey progression of the boat and its interaction with the water. At the mid-ground of this scene, on the expanse of water behind the pleasure boat, Eishi used thin undulating lines to render rippling of the water. Those lines are not as organic as are the lines in front of the boat. The angle between those lines is smaller, therefore suggesting the smoother undulation. The area where the river meets the bank, Eishi leaves blank, in order to suggest the peacefulness of water.

In depicting the landscape and the boat in it, Eishi demonstrates his advanced compositional skill by intentionally placing elements of the image at various locations throughout the print. Moreover, the scale and perspective he used are also worth to investigate. The main part of this print is dominated by the pleasure boat which is leaving a strong impression on viewers. Compared to the pleasure boat, the landscape appears to be unimposing. Nevertheless, the artist implies the importance of the river by using water to surround the boat. Also, he placed the bank and water contact line very high - at the level of three quarters from the bottom of the composition. Thus, the artist guides the viewer's vision and also lifts the focus point. Thus, the print has a balanced composition in which a large stable object takes almost seventy percent of the print surface. The relatively

thin strip of the river bank separates the water from the sky that takes the upper one-fourth of the surface, shows the artist's aspiration for using perspectival strategy. Drawing the trees and buildings in a smaller scale, Eishi seeks to introduce the concept of focus in perspective. He depicts the near vegetation and architectural structures in a large scale while leaves the faraway objects in a small scale. However, except the landscape, the main part of this print seems still flat and graphic.

When Eishi depicts a landscape, he uses a twofold style. Vegetation and buildings are rendered by sketching and usage of overlapping lines. Additionally, bank and land are represented by an intentional application of pure color blocks. Some simple dots and short lines are used to symbolize the vegetation that grows at the bank. The colors that the artist used are also not saturated. Although it is a river landscape, there is no blue in this print. The color of water and that of the sky are apparently very similar, or, as the viewer can observe, are the same, thus leaving an opportunity for viewers to imagine the similarity between water and sky. It causes viewers to wonder: "Is the water reflecting the sky or is the sky is composed by the water?" At the same time, this color unification helps to decrease the density of this print, avoiding an overfilled composition. Moreover, the vegetation within the river and the trees on the ground share the same color, creating a sense of consistency. However, the real reason of no blue is that the Prussian blue pigment that propelled development of landscape genre in ukiyo-e was not massively available until 1820s. Vegetable colors used in 1790s were prone to fading so maybe there were some dayflower- or indigo-printed parts in the composition that cannot be easily identified today.

Looking from today's western point of view, it is tempting to speculate who was looking at this pleasure boat back then when the print was designed. As has been noted above, the ornaments and decorations of this pleasure boat reflect reference to a person of high social status and of wealth by extension. Also, because boats of this type were specifically designed for the purpose of amusement, the women on it look like courtesans, beautiful, glamorously attired and finely groomed. If this print is depicting such a recreational moment that has a sexual implication, there must be potential viewer. Giving readers a center perspective of the pleasure boat and the *bijin* – fashionable beauties, Eishi provides viewers with the same sight as the potential viewer might have. This view

offers public an opportunity to share luxurious atmosphere affordable by the affluent clients or to delight in cultural imagination -- an atmosphere that is far beyond the reach of the commoner class.

In the light of the above, it is interesting to consider a website<sup>143</sup> designed by students - participants in a seminar, *ARTH 515: Utamaro and his Contemporaries* at the University of Pennsylvania School of Arts and Sciences. This website is an online catalogue of Japanese prints from the Kislak Collection. This seminar allowed students in the seminar work directly with the selected prints, to catalogue and interpret them. One of the prints analyzed was *Eishi's Beauties on a Pleasure Boat on the Sumida River*. The color of this triptych version is closer to the one in the collection of the RISD Museum that is used for the current exhibition project. Students at UPenn investigating this print hypothesized that the women on the boat might be an idealized portrait of members of a samurai family celebrating coming of age ceremony. They also pointed out that Eishi as one of the preeminent designers of bijinga used "pleasure boat" theme and the compositions of the triptych to become an early experimenter in the landscape genre.<sup>144</sup>

It is not difficult to see the role of the boat in this print. Instead of being a transportation method or a means for merchandise delivery, it works as a medium of amusement. It has more decorative and ornamental elements, and is structurally designed for a short and peaceful journey. The pleasure boat provides another possible of entertainment in Edo period Japan. The courtesans at that time were not physically restricted in Yoshiwara, but had an opportunity to take a trip with their guests. Entertainment on a boat made the event even more enjoyable. The evening breeze was refreshing for the boat riders; the elegant *yakatabune* and its graceful passengers were reflected in the waters of the river. A pleasure boat acted like a stage for the beautiful fashionable women performing their role of professional entertainers. This view was relished by their fellow citizens during their outings to enjoy the evening cool on a summer night, whether real or imagined - the sight of alluring dream-beauties of the fantasized dream-world of pleasures.

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<sup>143</sup> KISLAK COLLECTION OF JAPANESE PRINTS: <http://web.sas.upenn.edu/japaneseprints/2016/05/11/about-this-project/>

<sup>144</sup> Chōbunsai Eishi, "Beauties on a Pleasure Boat on the Sumida River," ca. 1792-93. It has since been determined that implied is a semi-legendary story when Shizuka Gozen, mistress of Minamoto Yoshitsune (1159-1189) was forced to dance for his brother, shogun Minamoto Yoritomo, as he chased her beloved. See catalog "*Striking Chords: Music in Ukiyo-e*", pp. 136-139, for detailed discussion and evidence. 158

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Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797-1858

*Enjoying the Evening Cool and the Fireworks at the Ryogoku Bridge (Ryōgoku nōryō dai hanabi)*

Singed: Hiroshige ga (picture by Hiroshige), on each sheet

Publisher: Yamadaya Shōjirō

Date: 1847-1852

Size: 37 x 74 cm, three sheets

Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, vertical *ōban* triptych

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 46.293.11

## ***Enjoying the Evening Cool and the Fireworks at the Ryogoku Bridge***

By Xiner Jiang and Victoria Liang

The three prominent girls look compelling. Their elegance, their delicacy, their beauty, the gentle wind that comes and blows up their kimonos, their slightly bent neck and spine and the curvature in their silhouettes depicted by thin, soft lines, the small patch of feet skin hidden-and-sought under the edges of her fabric, and the three or four naughty strings of hair falling out of her bun. And their lips, their eyes, their brows, traces and signs of joy, tease, play, but super nuanced—all these details show Hiroshige's incredible sensitivity and genuine passion for the raw beauty of these girls. That's what makes the scene so enchanting.

The second most beautiful thing, ranked right after the beautiful girls, is the invisible yet decipherable summer breeze, the enjoyed “evening cool,” the *noryo* served alongside with the fireworks. The beauty of it exactly comes from the fact that it is nowhere, but also everywhere—it is in the swirls and twirls of their *kimonos*, it is in the hair dancig on their foreheads, it is in the willows brushing gently aside their necks, in the berlin blue river bank, in the cry outs from the boat merchants, in the chitchats of the crowd, in the burnt smell of the fireworks or perhaps the cracking snacks, popcorns or barbeques, and, in the slightly dimming night sky. These subtlety and nuances makes up this lively scene, and celebrates the prosperity of urban life.

This print is a scene of people enjoying the firework festival aside the Sumida River—a delightful social activity in an urban summer night. Hiroshige crafted the scene with rich, delicately handled details, an elegant sense of motion, interplay of dimensions and space, and harmonious yet supplementing colors.

### **The Fantasied *Bijin***

This charming scenery of beautiful girls sparks curiosity and raises questions towards their story — who are these girls, and what is the event? For a modern spectator, who is likely an innocent and ignorant speculator, these would appear to be generic young Japanese girls dressed in kimono. However, if viewed by a spectator from *Edo*, who is affiliated with the necessary cultural context, these girls would very likely to be identified as courtesans. The first reason is pretty simple and straightforward - it is really common for

the genre *bijinga* to portray beautiful courtesans or kabuki actors. Secondly, the abundance of rendered details gives away much information of their identities and activities, such as their hairstyles and their boat style. The *shimada* hairstyle adorned with the gilt *kanzashi* pins, as portrayed in the ukiyo-e, is an iconic hairstyle worn by courtesans during the Edo period, typically by high-ranking ones.<sup>145</sup>

Perhaps this a scene about joyous courtesan girls enjoying their leisure time with their best-friend-forevers on a peaceful summer night. Even more mysteries arise from this assumption—why is their boat much more lavish than those straw-made canoes in the background? How often were courtesans allowed breaks for leisure time to attend urban festivals and events? Were they allowed that freedom at all?

As the hairstyles give away their status and identity, the type of the boat is also revealing of typical scene and circumstance happening inside the frame — this kind of boat is called *yakatabune*. *Yakatabune* is mostly used for extravagant activities: Another genre of maritime prints shows people on boats for pleasure, generally either visiting the pleasure quarters, viewing fireworks or cherry blossoms from the river, dining on board a ship, or a combination of the above. The people in these prints are often courtesans or members of the elite, discernable by their hairstyles and clothing.<sup>146</sup> According to these pieces of information, it is highly possible that the depicted courtesans have been invited to the *yakatabune*, accompanied by their clients, who are likely sitting off screen. Unfortunately—though from a romantic perspective, and for my love for these cheerful and beautiful girls, I would wish that it was a casual day for their free time activities—this is unlikely the case. According to historical documents on Edo period woman life styles, almost all common girls are unlikely to go on street during night time by themselves. This is not a restriction from their brothers or fathers, but a decision made by women themselves out of safety consideration. According to Nagai Yoshio's *Zusetsu yoshiwara jiten*,<sup>147</sup> courtesans regardless of ranks, are mostly not allowed to step outside of Yoshiwara at all, since their job requires them to be located in *Yoshiwara*—they are basically the “properties” of this business themselves. Of course, *Yoshiwara* does have

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<sup>145</sup> Murata, Takako. *Edo 300-nen no joseibi : keshō to kamigata* (江戸三〇〇年の女性美 : 化粧と髪型 / 村田孝子) Kyōto-shi : Seigensha, 2007.

<sup>146</sup> Damian, Michelle M. *Archaeology Through Art: Japanese Vernacular Craft In Late Edo-period Woodblock Prints*. East Carolina University, 2010. pp.60

<sup>147</sup> Nagai, Yoshio. *Zusetsu yoshiwara jiten* (図説吉原事典) . Tōkyō : Asahi Shinbun Shuppan, 2015. pp.216.



festivals and holidays for their workers, but those are usually courtesan-specific events or major festivals such as New Year's spring festival. *Ryōgoku Kawabiraki* fireworks wasn't listed in their major holidays, therefore, it is very likely that, if they luckily had a break for a summer night firework trip, it shall be in favour of a patron's invitation. The patron is portrayed nowhere, but perhaps looming somewhere on the other end of the boat, perhaps indicated through the mysteriously scattered shoes on the boat edge. He is staying off screen, perhaps just for the sake of aesthetic reasons, or for the artist's and the spectator's romanticism, to alleviate or refusing to address the courtesan's realistic life situations—we don't know.

Where is *her* voice? If we cannot have *her* voice, then is *this* voice necessarily harmful? Can the girls actually benefit and advantage from the imposed love from literati and artists? Cecilia Segawa Seigle points out how this could cause pain for the courtesans in her exclusive book *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan*, she seems carefree in the eyes of the people, but painful reality lurks underneath...

Generous men who give me money are rare while deceivers are numerous. I have to give presents and tips to more and more workers of the quarter, only deepening the pool of my debts and suffering unbeknownst to others... On the surface I have to speak naively of innocent things, pretending ignorance of money and anything that has to do with money. Seated in front of a dining tray, I have to restraint myself from ever eating my fill. <sup>148</sup>

This illustrates the complicated relationship between courtesans and commoners--despite of the surface glamor and government sanctions, Yoshiwara prostitutes represented a dichotomous existence: social outcasts on the one hand yet countenanced by society on the other.<sup>149</sup>

## Kimono Patterns

The kimono patterns of the courtesans are mostly comprised of geometric shapes. The courtesan on the left is wearing blue and white *tatewaku* that has red lining. This type

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<sup>148</sup> Seigle, Cecilia Segawa. *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1993. pp. X / preface.

<sup>149</sup> Seigle, Cecilia Segawa. *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1993. pp. 10

of pattern originated from China<sup>150</sup>. It symbolizes auspiciousness as it depicted rising steam, which was thought to be a reference to advantageousness<sup>151</sup>. The courtesan in the middle is wearing a checkered pattern called *ichimatsu*, which was named after the kabuki actor who brought it into fashion<sup>152</sup>. *Ichimatsu* symbolizes prosperity and great career<sup>153</sup>. Lastly, the courtesan on the right is wearing *karakusa* or arabesque on top of *shima*, or stripes. While *shima* may just be a compositional framing element, the *karakusa* symbolizes longevity and prosperity<sup>154</sup>.

Hiroshige's choice of employing only geometric patterns may have been a trend at that time. However, it is also possible that he intentionally avoided depicting large extents of floral patterns, even though the summer firework event is a seasonal subject matter. These geometric patterns add less complication to the overall composition. They draw less attention away from the actual event, and collaborate with the unshaded, plain colors of the sky, bridge, water, and pleasure boat, to create a clean and tranquil stylization.

### **The Decentralized *Bijin***

Beyond the seemingly central courtesan figures in the foreground, the background is also a rich place to examine. The details of the print are puzzle pieces that construct a wonderful representation of the Sumida riverside culture. There is a variety of boats on the Sumida River. The courtesans worked on the *yakatabune* to their patrons. The smaller boat that had lanterns was a smaller version of the *yakatabune*. In addition, there are also *urourobune*, or casual wandering boats that sold watermelon and drinks. Moreover, commoners who were not wealthy enough to go on *yakatabune* could go on regular *hanabibune* to enjoy the fireworks. The heavy boat traffic created a unique landscape during the event and was such a culturally rich but temporary scenery. The bridges, the shops, the different types of boats, and people who participated in the activities were recurring motifs in the riverside prints created by Hiroshige.

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<sup>150</sup> 和服独特の文様や柄

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>152</sup> 市松模様を感じる「和」とは？

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>154</sup> 風呂敷・和雑貨の山田織維

Although the fireworks event occurs in a public space, each boat provides a certain amount of privacy to its occupants. The boats that have a roof provide the most private spaces. It is noticeable and logical that boats for fireworks watching and parties have roofs while the vendor boats don't. The three female figures are allocated in the center of each of the three equally spaced panels. This decision may be for practical reasons, so that the panels can be sold separately. However it also demonstrates a social situation through depicting personal space that also contributes to a balanced composition. Nevertheless, the female figures' crossing lines of sight indicate a sense of connection as well as interaction that unites the three panels.

Logically, the brightness of fireworks would lead to water reflections of the boats and of the bridge. However, the Sumida River is described with plain Berlin blue. The boats thus show a sense of lightness, as if they are floating. The absent of waves also contributes to this serene atmosphere.

The Ryogoku Bridge was a traditional wooden bridge built in 1660.<sup>155</sup> Hiroshige's prints successfully promoted the bridge, which joined Musashi Province and Shimosa Province.<sup>156</sup> One can imagine that the bridge not only served as a convenient conjunction but also as a wonderful community gathering space. By using the color black, Hiroshige unites the bridge with the people on the bridge, the city in the distant and smaller boats in the middle ground. This stylization divided the print in two halves, the women-entertainers and the background. This separation could be for utilitarian purposes which is to put emphasis on the subject matter, or for creating a gap between the common population and the courtesans to hint at the vastly different reality that they lived in. By leaving out the courtesans' patron, and depicting ephemeral beauty Hiroshige successfully showcased a moment of fantasy of an otherwise harsh reality.

If one looks carefully enough, one can see the village behind the bridge. Slight indications of housings are noticeable through the gaps of the complex wooden bridge structure. This is an indication of Edo's riverside culture, where activities, people and businesses gather along riversides, especially those of the Sumida River. Edo and the surrounding provinces are integrated by many canals and rivers. The Sumida River generates a business based on tourism and ukiyo-e artists such as Hiroshige participated

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<sup>155</sup> Puck, Brecher "Down and out in Negishi: 10

<sup>156</sup> The Sumidagawa River: Lifeblood of the City

in this phenomenon by creating guidebooks, calendars, maps, and pictures of the *meisho* – famous places along the river.<sup>157</sup> More businesses opened along the river as more people gathered there. Theaters, food stalls, sumo tournaments, tea houses and many other popular culture enterprises thrived in the area. Hiroshige places the three courtesans in this context. Perhaps the print's giving less amount of attention to the women figures than most *bijinga* (illustration of beautiful women) prints would, proves Hiroshige's intention to promote the ukiyo-e philosophy. While most *bijinga* prints focus on showcasing feminine beauty, this print gives an equal amount of attention to its cultural abundant context. This print celebrates the living-in-the moment spirit by depicting the ephemeral beauty of fireworks/courtesans.

This print allows viewers to take a peek at a regular day of common Edo lives; it shows a vibrant fireworks event that is rich of culture and excitement. It is Hiroshige's celebration of Edo and of the passionate people who made these kinds of activities possible. Moreover, this print is one example of many attractions that occurred near the bridge and along the Sumida River. Many people went to the banks to enjoy seasonal activities or to temporarily escape from the crowdedness of the city.<sup>158</sup> Hiroshige once said Ryogoku Bridge is "the liveliest place in the Eastern Capital, with side-shows, theaters, storytellers, and summer fireworks; day and night, the amusement never cease". From this statement, one tells his love for the liveliness of the bridge.

### **Who Decides the Prints?**

What is the main driving force behind the romanticizing of the conditions and reality of the courtesans, but then, to be extremely faithful to the events, and urban and geographical realities? Is it really Hiroshige? Or the commissioning publishing house? Or the market?

Even though ukiyo-e prints have a distinct artist who is responsible for its design (painting), ukiyo-e is a collaborative print production process involving more than the artist himself. It requires four participants (specialty) to produce a ukiyo-e prints: Artists who designs the print (*ukiyo-eshi*), woodworkers (wood carvers) who carves the woodblock with a given design from the artist (*horishi*), printers who select the paint and use the

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>158</sup> Puck, Brecher. "Down and out in Negishi: 11

carved woodblock to print the ukiyo-e (*surishi*), and the publisher who is responsible for commissioning and distributing the prints. It is questionable whether the dynamics of such collaborative work might give unexpected impact on artists or not. To which extent this was an industry where unique style of drawing directly related to the works' popularity?

One of the aspects that drew viewer's attention in Utagawa Hiroshige's print is the stunning details of the Japanese woodwork from Ryogoku Bridge and a variety of boats. Comparing to other artists' prints with less details on the woodworking such as Katsushika Hokusai's *Abridged view of the Tago coast near Ejiri on the Tokaido* (No. 1 in this book), or *Nihonbashi, Edo* (No. 3 in this book), Utagawa Hiroshige's artistic decision to depict the precise structure of a wooden element in night time is absolutely remarkable. However, even Utagawa Hiroshige doesn't detail the wooden element in every single print. With that being said, it is assumable that depicting the wooden details is part of the style in designing the prints.

All answers to these issues have to be eventually threaded back to the print's mass-produced nature, the dominating factor that is the real controller behind all of these "artistic decisions." The discrepancies between panels show its making process and the fact that the panels are meant to be separate objects that stands on their own. It is not a refined "high art", but rather a mass-produced art for the common people. This explains the stylized as well as romanticized portrayal of courtesans, rather than an authentic documentary. The targeted audience, either male audiences who are "superficially" attracted to the beauties, or female audiences who might be attracted to the presented fashion trends, textiles and lifestyles, would nevertheless prefer to have a lighthearted fantasy over a bittersweet realism.

Should the targeted audiences be criticized for their unawareness and insensitivity? Should we condemn the artist's intentional distortion? On the moral grounds of this, Cecilia Siegle pointed out that, "One undeniable fact from a historical perspective is that the Yoshiwara was an integral part of Edo society. In its heyday, not only was every Edoite aware of its existence, but many people were touched by it--directly or indirectly, happily or tragically. It instigated and promoted the creation of unique and significant works

in Japanese literature and the arts".<sup>159</sup> Maybe, on some level, the answer lies in the name ukiyo-e itself—

*...living only for the moment, turning our full attention to the pleasures of the moon, the snow, the cherry blossoms and the maples, singing songs, drinking wine, and diverting ourselves just in floating caring not a whit for the poverty staring us in the face, refusing to be disheartened, like a gourd floating along with the river current, this is what we call ukiyo.*<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Siegle. Pp. xii.

<sup>160</sup> Asai Ryōi . *Tales of the Floating World* (浮世物語 *Ukiyo Monogatari*) 1661.

## **HISTORICAL BOATS**

UTAGAWA KUNIYOSHI



Fig.1. Kuniyoshi. *The Ghosts of the Heike Appear at Daimotsu Bay in Settsu Province*, 1839-1844.



Fig.2. Kuniyoshi. *Battle at Dannoura*. 1849.



Fig.3. Kuniyoshi. *Takeshiuchi-no Sukune (Katō Kiyomasa) Sails toward Korea*. 1850.



## Kuniyoshi's Historical Boats and Raging Nature – a Case of Artistic Acumen

By Tanya Agarwal, Kanika Kumar, and Sophia Sena

Kuniyoshi's pieces are remarkable for many reasons, including their attention to detail, vibrant colors, and intense storylines. He is best known for warrior prints that portrayed conflict in a censorship ridden time for artists in Japan. His dynamic portrayal of action, especially in scenes with warriors and supernatural monsters, is said to have inspired modern day anime and manga, as well as comic prints and some especially daring works that feature forbidden political satire in disguise.<sup>161</sup> While his prints primarily focus on warriors and conflict between characters, his seascapes stand out as unique due to his portrayal of boats and nature that act as storytelling elements alongside the figures.

Kuniyoshi commonly utilized boats in his prints as vessels of human conflict and as platforms for the feats of his heroic subjects. Incorporating overly dramatic qualities, the characteristic ships of his prints were often secondary to the elaborately designed figures – they served as an enhancement of the scene for his warriors: the most successful of Kuniyoshi's triptychs that feature ships often have the human figures in direct interaction with the vessel. Unlike Hokusai or Hiroshige, rarely does he depict boats by themselves. In his historic pieces, boats are primarily representations of discord and calamity. In many of his triptychs depicting Yoshitsune – the famous military general during the Genpei Wars (1180-1185) – aboard his ship, the opulence of the military vessel is intended to create a tense dichotomy with the foreboding waters around it (fig.1).<sup>162</sup> In another triptych (*Battle at Dannoura*, fig.2) detailing the devastation of the Taira clan by the Minamoto clan, the print's lavishly decorated boat is emblematic of the Taira's last remnants of power, which stands in strong contrast to the once mighty clan's tragic collapse.<sup>163</sup> Thus, Kuniyoshi uses the boat to evoke a sense of conflict and an indicator of destruction. Furthermore, ships are also represented as vehicles of invasion, exemplified by Kuniyoshi's depictions of

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<sup>161</sup> "Two Japanese Master Printmakers Go Head to Head in "Showdown! Kuniyoshi vs. Kunisada"." Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. August 16, 2018. Accessed October 18, 2018. <https://www.mfa.org/news/showdown-kuniyoshi-vs-kunisada>

<sup>162</sup> "The Ghosts of the Heike Appear at Daimotsu Bay in Settsu Province (Sesshū Daimotsu No Ura Ni Heike No Onryō Arawaruru No Zu)." Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. April 17, 2017. Accessed October 18, 2018. <https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/the-ghosts-of-the-heike-appear-at-daimotsu-bay-in-settsu-province-sesshū-daimotsu-no-ura-ni-heike-no-onryō-arawaruru-no-zu-494229>

<sup>163</sup> "Battle at Dannoura." Honolulu Museum of Art. Accessed October 18, 2018. <http://honoluluuseum.org/art/10283>.

subject matter that deal with Japan's invasion of Korea (fig.3)<sup>164</sup> and other military conflicts at sea. Therefore, the boat in this context functions as an instrument of war, and as a method of transport to bring those involved aboard and to carry them towards conquest.

Moreover, many of the ships in his renowned warrior prints are elaborately decorated *goza-bune* adorned with the motifs of respective powerful clans. Thus boats were also seen as symbols of military strength and might. It is very evident in Kuniyoshi's print titled *The Nineteen Retainers of Yoshitsune* (fig.4), wherein the heavily ornate boat takes up most of the composition and is the object of focus,<sup>165</sup> and there is very little of the triptych left to the surrounding waves. These grandiose ships were also scarcely seen by the common folk of Edo, thus these prints would be a feast for the eyes of the beholder – it would allow the townsmen an entryway into the nation's rich history. Ultimately, watercraft were employed as elements to enrich Kuniyoshi's natural environments – emphasizing grand scenes of unquestioning loyalty, fidelity in revenge and pure courageous acts that culminate in the theme of the desperate last stand against overwhelming odds.<sup>166</sup>

One very important and recurring theme that emerges in many of Kuniyoshi's prints is man versus nature, where the artist depicts a scene between characters and then uses nature to communicate the story further. Kuniyoshi often portrays the sea or a water body in many of his prints. He also sometimes features waterfalls or rain details to further enhance intensity of the situation rendered in his prints. This man versus nature theme is prevalent in his portrayal of the sea, where he uses the sea as an oppressive force to heighten his scenes – it plays a key role in communicating conflict and reinforcing a sense of chaos. Kuniyoshi details the sea with violent features such as well-defined waves that appear to be rising up and hostile claw-like foam fragments to

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<sup>164</sup> "Takeshiuchi No Sukune [=Katô Kiyomasa] Sails toward Korea." Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. February 02, 2018. Accessed October 18, 2018. <https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/takeshiuchi-no-sukune-katô-kiyomasa-sails-toward-korea-463516>.

<sup>165</sup> "The Nineteen Retainers of Yoshitsune (Yoshitsune No Jûku Shin)." Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. April 16, 2017. Accessed October 18, 2018. <https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/the-nineteen-retainers-of-yoshitsune-yoshitsune-no-jûku-shin-500225>.

<sup>166</sup> Robinson, Basil W. *Kuniyoshi: The Warrior-prints*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1982.



Fig.4. Kuniyoshi. *The Nineteen Retainers of Yoshitsune*. 1836.

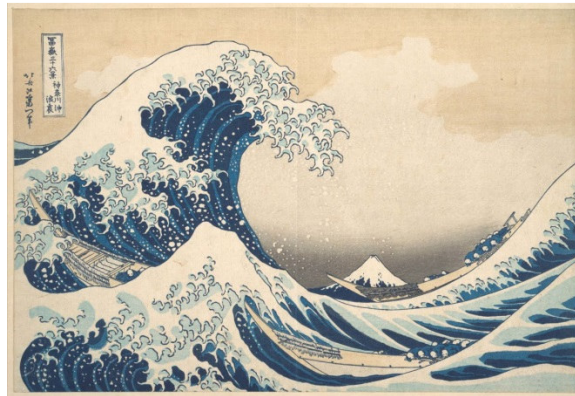


Fig.5. Hokusai. *The Great Wave*. 1829-1832.



Fig.6. Kuniyoshi. *Casting an Invocation on the Waves at Kakuda in Sado Province*. 1835-1836.



Fig.7. Kuniyoshi. *Konkoryu Rishun*. 1827-1830.



Fig.8. Kuniyoshi. *Itabashi*. 1852.



Fig.9. Kuniyoshi, *The Priest Noin*. 1840.

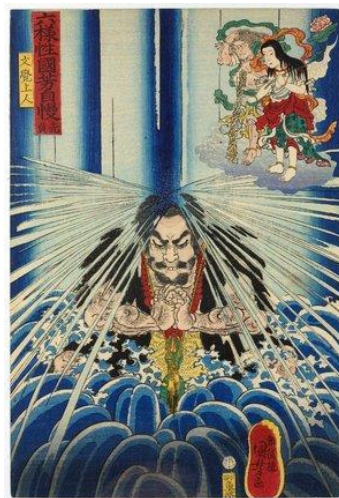


Fig.10. Kuniyoshi. *Senbu*. 1860.



Fig.11. Kuniyoshi, *View of Mitsumata*. 1831

incorporate movement and complexity into the scene. This is particularly different from other ukiyo-e artists that represent the sea as a view of nature that itself constitutes the scene rather than contributing to its story. These other depictions of the sea use more gradients and gentle vibrancy of hues rather than well-defined details that command as much attention as the rest of the figures and details in the print.

An incredibly important element of Kuniyoshi's portrayal of the sea is his reference to *The Great Wave* (fig. 5)<sup>167</sup> by Hokusai. Many of his prints utilize a very similar style when rendering water bodies that appear to be rising up and are shown with as much detail as that of Hokusai's piece. Kuniyoshi's *Casting an Invocation on the Waves at Kakuda in Sado Province* (fig. 6)<sup>168</sup> print is the prime example of this, where the water appears to be rising in a hostile manner to engulf the rest of the elements.<sup>169</sup> Many of his other pieces show clear Hokusai influence, but this piece stands out as the most similar by far. Kuniyoshi uses this detailed portrayal of the sea to introduce interactions between the sea and boats or characters. Even prints with lesser conflict have well bodied waves to add more visual interest and intensity to the scene. This is seen in *Konkōryū Rishun* (fig. 7)<sup>170</sup> where a man appears to be raising a huge boat with passengers out of the water and right into the air. The complexity of the water around Rishun adds more chaos to the scene of violent attack undertaken for a noble cause. Unleashed powers of nature resonate with the forceful actions of superhero in action.

Further, the artist makes efficient use of the transparency of water in some of his prints, and sometimes appears to tell part of the story from a view underwater. This is seen in *Itabashi* (fig. 8)<sup>171</sup> where a figure appears to be helping another figure across the water, but the act is seen from an underwater view. This is particularly interesting because Kuniyoshi efficiently portrays the transparency of the water while still including enough details to confirm that the setting in front is in fact a body of water. Other instances where

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<sup>167</sup> Metmuseum.org. Accessed November 02, 2018. <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/jp1847/>.

<sup>168</sup> "Utagawa Kuniyoshi: Casting an Invocation on the Waves at Kakuda in Sado Province - Honolulu Museum of Art." Ukiyo-e Search. Accessed November 02, 2018. <https://ukiyo-e.org/image/honolulu/7395>.

<sup>169</sup> "Honolulu Museum of Art." Honolulu Academy. Accessed October 18, 2018. [http://honolulumuseum.org/art/exhibitions/11514-pathways\\_evolution\\_japanese\\_buddhist\\_prints/](http://honolulumuseum.org/art/exhibitions/11514-pathways_evolution_japanese_buddhist_prints/).

<sup>170</sup> "Utagawa Kuniyoshi: Konkoryu Rishun 混江龍李俊 (Li Jun) / Tszoku Suikoden Goketsu Hyakuhachinin No Hitori 通俗水滸傳濠傑百八人一個 (One of the 108 Heroes of the Popular Water Margin) - British Museum." Ukiyo-e Search. Accessed November 02, 2018. [https://ukiyo-e.org/image/bm/AN00586911\\_001\\_I](https://ukiyo-e.org/image/bm/AN00586911_001_I).

<sup>171</sup> "Utagawa Kuniyoshi: Itabashi - Japanese Art Open Database." Ukiyo-e Search. Accessed November 02, 2018. [https://ukiyo-e.org/image/jaodb/Kuniyoshi\\_Utagawa-69\\_Stations\\_of\\_the\\_Kisokaido-Itabashi-00030566-020424-F06](https://ukiyo-e.org/image/jaodb/Kuniyoshi_Utagawa-69_Stations_of_the_Kisokaido-Itabashi-00030566-020424-F06).

Kuniyoshi plays on the transparency of water include his portrayal of rain or waterfalls. He uses striations across the print to indicate rain, which adds visual interest and complexity. *The Priest Noin* (fig. 9)<sup>172</sup> even appears to make use of the refractive properties of water in the scene where the viewer seems to be looking at the subjects behind a sheet of water that lightly distorts them. This is also seen in *Senbu* (fig. 10)<sup>173</sup> where the translucent streaks of water unite the figure with nature. The water itself adds tremendous visual interest to the print, which would just be a figure standing in a body of water without it. The sharp waterfall streaks, paired with the bubbling water rising from underneath make it look like something important is happening and makes the scene less peaceful.<sup>174</sup>

While Kuniyoshi is not as well known for his landscape works as he is for his warrior prints, he is widely regarded for his contribution to the landscape genre in what was termed as his 'poetic landscapes'. For instance, in one of his most famous series, *One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poet*' (cited above, see print *Priest Noin*, Fig. 9), he interprets the poems and brings them to life by setting them in what can be described as lyrical landscapes. Kuniyoshi's successful prints are said to have been influenced by the Dutch school of Akita fief which had pioneered the Europeanised style in Japan, and this is interpreted from his prints showing low horizons, ragged clouds, occasional shadows, pronounced foreground motifs, unusual subjects and viewpoints.<sup>175</sup> His reasons for creating landscape work were more practical than self-initiated. Landscapes and their relationship to prints were changing in 1842 when newer and stricter censorship regulations were introduced as a part of the Tenpō Reform measures. Under this movement, everything from the subject matter, to the prices of prints, the number of colors permitted and the number of sheets that could be combined to make a larger print were strictly limited.<sup>176</sup> Kuniyoshi's portrayal of landscapes was not only a way for him to avoid

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<sup>172</sup> "Utagawa Kuniyoshi: Priest Noin - Honolulu Museum of Art." Ukiyo-e Search. Accessed November 02, 2018. <https://ukiyo-e.org/image/honolulu/7299>.

<sup>173</sup> "Utagawa Kuniyoshi: Senbu 先負 (Not a Very Lucky Day) / Rokuyosei Kuniyoshi Jiman 六様性国芳自慢 (Kuniyoshi's Analogies for the Six Conditions of Nature) - British Museum." Ukiyo-e Search. Accessed November 02, 2018. [https://ukiyo-e.org/image/bm/AN00587520\\_001\\_1](https://ukiyo-e.org/image/bm/AN00587520_001_1).

<sup>174</sup> "Utagawa Kuniyoshi - 165 Artworks, Bio & Shows on Artsy." Artsy - Discover, Research, and Collect the World's Best Art Online. Accessed October 18, 2018. [https://www.artsy.net/artist/utagawa-kuniyoshi?medium=\\*%&page=3&sort=-decayed\\_merch](https://www.artsy.net/artist/utagawa-kuniyoshi?medium=*%&page=3&sort=-decayed_merch).

<sup>175</sup> Clark, Timothy, and Utagawa Kuniyoshi. *Kuniyoshi: From the Arthur R. Miller Collection*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2009.

<sup>176</sup> Thompson, Sarah Elizabeth. *Utagawa Kuniyoshi the Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaidō*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2009.

potential censorship problems but also a result of publishers' way to exploit the genre that was being popularized by other artists like Utagawa Hiroshige.<sup>177</sup> For instance, the above mentioned series, *One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets* accorded well with the moralizing aims of the Tenpō Reforms. In addition to this, Kuniyoshi uses his landscapes to represent a type of humor called *mitate*. In ukiyo-e this term refers to a technique of wittily combining representation of elements seemingly not related to each other. For example, in his series called *Sixty Nine Stations of the Kisokaidō*, the humor lies in the selection of the works itself. Kuniyoshi matches the names of the places with specific stories when portraying them, or matches a story to a station on the Kiso road because of a pun on a person's name, a place name or some other element within the story<sup>178</sup>. Despite all these reasons, his landscape work is said to have been inspired by experiences in his personal life. For example, in this work *View of Mitsumata*(fig. 11)<sup>179</sup> from the series *Famous View of the Eastern Capital*, the work is thought to represent scenery Kuniyoshi saw on a stroll through town.<sup>180</sup>

Ultimately, Kuniyoshi had a gift for knowing how to employ elements of nature to maximize the emotional impact of his images. He utilised diverse graphic resources that reinforced each other, as well as strengthened the versatility and sensitivity of his narratives - culminating in an extraordinary revival of Japan's history through visual storytelling.

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<sup>177</sup> Clark, Timothy, and Utagawa Kuniyoshi. *Kuniyoshi: From the Arthur R. Miller Collection*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2009.

<sup>178</sup> Thompson, Sarah Elizabeth. *Utagawa Kuniyoshi the Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaidō*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2009.

<sup>179</sup> Utagawa Hiroshige, II. "Nakazu Mitsumata, from the Series Thirty-six Views of the Eastern Capital (Tōto Sanjūrokkei)." Digital image. Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Accessed November 2, 2018. <https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/nakazu-mitsumata-from-the-series-thirty-six-views-of-the-eastern-capital-tōto-sanjūrokkei-176385>.

<sup>180</sup> "Kuniyoshi's Landscapes and Warrior Images." Japan Forward. September 13, 2017. Accessed October 18, 2018. <https://japan-forward.com/kuniyoshis-landscapes-and-warrior-images-and-why-they-are-highly-valued-today/>.

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Utagawa Kuniyoshi, 1797-1861  
*Toyotomi Hideyoshi Escapes Assassination on the Ship of Yojibei* (Toyotomi Hideyoshi to Yojibei)  
Signed: Ichiyūsai Kuniyoshi ga (picture by Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi), on each sheet  
Publisher: Mikawaya Tetsugorō  
Censorship seals: Fuku, Muramatsu  
Date: 1847-1852  
Size: 37.2 x 25.4 cm (14 5/8 x 10 inches);  
Polychrome woodblock print *nishiki-e*, vertical *ōban* triptych  
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1310



Detail of the above. Rijksmuseum collection.

## ***Toyotomi Hideyoshi Escapes Assassination on the Ship of Yojibei***

By Tanya Agarwal, Kanika Kumar, and Sophia Sena

A roaring storm raging at sea fills the sight. High froth-capped waves are breaking violently against a huge and colorful watercraft – perhaps, even more than one. The details are not immediately clear but it is obvious that we witness a bitter confrontation of two powers: man and nature. In fact, there is a story to this dramatic scene.

Hideyoshi, on his way to lead the invasion of Korea, learns of his mother's failing health and immediately decides to return to Kyoto. On his way there, Hideyoshi faces an assassination attempt by the sailor Yojibei, who steers his ship into the rocks in an act of revenge for his deceased brother. Hideyoshi barely makes it out alive by leaping from the boat to safety. Yojibei then assumes responsibility for the action and commits suicide. The channel wherein this scene occurs, Yojibei Channel, is named after him.

In this triptych, the most characteristic feature is the immediate chaos – the depiction of violent, rolling blue waves and chaotic sprays of water that weave throughout each individual print represent the sea as a destructive force. The waves in particular are massive – appearing to consume and extend toward every edge of the composition. Subtle slanted lines suggest that it is raining, and that this scene occurs in the midst of a storm. The primary subject is centralized within the piece: a magnificent ship with a curved stempost boasts the red seal of a paulownia flower on its extensive white sail. This red seal is known as the crest of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), a preeminent military commander and political figure who is regarded as Japan's second "great unifier." The ship's body is painted a vivid red, with latticed rails, and adorned with black lacquer and gold ornamentation of the same seal with floral and animal motifs. The edge of the deck and of the shelter-like superstructure is clad in elaborate purple fabric curtain also bearing Hideyoshi's paulownia crest. At the back of the ship, a unique standard protrudes above the cresting waves, embellished with several gourd-like bulbous forms – it is Hideyoshi's thousand gourd standard (*sennari hyotan no umajirushi*) – one gourd for each victory, an indication he is aboard the ship.

Despite the grandeur of this vessel, the ship is illustrated in the midst of colliding with a huge rock formation. The upward motion of the boat is felt through the arc of its

body, with its prow almost touching the topmost border of the print. The decorative tassel on the prow's apex is tossed up by the shock and then repeats the undulating movement of the waves. A smaller and rather inconspicuous red boat with a curved stempost, similarly accented with black lacquer (though incomparably less opulent), flanks the larger vessel. Twenty-six figures appear throughout the scene – many of them located on the boat decks, endure the brunt of the storm. On the leftmost side of the print, a distinguishable male figure is leaping from the large watercraft, clad in a patterned blue cloak and purple *hakama*. His left arm clutches his sword's hilt as the other is outstretched. Referencing the print's title, this figure is most likely Hideyoshi – he is jumping for his life and is about to be caught in mid-air by a loyal associate. In the middle print, there is a male figure dressed in blue with a black hat, seated aboard the main vessel. He bears a crest different from Hideyoshi's – instead of the paulownia it is a four-petal diamond-shaped flower motif, *hanabishi*. This is speculated to be Yojibei, who is therefore steering the ship. In the lower half of the same print, a larger figure in profile, dressed in purple robes, stands atop the smaller boat with his right arm extended to steady himself. His sleeves are swinging behind him and while his garment is partially obscured, one can make out the details of a bold line and circular forms – the crest of the Mōri clan. According to the print's discussion on the website of the Chiba City Museum of Art, this man had come to Hideyoshi's aid.<sup>181</sup>

The rightmost print is equally busy within the sphere of humans and in nature. Figures scattered around the back deck of the big ship are a mixture of almost faceless individuals. Some are wearing black triangular hats with the right circle symbolizing the rising sun. A group of bareheaded men also appear with their headbands *hachimaki*. Fragments of the military camp curtain *jinmaku*, with Hideyoshi's paulownia crest, is repeated multiple times throughout the scene. On the smaller boat two men with distinct facial features lean forward following their leader shown on the central sheet; on the back deck of this smaller vessel several men in rounded hats and striped vests group together – they are likely also a part of the Mōri clan. As ukiyo-e prints were traditionally read from right to left, an onlooker would initially see the groups of small figures huddled together on the boats. Those on the big boat the viewers would recognize as Hideyoshi's men –

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<sup>181</sup> Chiba Museum of Art, 2006, Accessed October 14th 2018. <http://www.ccma-net.jp/>

because of his crest repeated on the curtain fabric, on the rectangular personal flag, on the tassel-shaped streamer and on his famous standard of a thousand gourds. Then the onlooker will see presumably Yojibei directing the dangerous move of the ship; his figure is small since the ship is further away from the viewer; the viewer will then see the sailors of the Mori clan coming on the smaller boat to Hideyoshi's rescue. Then finally the viewers would see Hideyoshi in the midst of jumping to save his own life. The overall scene is a maelstrom of vivid activity, with every element reinforcing this sense of tumultuousness.

When interpreting the different details we see here, it is important to consider some of the main forms that are most apparent. Here first of all belong the boats in the scene. There are a total of two boats – the big ship and the small rescue boat. The big ship extends throughout all three sheets of the triptych: following it from left to right, we see its prow with a black tassel, some part of its red hull, its superstructure with the huge sail and the back deck with several groups of people and three Hideyoshi's standards. There are altogether twenty-six figures in the print that all play a key role in communicating the story in all details. The major part of the print's surface has powerful waves flowing through and evoking a feeling of chaos and power. These waves have been printed with very detailed lines that endow them with an even more sinister and damaging nature. These lines allow the waves to stand out as more than just a part of the background but rather an integral storytelling element. The detailing of the waves almost look like claws, which adds a hostile ambience to the scene – everything points to an attack or assault. Since ukiyo-e prints are typically read from right to left (as has been mentioned above), the detailing of the waves adds a sense of movement where the viewer can actually imagine the larger boat being rammed into the rocks. The top-to-bottom inclined striation marks across the print look like heavy rain and this intensifies the stormy feeling. Conspicuous crests of Hideyoshi boldly decorate the big ship – they differ in color adding to the vibrancy of the dramatic scene. Variations of color further enhance the overall vividness of the drama. The smaller boat belonging to the Mori clan that is making its way to Hideyoshi's aid is not identified by its clan's crest – perhaps because it had to be dispatched very quickly.

The Mori clan members in the small swift boat are wearing flat hats, while the sailors on the big ship, *gozabune*, are wearing hats of conical shape. The sailors on the big ship towards the back deck are wearing hats similar to those worn by the Mori clan but

with red spots on them. This is *hinomaru* – “circle of the sun”, the *de facto* national flag of Japan. The boats have beautiful golden detailing on them, which evokes a sense of pride that the Japanese people had for their boats. This pride is expressed here alongside the general chaos that the piece creates. It is also important to interpret the details of the print by taking a step back and observing general details that help construct the overall mood of the scene. The scene appears to be taking place around late evening suggested by the intense shadows on the waves and the rock. The rock is wrinkled and many faceted, the detail achieved by overprinting of the darker brown over the lighter brown tones and of hatching-like parallel lines. The scene appears to be happening between the summer and fall seasons. Japan is affected by the Pacific Typhoon season between May and October, and most strongly in August and September. Since the scene shown here occurred around the days of death of Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s mother, it is easy to determine the approximate dates when the scene happened. Hideyoshi’s mother died on August 29, 1592 – so, this was indeed the high typhoon season and the time when the rains are the strongest and the sea is at its roughest.

In terms of discussing general visual features, the first thing one sees when looking at this image is the water. It is the most visually and thematically dominant aspect of the print. It dominates the print in terms of the color, mood, theme, time and place. Through the narrative that is unfolding within the print, one knows that it is a moment of tension and war, but this is made apparent to the viewer without even knowing anything about the story, through the water. What draws one’s attention is not the large blue area you would expect it to cover, but rather the white texture on the water, which indicates movement, violence, rage, danger, and tension. The waves seem to be high and angry. It was believed that waves encircling the Japanese islands would shelter them from intruders onto their land and in *Nihonshoki* (one of Japan’s earliest chronicles, 8<sup>th</sup> c.) waves were known to hide and protect people.<sup>182</sup> Perhaps the artist was attempting to create a similar feeling of the waves protecting Hideyoshi from being assassinated. But the looming claw-like appearance of the froth makes it look menacing thus heightening the precariousness of the situation.

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<sup>182</sup> Guth, Christine M.E. *Hokusai’s Great Waves in Nineteenth Century Visual Culture*. New York: College Art Association, 2011.

The overall form and texture of the waves in this print are reminiscent of those from the *Great Wave*, a world-renowned masterpiece print by Katsushika Hokusai. During the time when the *Great Wave* was created (ca. 1830), it gained popularity fairly quickly. Artists from all over Japan attempted to capture the essence of Hokusai's work by trying to incorporate his style into their work, however few were successful. Although Kuniyoshi attempts to do something similar, he manages to create a different effect. Hokusai's wave has been described as "capturing and fixing it so that it paradoxically becomes a static, elegant and poised structure rather than something fluid and ephemeral"<sup>183</sup>, while Kuniyoshi's waves make the scene almost alive and manage to capture the tension in the scene.

Unlike a lot of ukiyo-e prints, this print by Kuniyoshi is very line based visually. In addition to all the elements having black lines, the waves specifically have a texture of lines within them. Additionally, thin undulating lines of the waves are crisscrossed by the vertical lines slanted at various angles that render the rain, furthering the impression of utmost rage of the water element, adding to the visual texture of the print and its dramatic mood.

Further, this print consists of three separate panels – it is a vertical triptych. The purpose was said to have been purely functional, as the printers couldn't print bigger than a specific size. The format of the triptych was becoming more popular around mid-18<sup>th</sup> century in ukiyo-e prints, however the size of individual sheets forming a multi-panel composition was smaller, which grew later on.<sup>184</sup> The triptych slowly became popular among artists, despite the fact that for publisher it was more expensive to print and publish. Although being popular and part of the new culture, artists deeply considered the content of the print before choosing it. Each print of this panel is of the *oban* size, which was around 10 inches by 15 inches.<sup>185</sup> Before Kuniyoshi, the panels in a multi-panel composition could be sold separately – they were designed accordingly so that each panel would have a self-sufficient composition. Kuniyoshi with his interest in the dramatic lore of the past started creating sweeping compositions across all panels, of which the current

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<sup>183</sup> Guth, Christine M.E. *Hokusai's Great Waves in Nineteenth Century Visual Culture*. New York: College Art Association, 2011.

<sup>184</sup> "Ukiyo-e Diptychs, Triptychs, Polyptychs - The Expanding Horizon." *Toshidama Gallery* (blog), June 01, 2012. Accessed October 11, 2018. <http://toshidama.blogspot.com/2012/06/ukiyo-e-diptychs-triptychs-polyptychs.html>.

<sup>185</sup> "Japanese Print Sizes." JAPANESE GALLERY, London, UK. Buy Ukiyoe Prints Online. Accessed October 14, 2018. <http://www.japanesegallery.co.uk/default.php?Sel=printsizes&Submenu=4&box=triptych>.

print is an example. The artist's signature, the seals of the censors as well the seals of the publishing house appear on each panel. The reason for this is the governmental requirement to those involved in the production of mass-produced prints could be easily identifiable in case of publication of subversive material. The fact that this triptych was meant to be perceived as one solid work of art is proven by the size and position of boats that run across the sheets and also by the placement of the cartouche with the text telling the story on just one right-hand side panel, the first one observed by the viewer.

Overall this print from the RISD Museum looks cohesive because the style of the artist appears to be consistent in description of boats, men and the environment; similar cohesiveness distinguishes the colors. However, upon a more detailed inspection, you will be able to notice the slight color variation which occurs between the panels. The gray highlights differ in the mainsail of the boat on the middle panel from those on the left panel; so does the darkness and depth in the blue highlights in the water. Apart from this, the biggest evidence of the imperfect alignment is just a slight offset of the lines and marks, which is mainly highlighted by the use of consecutively repeating and continuing lines across the panels. Not all works have the same scale of differences, but most have similar, and more pronounced, visual imperfections, which highlights the prints' humanistic and handmade nature.

The format of the three panels is interesting in this case because of the way it divides the scene. The tension and movement is apparent in all, but each panel can be described as having a different narrative. The panel on the left is dominated by the water and the prow; however, the presence of one man amid that chaos gives a kind of importance to him and his personality. The middle panel is dominated by the water, a large area of the boats and two figures, one of which is hidden in the back. The third panel is dominated by more of the water and the boats but also has most of the figures hidden among objects on the deck. This division of action and structure of the composition seems so natural that it could have been a deliberate attempt by the artist to separate areas of action and create a sort of hierarchy within the image.

The most intriguing part about this set of printed panels is the variation in colors. When comparing the copy of the print in the RISD Museum with the one in the MFA, Boston, there are many subtle and not so subtle variations in these two imprints of the



same composition, the biggest one being color. The colors in the print at the MFA appear to be brighter and slightly more saturated. The faded and aged red, almost vermilion color that is in the RISD print appears saturated and more towards a magenta-red tone. The highlights in the water, across all the panels, also appear to vary between the two prints. These highlights in the print from the RISD Museum do not only appear to be in different places than that of the MFA, but they also have a slightly more tonal variation. The variation in the color can be justified by considering the print runs or even the way in which the print was conserved. Since not a lot of information is available about details at this time, the real reason behind these variations can only be assumed. When comparing other details, in the format and visual presentation of the prints from the above two collections and the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, still another observable difference becomes noteworthy: the difference in the presentation of the triptych. In the Rijksmuseum, there is space left between the panels, which could lead to a different experience of the print.

Within the scope of ukiyo-e genres, this print is classified as a *musha-e* – a warrior print. Kuniyoshi is most well-known for his depictions of warriors and for his long-time fascination with the life of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the man who brought an end to the Warring States period in Japan (ca. 1467-1600) and established his authority over it. Kuniyoshi repeatedly treated Hideyoshi in his *nishiki-e*, and at least four of Kuniyoshi's 'monographic' sets that dealt with legends are centered around Hideyoshi and his allies.<sup>186</sup> Kuniyoshi's fascination with history and personal admiration for Hideyoshi prompted him to push the limits of what was permitted in art during the period, and led him to create many Hideyoshi-related prints.

Kuniyoshi subtly incorporated many elements that alluded to Hideyoshi within his work. In this triptych, Kuniyoshi's red gourd-shaped cartouche can be seen at the bottom of all three prints. From 1831, the artist began using this gourd-shaped frame, known as a *hyotan-yoshi* (gourd-shaped *yoshi*), for his signature as a blatant allusion to Hideyoshi's famous symbol. A well-informed viewer would make a connection between the signature and Hideyoshi's 'standard of a thousand gourds' (*sennari-hyotan-no umajirushi*) shown towards the stern of Hideyoshi's ship on the print. Hideyoshi's recognizable paulownia

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<sup>186</sup> Varshavskaya, Elena, and Kuniyoshi. *Heroes of the Grand Pacification: Kuniyoshis Taiheiki Eiyū Den*. Amsterdam: Hotei, 2005.

crest, which is scattered throughout the triptych, also makes itself apparent in Kuniyoshi's personal seal underneath the gourd-shaped frame – this seal is set in a red square and is fairly simplified. Because Hideyoshi was the only one to combine these two symbols, the scholar Suzuki Juzo suggests that Kuniyoshi's adoption of them meant that he wanted to be 'associated with the achievements and extravagances of [Hideyoshi's] fictionalised personality'.<sup>187</sup> However, since open representations of Hideyoshi were banned, Kuniyoshi had to rely on two types of masking techniques to relay his hidden messages, both of which are present in this print: *mitate* (parodies) and aliases.<sup>188</sup> *Mitate* meant that the print displayed the permitted historical material, but contained faint visual hints to alert the viewer of an underlying agenda - for example, the inclusion of the family crests of warrior houses. In this print, the paulownia crest of Toyotomi and the symbol of the Mori clan help to identify the respective individuals. In regards to the second method, the use of an alias is exemplified by the print's title, wherein Hideyoshi is not referred to by name, but as the 'Great General'. It is through this that Kuniyoshi managed to thwart the Tokugawa shogunate's repeated efforts to suppress Hideyoshi's legacy, and pushed the boundaries of the artform.

Interestingly, the watercraft depicted in this print differed greatly from what was usually depicted by ukiyo-e artists at the time. Unlike the contemporary boats that frequent genres like *fukeiga* and *bijinga*, which range from fishing vessels to pleasure boats – aspects of Japanese daily life – this print presents a historical military vessel. It is a departure from the portrayal of boats in times of peace, unveiling instead boats as instruments of war. It would have been a type of boat that neither the public nor artists would normally see, and thus it greatly expands cultural awareness of the audience of mid-19th-century Edo Japan. The print-buying public would have been able to read between the lines and recognize Hideyoshi, revealing their interest in the country's rich historical past. Furthermore, while most prints were set in Honshu, this triptych takes place geographically between the island of Honshu and the island of Kyushu. Yojibe, the sailor mentioned in the print's title, was in fact the administrator of Hideyoshi's fleet, a daimyo of the Ishii clan. Hideyoshi was going to lead the invasion of Korea and was heading there

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<sup>187</sup> Quoted in Varshavskaya, Elena, and Kuniyoshi. *Heroes of the Grand Pacification: Kuniyoshis Taiheiki Eiyū Den*. Amsterdam: Hotei, 2005.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 22

when he received information that his mother was critically ill and decided to return to Kyoto. Ishii Yojibei was navigating the vessel with Hideyoshi when he ran the ship aground and afterwards committed *seppuku*.<sup>189</sup>

Yojibei's story became a popular topic amongst the arts of townspeople – in ukiyo-e, Japanese storytelling and Kabuki theatre. It also became known to a German physician, Philipp Siebold, who was exploring Japan far and wide and put together numerous records of Japan's past and present. Siebold sketched the location where the situation occurred and the monument once built to commemorate Yojibei:<sup>190</sup> a testament to how widespread the tale had become so that even Western audiences were aware of it. Popular legend, however, has it that since Yojibei's brother had died at the hands of Hideyoshi, Yojibei deliberately ran the ship against the rock.<sup>191</sup> The fact cannot be established. The seascape on this triptych is therefore a great example of the aspect of watercraft as emblematic of conflict, a chronicle of the nation's rich narrative, and evidence of the increasing cultural literacy of the Edo populace.

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<sup>189</sup> Abe Takeshi, Nishimura Keiko, *Sengoku jinmei jiten*, Tōkyō: Shin Jinbutsu Ōraisha, Shōwa 62 [1987], p. 81

<sup>190</sup> "与次兵衛瀨の碑." Overseas Images of Japan Database. Accessed October 14, 2018.

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<sup>191</sup> <https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/when-the-great-general-was-on-the-way-to-kyoto-from-kyushu-he-encountered-a-storm-at-manaitagase-in-dairi-bay-in-buzen-province-the-sailor-yojibei-was-killed-and-his-body-thrown-into-the-sea-and-since-then-the-place-is-called-the> (website of the MFA, Boston)

## APPENDICES

### ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES & GLOSSARY

## UKIYO-E ARTISTS REPRESENTED IN EXHIBITION *BOATING IN THE FLOATING WORLD*

### CHŌBUNSAI EISHI (鳥文斎 栄之), 1756 - 1892

Chōbunsai Eishi is a painter and print designer particularly famous for his images of beautiful women. He was born the eldest son of a local Edo samurai official. Before Eishi began working on ukiyo-e prints for which he is well-known today, he served as an official painter for the shogunate. After he ended his official service, he became, in 1790s, a notable master of *bijinga* following the style of Torii Kiyonaga. Like his influential contemporary, Eishi tended to represent tall, elegant, impassive beauties, often showing them arranged in a procession and set in natural environment. Eishi's *bijinga* images are noted for their refinement and finesse. He was fond of bringing together references to classical themes and contemporary imagery in *mitate-e* compositions. Later in his career he discontinued print design and focused on ukiyo-e painting.

### KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI (葛飾 北斎), 1760 – 1849

Katsushika Hokusai is a celebrated ukiyo-e artist and an extremely prolific printmaker. Although he is revered across the world today, he only became **recognized** for his work very late in his career. Throughout his lifetime he created around 30,000 works and used about 30 aliases for himself to present his work under, including the name 'Hokusai'. His vast legacy testifies to Hokusai's remarkable versatility of themes and artistic styles, mastery of drawing, keenness of observation, insight and wit. Hokusai had a penchant for incorporating Western techniques and Chinese elements into his work, and he was particularly interested in universal concepts. He is recognized as a great innovator of the landscape genre in ukiyo-e. Hokusai is renowned for his depiction of humans in the natural world. This eventually led him to focusing on the concept of humanity. His fascination and level of observation of human mannerisms is what sets him apart from other artists during his lifetime. Hokusai's first print sets to feature landscape as their subject matter appeared in mid-1830s. Here first of all belong prints from *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji* (forty-six altogether) but also *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, Explained by the Nurse*, represented at the current exhibition. Hokusai captures "the grandeur and timelessness of nature, infinite variety of its forms, its endless transformations and human's deepest unity with the natural world."

### UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE (歌川 広重), 1797 - 1858

Utagawa Hiroshige is a preeminent Edo period painter and print designer. Born into a family of lower ranking samurai serving as official in the fire department, in his early teens he became a student of Utagawa Toyohiro, receiving the name of Utagawa Hiroshige. His first published work was released when he was at the age of 21, and he only began focusing on depicting landscapes in 1830s. Hiroshige's greatest contribution is to the landscape genre *fukeiga* and related flower-and-bird genre *kacho-ga*. Particularly influential were his travel series, *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*, of which he had created at least twenty sets, *The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaido*, (created in collaboration with Eisen), and many other sets with famous views throughout Japan, such as *Famous Places in the Sixty-odd Provinces of Japan*. Hiroshige willingly chose any

topics concerned with representations of nature, as, for example, his masterpiece series “Eight Views of Omi,” that had classical Chinese origin. Hiroshige’s landscape images are admired for the simplicity of motifs and sensitivity to the life of nature that serves as a setting for the ordinary life. Seasonal attributes, transitions of daytime, atmospheric conditions rendered with subtle coloring are the most distinguishing features of his landscape prints. . Although Hiroshige produced prints and paintings across numerous genres, he is still most renowned as the master of poetic landscape. Towards the end of his life, Hiroshige made the decision to retire from the world in 1856 and became a buddhist monk. It was at this point he began his masterpiece series, *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* that had a marked influence on Western art. Vincent van Gogh is known to have studied and copied prints from that set.

### **UTAGAWA KUNIYOSHI (歌川 國芳), 1798 - 1861**

Utagawa Kuniyoshi is an extremely versatile print designer and painter. Having received training at the studio of Utagawa Toyokuni, Kuniyoshi mastered thematic repertoire and the style of the Utagawa School. Utagawa Kuniyoshi was instrumental for the development of *musha-e*, warrior genre in ukiyo-e. After his first success in late 1820s, he created innumerable images of warriors from Japanese heroic lore, history, old and contemporary literature. Kuniyoshi found his own vivid, dynamic, bold, colorful visual language to adequately render his mighty characters and dramatic action. His images are shaped by his unbound imagination and playfulness. Kuniyoshi heightens the impact of his designs by representing historically accurate trappings and appropriately violent natural conditions. Kuniyoshi readily worked in large-scale format of polyptychs unfolding sweeping compositions across panels to enhance a striking effect of the intense scenes he portrayed. Kuniyoshi was also successful in *bijinga*, *yakusha-e*, and landscapes but he is first of all remembered as Kuniyoshi of the warrior genre.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Compiled by Kaylyn Chileen

- **Aizuri** - woodblock prints predominantly printed in monochrome blue on white background.
- **Berlin Blue (bero-ai)** - also known as Prussian blue, it is blue pigment of intensive hues and non-fugitive; became widely available in Japan in 1820s through the trade with the Chinese and the Dutch; it is believed to have influenced rapid development of landscape genre in ukiyo-e.
- **Bezaisen** - a class of several different types of large coastal transport boats.
- **Bijin/Bijinga** - a beautiful, contemporary, stylish and idealized woman and pictures of such women, one of the main genres in ukiyo-e.
- **Biwa** - a stringed instrument similar to a lute with four or five strings.
- **Bokashi** - a printing technique of tonal shading or gradation of color that is made to transition from darker to lighter shades or vice versa.
- **Cartouche** - an area, usually in the upper part of a print, containing the title of a print with or without additional information.
- **Chochin** - paper lanterns were traditionally made with a bamboo frame covered in either silk or paper.
- **Courtesans** in Edo period Japan's licensed brothels - culturally trained entertainment women who were providing sex services to their wealthy clients; they served at the brothel quarters in large cities - Yoshiwara in Edo, Shimabara in Kyoto, and Shinmachi in Osaka.
- **Daimyo** - a regional feudal lord, hereditary owner of vast land holdings; stopped to exist with the end of the Edo period.
- **Fukei-ga** - prints of landscapes, one of ukiyo-e genres.
- **Furoshiki** - a traditional Japanese wrapping cloth used to transport goods.
- **Gaiters (kyahan)** - a clothing item similar to leggings, worn to cover or protect the lower leg.
- **Gazetteer** - used to refer to an informational pamphlet; often illustrated they contained historical and legendary accounts of various regions. Became exceedingly popular toward the end of the 18th century and were widely borrowed from by ukiyo-e designers for their landscape compositions. The exhibition includes several prints by Hiroshige that included fragments of gazetteers.
- **Giboshi** - a decoration in the shape of the onion-bulb jewel, used as bridge railing ornament in Japan.
- **Gozabune** - "Honored-seat boat," an ornately decorated ship used by daimyō (MD).
- **Hachimaki** - a stylized headband worn for various purposes: under a helmet or hat as an inner cap, or to absorb sweat by laborers but also to symbolize the effort and courage of the wearer.

- **Hakama** - long - wide trousers worn on ceremonial occasions.
- **Hakkei** - eight scenic spots from one geographic area specifically chosen to be treated in verse or pictures; originated in China as The Eight Views of Xiao and Xiang in the 11th century and became popular in Japan in the 14th-15th cc.
- **Hanabibune** - a boat used for watching fireworks.
- **Hanabishi** - a flower-shaped pattern in the form of a diamond, often a family crest.
- **Hanakanzashi** - a Japanese hairpin with ornamental flowers.
- **Hull** - the main body of a ship or vessel including specifically the bottom, sides, and deck only.
- **Hyotan** - bottle gourds used in Japan as water containers. In ukiyo-e often symbolized Toyotomi Hideyoshi after his legendary adding a gourd to his standard as a mark of every victory.
- **Ichimonjimura bokashi or ichimonji** - a gradation technique, varying in width and shape horizontally. Also see *bokashi*.
- **Jinmaku** - a large massive fabric curtain for a military camp, *jinmaku* is decorated with the clan's crests, the *mon*.
- **Kago** - a palanquin or a litter used for travel. One person was transported inside and usually two men were carrying it.
- **Kanshi** - a general Japanese term for Chinese poems
- **Kanzashi** - ornamented hair pins used in traditional Japanese hairstyles.
- **Kasa** - a broad term for a traditional Japanese hat often made of bamboo or woven of sedge.
- **Kasumi** - literally meaning "mist," it was usually conventionally represented as spreading horizontally in bands; had a function of dividing pictorial space in foreground, mid-ground and background or to suggest change of scene or passage of time. A feature of *yamato-e*, it was also often used in the art of ukiyo-e.
- **Koto** - a musical instrument consisting of a long sounding-box over which strings are stretched, each with its separate bridge, and plucked with plectra attached to the player's fingers.
- **Kyōsoku** - portable armrests used while sitting on the floor, often while eating. Made of wood with the cushion-like part at the top was often upholstered with silk; used by the nobility and the military elites.
- **Lotus Sutra** - Buddhist sacred text, one of the most influential in Mahayana Buddhism.
- **Musha-e** - prints of warriors, one of genres of ukiyo-e prints; having originated in the 18th century, it reached maturity in the art of Utagawa Kuniyoshi, flourishing from late 1820s on.
- **Nativism** - in the current case, interest in native legacy in early modern Japan, for example, illustration of classical subject matter in the popular art of ukiyo-e (such as, Hokusai's *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, Explained by the Nurse*; Hiroshige's *Eight Views of Omi*).
- **Nihonshoki** - one of Japan's earliest chronicle books from the 8th century.



- **Nishiki-e** - literally, "brocade pictures," a term for full-colored prints produced after 1765 and printed from multiple blocks, one for each color.
- **Noryo** - enjoying the cool of the evening.
- **Nozoki-karakuri** - a type of slide projector fitted with a lens and mirror, enjoyed popularity in Japan in the 18th - 19th centuries
- **Obi** - a sash of a kimono; obi for women were often made of silk brocade.
- **Oshiokuri-bune** - "push-through boat," fishing or transport vessel usually found in open waters.
- **Prow** - the most-forward part of the ship's bow; the prow stays above the water.
- **Rangaku** - "dutch learning". A body of Dutch knowledge and by extension of European knowledge in general that developed by Japan through their limited contact with the Dutch during Edo period at the time of Japan's self-imposed isolation.
- **Ro** - a wooden pole used to propel the boat; a sculling oar (MD)
- **Rogui** - a pivot post for *ro*
- **Sagegami** - wearing hair long and straight in back common for women of high social status from noble and military households.
- **Sankin kotai** - a system in which daimyo split their time between Edo and their locality, one year in each place. Daimyo family stayed in Edo at all times thus becoming near-hostages of daimyo loyalty; enacted by the shogunal government in order to maintain power.
- **Sansuiga** - literally, pictures of mountains and water; the term is Japanese rendering of the Chinese term *shanshuihua* (q.v.); a style of painting of idealized images of nature, depicting mountain and waters to create an impression of endlessness of the world.
- **Sasarindō** - family crest design of five bamboo grass leaves looking down and three upward looking gentian flowers; originally the crest of the Minamoto family and its supporters.
- **Setsugetsuka** - literally, "snow moon flowers," it was a frequent theme in poetry and visual arts to celebrate seasonal beauty; originated in China and became widespread in Japan.
- **Shanshuihua** - Chinese, literally meaning "mountains and waters painting," the same as Japanese *sansui* (q.v.); refers to Far Eastern paintings of idealized landscapes, fully developed in China during Song Dynasty (10-13cc).
- **Shikishigata or shikishi** - a thick square paper used for calligraphic poems or paintings. There are two standard sizes: the larger 7.6" X 6.6". and the smaller 6.6"6.2." Often these squares are decorated with mica or colored patterns overlaid with gold or silver cut into small pieces or sprinkled like dust. (After J.).
- **Shimada** - a female hairstyle worn by women of high and low status alike during the Edo period; the usage of this hairstyle was later limited to geishas.
- **Shogunate** - military government of Japan led by shogun, Japan's military ruler; shogunate existed in Japan from 1185 through 1868.

- **Suyari-gasumi** - literally, spear mist, it refers to conventional representation of mist or clouds used through the history of Japanese visual art as a framing device. In the current selection of prints it appears in Hokusai's prints from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*. See *kasumi*.
- **Tanzaku** - a long and narrow strip of paper used as a poem cards, approximately 6" long and 2.3" wide ( 36 cm x 6cm), that may be decorated with colored designs, sprinkled with cut gold, silver or mica or covered with silk. (JAANUS)
- **Tenugui** - a thin Japanese hand towel made from cotton and almost always dyed with a pattern.
- **Urourobune** - a casual wandering boat that sell light refreshments like watermelon or drinks.
- **Waka** - literally, Japanese poem; a form of court poetry, waka consists of thirty-one syllables arranged in five lines of 5, 7, 5, 7, 7 syllables each. Developed from the 7th century; see two prints by Hokusai from his series *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, Explained by the Nurse* at the exhibition.
- **Watari-bune** - literally, "crossing-over boat," a passenger ferryboat (MD).
- **Yakatabune** - a large river-based pleasure boat with a deck house that can accommodate a large number of people.
- **Yamato-e** - literally, Japanese painting; though originally of Chinese inspiration, it fully developed into Japanese national style during Heian period (8-12cc); used to treat exclusively Japanese subject matter only (literature, history, nature, people) and is characterized by a number of conventions, including using strong color, flowing lines, view from above (blown-off roof), predilection for narrative subject matter, inclusion of seasonal references; ukiyo-e style is considered to belong to the same tradition.
- **Yoshiwara** - government-licensed prostitution quarter in the city of Edo, established in 1617; genre *bijinga* in ukiyo-e is closely associated with courtesans *yūjo* that served for Yoshiwara.