



# Earthly Pleasures



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*Japanese Ukiyo-e Prints*

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HAVC Japanese Ukiyo-e Prints  
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# Foreword

*Earthly Pleasures* or, broader, *nature's riches and man*, is a topic for an exhibition project of the ukiyo-e prints curatorial course taught at RISD in the Fall Semester of 2015. When deciding on this subject matter we were curious to see how the urban art of ukiyo-e with its focus on figurative representation of celebrities dealt with the nature theme, essential for Japanese culture and all-pervading in Japanese classical visual arts and literature. Did ukiyo-e artists include images of nature in their compositions? If yes, then who, when and how? It is with this quest in mind that a selection of thirteen prints from the collection of the RISD Museum has been made.

In the process of our studies we discovered that treatment of nature in prints has evolved dramatically. It has made a long journey from rather formulaic seasonal references, often a mere framework for stylish beauties in the designs by early ukiyo-e masters, to the status of self-sufficient landscape genre with some of the most profound images of nature ever created in the prints by Hokusai.

The goal of the course was to approximate professional curating of a temporary exhibition in an art museum. Through massive research and multiple discussions students formulated the title of the exhibition, developed a well-thought out script, and examined prints in profound papers that are bound in the present catalogue. Print compositions in the extended format of triptychs were explored by multiple study teams to investigate various visual, literary and cultural connotations. Several students wrote overarching introductory articles, looking at the theme at large; an index of ukiyo-e artists represented at the exhibition is included in the catalogue.

In addition to the compelling curatorial responsibilities, students have

completed a wide range of the exhibition-related design tasks, including the book cover design, the exhibition poster, invitation cards, design of the book proper, and visual merchandize for a fictional museum shop.

The class that authored the project is now happy to invite the exhibition visitors (and catalogue readers) to observe the prints and imagine taking part in seasonal activities that are still practiced in Japan today and are still dear to the Japanese heart. We encourage you to seize an opportunity for getting in tune with nature together with those portrayed and delight in *earthly pleasures* along with them.

Elena Varshavskaya, Ph.D.  
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# **Introduction**

## Earthly Pleasures in Ukiyo-e Prints

*Isabelle Rose*

Young herbs gathered, irises cut, mushrooms foraged and persimmons picked; Earthly Pleasures presents a selection of Edo period ukiyo-e woodblock prints centered upon the idea of seasonality. A collaborative curatorial project of RISD art history students, this exhibition seeks to encompass the enduring significance of seasonal topic in ukiyo-e: from first nishiki-e by Harunobu, who is credited with the introduction of the full-color printing, to the peak of images of nature in the art of Hokusai and Hiroshige, to more narrative works in collaborative prints by Hiroshige, Kunisada and other Utagawa artists.

While attention in ukiyo-e has largely been placed on the urban environment, Japanese life has been inherently aligned with that of nature, and is a definitive aspect of Japanese culture rooted in the animistic religion of Shinto. Idealization of nature comes from the overwhelming respect for nature and the transition from ancient rituals, such as pilgrimages to Mount Fuji that were performed as a ritual of renewing life through direct contact with nature. Representations of nature became a pervasive theme in Japanese classical visual art and literature. Ukiyo-e prints of seasonality reflect how visions of nature are embedded into Japanese culture, with seasonal symbols to elegantly and implicitly describe the human condition.

Looking chronologically at the exhibition, nature appears in the early stages of nishiki-e as seasonal tropes, seen in Suzuki Harunobu's *Gathering Flowers* through modular depictions of spring flowers. The prints offer both primary

and secondary nature: Primary nature is rendered through landscape views, famous natural landmarks and fleeting atmospheric effect, whereas secondary nature references an internalized seasonality re-interpreted through gardens and flower motifs on textiles. The relationship between nature and culture is shown as reflexive; nature dominates culture, while culture interiorizes nature. This dichotomous approach to nature continues in 18th century. In the print by artist Torii Kiyonaga *Mimeguri Shrine*, nature is represented both as the topographically precise landscape, a favorite site for a public pilgrimage and in the textiles, glorified here through the style and fashion of the *bijinga* genre, or images of beautiful women in ukiyo-e.

In the 19th century ukiyo-e, the symbolism of nature was reinvented by Hokusai's prolific body of work, exemplified by the series of *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*. Transitioning from a systematic symbolization of nature, Hokusai established the *fūgaku*—landscape genre—as a self-sufficient theme, requiring no narrative or justification. This new landscape genre in ukiyo-e was founded through the philosophic content, abstracted dynamic compositions, and sensitivity to nature's materiality.

Representations of nature in ukiyo-e are subtly romanticized to bring forward the poetry of seasonality; yet all the prints accurately depict the flow of life in the culture of the four seasons. *Earthly Pleasures* illustrates this social dependency on the cyclical order of natural phenomena through the chronological curation of seasonal activities. *Earthly Pleasures* acts as a pilgrimage to indulge in Japanese seasonal activities, and in the harmony of visual poetry, culture and temporality of nature.

## Ukiyo-e Prints: Introduction

*Caitlyn Sit*

Ukiyo-e, or “pictures of the floating word” is the 17th – 19th century style of painting and woodblock printing that is rooted in yamato-e, or classical Japanese-style paintings that depicted scenes from every day life. Yamato-e was originally for aristocracy or the upper class, while woodblock printing was initially strictly used for producing Buddhist texts and printing books. However, once Japan entered a time of internal piece during the Edo period under the new shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu in the beginning of the 17th century, the middle and lower classes began to prosper and could then afford to spend their leisure time in what had used to be luxuries. Ukiyo-e flourished because it was by and for the people, accessible, and affordable. Throughout the years, the genre went from referencing different kinds of literary and historical texts to illustrating modern activities, viewpoints, and fashion, among others. During the Edo period, these prints were made using specific materials to produce the effects that viewers see in the finished print.

Traditionally, Japanese woodblock designs were carved into the blocks of sakura, or cherry wood, because of its medium hardness and weight, as well as its fine texture and straight grain. These features allowed for the high-relief technique and intricate designs that the prints used. Additionally, because cherry wood can withstand damp conditions, the woodblocks were fairly resistant against warping and swelling. Occasionally, print engravers would take advantage of the wood grain and emphasize the grain to produce a specific texture in large areas such as the sky. The handmade paper, made of paper mulberry called kōzo, also had the strength to withstand water after applica-

tion to its surface of a mixture of animal glue and alum called, dosa. The result was an absorbent yet flexible surface, though deluxe versions of prints would be produced on a thicker and more absorbent variation of the kozo paper, called h sho. Like other handmade papers, these had grid lines running on the surface from the screen that was pressed into the mulberry pulp to produce the sheet of paper. However, as a result of this process, the paper would, in time, become weaker along the slight indents.

Pigments used for ukiyo-e prints’ production ranged from organic to inorganic materials, some were made in Japan, while others were imported from other countries. Typically, translucent powder pigments were used, but colors that could not be made translucent stayed opaque. While some of these pigments dissolved or could dissolve in water, others had to be mixed with alcohol before water. One of the most influential periods came at around 1830, when a bright blue began to make its way into the ukiyo-e prints. Nicknamed the “Blue Revolution” by the American Japanese scholar, Henry Smith II, this era introduced not only advanced methods in using natural indigo, but also the imported Berlin blue or Prussian blue. A color-maker in Berlin actually accidentally discovered this chemical pigment while trying to create a cheaper substitute for the expensive cochineal red. Some printers pushed colorants further by adding metallic powders and minerals to their works. Kitagawa Utamaro’s “The Interesting Type”, for example, depicts a woman looking into a mica-covered mirror to blacken her teeth. The mica texture and subtle grainy shine was meant to represent the reflective nature of mirror. Metallic pigments were usually quite expensive, and thus were usually only used for limited edition prints, such as in Suzuki Harunobu’s Night Rain on Daisu, which employs gold and silver and was commissioned by a Tokugawa retainer, Okubo Jinshiro. Metallic powders and minerals were difficult to use, as they needed to be glued to the print with a soft brush or cotton cloth. Any leftover particles not adhered to the paper was later brushed off.

While the work is usually credited with the print designer or artist, several people would be involved in producing each work, which included the publisher, artist, engraver, and printer. First, the publisher would commission an artist to design the print. The image would then be submitted to the censors to be approved, a process wherein the censors would make sure no images included depictions of the emperor or government officials, for example. After approval,



the artist would draw the design on very thin paper. The engraver would then glue the sheet face down onto the woodblock before carefully carving. This keyblock was then sent to the printer, who would make proofs of the print and send these proofs back to the artist. After the artist had indicated where the colors were to go, the proofs would then be sent back to the engraver to carve out the individual color blocks. Once the printer received the finished blocks, he would print the keyblock first before pressing down the color blocks. With this process, up to 8000 prints could be made from one set of keyblocks, though most edition runs were around 200 prints, or the usual number of prints that could be produced within one day.

Due to the characteristics of the specific paper and inks, printers were able to develop various kinds of techniques to produce different effects. The early-Edo woodblock prints were produced as black and white images, and only used black ink. As this kind of illustration, called *sumizuri-e*, became increasingly popular, artists began to add color painting in the black lines. This method was too time-consuming to mass-produce, however, and soon, the method of producing *nishiki-e*, or multi-color prints, was created and used. This process involved producing a separate woodblock for each color used in the print and it was not uncommon to see prints with at least ten blocks. One of the most common techniques used in the making of some *nishiki-e* was *bokashi*, or the skillful technique of applying gradients. *Bokashi* is usually seen in large areas in a print, such as for the sky or grass and is created by varying the colors or color shades within a single woodblock. Another technique employed in some prints was using typically black lacquer. The lacquer was usually used to emphasize certain areas of the print with the intention of giving that part a life-like quality and is applied using the same method as that of normal color printing. Another method is to expose the woodgrain of the block, a technique briefly mentioned before. In addition to these techniques are several others, including burnishing and texturing.

In this exhibition, viewers can appreciate the precision and expertise demonstrated by not only the print designer, but also the publisher, engraver, and printer. Prints in this selection, depicting a wide range of seasonal activities, incorporate varying techniques of printing (including embossing) and coloring while introducing the specific style of some of the most prominent artists in the *ukiyo-e* tradition.

## Labor and Leisure in Ukiyo-e Prints

*Megan Farrell*

*Ukiyo-e*, a 17th – 19th century style of art of townspeople of Japan, encompassed many artists and treated a wide range of themes over its more than 200-year-long history. As an art of the common citizen, it was economically accessible and the prints' subject matter reflected this colloquial use. *Ukiyo-e* prints often depicted individuals who were not from high-status backgrounds. Instead they represented cultural interests of the city such as beautiful courtesans – the epitomes of fashion, kabuki theater actors and sumo wrestlers, drew upon myths and stories from the public consciousness, or simply depicted landscapes and activities familiar to the Japanese people at the time. The prints displayed in this exhibit portray events familiar to their original audience, scenes of daily living, experienced through both labor and leisure.

The scenes of labor explored in *Earthly Pleasures* center on life outside of large cities such as Edo (now Tokyo). The Paddies of Ono, Suruga Province, *Kajikazawa* in Kai Province, *Cormorant-fishing boat, Tosa—Bonito Fishing at Sea, Station #51, Minakuchi: a Famous Product of Gourd Strips*, are snapshots of rural life in provinces throughout Japan. Though several artists designed prints of labor scenes, it was primarily Hokusai and Hiroshige who created many of these types of prints, giving rise to the popularity of the labor/village scenes.

Hokusai's famous series of prints *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji* introduced the theme of simple human labor in all its universal significance, equivalent to nature's grandness represented by Japan's sacred mountain. Hokusai's Paddies

of Ono, Suruga Province depicts seasonal daily tasks of dwellers of Suruga Province, located on the east coast of Japan. A group of men are carrying home harvested reeds on the backs of oxen. Meanwhile, two women hold grasses on carrying frames. The marshlands and Mt. Fuji in the background exemplifies the scenic landscape these villagers work in and thrive of.

Kajikazawa in Kai Province shows a man and child fishing with cast lines into the tumultuous waves of the Fuji River, near the north-east side of Mt Fuji. The waves crashing over the rocks are rendered in Hokusai's signature clawed-shaped waves. But the fishermen are fully accepting nature's intensity and steadfastly continue with their task.

Cormorant-fishing boat, by Katsukawa Shunzan, shows a traditional East Asian fishing technique practiced on several Japanese rivers, especially around Kyoto. Trained cormorant birds dive to catch fish, swallowing them whole and carrying them in a pouch in their necks until the fishermen retrieve the fish from the bird's throats. Fires on the front of the boats serve as lanterns for the fishermen and birds. A 12th century poem included in the design of this fan-shaped print testifies to the poetization of fishermen labor in Japan.

Still another print of fishing is by Hiroshige: Tosa—Bonito Fishing at Sea conveys the communal and lively work of the southwestern province, Tosa. The fishermen traditionally used poles rather than nets when fishing for bonito, believing that this method caused less stress and damage to the fish. The soft oranges in the sky characterize the early morning light the fisherman work in. Hiroshige is equally sensitive to the ever-changing light effects over the sea and to the peculiarities of human behavior captured by him in this print with quite remarkable precision.

There is another Hiroshige's print at the exhibition that explores the theme of labor, this time in a small village. The sheet Station #51, Minakuchi : a Famous Product of Gourd Strips comes from the artist's most famous woodcut set Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road (his earliest work on this topic). The print depicts three women in the foreground of a village scene peeling and drying gourd strips. These gourd strips known as kanpyo is a specialty product that place was famous for. This print reflects an interest in the daily culture and work of a small town.

All these prints further reveal the traditions and livelihoods of Edo Period Japan. These labor scenes highlight an integration of nature into one's daily

routine. This same balance is seen in ukiyo-e prints depicting periods of leisure, some of which are discussed below, revealing the value and reverence the Japanese culture holds towards nature.

# Early Spring

*New Year Celebrations*



Gathering Flowers, Suzuki Harunobu, ca. 1767

## Gathering Flowers by Suzuki Harunobu

*Daniel Chae*

Printed two years after developing his polychrome technique in 1765, *Gathering Flowers* by Suzuki Harunobu is a combination of familiar ukiyo-e motifs and Harunobu's distinct style. In the print two women in kimonos gather flowers under a blossoming cherry tree against the characteristically bare, two-toned, backdrop. It is a depiction of the everyday, of the common and accessible. Such a scene would have been well embedded in the cultural language of the people of Edo, something Harunobu understood well. His most common subject, after all, was domestic life in Edo, with many subtle references to the multiple layers of culture innately present in it. What gives prominence to his portrayals of Edo life is not merely the documentation and accessibility of the subject matter, but instead the idealized and otherworldly quality he imbues on familiar scenes through his distinct portrayal of the female form.

In this regard, *Gathering Flowers* is no exception. The women are positioned center as the two largest entities in the print, squarely fixed at the top of the visual hierarchy. They are not to be missed. Yet despite commanding such juxtapositional weight within the context of the frame, the women themselves are depicted with the lightest of line marks. This is to become the signature mark of Harunobu: the women as delicate and forever youthful, possessed by a detached, dreamlike demeanor. Influenced by Nishikawa Sukenobu's portrayal of the female form as graceful and aristocratic, Harunobu surpassed his predecessor by pushing this dimension of detachment and idealization that existed

within the portrayal of aristocracy and formed it into a distinct visual language through which women, despite any social context, could be imbued with the same quality. Consider the variation of line weights used within this piece: the lightest being reserved for the women. From their disproportionately small hands to their emotionless faces, they should all be considered part of Harunobu's vast visual language.

It is through this juxtaposition of the otherworldly, idealized women upon the backdrop of the customary, the habitual that Harunobu's work is given tangibility. For his female motif to work, it has to be placed within the context of the familiar, a frame all people of Edo could have understood. Ukiyo-e itself is of the people—a pop-culture. It is a layered art form that thus inherently assumes a certain knowledge of context from the viewer, something quite lacking a few centuries hereafter. Fortunately, Harunobu opts to tuck context under subtlety to rewards conscious examination. For example, upon examining the women's kimonos, the cherry tree, and the flowers being gathered, it becomes possible to discern the season as early to mid-spring.

The kimono of the woman on the right depicts bamboo leaves with snow and several sparrows patterned throughout. While snow on the leaves could indicate either a coming winter or a passing one (muddling the distinction between fall, winter, or spring), sparrows twitting in bamboo is a standard late winter motif. Thus concluding, the kimono is symbolic of the advent of spring. The same process can be applied to the other kimono to arrive at a similar conclusion. While the ponds alone can't be used to define the specific season—especially not such an abstract rendering—when combined with the *karazuri*, the blank printing, of blooming flowers it becomes easy to narrow the timeframe. This ability to subtly nest context cues—especially ones relating to season—would have come naturally to Harunobu at this point.

His undeniably greatest contribution to ukiyo-e as a craftsman was the development of the polychrome print—a milestone that rendered all previous techniques obsolete and marked the final stage of technological development in ukiyo-e. Yet this was only possible, in no small part, through his wealthy benefactors—prominent poets or publishers from literary circles able to finance luxury print editions. It was famous poet, Kikurensa Kyosen that commissioned Harunobu the design of *e-goyomi* (illustrated calendar) prints in 1765. Through Kyosen's resources, Harunobu was able to experiment with the finest

materials. Traditional but cheap catalpa wood was replaced by the stronger cherry, paints were applied in multiple thick coats, and custom-cut notches could now allow for multiple registries at once. Even in Harunobu's earliest *e-goyomi* a certain savvy for subtly hiding context exists, a savvy further-honed for two years before being applied to *Gathering Flowers*.

Consider the cherry tree framing the upper right corner of the print. It is a common visual motif in ukiyo-e performing both as a conceptual appeal to deeply rooted ties between Japanese aesthetics and nature, and as a framing device to set asymmetry. But in *Gathering Flowers*, Harunobu appropriates this common motif as a simple calendar. The cherry tree as an entity would have been—as with the act of gathering flowers—in the common culture of the people of Edo. It would have been a usual sight in the spring as cherry trees are native to Edo (present-day Tokyo). Thus, the blossoming of the tree would have been a clear cue to the viewers of the seasonal context in which this scene takes place. The same can be applied to picking flowers, tentatively identified here as cudweed (Latin: *Pseudognaphalium affine*, Japanese: *gogyō* or *hahakogusa*) being gathered by the women. If identified correctly, it is one of Seven Herbs of Spring or the grasses put into the so-called seven-spring-herb soup (*nanakusa*) eaten on the Seventh Day of the First Month to attract good fortune for the year.

Representation of the flowers being gathered emphasizes the seasonal message of this print.



Mimeguri Shrine: Spring Promenade at Mukojima, Torii Kiyonaga, ca.1787

## Mimeguri Shrine: Spring Outing at Mukojima by Torii Kiyonaga

*Do Yun Kwak, Fallon Wong, Saskia Fleishman, Minkyung Kim*

Mimeguri Shrine: Spring Outing at Mukojima by Torii Kiyonaga is a nishiki-e triptych or a composition, consisting of three polychrome woodblock prints which together capture seven elegant women collecting herbs on a stroll. Tall and elegant, they are shown full-length in the foreground against a vast panoramic landscape. Although each print of the triptych can be viewed individually, when placed together they form a coherent composition united not only by the landscape, but also by the movements, gestures and gazes of the women. The composition and attention to detail provides the viewer with an understanding of important aspects of Japanese culture and life during the Edo period.

The print illustrates seven beautiful women taking a walk in the vicinity of the Mimeguri Inari Shrine. Due to their dress, these women are recognized to be courtesans engaging in their spring ritual of collecting herbs. The background depicts the view from Mukojima, location of Mimeguri Inari Shrine, with the Sumida River and the Asakusa district in the distance. In the right print, there is a tea house for casual meetings and the shrine is represented by the two torii in the left print.

Kiyonaga is renowned for creating bijinga, which is one of the leading ukiyo-e genres. Bijinga's literal translation is "images of beautiful people". In this triptych, the female figures are the focal point, and are drawn in great detail.

They are graceful and stylish, revealing them as fashionable urban beauties.

In Japan, visual images and text are read from right-to-left. Viewers would, therefore, first observe the right triptych. There is a woman bending over picking a fresh green shoot while holding a bundle of herbs in her other hand. The female figures are engaged in the seasonal activity of collecting spring herbs and enjoying a stroll on a warm spring day.

The traditional Japanese New Year celebrations coincide with the advent of spring. Adding the young shoots, which are called the seven herbs of spring or *nanakusa*, to rice gruel is a traditional New Year's meal. The finding and tasting of the new grasses brings the joy of discovery and direct experience of the new season. The felicitous concept behind the "seven herbs of spring" was originally imported from China inspiring the Japanese to observe the Festival of the Young Herbs (*wakana no sekku*). "Early in Heian period on the seventh day of the New Year of the lunar calendar, nobles presented to the emperor a gruel to which seven plants were added that came to be known as the Seven Herbs of Spring." This gruel has been long believed to help avoid misfortune and to ensure a long life. Beginning in the Heian period on this custom gained popularity among commoners. Herb gathering is a common theme in *ukiyo-e* prints since it was such a distinctive seasonal activity. Another good example is the print by Utagawa Toyokuni entitled *Gathering Herbs at Mimeguri* (1816).

Since a triptych consists of three separate prints, Kiyonaga used the gaze of the seven women to direct the viewer's eyes, contributing to the overall harmony of the triptych. By observing the print in a right to left direction, starting from the foreground and eventually fading into the background, Kiyonaga positioned the women walking in different directions, allowing viewers to appreciate the triptych as a whole. The gaze and gestures of the seven women adds fluidity and creates movement between the three prints. Although the colors in the triptych do not have gradation, the contrast created by the vast difference in scale and movement of the figures and landscape forms depth within the triptych. All the characters are involved in conversation with each other bringing logic to the arrangement of the company and adding to the balance of the composition. Furthermore, Kiyonaga's evenly distributed color palette, which is mainly composed of orange and black, further unifies the triptych, allowing the viewer's eye to move back and forth along the three prints.

The clothing of the women and their assistants is drawn in great detail

with special attention paid to floral and geometric patterns. One may say that sensitivity to nature is emphasized by its repetition in the textiles of the women's clothing. The first woman on the far right is wearing a popular striped kimono and her obi, or sash, is decorated with a variation of *karakusa*, pattern of Chinese grasses. The woman to her left is wearing a kimono with cherry blossoms. The right most women in the center triptych is holding her black sash which has the geometric pattern called *asa-no-ha*. *Asa-no-ha* means "hemp leaf" and is a repeating six-sided geometric design that resembles the leaves of the hemp plant. The design is diamonds surrounding a central point. This design was very popular in the Edo period and was prominent in kabuki theater actor costumes. On this woman's kimono, the geometric pattern called *sayagata* is used. This design is a pattern derived from interlocking swastikas. It was commonly used on silk and combined with designs of nature. The woman in the center has a yellow obi which has the design called *takara-zukushi*. This design is composed of eight lucky treasures of Chinese origin. The crest on both these women's kimonos is an ivy leaf. Looking to her left, on the bottom of the women's all black kimono is a pattern called *shippo* or "seven treasures". This pattern is composed of overlapping circles with equal overlaps on all four sides. The crest on her kimono is a triple oak leaf. In the left print, the rightmost woman's kimono has ivy leaves printed on it, and her obi is also decorated with *karakusa*. The leftmost woman's kimono is decorated with a meandering stream.

Traditionally, the women dress and groom to look their finest for such a pleasurable outing. All the women have the same Shimada hairstyle. Their fine accessories—combs and hairpins in the hairdos, a smoking pipe, hand-held folding fans, traditional footwear, and a variety of sunshine protective objects including a broad round sedge hat and an umbrella, combine to create a chic and trendy image of these women as paragons of femininity. Kiyonaga has included assistants to the courtesans on the right and left prints of the triptych. The small man in the right print may be *wakaimono*, who is an attendant to help the ladies with their outings such as by holding their umbrellas. The man's garment is much less ornate than those of the courtesans, which, together with his background position, suggests his service role. The smaller figure in the left print is, perhaps, a *shinzo*—a young female attendant to a high-class courtesan.<sup>6</sup> The smaller scale of the assistants' figures, their placement in the second tier, and their more modest clothing serve to further emphasize the beauty and

elegance of the seven women in the foreground.

Religion has historically played an important role in Japanese culture. Shinto is the most important religion in Japan; it is inseparable from Japanese' everyday life. The name, Shinto, is translated as the “way of the Gods.” A Shinto shrine is a sacred area of worship for the Shinto kami, the Shinto deities. Mimeguri Inari Shrine was a popular shrine to visit during the Edo period. The word “mimeguri” means “three turns in a circle,” and the word “inari” means “fox”. According to the legend, an old man found a white fox buried beneath the shrine. After finding the fox, it came to life, spun around in a circle three times, and then disappeared. On the whole, foxes are considered as sacred animals in Shinto. They are associated with the rice harvest and its protection. The importance of Shinto in Japanese culture is demonstrated by employing the activity of visiting shrines as illustrated in this triptych.

The details included in the landscape and setting further emphasize the importance of Shinto in the Japanese culture. Kiyonaga depicts the beautiful women walking on the grounds adjacent to the Mimeguri Inari Shrine. Mimeguri Inari shrine is depicted behind the three women on the left print. Close to the bank of the Sumida River, there are two torii gates that are signifiers for Shinto Shrines. They are the entrance to the famous shrine. The torii on the far left is made out of stone while the adjacent torii on the right is made out of wood and is painted red. The stone torii marks the outer gates whereas the wooden torii are often closer to the shrine grounds. The two torii define the entrance and separation of the sacred shrine grounds from the outside temporal world. In front of the two torii, there are staircases with pathways called sandō, leading from them. There are two women walking down the stairs, which were embedded in the embankment to provide access to the shrine in the lowland. The placement of small figures in the background directs the viewer's eye towards the shrine.

Moving further into the background, the landscape is a view from Mukojima—one of the most famous scenic spots in Edo. According to the map in Figure 1, the triptych depicts Mukojima lush grounds in the foreground, a part of Mimeguri Inari Shrine in the middle ground, and the Sumida River and Asakusa district in the background. In the right print, there is a thatched-roof building behind a bamboo fence in an overgrown garden with a stone lantern. There is a man with two women at the entrance next to a round window. The

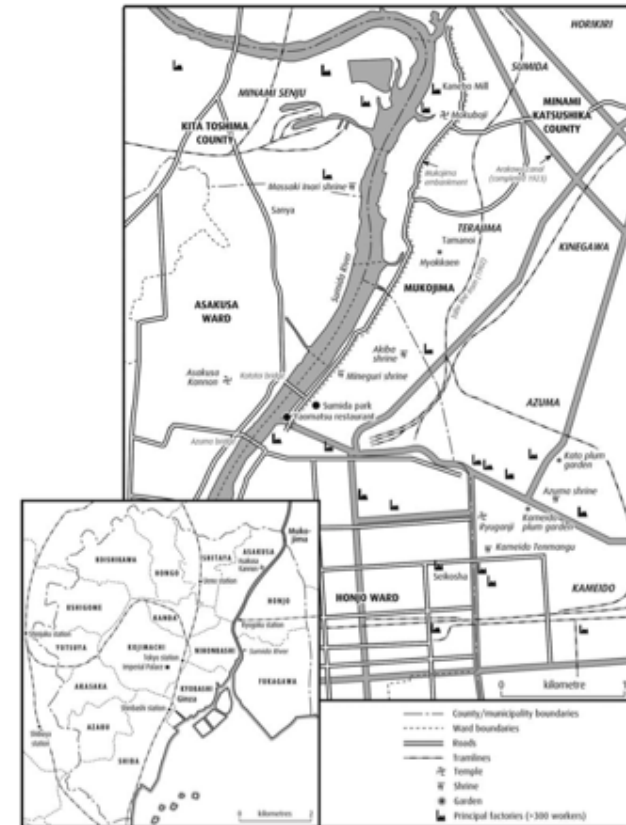


Figure 1. Map showing Mukōjima and its location in



door is opened slightly, revealing the interior structure. Rendered with great detail, there is a traditional Japanese sliding wall made out of wood and washi paper. The purpose of the building remains uncertain, but it can be presumed to be restaurant or a tea-house with visitors or waitresses on the threshold. Across the river, also on the right side print, there are the roofs of two houses peeking through the clustered trees. There is a small bridge made out of stone and wood which links the grove with a more populated area across another water arm. Moving to the left, Asakusa temple stands tall amongst the buildings on the low ground. Along the river bank are bamboo fences placed to protect the Asakusa district. Numerous boats, some with small house-like structures installed, are pulled to the bank in a section where there are no fences blocking the way to the town.

As a whole and upon first glance, it is easy to appreciate the quality of the triptych, such as the finesse of line, color choices, and stylistic representation of the figures. Despite the several vertical fold marks across all three sheets of the triptych, the colors of the prints are still vibrant, proving the good condition of the piece at the RISD museum collection.

In conclusion, Kiyonaga's attention to detail in the triptych provides documentation of everyday life and culture during the Edo period. This includes the idealization of feminine beauty and elegance, the achievements in the Japanese textile industry, the importance of visits to Shinto shrines, the seasonal spring celebration, and the famous view of Edo. These are essential in understanding the Japanese culture during that time period. The triptych is sophisticated through its considerations and is extraordinary in its artistic sensitivity. Kiyonaga has created an idealization of feminine beauty that is original and innovative. The seven women are accentuated as the main subject of the triptych through the stage-like setting. It focuses viewers' attention on the importance of the women's spring trip and their graceful and delicate depiction. Although the visual landscape is secondary to the figures' beauty, the deep connection of these women to their natural and cultural environment is emphasized through setting this parade of splendor at the outset of a new season and through showing women directly experiencing nature's awakening by gathering the freshly grown young herbs.

# Late Spring to Early Summer

*Mid-April to Mid-June*



Gathering Shells, Utagawa Kunisada, 1843-1847

## Gathering Shells by Utagawa Kunisada

*Yuri Lee*

This Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock print is titled *Shiohigari* (潮干狩), which literally means “low tide hunt” and can be interpreted in English as “Gathering Shells” or “Clam Digging.” This piece is designed by Utagawa Kunisada, one of the most significant ukiyo-e print artists of the Edo period.

On the print, a young attractive woman, nicely coiffured and attired, is shown full-length against the blank background with just a strip of gradated blue at the top, likely indicating the sky. She is hurrying ahead, holding in place a hand-towel *tenugui* on her right shoulder while carrying a basket in her left hand.

The woman’s activeness is described not only with her posture and the movement of her clothing, but also with her hair. The hair bun of her *Shimada* style chignon is loosely tied up with different hair strings and golden Japanese traditional hairpin called *kanzashi* (簪). Her shorter hair is falling down to her cheeks, and yet she doesn’t seem to care much about it.

Traditional dress that she is wearing, a kimono, is made of fabric of various patterns in rather bold colors. Her outer dark-orange kimono is decorated with checked pattern, all lines of which are clearly articulated. Checked patterned textiles were very fashionable in Edo period Japan, yet the woman’s kimono looks rather plain since many textiles during the same period were very fancy and flamboyant adorned with nature-derived patterns. Many kimonos of Edo period were made out of cotton or sometimes hemp since silk production was

limited during the time, and regulations allowed only women of the samurai class to own silk kimonos. Two contrasting shades of orange and the blue of her kimono's hem and of the sash obi to make her stand out against the similarly warm-toned paper.

Though the woman is shown without any environment, the fact that she is carrying a basket with a couple of shell-like objects discernable within, her being barefoot and moving fast forward all suggest that she is in the middle of doing something on the seashore. The clue is given by a small inset composition, the so-called koma-e (小間絵), placed in the upper right-hand quarter of the sheet. Insets were occasionally used in ukiyo-e prints to expand the meaning of the main image, to which it may be related in multiple ways.

The importance of koma-e here is suggested by its very location: Japanese text is read from right to left top to bottom; the same, one can assume, was the direction of the glance of print viewers. Thus the inset would have caught attention of the original beholder right away. Here the inset shows a small seaside town/hamlet with houses set among the low hills at the shore. Some children can be seen at the sand bank, a basket similar to the one the woman is holding stands at the sand edge. They are out there to gather clams—most likely with other members of the community who are left beyond the image, and it is there that the large-scale woman on the print belongs to. Shell gathering is an important aspect of Japanese culture. Low tide gathering was seasonal—mainly occurred in 3rd and 4th month of old calendar corresponding to the 4th and 5th month of today; mention that this kind of hunting in low tide became so firmly associated with the spring that the word “shiogari” became a seasonal word used in poetry. The act of gathering clamming was regarded a family event. Families would visit famous shell-gathering places during spring and while parents were gathering shells, children enjoyed themselves playing in the sand.

It is exactly children at play that are depicted on the inset. Maybe one child just fell down in a game or there happened some kind of fighting but it is considered to be traditional spring fun for children to be spending time in shallow waters of the low-tide. Thus the inset provides the context of the figure of the woman. It is interesting also that the two images—the woman and the inset—are echoing each other in terms of color: the uneven blue of the woman's obi is in resound with the bluish—greenish hills of the inset, maybe also

with the irregular areas of water; orange, the main color of the woman's kimono re-appears in the gradated strip of sunlight at the top of the inset and in the clothing of some of the children.

Both the print and the inset contain writings. The inscription in the inset reads “Student Kunimasa” (Monjin Kunimasa) while the big print bears one of the artistic names of Kunisada—the inscription says Kochoro Toyokuni. Next to this name one may see the round seal of the Utagawa School artists, the toshidama, the publisher's seal and the censorship seal.

Thus this print is an example of teacher–student collaboration. Such student- teacher co-production usually wasn't a real planned collaboration but rather the interior studio decision.

Another interesting aspect of this print is that a full-length woman depicted here is a case of re-using by Kunisada of his earlier design. That earlier design is a very elaborate triptych showing three beauties with their rich catch after the hunt in shallow waters. The three appear against detailed seascape with numerous boats and hilly landscape with cherries in full bloom; the woman on the left sheet is nearly identical to the woman at the RISD print. She is moving ahead, slightly hunched, barefoot, with the towel across her right shoulder held by the same gesture. Her catch is suspended from a pole that she is carrying in her left hand together with another beauty. Both women share somewhat harsh style of beauty characteristic for the Utagawa School; both are wearing checked patterned kimono, but in earlier design the woman's appearance is much more deliberate and she certainly represents a courtesan and not just an young attractive woman from among the commoners.

In conclusion, this print provided multiple perspectives of Edo period Japan and the ukiyo-e woodcut tradition. It is an example of bijinga but of the later stage of bijinga when common women were often represented, not just the courtesans; it illustrates important seasonal activity such as spring low tide hunting. For this specific print, it doesn't operate with the continuous space but uses a koma-e—an inset in order to provide the context for the main figure. The print exemplifies the practice of teacher – student collaboration/co-production. Additionally, the print represents an interesting case of self-citation. Altogether, the print brings together Japanese popular culture of everyday life and Japanese aesthetics by depicting fashion and beauty and thus comprehensively reflects its time and captures its spirit.



Nobuto Bay, Katsushika Hokusai, ca. 1831–35

## Nobuto Bay by Katsushika Hokusai

*Isabelle Rose & Mint Pitaksuteephong*

Nobuto Ura or Nobuto Bay is a print from the Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji series by Katsushika Hokusai. The print depicts dwellers of Nobuto, a village in the bay of Edo, participating in Japan's favorite spring activity of 'shiohigari'. Translated, 'shiohigari' literally means 'hunt in shallow waters' and is enjoyed by Japanese families, who forage for clams and whose children play at low tide.

The narrative harmonizes clam pickers, torii gates, land and sea, all overlooked by the pure calm of Mount Fuji. In the foreground villagers are placed in the shallow waters of the low tide and underneath the torii gate. The first group has three figures who appear to be done with picking clams as their baskets are full. The second group consists of two men still picking the clams; both men are bent over their baskets that seem submerged in water. The third pair is formed by two women, who are having a lively conversation that seems to keep them from beginning their clam hunt. They are dressed in kimonos of darker colors, green and blue, and have hand-towels *tenugui* wrapped around their heads. Both are equipped with small rakes for clamming—one has lowered hers, ready to use it, the other has hers on her shoulder, a miniscule detail difficult to discern but obviously important enough for the artist to depict it. Both women are holding their yet empty baskets in left hands. The fourth pair is comprised of children playing in low tide while the adults are doing their jobs. Each grouping of figures in the print animates different activities that show how the location functions as a community space.

Clam picking is set on both a land and seascape, and is separated by the two Shinto shrine gates.

The torii gates dominate the foreground and the entire composition, a large shrine that happens to provide an entry way for the activity of clam picking. The large gate and smaller gate act as an emphatic dramatic vertical compositional element, dissecting the composition in half and creating a dramatic angle in the sky. The rest of the composition is relatively horizontal and spans the picture plane.

The shrine gate torii embodies Shintoism and establishes the cultural context of religion in Japan. The gates function as a symbol to reference both a reverent communication with the nature's spirits kami and a message of divine protection to the native villagers of the surrounding wetland. This religious connotation of the gates could suggest another symbolist manifestation of protection and a religious reverence, as Mount Fuji is believed to be Princess Konohanasakuya-hime, who is the Shinto Goddess and the symbol of Japanese life, also recognized through her emblem as a cherry blossom. Represented in Japanese mythology, she is a mythical wife of Ninigi-no-mikoto, the divine grandson of Amaterasu, Shinto main goddess, sent by her down to earth to rule over Japan. It is believed that her powers will stop the volcano from erupting and she associated with earthly abundance and immortal power.

Several factors drove Hokusai's devotion to Mount Fuji. Its significance comes from the Taoist belief that it is the secret of immortality, and his continuous veneration of the mountain illustrated his own obsession with the idea of transcendence and an elixir of immortality. Within *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* Hokusai uses the recurring theme of Mount Fuji as a staple to explore genre scenes in the tradition of Japanese woodblock narrative tableaux. Here, in the middle of the horizon line on the third upper hand part of the picture plane, Mount Fuji is depicted at a small scale and in a more subtle composition than those of his other works in the series. The shape is depicted using the white of paper, honoring a materially pure and humbling view of Mount Fuji. The materiality of the white of the paper is repeated in almost all the prints of the set. When Hokusai fills the shape with color or gradients of color, there is still a small part of Mount Fuji that retains the earthly modesty of the material of paper.

In order to render the strong serenity of Mount Fuji, Hokusai uses in this

representation a visual device of imagistic coupling. Each element of the design is given by the artist another one to form a pair, or is repeated as multiple modules. The torii gates of the Shinto shrine are repeated twice with a smaller structure as an entryway into the larger gate. The figures of all those who are involved in the seasonal activity of forging for clams beneath and surrounding the gates, are arranged as pairs, and so are two boats in the distance that expand this narrative. The houses in the upper middle ground also create a community, and even the ridges on the thatched roof in the lower right-hand corner are repeated, forming a rhythmic arrangement of forms. Framed by the larger gate of the Shinto shrine, Mount Fuji stands as a singular entity in the background, embodying the idea of rebirth, divinity and sacredness. Rebirth functions in the symbol of Mount Fuji through the idea of pilgrimage, Edo commoners would climb to the sacred peak as a ritual that performed as a spiritual reawakening.

Landscape and sea dominate the middle ground and stages the scene where the shell pickers forage. Scale is used in this print as a way of creating perspective. Clam pickers mirror the receding of the landscape and lessen in scale as they go from the foreground into the background. The picture plane reads right to left, from the rolling verdian hills of the shore and into the seascape with shell gathers. The absence of figures in the landscape is constituted by the reticulation of grass in the landscape, repetition of clusters of foliage and groupings of thatched houses.

A similar composition and perspective is seen in Hokusai's earlier painting, *Gathering Shellfish at Ebb Tide* (1806 – 11), where there is play in scale of figures who are gathering shellfish at the tide with Fuji mountain receding in the distance. A possible reference to this earlier painting, Hokusai may have reinterpreted and altered other visual elements, such as replacing the figures on the right with hills and houses to further integrate the concept of human interacting with nature.

The print is limited to a palette of green, dark green, blue, indigo and beige. Atmosphere is created through gradient and layering the translucent, water based pigments. These colors are used here to represent the rural life in Japan, especially Berlin blue that is seen primarily in the water and sky, as well as mirrored in the commoner's indigo-dyed cotton yukata. The unifying key block in this print is printed in the Berlin blue pigment, a newly introduced pigment at the time the series were made. The coherence of *Thirty-six Views of Mount*

Fuji series is partly established through Berlin blue that is primarily used to represent the colors of the sky and water that surround Mount Fuji. The Berlin blue outline attests to the atmosphere of the wetland location, the muted color palette of the print remains subtle through the softness of the blue. Hokusai's color palette generalizes the weather, the scenery and other aspects of nature. The subdued, earthly palette harmonizes the human interaction with nature.

Hokusai's trademark Berlin blue gradient sweeps across the sky, and within this gradient we are able to determine the condition of print. While the masterfulness of the print is inherent in the design, composition and artistic decisions, color has started to subdue over time.

The pigments have aged slightly over time and compared to other copies of the design the colors are slightly less vibrant. The white of the paper has yellowed slightly and the green is not as vibrant as other copies of the print. Through the yellowing of the paper, the Berlin blue has also faded and has a more cerulean gradient. The sky also shows small black dots possibly as a result of handling the print over time. In spite of certain fading and other flaws in the condition, Nobuto Ura stands as testament to Hokusai's masterful craftsmanship and represents ukiyo-e at its greatest artistic height.

On the whole this print brings the viewer right into the midst of Japan's life of the Edo period. It makes one witness the perpetual flux of simple human existence intertwined with that of nature and continuing against the timeless Mt. Fuji. His depiction of Mount Fuji seems to go beyond the woodblock ink, the magic and serenity inherent in the materiality of the paper and the object.

The print attests to deep understanding of human/nature unity in Hokusai's compelling design and testifies to the philosophical depth and artistic sophistication of the popular art form of ukiyo-e woodcut.

# **First Bonito**

*Mid-April*





Tosa: Bonito Fishing at Sea, Utagawa Hiroshige, 1855

## Tosa: Bonito Fishing at Sea by Utagawa Hiroshige

*Erika Chang, Jessica Song, Tang Hon Juan*

Hiroshige's Tosa Province: Bonito Fishing at Sea takes place on the southern coastline of Japan, laying out a prominent vista of a scene of fishermen catching bonito fish off of the coast. This type of woodblock print called nishiki-e is created with ink and color on paper. The print gives indication of the coast with the mountains and the line of seven boats receding into the distance in a distinct zigzagging pattern. Two sailboats are shown farthest away, closer to the mountains with the sun hinted over the horizon. It is unclear whether it is dawn or dusk, as fish are equally active within either of those times. With the stronger, more animated currents depicted, it is most likely that they are fishing at dusk.

Hiroshige's details are abundant throughout his work, many of which may be seen by looking closer at each of the items within. Five boats that appear preceding the sailboats are growing larger in perspective as they get closer to the viewer. Based on Hiroshige's contemporaries' renditions of boats, the boats at the foreground of the print are oshiokuri-bune (押送船 "push-through boat"), a fishing vessel usually found in open water. These boats, being fishing boats, do not have sails. However, some oars can be seen resting on the back of the front boat, next to the upright posts called hashirauke do (柱受胴), or alternatively, yokogami (横神 "horizontal spirit"). In the middle of every boat rests a large container of water (presumably filled with fresh bait); the container itself is elevated by 2 feet, wrapped with green ropes for support. Hiroshige's rendition

of the fishing boat includes the oshiokuri-bune with straw matting draped over the washboard, in which the straw (コモ, komo) functions “as wave breakers in rough seas or to cover cargo in storms”. Each of these boats have 5 to 7 people on board, who split bait and fishing jobs evenly amongst the members of the group. The men in charge of fishing are holding fishing poles made of bamboo. The fishermen wear green, grey, and reddish-brown garments (green being the most common amongst all, giving the impression of a uniform). They also wear tenugui that either cover the head, tied around like a headband, or sit on top the head; some have their wide-brimmed straw hats called kasa on or leave their headgear hanging off of their shoulders. The fishermen's faces are often contorted into exaggerated expressions revealing physical strain or excitement. Some of the fishermen throw smaller fish into the water as bait to lure the bonito fish closer to the sides of the boat, subsequently casting gill nets over to immediately catch the fish. A total of five bonito fish can be seen, two on the boat and three in the water.

The image within the outline encasing the print (especially the cropped boat) allows the viewer to imagine how vast the waters could be. Within this frame there is a flow created by the land, the boats, and the waves. The zigzagging pattern allows the viewer's eyes to move forward and backward within the piece, bringing the onlooker closer, either to the front of the piece (being the closest boat) or farther, propelling backwards toward the southern coastline. There are detailed and realistic representations of the bonito fish and figures within the boats. Thin lines are formed delicately, backed up by a clear mastery of ink in Hiroshige's original design for his dynamic and precise line-work in capturing people's characters. The lines' wispy, waify form represents the varying human emotions displayed, all with distinct traits. Emotions of toil are rendered through the facial expressions of the fishermen and the hard terrain-like waves rocking outside of their boat. Hiroshige balances the vertical structure of the print by creating a horizontal accent in the color gradient at the top and at the bottom of the composition. Moreover, the gradient of the sky is then repeated twice, at the top and bottom of the sky at the horizon line. By using vibrant colors for the water in the rhythmic pattern of the waves, Hiroshige makes it easier for the viewer to focus on the fishing boats and the various actions the fisherman performed.

To specifically fish for bonitos requires moving farther away from the

shoreline, usually to the distance of around 3 miles from the coastline. Bonito fish are known for being particularly strong, fighting back and pulling hard—Hiroshige manages to capture the struggle through the fishermen's facial expressions. Fishermen know that “bonito are attracted to shoals of smaller fish and tend to form schools that aggressively attack the shoal, driving them to the surface of the water. Birds are attracted by this turmoil, swooping into the fray for their pickings. This spectacle is a signal for fishermen who are intent on taking advantage of the bonito schools work.” Japanese people usually prepare the bonito fish dry (katsuobushi—dried bonito flakes to be utilized as accents for dishes). The “drying racks” were perhaps used to bleed the fish out or to preemptively remove the wetness of the fish before being sent back onto land for the process of drying. The bait fish are called kibinago (silver-stripe round herring) which by themselves can also be eaten (in this instance, however, they were used as fishing bait to get bigger fish). The kibinago was separately caught by divers to utilize for pole and line fishing when catching bonito and tuna. Hiroshige has made other prints involving the bonito fish, such as “Three Views of Nature: Bonito, Butterflies and Bats”, “A Bonito”, highlighting the importance of the fish in the Tosa Province, which is known today as Kochi Prefecture on Shikoku Island.

Hiroshige's series Famous Places in the Sixty-odd Provinces (of Japan) hone in on various aspects of the Edo Period that were highly relevant to its time: scenic bays, shrines, temples, and islands. Tosa Province: Bonito Fishing at Sea and its fishing theme were probably conceptualized for the bonito fish's high value in the fishing districts of early summer. Hiroshige captured the liveliness of the fishermen acting industriously in the cramped boats. Throughout Hiroshige's numerous prints of Edo Japan, he made sure to detail each body of water with unique traits pertaining to that specific place. Tosa Province's waters in particular seem exaggerated in their intensity of undulating waves, with highlights of sky blue glistening over a darker cerulean. White foam is also playfully decorating the sides of the boats in the line of contact. As the sea recedes into the ocean in the distance, the ocean's deep blue hues become more saturated meeting halfway with a very white sky, seemingly without clouds nor sun. Tosa Province suffered often from its lack of affluence, promptly shown through the ordinariness of the boats and the fishermen with little to no decoration, looking rather plain in contrast to the sea, which serves as the piece's



Top: A Bonito, ca. 1882-3 Bottom: Three Views of Nature: Bonito, Butterflies and Bats, ca. 1840

most ornate and important character.

The print contains several inscriptions enclosed in cartouches and some separate seals. The cartouches and seals within the print are skillfully placed in a way that does not interfere with the composition. Moreover, the colored cartouches actively participate in the composition—the red rectangle at the print’s top balances the red rectangle with Hiroshige’s signature at the left, coming together and bringing a strong warm color to the print full of blues. The cartouches at the top right inform the viewer of the series the print belongs to (the rightmost) and of the title of the piece (the one to the lower left). The print is signed as Hiroshige hitsu 広重筆 (“by the brush of Hiroshige”). At further inspection, three seals can be seen. The seal at the bottom left corner is the publisher’s seal; at the top right margin there are two different, additional seals: the right one is the censorship seal which reads “aratame” (examined, ), and the left one is the date seal, indicating that the print was published in the Year of the Hare, the 9th Month (卯九). The overall condition appears crisp; the colors are vibrant with but a few printing mistakes.

Ukiyo-e, by definition, stands for “pictures of the floating world”. These were paintings and woodblock prints supported by the people in the middle class of society (shomin 庶民, or common people), mainly in the city of Edo. Because of the localization in Edo, ukiyo-e was also called edo-e 江戸絵. The term ukiyo-e, “derives from the fact that they depict the activities of a transient (floating), focusing on the enjoyable world. Ukiyo-e woodcuts were mass-produced in order to fulfill a great demand among middle-class people, who were their major audience. The demand rose for images of contemporary urban life, of images that depicted the culture and lives of commoners. In Japan, ukiyo-e was considered not more than a popular art form. However, “the art of ukiyo-e woodblock prints underwent great re-evaluation in Europe and America in the late 19th century to the early 20th century, and greatly influenced the artistic movements of Impressionism and Art Nouveau.”

Hiroshige was part of the famous Utagawa School, the most prolific studio of ukiyo-e designers, booming among its contemporaries in the second quarter of the 19th century. Hiroshige’s forte were views of Japan’s nature: “Hiroshige was best known for landscape prints... and his gentle, intimate style, which was a marked contrast to the dramatic, structural paintings of his senior contemporary, Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎 (1760 – 1849).” Hiroshige’s works were recog-

nized in his country and overseas already in his lifetime. Hiroshige's prints and paintings conveyed in a pure visual form the Japanese civilization's relationship with nature. His works portray nature as not being a "mere tool to be used or abused at will by man, but are expressions of the divine life present in each, and each becomes the interpreter and manifestation of this life." With "Bonito Fishing," however, Hiroshige depicts the violence of man applied to nature, albeit understood as a normal and necessary activity fundamental for supporting livelihood. The men in the print forcefully take from nature, but nature is also one to fight back. The struggle to successfully catch the bonito fish creates a different type of harmony from what usually persists in his prints—two struggling factions work against each other, yet it is what unites and harmonizes them.

# **Iris Bloom**

*Fifth Month*



Iris Garden at Horikiri in the Eastern Capital, Utagawa Hiroshige and Utagawa Kunisada, ca.1857

## Iris Garden at Horikiri in the Eastern Capital by Utagawa Hiroshige & Utagawa Kunisada

### LITERARY LENS

*Laura Lin & Nandi Lu*

#### I. The Story Behind the Print

##### *Literary Context*

“Iris Garden at Horikiri in the Eastern Capital” is a woodblock triptych based on a scene from the nineteenth century parody of a Japanese classic, Shikibu Murasaki’s *The Tale of Genji*. In 1829, writer Ryūtei Tanehiko collaborated with a prolific print artist Utagawa Kunisada to produce an illustrated serial novel that became Japan’s first national bestseller, *A Rustic Genji by a Fraudulent Murasaki* (*Nise Murasaki Inaka Genji*, hereafter referred to as *Rustic Genji*). Merging past and present, Tanehiko revives the eleventh century tale for his modern readers by transposing the story to a fifteenth century setting, with cultural references to the current era of Edo. As the most successful example of the popular *gōkan* format, the illustrated novel spawned a *Genji* mania, establishing a new genre of *Genji*-themed prints called *genji-e*.

##### *The Woman in Blue & Mitsuaji*

In the adaptation, the Shining Prince appears as the second son of a Muroma-

chi shogun, Ashikaga Mitsuui. Like the original Hikaru Genji, who is born the second son of Emperor Kiritsubo, he too is an idealized Casanova-type character blessed with beauty and excellence. He embarks on outlandish adventures in search of a stolen sword. Like his eleventh century counterpart, Mitsuui finds himself caught in several romantic entanglements along the way. Scores of the genji-e prints inspired by the adaptation depict Mitsuui in the company of beautiful women, either enjoying himself or deep in contemplation. In this particular print which is set against the backdrop of an iris garden during the spring, Mitsuui looks on as a young girl passes pruning shears to a woman who appears to be the subject of his gaze, as well as that of the young girl and a second woman who is serving Mitsuui a drink. Though this first woman appears to be the focus of the quartet, she stands the farthest from the Prince with her body subtly turned in the opposite direction, underscoring a compelling dynamic.

The setting of the iris garden is crucial in examining the identity of the woman and the nature of her relationship with Mitsuui or Genji. Traditionally, the iris symbolizes the spirit of warriors, due to its erect, sword-like leaves. Because the iris is associated with the beauty of manly strength and power, it became the flower symbolic of a traditional festival held in honor of boys. During the Genroku period, this holiday was established on the fifth day of May in celebration of their strength and good health. Boys' Day has since been changed to include all children, but many traditional practices remain. For instance, on this day families take baths filled with floating iris leaves to ward off evil, highlighting the enduring cultural significance of the iris in Japan ("Children's Day.") In the original Tale of Genji, chapter 25 features an archery meet that also takes place on the Day of the Iris. After the festivities end, Genji spends the night with a woman known simply as the Lady of the Orange Blossoms. Based on the literary context of the print, striking similarities can be discerned between this lady and the mystery woman.

In the story, the Lady of the Orange Blossoms occupies a lower social status compared to the rest of Genji's lovers, but shares a unique connection with him that surpasses the bounds of an ordinary romantic relationship. The Lady of the Orange Blossoms is characterized as a "dear, gentle lady" who never expects too much from Genji, yet has endless patience to listen to his complaints. When she spends the night with Genji, the two do not share a bed,

but easily pass the time conversing about issues in his daily life. Though Genji expresses regret over drifting apart from her romantically, he cherishes her as a good friend. This moving exchange poignantly captures the essence of their relationship:

"You honor the iris on the bank to which,  
No pony comes to taste of withered grasses?"  
To which he composes this sincere reply:  
"This pony, like the love grebe, wants a comrade.  
Shall it forget the iris on the bank?"

The profound relationship between Genji and the Lady of the Orange Blossoms is one of unusual purity, unlike his other numerous affairs with women. Having grown up without a mother, Genji perhaps views her as a maternal figure to himself, as well as to his daughters. More than a lover, she is someone on whom Genji steadily depends to bring peace to his mind.

#### *Tamakazura & the Significance of the Iris*

Though not directly relevant to the triptych discussed, the original Tale of Genji contains references to the iris that were likely familiar to the print-buying public and enriched their perception of the image. The iris flower plays a notable role in the story of Tamakazura, daughter of one of Genji's lovers, Yugao. It is constantly mentioned in love poems, such as in chapter 25 when Prince Hotaru and Tamakazura exchange letters:

"Even today the iris is neglected.  
Its roots, my cries, are lost among the waters."  
And her response:  
"It might have flourished better in concealment,  
The iris root washed purposelessly away."

In the above poems, the metaphorical iris stands for Prince Hotaru. He is so fond of Tamakazura but does not believe that she acknowledges him or is even aware. His affections are neglected, like the roots of the iris which grow underwater, hidden from sight.

The season of the iris also marks the time when Tamakazura begins to enjoy court life in the city after her long childhood in the countryside. During

this time, her status as a beautiful, unmarried woman makes her appealing at the lively parties that Genji hosts in his palace. In the triptych, it is plausible that the girl dressed in furisode kimono with hydrangea clusters on her head shares a similar identity or backstory like that of Tamakazura. Additionally, this formal style of kimono is only worn by unmarried women. As with Tamakazura, Genji might regard such a girl as daughter, but also as lover in the spiritual sense. That is why Tamakazura and Lady Murasaki, who is portrayed as Genji's soul mate, have such different outcomes in terms of their relationship with Genji.

Tamakazura seems attractive to Genji at the start, but she is his daughter-in-law. Whenever he makes an improper advance, she gently rejects him. Eventually Tamakazura starts her own family and leads an ordinary life of peace. Lady Murasaki, however, is a tragedy in regard to personal freedom. Raised by Genji, she is a virtuous and obedient woman who embodies all the traditional Japanese values. Genji regards her at once as daughter, lover and best friend. Yet she must endure his charismatic, flirtatious personality that attracts endless lovers. When she tries to become a nun, Genji refuses to allow it, thwarting her last attempt to achieve freedom. In the end she passes away with deep sorrow.

## II. The Appeal of Rustic Genji

### *Historical Context of its Creation*

As Genji's story became widespread, Genji gradually became a popular subject depicted on folding screens and hand scrolls. Demand for pictorial representation of the original Murasaki Shikibu's Genji grew especially in the 15th century. Manuals were created to guide artists in illustrating the most popular chapters. By the 17th century, the secular publishing industry was well-established. The print version of *The Tale of Genji* became more commonplace. Viewed in this historical context, the creation of *Rustic Genji* was no coincidence. In 1829 Edo-based publisher Tsuruya Kiyonobu released the first installments of Tanehiko's serial novel accompanied by Kunisada's illustrations.

### *An Anachronistic Adaptation*

In *Rustic Genji*, Tanehiko interweaves elements from different eras, giving the

classic tale a modern twist which resonated deeply with his readers. Aside from a few chapters that are peppered with detailed references from the fifteenth century, the Muromachi setting is mainly employed as a superficial backdrop. The greater focus falls on early Edo period culture, to which the author makes frequent and recognizable references. This period, dubbed the Genroku era (1688–1704), is considered the Golden Age of Edo, a time when the arts flourished as Japan underwent economic growth and stabilization. Traditional imagery is mixed rather boldly with Genroku technology and fashions. Though these material allusions were modern enough to be appreciated by his readers, they were just “quaint enough to lend an appealing patina of nebulous antiquity” to the work. Tanehiko himself appears to relish in these “deliberate anachronisms” scattered throughout the pages of *Rustic Genji*, even highlighting their presence in the chapter preface. Tanehiko liberally repurposes historical elements to create a “strangely time-warped world” that is intriguing yet relatable. This playful approach effectively connected nineteenth-century readers to the literary classic, making Tanehiko's adaptation instrumental in restoring relevance to *The Tale of Genji* outside the circles of elitist academia.

### *The Illustrated Gokan*

The novel's *gōkan* format contributed widely to its popular appeal, since the elaborate plot is written in simple language meant for the common audience, unlike the original *Tale of Genji* which was penned by a court lady to entertain the elite. *Rustic Genji* was released as an illustrated serial, a format often used to modernize classics, but one which traditionally borrowed plot lines from Chinese fiction. Tanehiko deviated from the norm by choosing to adapt a Japanese classic. The stimulating combination of literature and illustration was especially popular among children and women, as they were the target audience of his work. Full spreads are covered in pictures and flowing hiragana, which only required basic literacy to comprehend. More importantly, the accompanying illustrations done by Kunisada, along with the elegant design of visual elements, truly allowed readers to savor and connect with the layered work. *Rustic Genji* is the most prominent example of the woodblock printed graphic novel, which can be considered a precursor to manga.

Since the *gōkan* does not require costly covers and was much easier to produce, its inexpensive nature allowed for much greater accessibility. At the



time when a sale of 5,000 copies per chapter was considered remarkable for a renowned author, Ryūtei Tanehiko's adaptation broke sales records and became the first book in Japan to sell over 10,000 copies. After the series erupted in popularity and became a runaway success, Tanehiko decided to earnestly continue with a genuine adaptation of the tale in its entirety. Thirty-eight installments were published until the restrictive Tenpō Reforms swept through Japan in 1842 and abruptly halted its production under the authoritarian Tokugawa regime.

Despite its unprecedented success and enormous cultural impact, surprisingly little is written about Rustic Genji. Ironically, the very format that enabled the novel to reach such a broad readership is dismissed as a lower form of fiction due to its popular, lowbrow nature. The seminal illustrations of the gōkan genre, as well as gōkan in general, fell victim to the tradition of an "all-too-literary textual fetishism." Rustic Genji remains largely overshadowed by the canonical weight of the Heian tale, its literary significance only discussed in terms of its relationship to the original rather than its status as the definitive work of its genre.

#### *Cultural Influence & Popularization of Genji-e*

After Tanehiko recontextualized the story, Genji experienced a significant revival. The contemporary dialogue and Genroku references combined with kabuki theatrics appealed greatly to modern readers. Not only was genji-e suddenly in vogue, associated hair fashions and product names advertised in the novel were also hugely sought-after. Dramatized adaptations were created. By 1838, prints based on popular scenes from Rustic Genji were being released independent of the book, and Genji-themed designs began to emerge in ukiyo-e. By 1898, almost 1,300 Genji-themed print designs existed. Half of these works were designed by Kunisada himself, who supplied the original illustrations for Rustic Genji, and most are triptychs. Without a doubt, Genji was an economically lucrative theme.

A decade after the Tanehiko's death in 1842, Kunisada and Hiroshige, both master print artists of the leading ukiyo-e Utagawa school, collaborated on a series of ten triptychs titled "Elegant Prince Genji" (Fūryū Genji), based on Kunisada's earlier illustrations for the novel. Hiroshige supplied the sweeping background landscapes while Kunisada, who specialized in figurative representations, supplied the large figures in the foreground. Figures were dressed in

contemporary fashions of the day. Compositions consist of clearly defined foreground and background, distinguishing the work of the two artists. The placement of their signatures on corresponding panels further clarifies the identification. "Elegant Prince Genji" is one of the most popular examples of the genji-e genre. Designed by Kunisada and his pupils, these prints are actually based on Tanehiko's plot rather than the original canon work, as most readers viewed the original as a reflection of Rustic Genji, not the reverse. Ironically, genji-e prints displayed in museums today are often presented as portrayals of scenes from the original Tale of Genji, "when in fact they are almost exclusively based on [Rustic] Genji". Tanehiko's adaptation achieved a meteoric rise to fame in its day, radically transforming the established iconography of venerated Genji paintings. Although this fact is largely overshadowed by the canonicity of the original novel in contemporary academia, its lasting influence is visible in the enduring popularity of Genji-themed prints in the ukiyo-e genre.

## URBAN LIFE

*Boong Chamnanratanakul & Serena Hong*

“Iris Garden at Horikiri in the Eastern Capital” is a print that holds much significance in the history of ukiyo-e prints. The composition is a triptych, a form that is common among ukiyo-e prints. This multipartite form allows reflecting features of Edo culture, in this case many of those related to the Edo urban lifestyle. It is not surprising that this print depicts scenes from the urban life, since ukiyo-e is an art form that specifically revolves around the pastimes of everyday people, in particular those associated with leisure. Attention to detail and subtleties in rendering people’s activities in the Iris Garden at Horikiri represent Edo of that time. The triptych is based on the parody of the Heian Period literary classic, *The Tale of Genji*, written in 10th c. by a court lady, Murasaki Shikibu. In this parody serial novel the Edo period author, Ryūtei Tanehiko, sets the story in the Muromachi period, namely in the 15th century, but in fact presents all characters as Edo urban dwellers with all the mannerisms of the time. The hero of this story is a modified character of Prince Genji, who is the main character in the original *The Tale of Genji*. The “new Genji” is defined as the epitome of the Edo urban citizen.

The garden featured in this print highlights an important aspect of the Edo urban culture. The Horikiri Iris Garden is one of the oldest and most popular iris gardens in the world and is renowned for cultivating a special breed of iris, *hanashobu*. This breed of iris quickly became immensely popular within Japan, which helped this garden become a national hotspot. The Horikiri Garden especially rose in popularity after reports of two samurai who visited the garden became widespread. The garden became a famous seasonal site, frequented by townspeople, particularly by beautiful women. Hiroshige himself commented that “it was difficult to tell which were the real flowers.” Flower-viewing, in general, was a common activity in Edo. It was so popular that Japan named the third month of the year *hanami-zuki*, or “Flower-Viewing Month.” Furthermore, the flowers were taken very seriously throughout Japanese history. Flowers were not only appreciated for their physical beauty but also for the belief that they held magical, evil-ridding properties and religious connections. As a result, a significant component of Japanese culture is closely associated

flowers. During Edo period appreciation of flowers was undergoing democratization. Flower arrangement, or *ikebana*, originally was an aristocratic activity that was taught to the daughters of high-ranking and wealthy society members. There were many different forms of flower arrangements that revolved around religious, cultural, and aesthetic considerations. It was not until the Edo period when *ikebana* transformed from an important yet exclusive aspect of the elite culture to an art that can be appreciated by people of all social and economic positions. *Ikebana* as well as other forms of flower appreciation especially peaked in popularity at the same time *nishiki-e*, multicolor print, was first developed in the later half of the 18th century, thus explaining the strong correlation between ukiyo-e and its many depictions of flowers. Ukiyo-e triptych *Iris at Horikiri Garden* underlines popular character of flower viewing that became a common leisurely aspect of Edo culture. During these garden outings, people, especially women, made sure to put on their best attire. In this print, the female figures are all depicted wearing floral-print kimonos, emphasizing the comparison between women and flowers. Portrayals of beautiful women in ukiyo-e, known as *bijinga*, constitute one of the major genres in ukiyo-e. Although *bijinga* originally were representations of high-ranking prostitutes, the genre gradually expanded to embrace all kinds of beautiful women involved in a variety of daily activities. In this case, the female figures are seen lounging at the garden enjoying the view. The most prominent female figures, the two women in their prime and one very young woman are seen prepared for cutting the irises or serving tea. It is through these simple gestures that the women’s grace and loveliness is expressed, enhanced by the presence of the Horikiri Garden. The setting of the print itself is highlighting how the urban lifestyle revolves around beauty.

It is not only the fact that townspeople enjoyed participation in flower viewing outings as the necessary seasonal activity but their garments and accessories that give us further details of the urban lifestyle. In this regard, it is interesting to touch upon the hand-held fans carried by some characters in the triptych. Ever since hand-held fans were introduced to Japan from China through Korea in the 6th century, fans have become a significant factor of Japanese culture. Fans have been used for practical and ceremonial purposes throughout Japanese history, having many different forms. During the Edo period, fans were used for cooling while also acting as decorations. Ukiyo-e espe-

cially has strong correlations with fans since ukiyo-e prints were often printed on fans. Those could be a non-folding fan *uchiwa* and a folding fan *ōgi*. Both types would often feature portraits of famous kabuki actors and would be sold around the kabuki theatres. In the 19th century, themes for decoration of fans of all formats broadened greatly. Many fans would be adorned with landscape and bird-to-flower imagery. An example of the use of landscape depictions on fans is the *Cormorant-fishing Boat*, a woodblock print designed by Katsukawa Shunzan that is featured in our exhibition. These fans were used on a daily basis by everyone, thus being a necessity in the Edo urban culture. Prior to their urbanization, fans, like flowers, were only used by the aristocrats and samurais. The samurais used fans to accompany their formal and court attires during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. During the Edo period, however, fans became a fashionable accessory for everybody intended for everyday use. As has been mentioned above, within *Iris Garden at Horikiri*, various figures can be seen holding fans. Here the most prominent figure holding a fan is the “new Genji,” the main character of this print. He is seen sitting in a relaxed pose on the porch with a folded fan in his hand while being served a drink.

This triptych is a collaborative piece created together by Hiroshige and Kunisada. This is evident from the crests and signatures of both artists visible throughout the piece. Hiroshige’s signature accompanied by his diamond seal can be seen on the left sheet of the triptych. To the right of Hiroshige’s cartouche there is another frame with the signature of Moriya Jihei, an Edo publisher of ukiyo-e prints. Two smaller seals are also located next to Hiroshige’s signature. Both of these seals reveal when this triptych was made. The seal on the left contains the date of publication—the fifth month of the Year of Earth Snake, which corresponds to 1857. This date is further corroborated by the circular censorship seal on the right with the character for *aratame*, meaning approval; such seals were used from 1853 – 1857. At the bottom right of the right-hand sheet there is another set of cartouches and seals. The longer cartouche contains the inscription “by the brush of seventy-nine-year-old Toyokun.” Toyokuni, originally the name of Kunisada’s teacher, was one of Kunisada’s main sobriquets. Underneath Kunisada’s signature is a red, round seal with a swelling at one side; known as *toshidama*, it was a mark of the Utagawa School of ukiyo-e artists to which Kunisada belonged. Although Hiroshige was a part of the same artistic lineage, the seal served as Kunisa-

da’s personal mark. After 1861, Kunisada would often sign his prints with his age, most likely to reference his experience as an ukiyo-e artist. To the left of Kunisada’s signature is again the seal of Moriya Jihei, the publisher, the date seal, and the *aratame* sign. Not only are the artists’ signatures located at the two opposite edges of the triptych, their personal seals are placed throughout the print. Blue *toshidama* seal was used as a pattern on the vessel held by the woman who is offering a drink for the man sitting in front of her. The white paper lantern hanging on the veranda above the man is decorated with both the Kunisada’s *toshidama* and Hiroshige’s diamond crest in red. These are the subtle yet meaningful details that point to how the two artists worked together on this piece.

Collaboration between Hiroshige, the premier landscape artist in ukiyo-e, and Kunisada, a highly reputable figurative ukiyo-e artist, had a long history and took a variety of forms. It ranged from borrowing elements from each other’s designs to producing a series of prints together to working on separate sections of one print. From about 1853, the two artists moved further into collaboration, starting to tie in each other’s skills to create prints with no clear separation of their respective contributions to the designs such as, for example, in print sets dedicated to prince Genji and later re-workings of the Heian period classics.

Of special note is the cartouche with the print’s title. Light-colored rectangle with concave corners, it is situated at the right-top of the right print and was the first thing to be seen by the viewers due to the right-to-left direction of writing in Japan. The title is written in an elegant semi-cursive script against the background with two curvy cloudy shapes in pink and teal gradation. Yellowish dots are sprinkled irregularly over the entire field of the cartouche making reference to highly decorative papers used for the original *Tale of Genji* scroll of the 11th century, often specked with gold and silver filings. This detail made emphasized the layered meaning of the scene portrayed.

Kunisada’s and Hiroshige’s *Iris Garden at Horikiri* is a triptych that displays various characters engaged in recreational seasonal activities at a famous scenic spot of Edo. The main characters are modernized literary personages represented as Edo period urban dwellers. One can grasp appreciation for seasonal flowers, typical for townspeople at the time, their preference for fine textiles and fashionable accessories used during outdoor pastimes in

public spaces. The large-scale foreground figures are complemented by smaller figures of elegant Edoites dispersed throughout the composition, attesting to the popularity of the place. To make the image further relatable to the viewers, Hiroshige included well-known topographical details—vast lowlands overgrown with irises are traversed by a well-trodden road running across the right and central parts of the composition, while a steep hill with a kiosk on top dominates the left print. The hill and even the pine-trees at its edge were easily recognizable landmarks of the place. Altogether the triptych captures the pleasant if not joyful atmosphere of the spring outing in which elegant city public seeks immersion in the annual colorful awakening of nature.

## TEXTILES

*Zashary Caro & Alyssa Spytman*

Iris Garden at the Horikiri in the Eastern Capital is a triptych of ukiyo-e polychrome woodblock prints, designed collaboratively by two artists of the Utagawa School; one of them is Utagawa Hiroshige, responsible for the landscape and the other is Utagawa Kunisada, who designed the figures. Though a coherent composition that reads as one piece, each print can stand on its own which is a fairly common feature among ukiyo-e prints. The composition represents four main characters, three women and one man, in front of the vast blooming garden. On the right of this composition is a man that is colorfully layered with kimonos. He is sitting on the veranda of a house while being served a drink by the woman on his left. Behind the protagonists, there is a vast marshland overgrown with irises, cultivated at the time and turned into the famous Iris Garden of Horikiri. The blooming irises are particularly visible and vibrant closer to the foreground. A rather broad road runs across all three sheets, stretching right to left through the composition. Going at the oblique angle away from the picture plane, the road disappears gradually behind the hill in the left part of the composition. A path is leading uphill to a small yellow kiosk with many stylish people walking towards it or coming down.

Among the most prominent features of this print are the textiles the characters are wearing. They are dressed in kimonos, traditional Japanese garments worn by women, men and children. In Japan kimonos became widespread among the aristocracy during the Heian period (794 – 1192.) The kimonos' shape originated in China and is derived from the 7th century or even earlier Chinese robe. Kimono literally translates to 'the thing worn.' After the Heian period the courtly style of kimonos with wide wrist opening was substituted by the garments with narrow wrist openings, defining the form of Japanese kimonos for centuries to come. This change occurred as a result of an upgrade of the existing undergarment known as kosode, literally "small sleeve," to the state of an outer garment.

Most kimonos are cut in seven similar straight-line forms and sewn together. This method allowed the designers to make kimonos for a wide variety of body shapes. Kimonos require minimal cutting, an open overlapping front

(okumi), an attached neckband (eri) and long sleeves (sode) that are attached to the selvages. The body of the kimono, called the mihaba, is made out of two straight lengths of fabric. At the waist, a wide sash called an obi was worn. The obi used to be smaller in size when the kosode sleeves were still attached to the mihaba. When that was no longer the case, the obi became a prominent feature of kimonos. The size of the obi also depended on the gender. Men used to wear their obi around six inches in width but by the 17th century women wore their obi as wide as ten inches. The length of the kosode that evolved from calf-level to ankle-level as well as the large width of the obi, made it really restricting to engage in any sort of activity and therefore kosode were mostly worn by Japanese of high social rank. Like the Chinese, the Japanese also wear their kimonos overlapping front, left over right as opposed to right over left because that was a 'mark of barbarism.' Early on, kosode were made out of traditional fibers like hemp, flax and ramie and woven with plain weave. Later on, the Japanese were able to learn how to weave figured damasks, satins and crepe silks (originally done by the Chinese) that allowed them to create more elaborate designs on their kimonos. Kimonos are often woven on looms where these figured damasks and satin designs are woven straight onto the cloth.

A common woman during the Edo period would often have a loom in her house as solid weaving and sewing abilities were considered very important within Edo period Japanese society. Making of more lavish fabrics like silk required a special artisan. Individuals who understood the silk weaving process were usually men. The process of creating a silk cloth is a detailed one. One must first spin the silk boils to create silk thread. Then one sets up a warp and uses the silk thread to create a silk cloth. Printing on silk allows the colors to be vibrant and lush and creates a feeling that the design is part of the cloth instead of just being printed on top of it. Within Edo period Japan the industrialization of kimono making was a huge business that included embroiders, specialist thread suppliers, weavers, dyers, stencil makers and print designers. During the Edo period the "Drapery Store" business emerged; such a store was a place where one could go to get a custom kimono made or where one could purchase fabric for kimonos. The most famous drapery store of Edo period Japan was Echigo-ya. For different pattern making ideas, one would use a pattern book called hinagata-bon, which included illustrations of various kimono shapes with detailed notes on colors and embellishments.

Kimonos lend themselves to be layered in several ways. For example, during the summer, one would wear unlined kimonos and over winter the kimonos would be heavily layered. The layering of kimonos resulted in color combinations that can reflect personal identity, social status and seasonal activity. In the 10th century during the Heian era, an elegant form of layering kimonos called junihitoe arose. Junihitoe translates to 'twelve layer robe' and used to be called karaginu-mo meaning 'a Chinese jacket karaginu worn over the train mo,' a reference to the garment's Chinese origin. This twelve layering of kimonos was extremely elegant and therefore only worn by court-ladies in Japan. A key part of the junihitoe was the fan accessory. It was an important device of communication for women in Japan were not allowed to speak to male outsiders openly so they would shield their faces with hand-held fans; fans were also used for cooling because of the heavy layering of garments, which can make one hot and uncomfortable. The arrangement of layers and colors of the kimonos were very important and indicated the wearer's taste and rank.

Under the rule of the Tokugawa military government, Japan was officially almost isolated from the outside world and enjoyed a lengthy period of internal peace and political stability. The city of Edo (now Tokyo) quickly grew to become one of the world's largest cities with a highly advanced urban culture. This accounts for the development of a new market for textile arts during the Edo period. The kimono transformed into a very personal expression of personal display that indicated affluence which has now become a prominent manifestation of the individual's achievement. What one could also tell from the type of a kimono worn is a females' marital status. The young woman by the left edge of the central sheet is wearing fairly long sleeves that nearly touch the ground, which is very different from the woman she is facing who is wearing blue kimono with short sleeves. What the young girl is wearing is a form of kimono called a furisode that translates to 'swinging sleeve' and is a garment worn by unmarried women. This young lady is most likely in her teens; her petite size and her representation next to more mature women makes her look like a shinzō, apprentice of a courtesan, the two being often depicted together in the ukiyo-e prints of the bijinga genre.

The four protagonists in this piece are all wearing varicolored kimonos that are elegantly decorated with traditional patterns of flowers, birds and auspicious symbols. The most prominent colors of textiles in this print are navy

blue, cobalt blue, coral, yellow, green and light peach. The way the color is distributed throughout the piece makes the viewer's eye move around the composition. The patterns on the kimonos range from large scale motifs, like yellow floral design of the cobalt blue kimono, to small scale repeat patterns (komon) as seen on the man's outer kimono underneath his jacket haori. The motifs in the pattern can be indicative of the wearer's status and is always coordinated with the season the scene is set in. The motifs used here include peonies, sparrows and a spiral pattern known as *karakusa*, literally "Chinese grass." The peonies in Japanese culture represent good fortune, nobility and eternal beauty and often known as 'the king of flowers.'

It is also important to note the way in which the characters layer their kimonos. The three adults in the print have inner layers of orange while the young girl's decorated kimono is that same orange. The older women tend to wear darker and more subdued colors while the younger women and children wear bright colors and are usually more decorated with pattern. The layers in the kimonos each have different names. The outer layer is called the *uwagi* and is where patterns are placed and the trailing on the back of this *uwagi* functioned as an indication of rank. The higher the wearer was in rank, the longer the *uwagi*. Underneath the *uwagi*, is the *uchiginu*, which is a beaten silk gown typically not shown. This layer provides a stiffener for the layers on top of it. The way the characters order the layers of color of their kimonos is interesting to analyze. The standing woman on the left is wearing the inverse colors of those on the garment of the young girl to her the right.

The man's attire stands out against the kimonos of the women. His outer garment is a traditional kimono-like jacket called a *haori*. A *haori* is typically worn open; however, ties of various types are often attached to the *haori*'s sides to loosely keep them together, which can be seen on the man's *haori* in the print. The *haori* is adorned by the *karakusa* pattern echoing the design on the *obi* of the woman on the left sheet of the triptych. In its representation of the *haori* an overprinting of darker blue hues over the lighter blue of the background is used, perhaps to render it as shiny. This could mean that the fabric is made out of satin, which is often used during spring. The patterns on the man's kimono worn underneath his *haori* jacket are geometric unlike the bird-and-flower motifs on women's garments. In the white checkerboard squares strewn over his kimono one can see some of the so-called 'eight lucky

symbols,' a grouping of auspicious signs of Chinese origin, known in Japan as *takara-zukushi*. Usage of felicitous themes in decorative arts is a time-honored tradition in East Asia.

In general, however, the natural world is the most common source of motifs employed on kimonos during the Edo period and beyond. Therefore one can get a sense of what time of year it was in Japan by the colors the portrayed characters wear and the flowers they choose to be represented on their garments. Judging by the garments of the protagonists of the triptych and by the iris garden in the background, one can safely assume it is spring. Some spring traditions in Japan include *o-hina matsuri* – doll festival (or girl festival) held to secure good health and prosperity for the daughters, *o-hana-mi* – flower-viewing custom, and *tango* – boy's festival, celebration of which was meant to ensure good health and manifold success for the boys. Iris was exceedingly important for boy's festival, perhaps because of the sword-like shape of its leaves. The festival itself is sometimes referred to as *Iris Festivalshōbu matsuri*.

It is also interesting to see the make-up that all characters depicted on the print are wearing, including the man. Some black eyeliner, red lipstick and blush seem to be in trend. Women of the Edo period had to follow detailed instructions on the proper use of cosmetics and follow precise ways of application and with proper etiquette. Three basic colors comprised the palette of makeup during this time: red for lip, rouge and fingernail polish, white for face powder and black for eyebrow application. Face powder was a white lead based pigment and was traditionally applied with a broad flat brush or with hands. Pigment for rouge was made from safflowers and applied to the lips, cheeks and fingernails. It is said that a light application of both face powder and rouge was a "mark of refinement and beauty."

Like kimonos, hairstyles also indicated occupation, marital status and age. The Edo period was the golden age for elaborate hairstyles for both men and women. Here the man's hairstyle is particularly important. It is the key to the understanding the print's real theme. The theme alludes to Japan's foremost literary classics, *The Tale of Genji* written by a court lady Murasaki Shikibu in the 10th century. This 19th century parody was a richly illustrated publication that was illustrated by Utagawa Kunisada, the artist of the figures in the triptych. In his illustrations to the book, Kunisada created distinctive visual types of the characters, giving the protagonist his unique hairstyle known as "top-knot

in the shape of lobster tail,” ebi-chasen-mage in Japanese. Looking carefully, one can recognize the peculiar cord-bound braid the tip of which is divided in halves to make it imitate the lobster tail. Therefore to the original viewers of the print it was clear that the triptych was much more than just a scene of pleasurable spring outing of fashionable city dwellers but belonged to the so-called *genji-e* genre, associated with the “world” of prince Genji.

Except for this detail, the entire scene is portrayed as a moment of contemporary life. Common hairstyles for women in the Edo period include *shimada*, which has variations like the *taka shimada*, *uiwata*, *tsubushi shimana* and *momoware*; the type of hairstyle depended on the female’s ranking and age. This style of tying back one’s hair as opposed to the preference of long flowing hair used in other periods started becoming popular among courtesans and kabuki actors. Later on, it became a trend among wealthy merchant wives and then became an overall fashion trend. All women portrayed in the triptych are wearing a *shimada* hairstyle, which was popular among other young adults during the Edo period. The hair is gathered and tied up with pins, combs, ribbons and/or flowers.

It is really compelling to see this print alongside *Horikiri Iris Garden* by Utagawa Hiroshige. This print takes place in the same place around the same time. The irises are depicted in the same way and it looks like a zoomed up version of the *Iris Garden*. The backgrounds of both prints are also similar in the way the colors gradually turn from orange to blue, as if the sun is setting. Japanese designers liked to play with the idea of perspective and they would often use their other designs or even designs by other designers and place them onto their own work.

Although the image on the triptych is full of evocative cultural references to *Genji*, it remains first of all a picture of the extravagant lifestyle of Edo townspeople, fashionable and chic. The focused study of the figures in the triptych proves that kimonos are a prominent statement of Japanese culture. Interestingly enough, they are not often worn in modern day Japan. In Japan, kimonos are worn during special celebrations or events like tea ceremony, *ikebana* (a flower arranging ceremony), *o-hanami* (cherry blossom viewing get together) or kabuki theater performances. With the passing generations, less and less people are wearing kimonos due to restrictiveness of their shape and structure and costly maintenance. However, kimono designs have been very

influential internationally impacting modern day fashion designers like Paul Poiret and Alexander McQueen.



Detail of the *shimada* hairstyle and the *ebi-chasen-mage*, or “top-knot in the shape of lobster tail.”

**Late Spring to  
Early Summer**

*Cormorant Fishing*





Cormorant-Fishing Boat, Katsukawa Shunzan, 1780's–1790's

## Cormorant-Fishing Boat by Katsukawa Shunzan

*Jolene Dosa*

Ukaibune of the title translates to “cormorant-fishing boat”, and is the title of a work by 18th century Japanese artist Katsukawa Shunzan. Cormorant is a type of bird utilized by fishermen to catch fish in rivers and streams, a technique characteristic but not unique to Japan..

Ukaibune is a small print, just over nine by ten inches, the format reserved for fan-shaped prints uchiwa-e. Katsukawa Shunzan was a practicing artist in the late 1800s in Tokyo, Japan, and it is estimated that this print was made between 1780 and 1790. It is a polychrome woodblock print that was printed in black ink as well as color. Although faded over time, the line work is nevertheless exquisite, and the colors' muted tones reflect the peaceful harmony between man and nature.

This woodblock print is a design for a fan known as uchiwa-e. It is of a standard format for a fan in terms of the size of the paper, approximately 9 x 10 inches. Corners of the paper are left blank; the print itself lies within a circle skimming the edges of the paper sheet. The print shows a scene of cormorant fishing in the nearshore waters next to a patch of land in view of a coastal village and low hills in the distance. The boat, in which a fisherman and his assistant are fishing with cormorants at night, is shown on the right-hand side of the print. We know that it is night because a basket of fire serving as a torch is affixed to a crossbar of the boat on a bamboo pole and is hanging over the stern. A pair of cormorant birds is in the water in front of the boat's stern, one

is bent under the water in search of fish; the third bird is perched on the far boat-side. At the left side of the print, in the distance, there is land on which shelters sit, and a horizon line with a few rolling hills crosses over the entire background. A tree grows on some land in the foreground. The tree is branching up over the boat but with the tops cut off by a mist or a cloud on which a poem is written calligraphically in cursive script. It reads:

The cormorant boats  
Must have pushed their way  
Into the rapids—  
For the light of the fishing fires  
Is rolling with the waves.

鵜飼舟 / 高瀬さし越す / 程なれや / むすぼほれゆく / 篝火の影

Ukaibune / takase sashikosu / hodo nare ya / musubohoreyuku / kagaribi no kage<sup>1</sup>

The poem is by Jakuren (寂蓮, 1139–1202), a Buddhist priest and poet known also as Fujiwara no Sadanaga. A highly regarded poet in his time, his poems are included in some of most famous poetic anthologies, One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each (Hyakunin Isshu) among them. Jakuren lived some six centuries prior to Ukaibune's print creation and reference to this poem and its sensitive illustration attests to the ongoing connectivity of Japanese culture throughout its history. Jakuren's poetry displays his Buddhist mentality; his poems reflect on nature and seasonality, human nature, oneness and acceptance of one's place on the earth. The imagery his poem on the Ukaibune print evokes is melodic, that of all-pervading coordinated movement present in nature and human actions and unifying both entities.

The poem focuses on the movement of the boat, and without the mental picture evoked by the words, the image would be much more static. "...Pushed their way into the rapids" implies a strong force in the water, and this is not apparent in the visual image. That alone brings about a new aspect to the print, an aspect of challenge and strength. It matches the expression on the fisher's face. "For the light of the fishing fires/ Is rolling with the waves," is a beautiful aspect of the overall piece as well. That vibrant, orangey form of fire creates dynamic in the print alone, but paired with the idea of its rolling up and down

in the waves from afar ties together man and the elements. It also places the scene in a darker environment, as it is nighttime. As a whole, the print might not come together so beautifully without the aspect of poetry.

Of the two fishermen in the boat, the older one is standing; with his straw hat and straw apron typical for his profession, he is holding the strings attached to the cormorants in water. His facial expression is highly focused. He is obviously in charge. The other person, smaller in size, perhaps a child, is hunched behind him reaching for something in one of the baskets in the boat. Maybe a son of the adult fisherman or just an assistant, he is learning the complex trade of cormorant fishing through direct experience from his early childhood years.

Objects in the scene are quite descriptive. Items to look into include the fiery basket, the baskets in the boat, the boat itself, and the huts in the background. Katsukawa Shunzan uses thin consecutive lines to appropriately represent the fisherman's traditional straw skirt. The basket of fire lighting the waters where the cormorants are fishing is the most colorfully vibrant part of the print, sharing the center of the print with the main fisherman.

Ukaibune can tell us many things about Edo Japan. Through his depiction, Katsukawa Shunzan provides information about activity, nature and values during this time period. Traditional in Japan, cormorant fishing, or ukai, is to this day seen along the Nagara River in Gifu Prefecture and occasionally other rivers in the country. Shoguns of the period showed patronage and support to ukai fishing and introduced an honorable title of master cormorant fisher – the usho. Cormorant fishing provided sweetfish, spring seasonal delicacy. Imperial households commissioned the usho to deliver them the fish. As usho, men would form special bonds with the birds, and the fishing was regarded as teamwork between the man and bird in catching fish. This is an interesting aspect because relationship between man and nature is one of essential themes in Japanese culture present also in ukiyo-e prints. Harmony is exhibited between usho and cormorants in working together, but man is using this harmony to exploit one creature's abilities against another creature for his own gain. From today's perspective one can pose a question if Ukaibune is truly expressing harmony or rather man's exploitation of nature. Poet of Edo Japan, Matsuo Basho's haiku poem about cormorant fishing speaks to this flux between peacefulness and uncertainty. "So exciting/And, after a while, so sad –/Cormorant fishing." <sup>2</sup> Commonly cormorant fishing employs one fisherman and two boatmen. There

are usually up to six boats that make the journey into the river at night together. In the current case the entire scene is more of a poetic image than a representation of local staple trade.

Ukaibune may also provide insight to fashion of Edo Japan, as the print itself is made for a fan. As the Japanese utilized the cormorant bird to gather fish, they used natural scenes for applied artwork. Hand-fans were popular accessories among all ranges of people by the 17th century, and the development of printing allowed for a wide selection of options when choosing a fan. Men and women alike used fans. Ukiyo-e artists such as Katsukawa Shunzan designed an image onto paper formatted specially to be mounted onto a frame for use. The format of these fans is a round, paddle-like shape that is classified as uchiwa fans. As they gained popularity in Edo society, the imagery printed on them began to represent regions where the artists created them. For example, a town noted for the view of a mountain would probably have uchiwa fans produced that depicted that view. Due to the fans' use as accessory, these items were not preserved in as valued items in a way as other prints for interior spaces or books, and therefore are less common in museums or other collections today.

Ukiyo-e designer Katsukawa Shunzan focused on figurative themes in the majority of his prints. Taught in the studio of Katsukawa Shunsho, an innovative master of psychologically insightful Kabuki actor prints, Katsukawa Shunzan's characters were likewise largely Kabuki actors. His later prints included also bijinga, or beautiful women images. A bridge between his theatrical characters and the fisherman on the Ukaibune fan print is, perhaps, the activation of the fisherman's facial expression; Shunzan's clearly knew well how to portray emotion, often dramatic. It is curious that Ukaibune is a print that does not deal with any of Shunzan or the Katsukawa Shunsho school's typical subject matter. The environment is a landscape, and the figures are not donning special clothing, nor are they actors or beautiful stylish women of the bijinga genre. Also notable is that this is a print for a fan, not consistent with Shunzan's other pictorial work. What does resonate with his other work and Ukaibune, however, is the representation of an occasion. Ukai fishing requires certain conditions and certain people, just as theater requires a particular location and skill set. Both theatre and cormorant fishing were a spectacle to view imbedded as they were in the everyday routine.

The insight that Ukaibune can give a contemporary viewer to Edo Japan

is twofold; one can examine the application of the print as well as the imagery. By combining the 12th century poem of Jakuren with ukiyo-e print, Katsukawa Shunzan demonstrates the overarching themes in Japanese art throughout history. Interactions of humans and nature are what unify Japanese aesthetics over time.



Kajikazawa in Kai Province, Katsushika Hokusai, ca. 1833

## Kajikazawa in Kai Province by Katsushika Hokusai

*Tim Rooney*

Katsushika Hokusai's *Kajikazawa in Kai*, from the series *Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji*, is one of Hokusai's most simple, but successful prints. The dynamic composition, contrast, and use of symbols depict a tension-filled piece between man and nature.

The print depicts two fishermen on a jutting rock. The man who has his lines cast out is deeply concentrated on his fishing. This is shown through his hunched over posture and his intently staring gaze towards the waves. Honolulu Museum of Art explains, "His determination to make a good catch is expressed in his posture—foot firmly gripping the rock and body bent to hold the lines." The other fisherman, a young boy, is facing the opposite direction lying down and looking into the basket he is holding by the strings. Honolulu Museum of Art adds, "They exchange no word, but they are perfectly united in their dangerous endeavor." Although the two men are not facing each other, based on their posture and relationship to one another compositionally, you can tell they are completely content and at ease in the environment. Despite the harsh waves and dangerous cliff they are resting upon, the men look as though they've been fishing all of their lives and are completely accepting of nature.

Through Hokusai's use of composition, color, and symbolism he shows the antithetic unity between man and nature. The bottom half of the composition is very busy, while the top is almost devoid of any form or color. This creates a strong contrast, which further creates a focus on the fisherman. In Hokusai's

Mount Fuji, Jocelyn Bouquillard explains, “The substance of the foreground, full of waves, rock, and human activity, contrasts with the void presented by the sky and the mountain, thus reinforcing Fuji’s immutable character.” Below, there are waves crashing furiously. This is perceived through Hokusai’s use of blue and black speckled dots, which depict foam and the crashing of the waves. The sporadic shapes and curves of the many waves signify the unpredictability and randomness of nature. The combination of the fisherman’s tense pose and the fishing line, which is very straight, creates a striking tension between the fishermen and nature. Honolulu Museum of Art explains, “The pounding waves and wind-driven rain seem mercilessly cruel to humans, but at the same time, these forces also provide man with a way of life when he is determined to survive.”

The rock, fisherman, and fisherman’s rope create a triangle shape. This use of composition draws the viewer’s eye to the middle of the composition and focuses the viewer’s attention on the fisherman. The triangle shape, which is created compositionally, also mimics the shape of Mount Fuji in the background and the crashing waves, which suggests that humans had learned to adapt to nature in order to succeed. The calmness and stillness of Mount Fuji in the background versus the sporadic and chaotic nature of the waves in the foreground further strengthens the unity of nature near and far as well the unity of man and nature.

The print is comprised of mainly blue colors, besides some green and red-orange. Hokusai’s dominant use of blue in the print and the key block is symbolic of water and the concept of rebirth and renewal. The use of green is present because of the combination of yellow and Berlin blue that was available to Hokusai. Hokusai’s use of red on the fishermen’s clothes further draws attention to the center of page where the fishermen are. The combination of the use of red, the triangle-like composition, and the white background creates a powerful and striking focus, which is symbolic of the man’s focus, which is expressed through his face.

Hokusai’s *Kajikazawa in Kai* depicts a powerful relationship between man and nature. Through the use of color, shape, and amazingly executed compositional relationships, *Kajikazawa in Kai* is one of Hokusai’s most simple yet powerful pieces.

**Late Summer to  
Early Fall**

*Gourd Strips Kanpyo*



Station # 51, Minakuchi: a Famous Product of Gourd Strips, Utagawa Hiroshige, ca. 1833

## Station #51, Minakuchi: A Famous Product of Gourd Strips by Utagawa Hiroshige

*Megan Farrell & Shanaiya Maloo*

Station #51, Minakuchi: Kanpyō—Famous Product of Gourd Strips” is a color woodblock print by Utagawa Hiroshige from his first and most celebrated print series on Tokaido, the so-called Hoeido Tokaido, created in 1833 – 1834. The print depicts a village scene. Women are working together, preparing kanpyō: a product made from a gourd harvested between late July and September. In the foreground, one woman is holding a gourd about to start shaving it, one is in the process of shaving a gourd, and two more are hanging the peeled strips to dry them. A single male traveler, carrying a shoulder pack, walks through the middle of the composition, down an open area of the village. It appears that this man is curious to see making of the kanpyō as his face is slightly turned towards the women as he walks. The upper third of the composition depicts the village’s thatched-roof buildings, located at the base of a range of blue hills. The mountains are printed in color block only.

The Hoeido edition (1833 – 1834) of The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido, is the earliest of over twenty sets of prints dedicated to the Tokaido road. There exists an opinion that the artist produced it while traveling the Tokaido Road in 1832 as part of an official mission from the shogun to deliver a gift of horses to the emperor. Hiroshige was an urban man, living in the capital. It is believed that this journey revealed a radically different view of Japan to the

artist; traveling through the rural enclaves and natural wonders of his country deeply impacted Hiroshige.

The Tokaido, which literally means 'The Eastern Sea Road', was the main road of feudal Japan. It stretched for roughly five hundred kilometers. It started from the effective capital of Edo, the seat of the shogun, and extended to the old imperial capital of Kyoto. It was one out of a system of five governmental highways instituted by the shogunal administration to provide perfectly controllable traveling paths, primarily for the daimyo and their retinues on their way to or from Edo as a part of the alternate attendance practice (*sankin kotai*). The road ran more or less along the coast, through some of the most beautiful scenery in Japan, including areas where mountains suddenly meet the sea. It then traveled across the mountains, and around the southern end of Lake Biwa, to Kyoto. Fifty-three stations (not counting the two termini), became post-towns over time. The travelers, for example, traders and those travelling on business and religious pilgrims, were required to carry permits which were presented to government officials at each station. Tokaido stations functioned also as rest stops and included horse and porter services, along with a range of lodging, food, etc. Most travelers covered the on foot, either traveling several stages per day or spending several days at a single station, if they were so inclined. The journey along the entire road took an average of two weeks. A trip of only a week or so was possible, but bad weather could easily stretch it to a month.

The 51st station on this road, Minakuchi, depicted in this print, is located at the mouth of the river Yokota. The meibutsu, or famous product of Minakuchi is *kanpyō*. While meibutsu literally translates to "famous item", in practice it refers to the widespread distribution and usage of various regional products and goods. Meibutsu was an important cultural concept. Not only is it an integral part of the Japanese culture, but it also provides much-needed benefits to rural economies and can help stabilize or increase the overall population of those regions.

Even today each of Japan's 47 prefectures has its own unique meibutsu that was prepared for markets and consumers. Meibutsu could be "classified into the following five categories: (1) simple souvenirs such as the swords of Kamakura or the shell-decorated screens of Enoshima; (2) gastronomic specialties such as the *kanpyo* of Minakuchi, as one sees in the above wood block print.

(3) supernatural souvenirs and wonder-working panaceas, such as the bitter powders of Menoke that supposedly cured a large number of illnesses; (4) bizarre things that added a touch of the 'exotic' to the aura of each location such as the fire-resistant salamanders of Hakone; and (5) the prostitutes, who made localities such as Shinagawa, Fujisawa, Akasaka, Yoshida and Goyu famous." Such commodities made people stop at otherwise impoverished and remote localities, contributing to the local economy and the exchange between people of different backgrounds.

In order to be a meibutsu, an item has to be a special product; it required specific skills or knowledge for creating it, the expertise possessed by people in a certain region. This skill or knowledge is often passed down in families from generation to generation, thus preventing those from outside the region from gaining the ability to produce the meibutsu. Another concept that is essential for understanding the popularity of meibutsu is highlighted by the tradition of *omiyage*, or gift-giving. Many Japanese rely on meibutsu in their gift-giving culture. Being a part of a larger social culture, is one of the reasons meibutsu has increased employment opportunities.

The economic importance of meibutsu lies primarily in its ability to create identity and branding for local goods, thus allowing for comparatively higher pricing, the creation of derivative industries, and direct contribution to regional tourism. These benefits have been of increasing importance for regional economies where agriculture plays an important role as one of the largest employers.

The Edo Period saw the development of integral bureaucracy which involved restrictions on weapons, travel, and residence documentation in strict and extensive bureaucratic regulation. "It [integral bureaucracy] spelled out the character of human relationships throughout Japanese society in vastly more detail than had any earlier polity" in an effort to eliminate potential rival systems. However, during the same period of time, the composition of cities and infrastructure changed radically, impacting social and economic development. During the 16th–17th centuries, castle towns grew out of consequences of these political practices. Hundreds of new transit towns cropped up on the Tokaido Road. Port towns and commercial towns specializing in meibutsu not only increased total urban populace, but also eroded the economic "primacy" of the older, larger cities such as Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto. The urban growth and business diversity made it difficult for the rulers to fully regulate business.



These changes did not signal the end of economic development but rather a change in its scale, location and participants. Towns such as Minakuchi were able to build economic infrastructure and compete outside of the large cities.

In the foreground of the print, three women are busy making kanpyō. One is holding a ripe gourd to be peeled, one is peeling the gourd and the third is hanging the peeled skin to dry. The skins dry quickly and are usually hung up in the morning, and are taken down in the evening. They are then cut with large cutting devices. The local cooks also take the inner parts with gourd and seeds (nakago), and prepare simple, traditional dishes. In Minakuchi, a special dish is prepared at O-Bon, the annual festival to honor the ancestors. Kanpyō and green peppers (ao toogarashi) are boiled together and placed as an offering on the family altar, with a prayer for a good harvest in the coming year. This print most likely depicts the late summer, since this specific gourd is harvested between the end of July and September.

This print also shows us a glimpse the life of Edo Period villagers. The women are working hard completing their daily tasks. Women living in smaller villages were much less restricted by social expectations, and could play an integral part in the family's business. Peasant women were expected to do household chores in the early morning before working in the fields with their male relatives; peasant women of all ages were important, working members of their families.

The women in this print do not have any make up on and are dressed in robes with simple patterns, which stands in contrast to women who lived in the city, depicted in bijinga or prints portraying beauties, with elaborate make up, hair, and clothing. The kimonos that the women are wearing are known as yukata. Yukata are informal light cotton kimonos worn by both women and men. A standard yukata ensemble consists of a cotton undergarment (juban), which is covered by another piece of cotton with the left side of the yukata wrapped over the right side. The yukata is secured with an obi sash tied in a bow, traditionally placed in the back. In the print one can observe that the women are wearing yukatas as explained above. When looking at the woman hanging the gourd strips in the foreground, one can also see the white undergarment peeking from underneath the patterned yukata. People of the time wearing such kimonos were also seen wearing wooden sandals, such as the ones shown in this print. Two of the women are wearing tenugui, which are hand towels used

for the variety of needs. Here, the tenugui are wrapped around their foreheads as head bands. On closely observing the faces of the women, they are serious and focused. One of the women in the foreground carries her baby on her back as she works. The traveler looks down, as he continues on his solitary journey along this lengthy road.

This print uses a limited color scheme: blues with smaller areas of green, beige, and peach. Most clothing is rendered in colors of blue and pink except for the woman who is shaving the gourd, whose outfit is a deep green. The buildings are beige, or simply the color of paper. The surrounding landscape is portrayed with dark line-work and neutral colors. In contrast, the mountains are a vibrant blue, drawing a lot of attention to their form. Hiroshige expertly captures the moody and atmospheric weather conditions with great skill and beauty. This print depicts the mundane and everyday life of the place. Nature, too, is not exuberant in this print. In the depiction of Minakuchi, the landscape doesn't over-power the normalcy of the scene, yet makes its presence known and appreciated.

The way Hiroshige uses the technique of Western linear perspective in this print is interesting. Optical realism had been a widespread feature in the popular medium of the woodblock print since the mid-18th century. Hiroshige often used it for prominent street scenes, among other scenes. For instance, one or two house fronts would run from the sides of the picture at an acute angle towards an often unshown vanishing point. Hiroshige employs a similar use of perspective here, with the houses diminishing and vanishing into the distance. It makes the viewer feel the actual length of the journey that the traveler covers on foot. It also draws the observer's eye to what lies beyond the path shown within the frame. The directional path that moves towards the vanishing point is not actually drawn but is rather the empty space of the page. The shape of the foreground and background scene creates the diagonal shape of negative space, resulting in the sense of the open road.

The viewer's eye enters the scene in the lower left corner, observing the group of women at work. The viewer is then drawn across the page by the diagonal line created by the first woman hanging gourd strips, the large tree, the traveler, and the woman in the background. The viewer is then pulled back across the page by both the open space of the road and the vibrant hills. Hiroshige places a tree in the center of the page, instead of a figure. This leads one

to think that Hiroshige wanted to superimpose the power of Nature over the power of man. In addition, the scale and coloring of the sky, the mountains, and the trees seem to assert Nature's presence over the human activity going on in the foreground of the print.

Through this print, Hiroshige carefully curates the balance between the overwhelming presence of nature and the villagers' day to day reliance on and use of nature's bounty. The traditions and work of the villagers centered around the products and crops that the land offered. As the economy of Edo Period Japan began to commercialize and traffic along the Tokaido Road increased this use of the land took on new significance. Yet the overarching wonder and beauty of the landscapes depicted in Hiroshige's print asserts nature's immense beauty and power into this framework, alluding to the careful balance between man and nature.

# Fall

*Mushrooms · Persimmons · Reeds*



Enjoyment of Mushroom Picking in Mid-Autumn, Utagawa Kunisada, ca. 1843-47

## Enjoyment of Mushroom Picking in Mid-Autumn by Utagawa Kunisada

*Rachel Hahn & Caitlyn Sit*

Enjoyment of mushroom picking in mid-autumn presents work typical of one of the most prolific designers of ukiyo-e prints, Utagawa Kunisada (1786 – 1865). Kunisada’s work most frequently fell into the yakusha-e and bijinga genres, depicting actors and beautiful women, respectively. Historically, the bijinga originally depicted courtesans. With the rise of a middle merchant class, however, artistic interest was shifted to other classes, and bijinga began to reference the women from ordinary households. By the creation of this particular print in 1845, the bijinga genre had broadened and now “expressed the beauty of women in daily life through the depiction of their lifestyles and activities”. Thus, while Kunisada’s depiction of the woman elegantly enjoying mushroom gathering fits well into the bijinga genre, the boy figure complicates categorization. If the two figures are indeed mother and child, the print could be classified as part of the boshi-e genre. Bijinga and boshi-e are not, however, mutually exclusive; Cho Kyo notes that “Mothers appearing in mother-child paintings are portrayed as beautiful women,” and that their appeal and sexuality is in no way stunted by the prop-like inclusion of a child. Indeed, the discernable differences between courtesans and mothers in prints are few, and Kyo goes as far to suggest that they were “images of beauties—courtesans—in the guise of mothers”. Therefore, these boshi-e prints “should be considered

not as representing family images but as belonging to one of the many *bijinga* variants.” However, only by delving deeper into the details of the print do the unique cultural, social and historical currents that influenced the piece become apparent and, in turn, inform viewers today about this unique perspective and illustration of the celebration and honoring of the bounty of nature.

Before diving into its more nuanced characteristics, one must first understand the print’s basic features. This fourteen-and-a-half by ten-inch print serves both as the right-most piece of the larger triptych, as well as holds its own as a singular artwork. Because most of the colors in the piece are cool, rich blues and greens, the warmer colors pop out, like the faces of the figures and the yellow leaves, signifying points of interest and importance. Tree, mother, and child all lean excitedly over the mushroom in the lower right corner in this simple nature scene.

As main focuses of the print, the two figures need closer examination. First, the boy on all fours in the foreground peers at the mushroom he is grasping, about to uproot it from the ground. His pose looks quite dynamic and almost animalistic, as though his lower and upper halves of this body don’t quite connect under his folds of garments, but that each half is displayed for the viewer. Similarly, the way his face is partially hidden behind a strangely contorted arm suggests an intensity in his action, drawing the viewer’s gaze and stressing the action of mushroom gathering. Perhaps the strange posing of the boy is to emphasize his youth and agility, as if his young, active body is in motion within the print itself; the disjointed parts of the body represent different moments of his action unfolding before the viewer continuously. In contrast to the boy’s horizontal, contorted body, the woman’s is bent only slightly, fairly still and uninvolved in any aggressive movements. While she too peers over excitedly at the mushroom on the ground, the curve of her body forms a more elegant and elongated s-shape, while the boy is curled up in a pill bug state. Her arms are raised to affix a cloth around her head, again emphasizing the mid-action dynamism of the image. The boy’s body comes in front of and obscures the feet of the woman, strengthening the spatial relationship from viewer to foreground to boy to woman to background. However, though the woman’s feet are partially covered, viewers can still follow the slim form of her kimono to see that her feet seem to be pointing inward, like her knees—a stance that was considered to be feminine in the Edo period. Because the boy is in front and curled on the

ground, he is less mature: cruder, but perhaps more relatable.

In addition to the figures’ general positions, their clothing and hairstyles help add to their narrative and characterizations. Identifying the hairstyle of the woman is nearly impossible, because not only is her hair almost completely concealed by a *tangui*, a popular, multi-use cloth accessory, but Kyo also reminds us that these *ukiyo-e* mothers “are dressed like courtesans rather than ordinary women.” The popular Edo hairstyle for married women was the *maru-mage*, “a return to the single, round chignon, to show the woman’s heart has become whole again - one with her husband’s”. However, as a courtesan, this woman could also be wearing the *shimada*, in which the chignon is split in two on either side of a paper cord or ribbon<sup>6</sup>. The cloth that the woman is tying around her head is bright white and cleverly bears the *toshidama* symbol, the adopted identifying mark of Utagawa school. A similar blue mark is paralleled on the boy’s head, where a small patch of hair is shaved, and its black stubble represented by a blue shade. The practice of shaving the pate of a youth is called *nakazori*, or “shaving the middle,” and can be seen in other *ukiyo-e* prints, such as Kitagawa Utamaro’s *Yamauba* and *Kintaro*. Most of the rest of the visible clothing of the two figures is blue, suggesting perhaps the impending transition to colder seasons. Because the woman only appears to be wearing two layers and the boy’s entire upper body is exposed, however, it is evidently not too cold yet. Moreover, indigo-dyed cotton *yukata* were worn most frequently during the summer months, further indicating that the two figures are likely wearing light cotton. The bright orange pops of color of the woman’s first layer of clothing mirror the orange in the leaves above her. This bright fabric of the woman’s undergarment flows and folds in very sensual forms around her arms and between her legs, suggesting elegant sexuality with their yonic imagery. The importance of this sensuality goes back to the original categorization of this print as part of the *bijinga* tradition. Kyo reminds us that these “*bijinga* were produced with an awareness of sexually oriented consumption,” and that, therefore, the emphasis upon this feminine beauty and sexuality is no coincidence. We follow the brighter colors all the way from the top at the yellow tree leaves down to the woman’s orange clothing down to the yellow sash tied about the boy’s waist down all the way to his yellow sandals and the yellow mushroom in his hand, creating a trail for our eyes to bounce about the composition. The yellow handle of a parasol peeks out from the left hand

side of the frame, an invader from the piece of triptych to the left. This yellow object fits nicely in the trail of bright colors and effectively leads the eye to the left onto the next image after it had travels down through this piece.

The patterns on their clothing also help continue the narrative of the print: the boy's clothes are relatively simple, with a subtle stripe pattern on his shirt and solid blue pants. The woman, on the other hand, has more intricate and flowery patterns on all her garments. Despite the differences in detail, due to the existence of some similarly striped shibori patterns, it is likely that both figures are wearing some variation of shibori-dyed cotton or hemp fabrics. When juxtaposed with the clothing in Kunisada's other woodblock works, such as *Tokaido gojusan-tsugi* and *Haru no akebono eho-mairi*, the woman's kimono does not have the same colorful range or neat layers. In comparison with the garments in these two works, the looseness, context of the print, single color of the kimono base, and perhaps even the print patterns, suggest that the material worn in this mushroom gathering print is most likely cotton. If this is the case, considering the hierarchy of the two figures, it should be safe to assume that the boy is wearing a cotton garment as well. Perhaps the simpler-patterned clothing on the boy is designed for cruder tasks, such as crawling on the ground for mushrooms, while the woman should remain dignified and upright, to not soil her more intricate textiles. Additionally, flower patterns adhere to the idea of women as delicate and beautiful, whereas somber stripes instill the boy with stoic, strong masculinity. However, despite the figures' clear differences in status, indigo dye was used by farmers or people who had to work outside due to its natural snake repellent odor, and thus it is likely that the two are of some kind of working class.

Finally, the characters' skins and facial features vary. Again, to emphasize female delicacy, elegance and beauty according to a certain aesthetic, the woman's skin is cooler and paler. The boy, however, as an active youth, who perhaps has been romping around in the fields and sun more, has warmer and darker toned skin. Neither face holds much expression beyond their pleasant and intent gazes upon the mushroom.

The environment that these figures exist in also reveals meaning and message. Woman and child are on a hilly grassy field that rises to the left, while the sky is mostly a rich blue with a small area of darker gradation bordering the top edge. This gradient, known as *bokashi*, is achieved by first moistening the

area on the printing block to be colored. The ink is then directly dabbed onto the darkest areas, such as the top edge of the print or the upper areas of grass, and then it is teased with a brush into the other areas, causing the pigment to dilute and lighten with the water on the pre-moistened block. Ellis Tinios states that *bokashi* was featured in "the work of the top printers, as great skill was required to achieve the smooth gradations." The vividness of the colors in both areas of *bokashi* suggests that this specific print was one of the later copies made. According to the process of creating these kinds of woodblock gradients, the first prints will be lighter, while the later prints will be more vibrant, due to the build-up of color from previous prints. Because of the *bokashi* method, the grass is lighter around the figures' feet, posing a possible logistical solution to maintaining contrast and clarity with the boy's crouched figure and the focus on the mushroom, as well as maintaining visibility of the various signatures and seals. The grass gets darker as it rises, giving it the illusion of receding in space, as well as naturalistically falling under the shadow of the tree. Small, triangular markings of two-toned teal create areas of vegetation concentrated around the mushroom, above the boy's back, and behind the woman. Despite being simple marks, their quantity and quality make them part of the visual language of the piece, and they become vegetation as much as design elements. A similar effect is achieved with small, dark strokes to create a long grassy texture. A gnarled tree branch in the upper left corner mirrors the diagonal movement of the woman's body, as if both are craning over to see the mushroom bounty. Its golden leaves create a boundary at the top of the print, playing with the similar color reflected in the boy's sash down below.

These seasonal elements and nature-related themes, such as deep colors and autumn leaves, are common in woodblock works, as they are a part of *Shinto*, or the Japanese belief in the nature-deity relationship. Nature is embedded in the traditional Japanese way of life, as it is often found as an inspiration in art, as well as celebrated in festivals and honored in daily activities. Mushroom gathering, for example, was a common activity of entertainment due to the abundance of forestland in Japan. The boy in the print is most likely picking a *matsutake* mushroom. They can grow caps that span two inches up to eight inches and are considered expensive ceremonial mushrooms, especially since they cannot artificially grown. Matching the print, *matsutake* mushrooms grow under trees in soil, and they are associated with gifts that celebrate the season of autumn.

This enhances the idea that the print is heavily about the coming fall.

The print also contains textual elements that must be considered into its design. The reddish cartouche in the top right holds the triptych title and is therefore unique to only this panel. The white and gold flower embellishments at the tips of the cartouche are most likely decorative elements indicating a deeper story to the image, though it is unclear as to what kind of flower petals are being depicted and thus could have several different meanings. Camellias, for example, stand for waiting, while white chrysanthemums indicate truth or death. One can assume, however, that because the print has no hints of grief or impending death, the petals stand for waiting or expecting the change into autumn. Other prints by Kunisada include red cartouches that are similar, most notably in the work *Felicitous Women of Contemporary Edo*. It also features a gold border with small floral forms at the top and bottom, though it does not have the white petals. Other Kunisada works feature cartouches with decorative elements, such as gems, colored flowers, and tassels, which are tied in with the theme of the print. The opposite corner of the print holds the simpler black seals of the censor and publisher, as well as the artist's signature. These seals and signatures indicate the formality and regulation of the ukiyo-e field. To officials, the ukiyo-e was dangerous in its popularity and reproducibility, a combination that could easily disseminate subversive ideas and images. Therefore, any widely produced and distributed print had to be signed off by a censor as appropriate for the Japanese audience and the status-quo, indicating the powerful hold that the Edo government maintained during the Edo period, as well as the unification and regularity of form that developed in the ukiyo-e style.

Printed at the tail end of the ukiyo-e era in 1845, the piece is still in relatively good condition: the colors are still rich and vibrant, and one can still discern the patterns of inking, where the hand of the individual printmaker emerges. For instance, the light blue and green fields of color both show streaks, and in some black areas, the paper texture pops through. Additionally, little slivers of the paper underneath show through where the blocks were printed off registration. The careful eye can also spot a fine hair trapped in the print along the line of the boy's back, as well as a small linear gash in the background sky. Little idiosyncrasies such as these give history and character to the individual print.

Finally, the rich blues of the print reflect the "blue revolution," a period

starting in 1818 in which the use and intensity of blues in ukiyo-e became significantly more "varied and prominent." Here Kunisada uses *beru*, or Berlin Blue, a blue synthetic dye imported from the West that became widely popular to ukiyo-e by 1830 and was the most conspicuously vibrant development during the blue revolution. Preceding the use of *beru*, however, Kunisada also made great innovations with the more expensive, duller and native indigo dyes. His 1820 print *Evening Snow at Mokuboji*, for example, illustrates skillful manipulation of indigo to yield "so striking" an effect, it is often mistaken for *beru* upon first examination. While the foreign dye appeared in Japan as early as 1736 through relations with Chinese and Dutch traders, not until about 1817 did the demand and import of this pigment steadily increase. According to Henry Smith II, this increase in demand for the import is because, "[f]rom a printer's standpoint, Berlin blue was in every way superior to the existing blue colorants." Therefore, Kunisada's use of Berlin blue reflects the contextual historical growth of the demand for, supply of, and the expert use of this rich hue.

The overall effect of the print gives viewers a sense of the relationship between mother and son, between nature and humans, between the cycle of seasons, and between text and image. Both mother and son are eagerly joined in this task. Femininity and masculinity are differentiated and thus defined between the two figures, at least according to this artist's taste and his adherence to traditional conventions. The harmony between humans and nature is emphasized by the similarities between the tree and the woman, by the unity of palette and perhaps by the overall reverence of and focus on this small yet compelling mushroom.



Picking Persimmons, Suzuki Harunobu, ca. 1767

## Picking Persimmons by Suzuki Harunobu

*Jamie Chen & Jasphy Zheng*

In Suzuki Harunobu's print *Picking Persimmons* one sees a woman on top of a man's shoulders; they are seemingly stealing persimmons from the other side of a fence. They both may be considered to be *bijinga*, an ukiyo-e term meaning "images of beautiful people," although later it became a term that referred to females rather than males. *Bijinga* has always been one of the leading genres in ukiyo-e paintings and prints and Harunobu was one of the artists that was primarily preoccupied with this subject. The faces of both the man and the woman are expressionless and pale, which is a common feature in early ukiyo-e *bijinga*. It can be assumed that the woman at the top is young and unmarried because of the kimono style she wears, called a *furisode*. A *furisode* is characterized by its long sleeves that are about 110cm (39 – 42in) in length and usually worn specifically by unmarried woman. Her kimono pattern is formed by paulownia leaf-and-flower design, although somewhat roughly drawn. The paulownia tree is significant for Japanese culture. The wood of the paulownia has been used prolifically in Japan because it is strong, light, and ideal for building boats, chests, and everyday wooden objects. Paulownia leaves and flowers also historically were used as a mon, or family crest, of some of the most important aristocratic family clans in Japan, related to the imperial court. Known as *kirimon*, originally it was one of the crests that was restricted from being used outside of the imperial family but later it was chosen by a military hegemon Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Still later it became open to the public and used in pop-



ular design, including kimono prints. Beside the paulownia-flowered furisode, the woman also wears a checkered-patterned sash obi. This checkered design was design was known as ichimatsu mon'yo. It was also one of the most popular kimono prints in Japan due to its simplicity but perhaps mainly because it was associated with one of Edo's favorite Kabuki Theater actor, Sanokawa Ichimatsu. According to Seiroku Noma's book, "Japanese Costume and Textile Art", this pattern was originally introduced from China. The figure on the bottom wears a less elaborate kimono that is a faded blue with wood grain pattern and a tan color obi with alternating wide and narrow lighter stripes, the so-called komochi pattern, literally meaning parent and child. Although the figure at the bottom seems feminine, it is a male judging by the different hairstyles of those portrayed. In spite of this dissimilarity, the man can easily be misinterpreted as a female. This androgynous depiction reflects Japan's flexible perceptions of sexuality and suggests that Japan was more accepting of gender ambiguity at that time. The popularity of Kabuki actors during the Edo period, where men would roleplay as women, enforces these ideals. Women and men were equally desirable regardless of gender and it represents the liberal attitudes of sexuality in Japan. Some scholars, such as however, have also argued that Harunobu is trying to make a political statement rather than that of sexuality, by blurring the boundaries of gender and class.

The persimmons that the figures are about to steal are also indicative of Japanese culture. According to history, persimmons were introduced to Japan from China around the Nara Period. Since then, it has become the most popular tree in Japan. Persimmons are easy to grow; they are seldom attacked by pests and live a long time. Most importantly, the fruit can be used in many different ways. Therefore, it is the most common tree that one can see in ordinary Japanese people's yard. You might not see an apple tree quite often in Japan, but the persimmon tree is everywhere. When autumn comes, persimmons will turn from green to orange indicating the fruit's ripeness. As a result, persimmons are tightly associated with the season of autumn, representing harvest and triumph. Religiously, the persimmon is also a symbol of transformation in Buddhism. The green persimmon is acrid and bitter, but the fruit becomes very sweet as it ripens. Therefore, man might be initially ignorant but that ignorance is transformed into wisdom as the persimmon bitterness is transformed into sweet delicious fruit.

Another element in Harunobu's composition is the fence and the remarkable amount of detail he puts into representation of the fence as compared to other elements in the piece. The fence also occupies approximately one third of the whole composition of this simple print. It shows the importance of this everyday object and the role it plays in Japanese homes. For example, fences in Japan, kaki, is a common but vital element in house and garden design, even today. In the Edo period, to which this particular print belongs, fences were mostly made using bamboo foils, like the one we see here. Fences presumably establish boundary and privacy. But according to Edward Morse's "Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings," a fence is a boundary, not a barrier. Divided by function, fences for backyards are different from the ones for front yards. For backyards, where security and privacy is the main concern, a solid, high fence is a preferable, whereas a lower and more transparent fence is more suitable for the front yard since it is visually joined to the house in a way a backyard is not. A front yard fence must provide access to the public sidewalk as well as enhance the "curb appeal" of the property. Therefore, it is not difficult to tell that the fence in this print is a front yard fence considering its moderate height and the fact that it "allows" the persimmon tree to lean over it as an attraction to passers-by.

The composition of the print falls into two distinct parts, left and right. The two full-length figures occupy the right half of the entire image while the fence and the persimmon tree takes up the left half. The persimmon tree is on the other side of the fence stretching out a branch slightly over it.

Overall, the print has a subtly balanced composition. Although it shows the two figures in full length, which is a visual device to keep the audience at a distance, the composition is neither too empty nor too busy. It leaves the viewer enough space to focus on the elements of nature, like the persimmon tree and the textured fence. The open composition also gives the audience room to breathe. The openness of the print and lack of detail in the "sky" is a common characteristic in ukiyo-e prints in general. It gives ukiyo-e prints a transitory feeling where the viewers just focus on the moment captured in the piece and everything outside of that moment is of little significance. This also emphasizes the main characters in the print, which are the people. At the same time, it does not feel empty but elaborate because the elements in the print are taking most of its surface and are almost reaching all the edges.

As for the use of perspective, this print adopts the cavalier perspective, which is commonly used in Japanese two-dimensional art influenced by traditional Chinese painting. Unlike the western world, where painters tend to use linear perspective to create a three-dimensional effect, in cavalier perspective, point of view ends up in multiple points instead of one. As a result, the image turns out more flat. Also, no shadow is depicted in the print, which is another cause of the flatness of the image. This accounts for a more abstracted style of representation that was of great appeal for westerners when they encountered ukiyo-e prints in the 19th century.

The particular copy at the RISD Museum is slightly damaged, especially in the upper right corner where the paper is somewhat worn away, possibly from water damage. The paper and colors in general look faded but it could also be due to the color palette of the dark earthen red that characterized Harunobu's pieces of this time. Looking at other copies of the same piece, Harunobu's signature would be placed in the lower right side of the page, but for some unknown reason, was cropped away. It would have said "Suzuki Harunobu ga" meaning "picture by Suzuki Harunobu" if the signature were still present. Picking Persimmons is a nishiki-e, or brocade pictures, a type of full color prints made after 1765. Nishiki-e are distinguished by the amount of color layers each print has. Before, prints only had one to three layers of color, but nishiki-e has up to ten to twelve layers, each color with a wood block print carved for that color. Visually, they were likened to Chinese brocades because of such rich colors. It was a technique that was perfected by Harunobu when he was commissioned by kyōka-ren, prominent poetry groups in Edo, to design egoyomi, which are illustrative calendars, to use at their meetings. It was Harunobu, that really popularized the use of nishiki-e and was so admired that several artists begin to follow his style.

Thorough analysis of Harunobu's Picking Persimmons reveals how the print shows more than just two figures picking persimmons. By looking at the style of the print, composition, the clothing and identity of the figures, and representations of different elements, Harunobu's print becomes richer with history and meaning.

## The Paddies of Ono, Suruga Province by Katsushika Hokusai

*Sabrina Catlett*

In Hokusai's print *The Paddies of Ono, Suruga Province*, the viewer encounters a group of peasants returning home after hours of work in the field. They carry their bounty—gathered bundles of grass on their backs or of reeds on the backs of their oxen. The procession is passing by right to left at the edge of the vast marshland, guiding the viewer's eye into the background, centered is Mount Fuji. The mountain is rising to the very top of the print, the graceful lines describing its perfect cone ascending smoothly from the surrounding landscape forms. It is early morning and the dawning sun is reddening the clouds at the east while lightening the blues, the remainder of the darkness of the night. These atmospheric effects of fresh morning are rendered through the gradation of reddish and bluish hues—the bokashi—at the sides of the mountain.

*The Paddies of Ono, Suruga Province* exists within a series known as *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*; in fact, however, it belongs to the group of ten additional prints designed and published after the first thirty-six sheets had been issued—the task undertaken due to the overwhelming success of the original set. Katusushika Hokusai produced this series of landscape prints as a type of homage to Mt. Fuji. Mt Fuji is both Japan's tallest and most sacred mountain. It is also a volcano and was frequently active throughout most of Japanese history, particular-



The Paddies of Ono, Suruga Province, Katsushika Hokusai, ca. 1833

ly in the eighth and ninth centuries when the dominant legends were taking shape. It is a prominent figure within much of Japan's art and lore and is most often associated with ideas of immortality. The increasing popularity of depicting Fuji from numerous vantage points was on the rise during late Edo period Japan. These series fall within the genre of illustrated topographical works known as *meisho zue* ("illustrated famous places.") In 1834 Hokusai, at the age of 75, published the first corpus of works dedicated to Mount Fuji. Hokusai shows the iconic mountain from every perspective. His objective was to try to capture "the gift of immortality" that he believed was hidden at the heart of the volcano. His preoccupation with Fuji in many ways had religious overtones particularly associated with the concepts of life and death. The Japanese culture of the time saw Mt. Fuji as a source of immortality. This was the essence of Hokusai's own fascination with the mountain.

Hokusai configures the composition of the Paddies of Ono by dividing it into two horizontal bands. The action is concentrated at the bottom half of the print. The close-up of harvesters of grass and reed with their draft cattle take the foreground, commanding the attention of the viewer. Hokusai is able to capture a snapshot of the workers in motion; their group disturbs a flock of egrets. The birds are now flying low over the marsh away from the peasants, suggesting the wide expanse of the marsh and thus depth of space. At the head of the procession women carry frames of cut grass on their backs. They are followed by the men, which are responsible for guiding the cattle. The women are dressed in work clothes, loose airy robes and pants of darker and lighter blue indigo-dyed cotton or hemp; white bandanas cover their heads for protection during fieldwork. Both women are bare footed. Detailed as they are, women nearly merge with the landscape due to their small scale, but maybe primarily due to their bluish-greenish-white color-scheme which they share with the landscape. They are followed by the men, which are responsible for guiding the oxen. The orange-brown large bulbous bodies of oxen laden with enormous bristling bundles of reeds dominate the foreground. Huge mass of the oxen appears to contrast their graceful, rhythmic dance-like gate and serves to further emphasize it. Hokusai visually harmonizes the figures of the men and their cattle in both coloration and conformation; the legs of the cattle mimic the legs of the men. Some oxen may seem to be temperamental, heads lifted as if resisting the guidance of the peasant leading, but all are obedient in fulfilling

their habitual task, none pulling at the rein. As usual with ukiyo-e prints, representation abounds in precisely rendered details. The oxen are outfitted with a halter and ropes that keep the reeds from sliding up their necks or, conversely, from falling off their backs. A rope is tied vertically around their bellies, likely with the same purpose of fixing the reeds in place.

Just as there are visual correspondences between oxen-leaders and their cattle mentioned above, all people on the print are likewise sensitively coordinated. The men are dressed in blue work clothes similar to grass-carrying women discussed earlier, but instead of wearing pants and being bare feet, they sport gaiters *kyahan* and sandals. Most of men have round straw hats *kasa* either on the head or pushed back behind the shoulders since the intensity of the sun is not felt yet, now that it is so early in the day. The last man of the group carries bags on his shoulders using a balancing pole. The way this last figure in the procession is facing the viewer is mirrored in the figure of the foremost oxen-leader, the two men framing their group visually.

Moreover, coordination of the group continues through the similarity in the posture of the leader of the herdsmen and that of the first woman, completing the tying of all elements of the foreground. The first woman stands with arms crossed and body language that suggests that she has been waiting for the rest of the group to catch up. The man leading the group of cattle stands in a similar pose.

The overall plainness of the motif, the subtle coordination of form and color persistent throughout the print just as it was shown in the discussion of the foreground, are all indicative of the deep innate harmony that reigns in the simple life of people in nature. Here, as always, Hokusai captured this with his unparalleled humanness, grace and poignancy.

**Artist  
Biographies**

## Suzuki Harunobu

Suzuki Harunobu was one of the central figures in ukiyo-e during the 1760s and defined many of the works that came after him. His family originally came from Kyoto, but Harunobu spent most of his working life in the city of Edo. He was the pupil of multiple artists including Nishimura Shigenaga, Ishikawa Toyonobu, and Nishikawa Sukunobu, a prominent ukiyo-e artist in Kyoto in the 18th century. In his early works created between 1757 – 1764, Harunobu worked in the typical Edo style of ukiyo-e, focusing on subjects such as classical Chinese and Japanese stories, children at play, courtesans and women in daily activities. His most famous works were made in the short period between 1766 – 1770, when he became the first person to consistently create full color prints called nishiki-e, or brocade picture. These featured primarily unmarried girls either with or without a companion, courtesans, courtship, and mothers and children. Other than his innovation in printing, he was also known for his delicate and petite type of women. His style of work influenced his contemporary artists, such as Shiba Kokan, who imitated Harunobu under the name of Harushige, and Isoda Koryusai.

## Utagawa Hiroshige

Hiroshige was the son of Andō Genemon who was the warden of the Edo fire brigade. In the spring of 1809, when Hiroshige was only 12 years of age, his mother died. Shortly after, his father resigned his post, passing it on to his son. Early the following year, his father died as well. Hiroshige's actual daily duties as a fire warden were minimal, and his wages were small. Undoubtedly, these factors, as well as his own natural bent for art, eventually led him to enter in about 1811, the school of the ukiyo-e master Utagawa Toyohiro.

Utagawa Hiroshige was a disciple of Utagawa Toyohiro, who in turn was a follower of Utagawa Toyoharu, the founder of the Utagawa school. This school of ukiyo-e printing was considered to have the most prolific artists in the late Edo period. These artists imbibed the atmosphere of the time and successfully created a new, eclectic style in which balance and harmony were important, and landscapes were, at times, depicted using western perspective.

Hiroshige is best known for his landscapes, such as his famous series, The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido and the Sixty Nine Stations of the Kisokaido and for his depictions of birds and flowers. The subjects of his work were atypical for the ukiyo-e style, whose typical focus was on beautiful women, popular actors, and other scenes of the urban pleasure districts of Japan's Edo period. The Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, a series by Hokusai was a strong influence on Hiroshige's choice of subject, though Hiroshige's approach was more poetic and ambient than Hokusai's bolder, more formal prints.

## Katsushika Hokusai

Katsushika Hokusai is one of the most famous artists associated with ukiyo-e, having produced over 30,000 designs during a hugely successful career that spanned over seventy years. His complete oeuvre encompasses a great diversity of formats and genres including landscapes, bijinga (beautiful women), kabuki actor portraits, historical tales, still life, erotica, surimono (privately commissioned prints distributed in limited editions), instructional painting manuals, and more. Throughout his career, Hokusai switched styles and art names numerous times. Paintings and surimono from his Sori period and Western-style prints of his Hokusai period are among his particularly notable works. During his Taito period, Hokusai focused on book illustration; most of his encyclopedic collections of sketches known as “Hokusai Manga” were published then. Three prints from Hokusai’s world-famous series “Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji” created during his Iitsu period feature in the exhibition.

## Torii Kiyonaga

Torii Kiyonaga was one of the most important Ukiyo-e artists. Kiyonaga, originally named, Sekiguchi Shinsuke, was born in 1753 in Sagami Province and died in 1815 in Edo, Tokyo. During this time, he was a student of Torii Kiyomitsu I, the head of the Torii school at the time. The Torii school was the most influential school for Ukiyo-e prints during the first half of the 18th century. Due to his faith and love to the Torii family, Kiyomitsu adopted him as his own son. Kiyonaga took over the school after Kiyomitsu’s death in 1785. Kiyonaga is most famous and recognized for his large full colored ukiyo-e prints depicting courtesans and beautiful women. He depicts the women with graceful lines and elegance, then composes them in stage-like arrangements with landscapes as their backdrops. His prints are often diptychs, triptychs, or hashira-sets. Kiyonaga had many pupils, influenced many artists, and is arguably the best ukiyo-e artists who depicted beautiful women in the 1780s.

## Utagawa Kunisada

Born in 1786 unto a “well-to-do ferry owner” and aspiring poet, Utagawa Kunisada arrived to an Edo world already in full swing of the ukiyo-e movement. While he began the study of ukiyo-e in 1801 at the age of fifteen, by 1809 he was already considered “at least equal to his teacher Toyokuni in the area of book illustration.” His early success indeed blossomed, and by the time of his death in 1865, he was and continues to be hailed as one of the most prolific designers of ukiyo-e prints. Throughout his lifetime, Kunisada had created some 20,000 prints, specializing in the yakusha-e and bijin-ga genres. Kunisada also “developed close ties with prominent literary figures,” and this penchant for popular fiction is reflected in his famous series of prints illustrating the 11th century Tale of Genji. Between illustrations of this culturally and historically significant text, of famous kabuki actors, and of “erotically decadent women,” Kunisada’s “powerful, free style” is a staple of the ukiyo-e movement.

## Katsukawa Shunzan

Katsukawa Shunzan, an ukiyo-e artist of Edo period Japan, created his main work between 1782 and 1798. Shunzan was a pupil of the master ukiyo-e artist Katsukawa Shunshō, and the influence of Shunshō’s style remains prevalent throughout Shunzan’s works. Primarily, prints by both Shunshō and Shunzan depict kabuki actors. These prints are characterized by the remarkable facial expression of the figures; actors’ eyes are animated with emotion, eyebrows raised, mouths contorting and limbs often striking poses of sharp action. In this manner, Katsukawa Shunshō’s psychologically insightful style is carried through to Shunzan’s work. Depictions of bijinga, beautiful women, appear in Shunzan’s later work. Although not as boldly animated as kabuki actors, there is still an insightful sensitivity to the interaction of the bijinga. The tilt of a head, twist of a neck, and generally delicate rendering create prints that resonate with the idea of bijinga as graceful beings. This kind of psychological acumen can be traced in the focused facial expression of the main fisherman in the print at the exhibition.

The influence of Katsukawa Shunzan’s teacher on his own work demonstrates a trend of Edo period printmakers. This testifies to the continuity of style, subjects and techniques that resonate with other artistic and cultural aspects of Edo Japan. Katsukawa Shunzan did not develop his own innovative style, but through emulating of and expanding on Shunshō’s work, he aided the continuum of culturally representative ukiyo-e prints.



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