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Hokusai's Great Waves in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Visual Culture

Christine M. E. Guth

Katsushika Hokusai's *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (*Kanagawa oki namiura*), popularly known in the Anglophone world as *The Great Wave,* occupies an iconic place in modern visual culture (Fig. 1). Widely cited in word and image, included in exhibitions around the world, the focus of a documentary film in a series about artistic masterpieces, and, most recently, featured in the British Museum/BBC radio program *The History of the World in One Hundred Objects,* it is, in the eyes of many Euro-Americans, Japan's most representative artwork. This is not true in the country of its origin, however, owing to the fact that it is not a unique work of art but a woodcut of which thousands of impressions were made for popular consumption. Okakura Kakuzō, writing in 1900, called into question the print's authenticity as a representation of Japan when he declared that "the history of Japanese art cannot be written through ukiyo-e."[1] In his view, the Euro-American privileging of "pictures of the floating world" failed to take into account their true cultural place in the country that produced them. And yet, the modern-day celebrity of *The Great Wave* cannot be explained without recourse to its reception in nineteenth-century Japan. Looking at the sociocultural context in which *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* was produced and consumed helps to explain how and why it came to be singled out from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* of which it is a part.

Scholars in Japan, Europe, and the United States have examined this image's artistic and design elements chiefly in relation to Mount Fuji, with interpretations predicated on Hokusai's personal devotion to the immortal mountain, the new spirit of empirical inquiry expressed in his views of it, or its privileged status as an emblem of Japanese national identity.[2] These approaches, though appropriate given that the mountain defines the series, overlook the multiple levels on which this particular view may be read, as well as the many readings of the wave itself, which may be related to a range of images, practices, institutions, and texts.

Under the Wave off Kanagawa was but one of many renditions of a motif that cumulatively registered a new interest in maritime imagery in Japan from the 1790s through the 1860s.[3] Waves already had a long and multivalent history in Japanese literary and visual arts before the nineteenth century, but during this period, external and internal events combined to make them critical sites through which many artists, but most notably the prolific and long-lived Hokusai, provoked thought about their country's shifting geopolitical circumstances and, especially, its vulnerability to foreign incursions.[4]

Over a career spanning six decades, from the 1790s until his death in 1849, Hokusai produced image after image of waves. No other artist before him treated this subject so obsessively or creatively. There are scenic views of waves breaking on the beach at Enoshima; book illustrations of waves identified with legendary feats of heroism and self-sacrifice; designs of waves for the decoration of personal accessories and architectural interiors; artists' instructional manuals with incoming and outgoing waves; depictions of waves in the formal, semiformal, and cursive brush styles; a boat fighting waves to enter the famous Cave of the Three Deities; rabbits running over waves; ghosts haunting the waves where ships had foundered; a great wave seemingly morphing into plovers; male and female waves; *One Thousand Images of the Sea,* a series (never completed) whose title, *Chie no umi,* may be understood acoustically to mean "sea of wisdom"; and even a Taoist magician conjuring waves from the palm of his hand. While many of these enjoyed wide circulation, Hokusai's many variations of a single great cresting or tumescent wave especially captured the public imagination by bringing into an integrated and magnified aesthetic focus disparate external disruptions whose full import was not yet fully perceived or understood. As Susan Stewart has written in another context, "the gigantic presents us with an analogic mode of thought . . . [involving] the selection of elements that will be transformed and displayed in an exaggerated relation to the social construction of reality."[5] Widely disseminated in his own prints and illustrated books as well as in reinterpretations by other artists, Hokusai's "great waves" commented on a new maritime reality by their singularity, heroic scale, pictorial style, and even their very materiality.

Fears of Foreign Invasion

The idea that the waves encircling the Japanese islands sheltered them from outside intruders was deeply rooted in Japanese thinking. In a poem in the eighth-century anthology *Man'yōshū,* Japan is described as a beauteous island "hidden by a thousand lapping waves."[6] But waves did not simply hide and protect; a passage in the *Nihonshoki,* a mythologizing account of Japan's history also written at that time, testifies that they were thought to have divine agency as well. The wave was the means through which the legendary Empress Jingū exercised and extended her power over territory on the present-day Korean peninsula: "The Wind-God made a breeze to spring up and the Sea-God uplifted the billows," so that "without the labour of the oar or helm, they arrived at Silla." When the "tide-wave following the ships reached far up into the interior of the country," the king of Silla grew fearful of its destructive force and submitted to the divine power of the invading country.[7] These intertwined notions of Japan as a country protected and guided by divine winds and waves were recurring themes later associated with the abortive Mongol invasions of 1275 and 1281 and, fueled by late eighteenth-century nativist scholarship, with the prospect of European incursions.[8] Evidence of this linkage are the nearly fifty copies of a fourteenth-century illustrated handscroll recounting

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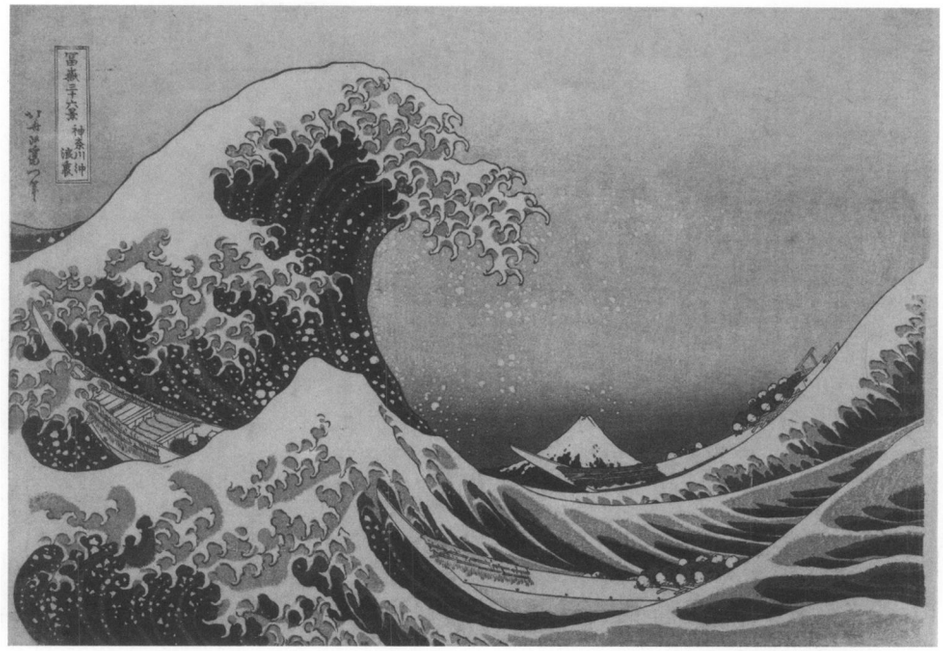

1 Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa,* from *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji,* ca. 1830–33, color woodblock print, 10¼ × 14⅝ in. (25.9 × 37.2 cm). British Museum, London, 2008.3008.1 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

the drama of the Mongol invasions that were created from the late eighteenth century onward.[9]

Japan was not a seafaring nation during the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). The shogunate had banned the construction of all ships over five hundred *koku* (forty-nine gross tons) "such that they can withstand high waves and weather a storm" and forbidden, on pain of death, those who left the country from reentering.[10] Merchant vessels that plied the waters of the archipelago had sails, oars, and an open stern to prevent them from taking to the open seas. In the 1780s these limitations even led some feudal lords secretly to seek information on how to build better oceangoing ships commensurate with those that, under the auspices of the Dutch East India Company, entered the southern port of Nagasaki every summer.[11]

Although only Nagasaki was open to European vessels, this port and others were active conduits for trade with China and Korea throughout the Tokugawa period.[12] In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, however, Russian, American, and British ships were also demanding access to ports around the archipelago. Foreign vessels were already regular sights in the vicinity of the southern ports of Nagasaki, but increasingly they were pressing for entry into the northern harbor of Hakodate. As a verse written about 1800 by Tokugawa Harumori, the feudal lord of Mito, put it: "Hakodate Barrier / Guardsmen, / Be alert! / This is not a time when only waves come to shore."[13]

Sightings of foreign naval ships off the Izu and Bōsō Peninsulas, leading to the bay that gave access to the shogunal capital of Edo, also caused alarm. Hayashi Shihei was one of a number of government officials who, at great personal cost, sought to alert the shogunate that encroaching foreign forces demanded a new outlook on Japan's watery periphery. The need to protect the country from foreign vessels perceived to be as powerfully built as "small fortresses" led him to write "Military Talks for a Maritime Nation" ("Kaikoku heidan," 1791), which opens with the question "What is meant by a maritime nation?" and goes on to address the defense preparations needed by a country "bordered on all sides by the sea."[14] While he held that defensive measures alone were sufficient, others spoke to the need to develop international commercial shipping and trade. Satō Nobuhiro, in his "Abbreviated History of the Western Powers" ("Seiyō rekkoku shi ryaku," 1808), declared, "There is nothing that compares with shipping and commerce to strengthen greatly a nation's interests."[15]

The rumored threat of a Russian invasion, followed in 1804 by the so-called Rezanov affair, in which a Russian diplomat landed in Nagasaki in the hopes of opening trade negotiations but was turned away, further fueled anxieties. Such threats led in 1825 to a shogunal edict ordering foreign vessels entering Japanese ports to be fired on, as was the American *Morrison,* when it entered Uraga Bay in 1837, using the return of seven shipwrecked sailors as a pretext for initiating trade, as Rezanov had earlier done. Adding to these events, accounts of China's defeat at the hands of the British in the Opium War of 1839–42, popularized in the semifictional "New Tales of a Foreign Land" ("Kaigai shinwa," 1849), prompted warnings that China's failure resulted from "a deficient sense of national unity and patriotism."[16] Expressions of growing concern intensified following Commodore Matthew Perry's arrival in 1853 and, especially, the signing of the Treaty Port agreements in 1854 and 1858. Foisted on Japan by the Western powers, these gave extraterritorial rights, first to lands around the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate, and later around Yokohama, Kobe, Nagasaki, and Niigata. These humiliating infringements of Japanese sovereignty were not abrogated until 1899.

Hokusai's Great Waves

Hokusai created a great wave that expresses the outside world both conceptually and artistically. His sweeping view of the Seven League Beach, Shichirigahama, at Enoshima, with the shrine of Benten and Mount Fuji in the distance, where the

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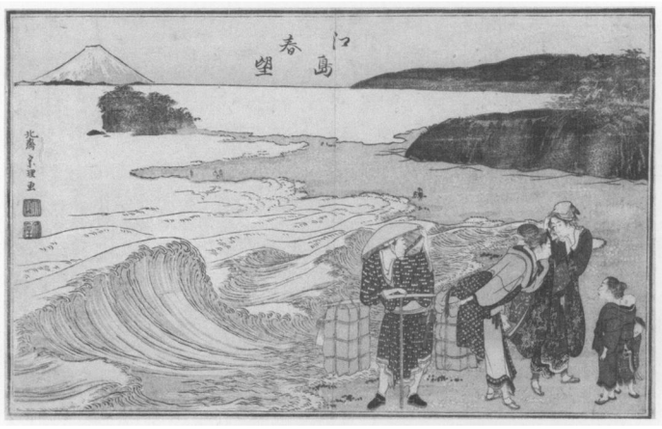
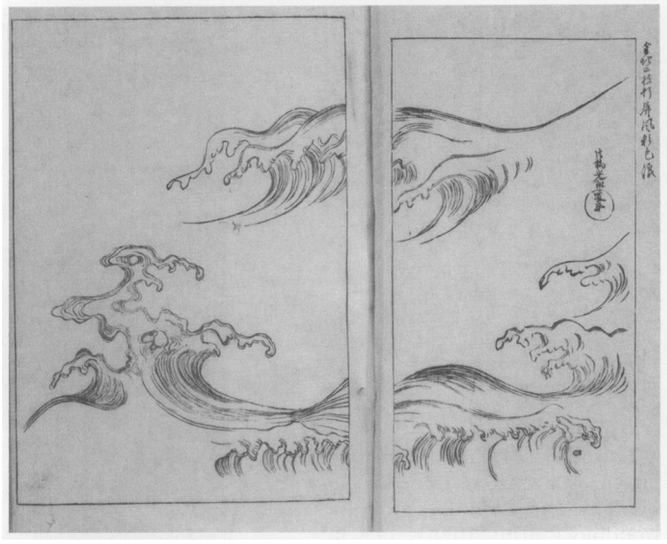


2 Hokusai, *Pilgrims at Enoshima,* double-page illustration from *Threads of the Willow,* 1797, woodblock-printed album, page 10 × 7½ in. (25.4 × 19 cm). British Museum, London, 1979.0305.0.177 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)



3 Sakai Hōitsu, double-page illustration from *One Hundred Designs by Korin,* 1826, woodblock-printed book, page 10 × 6⅞ in. (25.5 × 17.5 cm). British Museum, London, 1915.0823.0.185 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

singular cresting wave makes its first appearance, speaks to a key locale in which this motif's new twofold pictorial identity was constituted (Fig. 2).[17] As the presence of surfers today demonstrates, Enoshima was one of the few places with real waves along the Edo/Tokyo coast. Consequently, waves breaking on the shores of this scenic spot were a feature of many woodblock prints. Hokusai's illustration in *Threads of the Willow* (*Yanagi no ito*), a 1797 album of comic verse (*kyōka*), however, was unusual in its mobilization of Western perspective in combination with a single outsize wave in the foreground. Arrested in motion at the moment of cresting, the wave is made to look three-dimensional in a way that makes it as conspicuous a presence in the landscape as Mount Fuji. Despite his study of the principles of linear perspective to situate objects in space, Hokusai deliberately exaggerated the relationships of scale so that the wave competes for attention with the distant cone of the sacred volcano.

Waves breaking on a shore were not a new pictorial theme, but Hokusai's vision both contributed to and reflected heightened awareness of the actualities of Japan's coastal topography. Imaginary views of rocky coastlines with crashing waves had figured in screen paintings known by the generic title "rough seas screens" (*arisō byōbu*) beginning in the sixteenth century.[18] Many of these highly stylized works were suffused with poetic resonance by their identification with Matsushima, a scenic locale in the north made famous by the haiku poet Bashō.[19] In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, these gave way increasingly to more empirically oriented marine views, including carefully observed topographic records of the coast for military purposes, such as those painted in 1792 by Tani Bunchō at the request of the shogun's chief councillor Matsudaira Sadanobu.[20]

Yet even imaginary renderings were not entirely free of intimations of the natural violence of waves. In a screen painted by Kōrin, reproduced in *One Hundred Designs by Kōrin* (*Kōrin hyakuzu,* 1826), a woodblock-printed book compiled by the artist Sakai Hōitsu, the thrashing sea is creatively transformed into a drama at once fanciful and disturbing as two anthropomorphized waves with tentaclelike arms confront one another, the smaller one seeming to recoil in horror as the larger one thrusts forward (Fig. 3).[21] This pictorial wall of water could not but arouse in the viewer a heightened awareness of the way the sea may become a destructive force even in one's familiar surroundings. There is no evidence that Kōrin's playfully disruptive image was intended as a tidal wave, but the artist would have been aware of the catastrophic tsunami that so frequently followed earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, such as that of Mount Fuji in 1707.[22]

While Hokusai may have been motivated by a variety of considerations in depicting the cresting wave at Enoshima, his chief objective is likely to have been a desire to exploit the rising tide of enthusiasm for Western idioms introduced by, among others, Shiba Kōkan, an outspoken proponent of the "Dutch" style, whose view of the Seven League Beach with Mount Fuji in the distance Hokusai may have seen on display at the Atagoyama Shrine. Kōkan had presented his two-fold screen, painted in materials that simulate the effect of oils, to the shrine's votive hall the year before Hokusai published his print in *Threads of the Willow,* and it remained on public view there until 1811.[23] Whatever his intentions, Hokusai's reiteration of the subject in *Yanagi no ito* and other similar prints helped to popularize views of this famous seaside spot with a great wave.[24]

Enoshima, within a day's journey from Edo, was a popular site for outings, often under the guise of pilgrimage to the shrine of Benten, the goddess of wealth, love, and seafarers. It was a public stage where contact between strangers could take place, and men and women of different classes exposed themselves to the gaze of others. The seashore had long been associated with transient sexual encounters. Visits to the shrine of Benten evoked such brief engagements since it was only at low tide that pedestrians could reach the island cave where the goddess's shrine was located, and they had to leave before the tide turned. This tenuous relation with the main-

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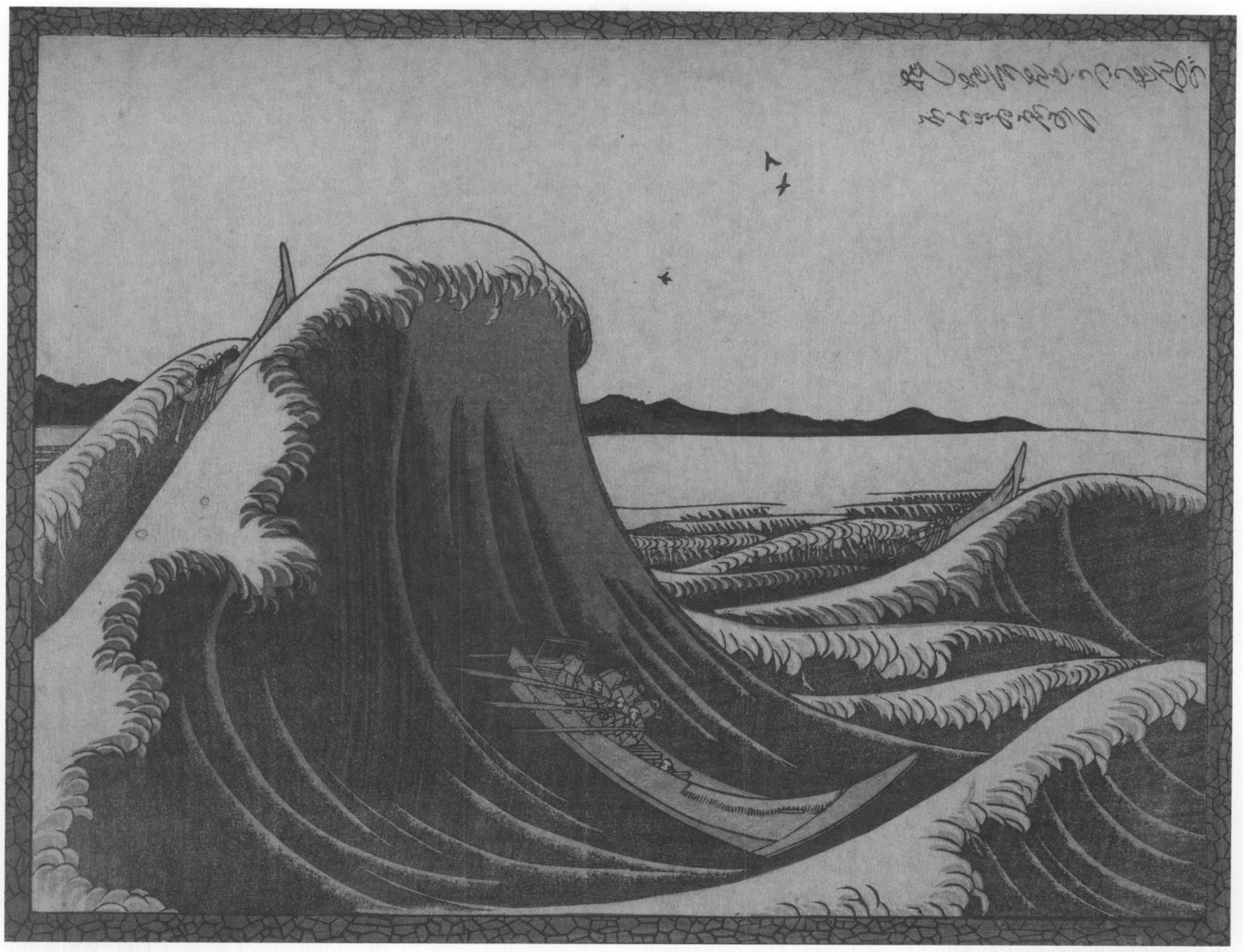

4 Hokusai, *Rowing Boats in Waves at Oshiokuri*, ca. 1810, color woodblock print, ca. 7½ × 10¼ in. (19 × 26 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William S. and John T. Spaulding Collection, 21.6678 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © 2011 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

land also made it a particularly suitable site to try out new representational codes. By the same token, we can begin to see here how, even as the great wave was framed in local terms, the idioms used in its representation defamiliarized a familiar space.

The success of this and other treatments of the singularized wave led Hokusai to use it again and again in various combinations. Its frequent redeployment also reflected practical considerations: the artist was under constant pressure to supply his publisher with new designs, and one successful print generated demand for another. Such commercial imperatives help to explain his multiple renditions of ships in stormy seas, a theme first assayed in *View of Hommoku off Kanagawa* (*Kanagawa oki Hommoku no zu*) and *Rowing Boats in Waves at Oshiokuri* (*Oshiokuri hatō tsūsen no zu*) (Fig. 4), two very similar horizontal-format prints issued about 1800–1810 for a series of eight pictures of Edo and its environs.[25] The former features a large vessel equipped with mast and sail, and the latter, the more vulnerable small skiffs (*oshiokuribune*) that carried fresh fish between the Bōsō Peninsula and the shogunal capital of Edo—the same type that would recur in *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*. In these views of boats pitching and tossing in the trough between two giant waves, fact and fantasy combine to give metaphoric expression to the costs and benefits of the flow of people and goods from across the seas. Although the boats themselves are Japanese, the prints' horizontal format, brown and green color scheme, and decorative frame are all conventions associated with Dutch copperplate engravings. These artistic references to Europe are reinforced by the added strangeness of the horizontal inscription.

Although its indebtedness to a European model is not as explicit, an illustration in *Strange Tales of Northern Echigo* (*Hokuetsu kidan*, 1813) represents another variation on this theme (Fig. 5).[26] Hokusai's terrifying vision sets a ghost ship atop a towering, unstable mountain of frothy water with an ominous black sky animated with eerie-looking storm clouds behind it. The Japan Sea off Echigo (modern-day Niigata Prefecture) is notorious for its turbulence, and tales of sightings of phantom ships circulated widely in its coastal communities. In this version, a certain Captain Magosuke has such an encounter but overcomes its threat by his fervent prayers

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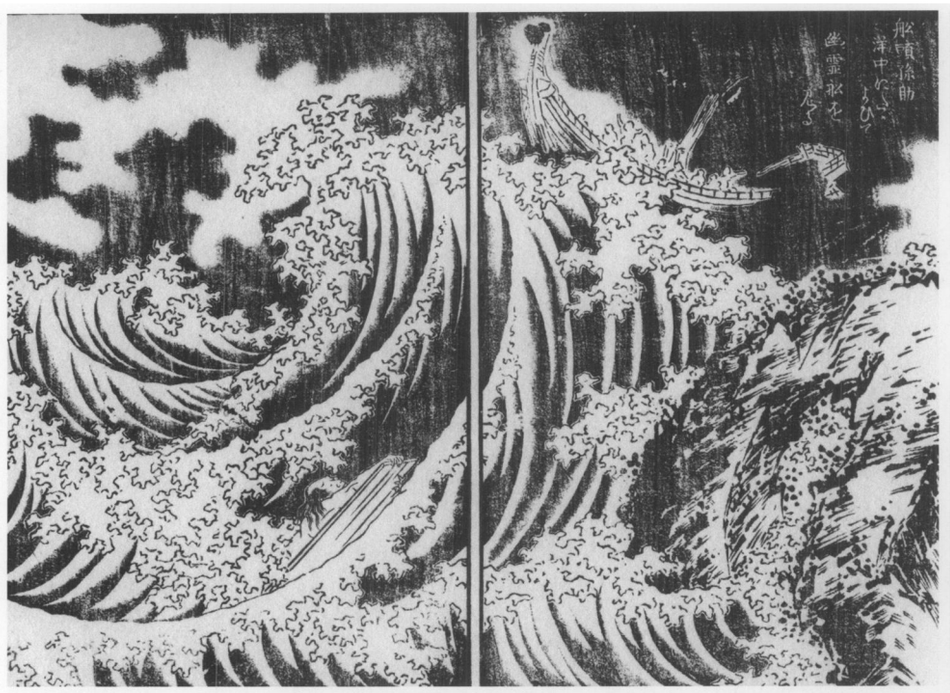

5 Hokusai, illustration from *Strange Tales of Northern Echigo,* 1813, woodblock-printed book (artwork in the public domain; photograph from *Hokusai yomihon sashie shūsei,* vol. 4, with permission of Bijutsu shuppansha, Tokyo)

to the compassionate deity Kannon, who, according to the Lotus sutra, promises devotees protection from perilous seas.[27] This vision of the dangers of travel to China by Japanese pilgrim monks is distinguished from earlier pictorial narratives by the replacement of serial waves with one gigantic one that completely dominates the scene.

The phantom ship, which recurs in a number of Hokusai's prints, speaks pointedly to the fantasies and nightmares that the giant wave aroused in Edo-period Japan. The romanticization of the sea and seafaring so pervasive in European literary and visual arts had little place in Japanese tradition. Those seeking to test their mettle or to escape from the social and political strictures of their world did not set out to sea but took to the mountains, a traditional Sino-Japanese site of spiritual rebirth. As the historian Marcia Yonemoto has observed, "The construction of ocean fears and fantasies allowed the Japanese to engage the idea of an overseas 'elsewhere' while maintaining only limited contact with (and evading threats from) non-Japanese peoples and cultures."[28] Although sailing out of sight of land was rare in the Edo period, harrowing accounts of boats swept off course by a typhoon or the currents were all too common, making ships in stormy seas an inauspicious pictorial subject.[29]

None of the boats in these three designs is Dutch, but the representation of a boat in storm-tossed seas was likely inspired by Hokusai's study of an imported print or a Japanese copy of one.[30] In the seventeenth century, when the Dutch republic had become a powerful trading nation with posts as far away as Batavia and Nagasaki, its artists were recognized throughout Europe as masters of marine painting. The repertory of Hendrick Vroom, Willem van de Velde the Elder, his son Willem van de Velde the Younger, and Ludolf Backhuysen, among others, included river and coastal views with ships, fleets of commercial ships, and naval battles as well as boats in stormy seas, a genre for which Vroom and Backhuysen were especially noted.[31] Some of their paintings were translated into engravings that might have reached Japan a century later.[32]

Under the Wave off Kanagawa

In 1831, a quarter of a century after his *Rowing Boats in Waves at Oshiokuri* and *View of Hommoku off Kanagawa,* Hokusai reinterpreted these narratives about boats struggling against a towering wave by the addition of Mount Fuji. While the earlier images are also identified with Kanagawa, they do not feature the sacred peak, which became the unifying thread in his *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji.* Unlike the earlier versions, for this ambitious series, the artist used the larger *ōban* (approximately 9¾ by 14 inches, or 25 by 36 centimeters) format, which allowed for greater visual scope than the medium-size *chūban* format (approximately 8½ by 11½ inches, or 22 by 29 centimeters). He also situated the outsize wave within a series of landscapes and cityscapes of unprecedented number, all informed by their use of Western illusionism. The visual and material multivalence of *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (fig. 1) made it one of the most successful views within the series.

No longer envisioned as a great mound of water with a toupeelike fringe, the great wave commands the picture plane, dramatically overshadowing the distant peak of Mount Fuji. Reconciling the essential contradictions between the movement of the water and the stillness of the mountain, this print captures and fixes the wave so that it paradoxically becomes a static, elegant, and poised structure rather than something fluid and ephemeral. While the wave's sheer scale and clawlike extensions are threatening, the potential for violence is undermined by the aesthetic artifice of making the smaller wave in front of it a visual double for Mount Fuji.

In the earlier versions, the viewer's gaze is deflected, the subject distanced and generalized, but here the curling wave

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in the foreground swallowing up the boats draws the viewer into its orbit, creating an extraordinary immediacy of experience. The disturbingly low, water-level viewpoint—giving the illusion that we are seeing the wave from within its vortex—makes viewership essential to the effect of this image in a way that was not true before. Further engaging our attention here is the uncertain fate of the boatmen struggling against the overwhelming force of this natural phenomenon. Their bobbing heads combine with the movement of the vessels thrusting in and out of the wave to effect a dialectics of revealing and concealing, closeness and distance. This instability is reinforced by the use in the print's caption of the word *namiura,* a cognate that may be interpreted to mean either beneath or behind the wave. As Timon Screech has written in another context, *ura* and its counterpart, *omote,* are highly charged words, suggesting not simply interior and exterior but that the front is facade and the back, that which is concealed from view, is truth.[33]

While the boats facing the colossal waves are familiar *oshi-okuribune,* viewers of the time could not have failed to notice the unusual vantage from which the familiar landmark of Mount Fuji is seen, one in which the gaze is not outward but inward toward Japan, suggesting the viewpoint of an invisible foreign ship. Left-to-right movement was not unknown as a pictorial convention intimating arrival, but from the perspective of the Japanese viewer, the left-to-right direction of the wave was likely to have been seen as unnatural, since pictures were customarily read from right to left. This directionality thus identified the picture with the sideways writing (*yoko-gaki*) of Dutch books and engravings. If this angle of vision points to a longing for the larger world or the possibility of a dialogue with Europe, the ambiguous fate of the boats confronting the overwhelming force of the wave also hints at the dangers such engagement could entail. That such a dialogue could even be imagined was dependent on the stability provided by the familiar conical form of Mount Fuji in the distance.

By Hokusai's day, the 12,385-foot-high volcano, sixty-two miles southwest of the city of Edo, had been routinized as part of the shared visual experience of all the city's residents. As an active volcano that had erupted as recently as 1707, the sight of it combined both pleasure and fear. Paradoxically, despite its volcanic nature, Mount Fuji was deemed immortal, Fu-shi, "no death," being one of its popular etymologies, thus suggesting that even as the world around it changes, Mount Fuji reassuringly does not. This etymology motivated Hokusai and his publisher Nishimura Yohachi to advertise the projected Fuji series of which *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* was to be a part as thirty-six in number, although in fact forty-six prints were issued.[34] This number capitalized on its association with the iconic thirty-six immortals of classical poetry, while at the same time playing off Mount Fuji's own immortality.

The belief that Fuji's veneration could confer immortality on its devotees had contributed to its becoming the focus of a devotional cult with a wide regional following, and in the summer months, many pilgrims climbed the sacred peak in the hopes of achieving this goal.[35] There is no evidence that Hokusai himself did so, but frequent allusions to his desire to reach the age of one hundred indicate that he was drawn to Mount Fuji's connotations of immortality.[36] Added to these attributes, over the course of the nineteenth century, pride in Fuji as *sangoku ichi no yama,* the tallest peak among the three countries of India, China, and Japan, increasingly took on nationalistic connotations. By its juxtaposition, Hokusai's wave shared in both the national significance and the enduring presence of Mount Fuji.

By defamiliarizing Mount Fuji through techniques of illusionistic perspective in *Under the Wave off Kanagawa,* Hokusai was following a practice first adopted in the 1730s in prints known as *uki-e,* "floating pictures," featuring views of the theater or the Yoshiwara brothel district. These opened up the world in a new way by extending the viewer's own space into the fictive space of the picture, making accessible the pleasures offered therein. As the scholar Kishi Fumikazu observed of a broadsheet of 1739 in which the first appearance of *uki-e* is listed between the sighting of a foreign ship and the return of shipwrecked Japanese sailors, illusionistic perspective represented a window on the world that was also understood metaphorically as a larger "opening," *kaikoku,* of the country.[37]

The advertisement for Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views* stresses the importance of empirical knowledge in capturing the appearance of the sacred mountain: "These pictures show the form of Fuji as it differs depending on the place, such as the shape seen from Shichirigahama, or the view observed from Tsukudajima: he [Hokusai] has drawn them all so that none are the same."[38] Although each angle of vision differed, by regulating the totality of the experience of Mount Fuji through the use of illusionistic perspective, Hokusai offered a uniform visual framework that in effect revised and reshaped the lived space of Japan. The sense that viewers of the prints were participating in a shared viewership is reinforced by the inclusion within many of the pictures of people looking at Fuji.

Hokusai further presented a new way of looking at Mount Fuji through a creative manipulation of geometric forms prompted by his study of European painting manuals. In *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* the conical form of Mount Fuji is viewed through the circular sweep of the wave, an approach that has a visual correlative in *View of Fuji from the Rice Fields in Owari Province,* in which the distant peak of Mount Fuji is seen through an enormous cooper's barrel (Fig. 6). Similarly, in the *Mitsui Store in Suruga District,* the mountain is framed by a triangular space formed beneath a flying kite, which is echoed in the pitched roofs of the adjacent buildings—the same approach that distinguishes *The Honganji Temple in Asakusa.* Many of the designs play the cone of Mount Fuji off a variety of rectangular forms: piles of lumber, as in *Tatekawa in Honjo,* or the viewing platform of a temple, as in the *Sazai Hall of the Temple of the Five Hundred Rakan.*[39] Even as these visual strategies generate pictorial depth, their interplay draws the composition together more tightly in an allover surface pattern. Furthermore, through their repetition, each individual *View* is rhythmically connected to others in the series.

Hokusai had been experimenting with circles, squares, and triangles since the publication of his playful instructional manual *A Quick Guide to Painting* (*Ryakuga haya oshie,* 1812), in which he exposed the powerful geometries that hide beneath the myriad forms of the visible world.[40] The *Thirty-six*

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6 Hokusai, *View of Fuji from the Rice Fields in Owari Province,* from *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji,* ca. 1830–33, color woodblock print, 10¼ × 14¼ in. (26 × 36 cm). British Museum, London, 1937.0710.0166 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

Views, however, is the first series in which he used geometric forms systematically to build internal relations both within and across a series of designs.[41] These visual strategies, drawing attention to the perceptual act itself by making us look over, through, and beyond things, subsequently became so hackneyed through the work of Utagawa Hiroshige and other printmakers that it is easy to forget how striking they must have appeared when Hokusai first deployed them.

While he may have shared Shiba Kōkan's conviction of the value of Western pictorial techniques, Hokusai used them more playfully, for their spectacular effects. In so doing his work points to the role of cultural practices such as theater and public performances in shaping nineteenth-century viewing habits. Hokusai was a master showman who, long before he produced this series, had captured the attention of a novelty-loving public by staging sensational displays of artistic virtuosity. To promote the publication of a new volume of his *Random Sketches* (*Manga*), in 1817, for instance, he painted before a huge crowd in Nagoya a 250-square-foot image of the Buddhist deity Daruma, an artistic feat commemorated in a souvenir print that carefully provides the impressive dimensions of the face, eyes, ears, and nose.[42] This same defiance of the norms of scale also underlies Hokusai's Fuji series, where the artist seduces the viewer by theatricalizing the wave. Just as Hokusai in his performance in Nagoya extended the fictional space of artistic creation to include the viewer, so, too, the vantage point adopted in *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* erases the boundaries between subject and object, transforming the viewer into a participant in this watery drama. In effect, the wave sets in motion a creative process that the beholder completes.

Hokusai's visual rhetoric underlines the fact that in *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* the wave's authority depends not simply on its scale but also on its singularity. In his design, Hokusai has tailored the visual tools that woodblock print artists customarily deployed to celebrate glamorous courtesans and Kabuki actors to devise a superstar wave. While modern viewers may liken the wave to the freeze-frame image



7 Kitagawa Toyohide, Kabuki actor Kataoka Gadō II as Chishima Kanja Yoshihiro, ca. 1841, color woodblock print, 15 × 10¼ in. (38 × 26 cm). Dr. Martin Levitz Collection (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Dr. Levitz)

captured by the camera, in the context of the nineteenth century, it would be more appropriate to see it as nature imitating art. The great wave performs much as does an actor when he strikes a dramatic pose, or *mie,* at the high point of a Kabuki play. Recognition of this commonality is evident in a clever print issued in Osaka, where the frozen form of Hokusai's great wave serves as a dramatic double for the stop-action pose, *mie,* of a Kabuki actor onstage in a new play (Fig. 7).[43]

Like the Kabuki theater with its stage extending into the audience, Hokusai's woodcut depends on a mode of theatricality that intrudes into the beholder's physical space. Holding a print engages the hands as well as the eyes; the multisensorial impact of its feel, its weight, and the intensity of its color all contribute to the embodied experience of its dramatic visual design.

The use of Berlin blue, one of the distinguishing features of Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji,* was an important constituent of this experience. When the publication of *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* was announced in the back of a book of stories by Hokusai's friend Ryūtei Tanehiko, the prints were advertised as *aizuri-e.*[44] This label identified them as

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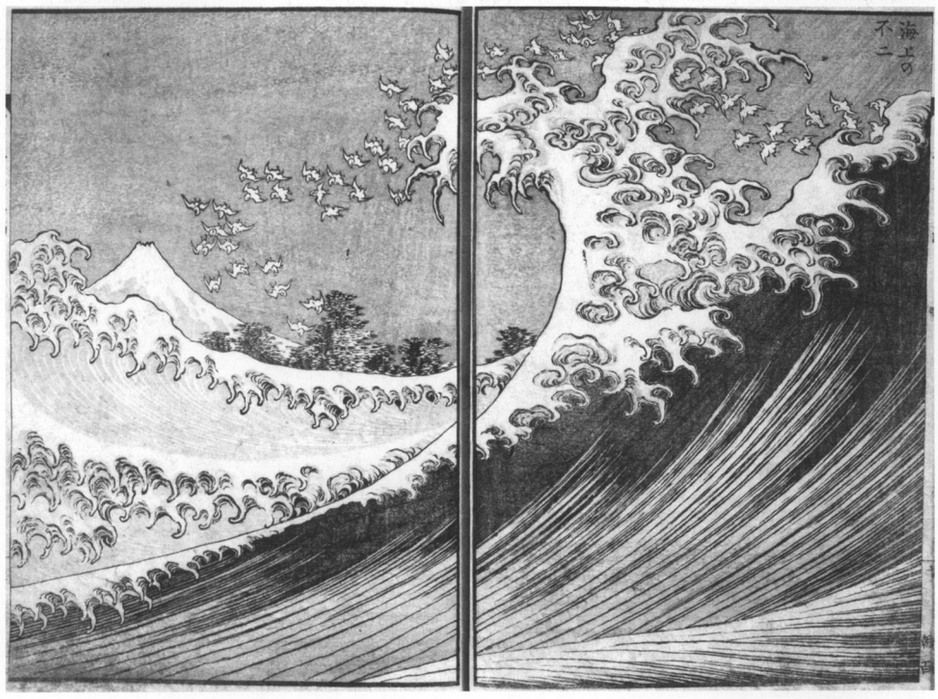

8 Hokusai, *Mount Fuji Viewed from the Sea,* double-page illustration from *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji,* ca. 1834, woodblock-printed book, page 9 × 6¼ in. (22.7 × 15.8 cm). British Museum, London, 1979.3-5.0454 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

being printed not with indigo but with a newly imported synthetic dye known in Japan as *bero,* the Japanese transliteration of Berlin blue, that produced a more intense, saturated hue resembling the cobalt of Chinese blue-and-white porcelains. Henry Smith's study of the "blue revolution" in prints has shown that Berlin blue was imported, possibly from China, sporadically beginning in the 1780s and 1790s, but it was only in the Bunsei era (1818–30) that large quantities made available by Dutch and Chinese traders brought prices down sufficiently for its widespread use in prints.[45]

When the advertisement for the series appeared at the end of 1830, according to Smith, five monochrome blue prints, including views of Mount Fuji from Shichirigahama and Tsukudajima, an island at the mouth of the Sumida River at the mouth of Edo Bay, had already been issued. The symbolic and expressive qualities of this first "pure" *aizuri* group were intimately bound up with the watery locales and activities depicted.[46] The next group of five, still predominantly blue, appeared at the New Year of 1831, with publication of the remaining works, only partially printed in blue, including *Under the Wave off Kanagawa, Fine Wind, Clear Morning* (popularly known as *Red Fuji*), and *Storm beneath the Summit,* continuing until 1833.

One measure of the series' sensational success is the fact that after the completion of the first thirty-six views, an additional ten were published. Whether owing to cost or some other factor, these were printed with black rather than the blue outlines that had distinguished the earlier prints.[47] Despite the more limited use of *bero,* they generated enough public enthusiasm for the publisher to begin producing a second edition of the first thirty-six prints with black outlines and a variety of new color schemes. In addition, even as these single-sheet prints were coming out, Hokusai began his three-volume *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji,* in which he reiterated the view of Mount Fuji with a wave in the foreground, but with its movement from right to left, in keeping with the direction a Japanese reader would view a book (Fig. 8). Whereas the first and the second volumes, the latter containing the view of Fuji with a wave, were first published in 1834, the third volume did not appear until the 1840s. At that time, a second edition of the first volumes was also published. Further slightly different editions came out in the 1850s and again in the 1860s or 1870s.[48]

The initial print run of each view in Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* series is not known, but scholars estimate it to have been between five hundred and one thousand impressions.[49] Minor variations among the many extant views indicate that all or part of the series went through many printings. Matthi Forrer's enumeration of the slight differences in surviving impressions of *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* suggests that there must have been at least four printings, while Timothy Clark estimates that the total output of this view alone may have reached eight thousand, which would have made it a best seller.[50] Whether other prints in the series achieved this level of success is not known. The dates of the reprintings are also uncertain, but they are likely to have continued until the artist's death in 1849, and possibly beyond, as did his *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji.*

By employing Berlin blue as a signifier of the exotic to represent familiar sights, the promised series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* reinforced the artistic operations of the great wave. *Bero* profoundly altered the meaning of the views of Japan in which it was used, because it materialized the relation between Japan and the world beyond its shores, making the medium part of the message. Hokusai's *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* thus participated in a discourse in which the beholder did not simply imagine China and Europe but experienced them bodily. Berlin blue denoted knowledge of the

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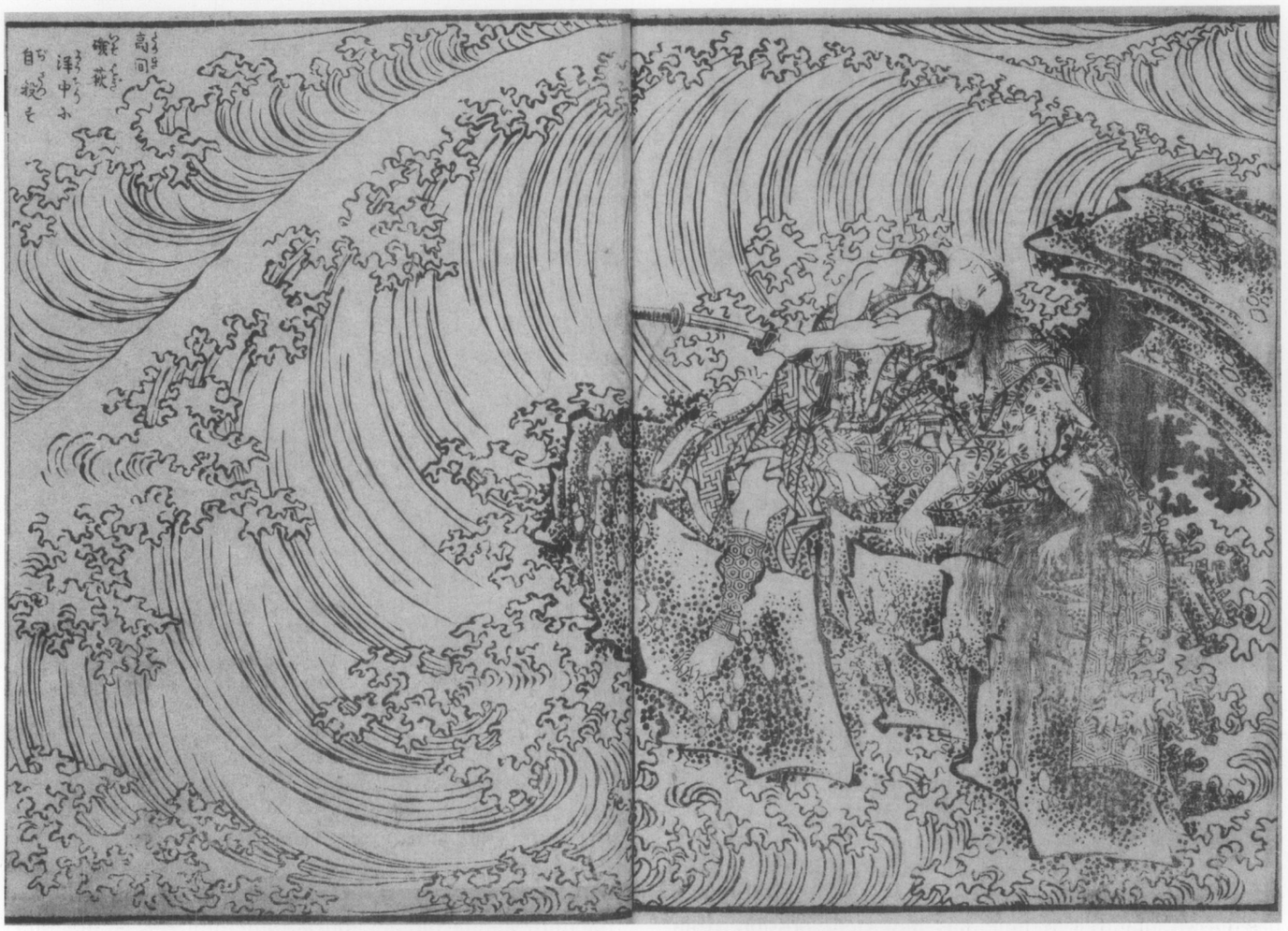

9 Hokusai, *Takama Isohagi,* double-page illustration from *Strange Tales of the Crescent Moon,* 1807–11, woodblock-printed book, page 8⅝ × 5⅞ in. (22 × 15 cm). British Museum, London, 1979.0305.0.488 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

outside world not as a realm separate and remote from Japan but vitally connected through desirable imported commodities.

Hokusai's Heroic Waves

Alongside the cresting wave figuring in his *Thirty-six* or *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji,* Hokusai also made prints and book illustrations in which a great wave is paired with a heroic warrior. Wide circulation of images featuring this potent combination inflected the wave motif with a potent political symbolism.

Hokusai first put great waves to imaginative use in epic tales about Chinese and Japanese warriors in the illustrations to Takizawa Bakin's epic *Strange Tales of the Crescent Moon* (*Chinsetsu yumiharizuki*), a gargantuan project that brought both novelist and illustrator huge popular acclaim. Serialized from 1807 until 1811, Bakin's version of the adventures of the twelfth-century bowman Minamoto no Tametomo, the uncle of Yoritomo, founder of the Kamakura shogunate, was accompanied by many illustrations featuring dramatic views of the coast, of boats fighting and succumbing to stormy seas, and of the hero swimming amid huge waves.[51] None of these, however, has the visual power of the scene of Tametomo's loyal retainer Takama Isohagi committing suicide. Standing on a rocky promontory with his dead wife, Isohagi plunges a sword into his belly, the erotic violence of his gesture redoubled by the tumescent wave that is about to break over him (Fig. 9). This drama of destruction and renewal is reiterated in the spindrift, which seems to spray like blood from his arched body. Suicide was the warrior's ultimate sacrifice, and as the site of purification rituals (*harae*), the seaside was an appropriate place to carry out such an act, since waves immediately washed away all traces of pollution.

As Mary Douglas has argued, the human body is a symbol for the social body, and when social groups are threatened, they use the body in a symbolic manner to define boundaries.[52] The imaginative power of this juxtaposition of man and wave draws on the physical force of the wave as a metaphoric double for the warrior. With this symbiosis, Hokusai introduced a new, highly eroticized, and enduring image of masculinity that was used in many contexts and against many enemies.[53] Fiction and its illustration, of course, are powerful tools for giving shape to new ideas, and in his retelling of these epic battles between rival clans competing for power, Bakin capitalized on the way myth gives collective expression to actual social experience and material conditions. In the

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historical recounting, Tametomo, a warrior on the losing side of the Hōgen rebellion, was sent into exile on the island of Oshima, where he committed suicide. In Bakin's version, however, the seven-foot-tall hero does not die in exile but escapes by sea, only to fall victim to a storm that causes his ship to go off course, landing in the Ryukyu Islands, where, after overcoming a demon, he marries a local princess. Oshima, an island off the coast of the Izu Peninsula, however, is the setting of Tametomo's most celebrated exploit, in which, wielding a twelve-foot bow, he pierces the hull of an enemy ship and sinks it.

In the context of early nineteenth-century Japan, the narrative of *Strange Tales of the Crescent Moon,* in which the hero Tametomo journeys beyond Honshu to take control of islands, real and imaginary, transposes the classic themes of heroism and self-sacrifice into an expanded geographic framework. This new narrative is no longer centered on Kyoto (although the imperial presence is important) but directed toward the subjugation of islands once defined by their difference or exclusion from the mental universe of civilized Japanese. Until this time, the Ryukyu Islands were not spaces over which Japan felt a need to assert overt power, since they were taken for granted as tributaries. With the periphery realigned in the struggle to define and maintain Japanese territorial integrity, however, the seashore and naval battles assumed new prominence as proving grounds for warrior valor and honor. Tametomo's subjugation of Oshima, the Island of the Women, the Island of Demons, and, especially, the Ryukyus symbolically marked the expansionist scope of Japan's energizing national vision when control over the archipelago itself was increasingly in question.

Bakin's adaptation of the historic twelfth-century narrative was likely informed by the Chinese vernacular novel *Water Margin* (Chinese: *Shuihu zhuan;* Japanese: *Suikoden*) about a legendary band of 108 outlaws from China's periphery who carry out vigilante justice in the face of an unjust and corrupt government. The earliest known compilation of the *Shuihu zhuan* dates from 1589, and by the seventeenth century there were many printed and illustrated versions, but accounts of these heroes were in circulation in China long before that time.[54] Loosely based on historical events related to a twelfth-century Chinese rebel and his followers who took refuge from society in the marshy lands of present-day Shandong Province, *Water Margin* spoke to marginality on multiple levels: as a work of vernacular rather than elite fiction imported from China; in its celebration of outlaw heroes; and in its setting on China's southern periphery.

The subject of *Water Margin*—virtuous men, motivated by honor, justice, and loyalty who take the law into their own hands—was also read as a critique of the shogunal government in nineteenth-century Japan. Such readings were especially common during the Tenpō era (1830–44), which saw earthquakes and poor harvests followed by widespread famine and peasant uprisings that compounded the sense of impending disaster aroused by fears of foreign invasion. These catastrophes, widely interpreted as supernatural signs of bad governance, prompted the feudal authorities to undertake reforms that included restrictions on the consumption of frivolous luxury goods, including extravagantly polychrome prints promoting the Kabuki theater and geisha.[55] Censorship is thought to have led publishers to focus on more acceptable subjects, such as brave and loyal warriors, but the extraordinary recursive power of the unorthodox heroes of *Water Margin* subverted the intent of the shogunal dictates.[56]

First introduced to Japan in the early eighteenth century, *Water Margin* was enthusiastically received, a response that led to numerous translations, reinterpretations, and print series. Takizawa Bakin's hugely successful *New Illustrated Edition of the Suikoden* (*Shinpen suikoden*), which was serialized for more than a quarter century, from 1805 to 1838, had much to do with the tale's hold on the public imagination.[57] Bakin's version was accompanied by imaginative illustrations by Hokusai, many of them depicting the outlaw heroes as individuals fighting evildoers on, in, and even underwater, all dramatically new modes of portraying warriors that both shaped and reflected the sea as a site where military strength was tested. So popular were these images that in 1829 Hokusai issued a one-volume picture book with portraits of all 108 heroes.[58] Rōri Hakuchō Chōjun was celebrated for his exceptional aquatic skills; in Hokusai's novel interpretation, his prowess is expressed by his walking through the trough formed by two giant waves that he has seemingly tamed with his sword (Fig. 10).

The anthropologist Anne Allison's observations about modern superheroes also aptly characterize Tametomo, Rōri Hakuchō Chōjun, and other warriors fighting on the periphery immortalized by Hokusai:

> Superheroes transcend the limits of human normalcy, yet at the same time they work to restore what was once normal (and disturbed by alien enemies, natural calamities at home). The superhero myth, then, is about borders: about extending them in one place only to reassert them somewhere else. As a fantasy as much about normalcy as about exceptionalism, it is not only mythically universal but also concretely shaped by the times and places in which it circulates as popular culture.[59]

The politicization and militarization of littoral space common to Bakin's novel and *Water Margin* are also pronounced in a scene in Hokusai's *Heroes of Japan and China Illustrated* (*Ehon Wakan no homare*), one of a number of publications from his late years that celebrate warrior exploits in highly original and imaginative ways. Hokusai is thought to have completed the illustrations in 1833, but the book's publication was interrupted by the restrictions of the Tenpō-era reforms, so it was issued posthumously in 1850.[60] The sea had long figured as a realm where mortals might discover the divine, but such encounters generally required traveling either far out or deep beneath the ocean. In the episode illustrated here, the dragon king of the sea emerges from a great wave breaking on the very shore where the warrior Nitta no Yoshisada stands (Fig. 11). This divine intervention—which recalls the divine wind, *kamikaze,* that destroyed the Mongol fleet in the fourteenth century—follows Yoshisada's offering of his sword with prayers for the seas to recede so his army can capture Kamakura and restore Emperor Go-Daigo to power. The deity's appearance within a great wave aligns

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10 Hokusai, *Rōri Hakuchō Chōjun,* from *Chūgi suikoden eden,* 1829, woodblock-printed book, 8⅝ × 5⅞ in. (22 × 15 cm). Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., The Gerhard Pulverer Collection, V2006.20.208 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)

this motif with a larger set of moral values and meanings linked to Japan's mythic origins in the "age of the gods."

The shore, to be sure, had long figured as a liminal space, but the appearance of the sea god here rather than deep in his palace beneath the waters suggests a blurring of the boundaries of land and sea, making what was previously invisible or unknown part of the here and now. Two worlds merge around the wave again in an illustration for an adaptation of a Chinese novel, *The Wars of Han and Chu Illustrated* (*Ehon Kanso gundan,* 1843), where a fierce and resolute Chinese warrior facing a dragon is doubly empowered by his equine mount and the leaping wave behind it (Fig. 12).[61] Here, too, the artist is not simply representing the wave but mobilizing it as a visual trope for its performative qualities. While the wave may function elsewhere as a signifier of the marauding foe that propels the hero, here it embodies the hero's divinely assisted response to it. Legends linking Kannon's manifestation in the form of a white steed to save a drowning woman may have contributed to this configuration.[62]

The One and the Many

The iconic nature of the outsize wave was dependent on the cumulative impact of its multiple iterations by Hokusai and other print artists during and after his lifetime. Its various meanings made it amenable to replication and reconfigura-

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tion in many forms and contexts, each with highly contingent interpretations that, even as they reinforced the cultural value of Hokusai's versions, inscribed new significations to them. Prints were an important medium of communication in nineteenth-century Japan, but they were also artistic commercial products intended to provide amusement and diversion; to read them primarily as ideologically driven risks giving them an intentionality that was not necessarily there on the part of the artist. Yet the dynamics of the nineteenth-century political environment were such that much could not be openly articulated. References to current events were forbidden. This made artists adept at visual subterfuge and readers prone to look for hidden sociopolitical meanings, even when there were none.[63] Despite their use of altered names and transposition of recent events to the distant past, artists could be punished by fines or imprisonment for real or perceived breaches of censorship laws. Not all the iterations singled out here refer specifically to the identification of the great wave with the foreign threat, but those published from the 1850s onward are more explicit, possibly because the weakened shogunate no longer had the authority to enforce these laws.



11 Hokusai, *Nitta no Yoshisada,* double-page illustration from *Heroes of China and Japan Illustrated,* ca. 1850, woodblock-printed book, page 8⅝ × 6¼ in. (22 × 16 cm). British Museum, London, 1979.0305.0.468 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

Variations of Hokusai's great waves were issued both as parts of new series focused on Mount Fuji and in independent form. The sampling introduced here gives some indication of their range and expanded network of meanings. Hiroshige's 1852 reinterpretations in *The Embankment at Koganei in Musashi Province* and his 1858 *The Sea at Satta in Suruga Province,* each published within series titled *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji,* speak to the ongoing enthusiasm for serial views of the mountain, while also testifying to the redistribution of Hokusai's cultural capital by close quotation (Fig. 13). Hokusai's mountainlike wave also generated a witty reinterpretation by his pupil Yashima Gakutei, who resituated the theme in Osaka, a major center of trade whose economic clout challenged the political power of Edo. This print, inspired by *View of Hommoku off Kanagawa,* depicts a ship in stormy seas between the trough formed by two huge waves with Mount Tenpō in the background (Fig. 14). In an age that delighted in theatrical gigantism, viewers would have been amused by this clever analogy between Mount Fuji and the artificial mountain constructed in 1834 of the soil drained from the mouth of the bay that became an Osaka landmark.

An anonymous broadsheet, *kawaraban,* showing a colossal wave at the foot of Mount Fuji with humans, animals, and goods caught up in its watery maelstrom testifies to the rapidity with which the album version of the great wave became independently recognizable and consumable (Fig. 15). Anonymous, free-floating, and potentially subversive,



12 Hokusai, *Chinese Warrior on Horseback,* double-page illustration from *The Wars of Han and Chu Illustrated,* 1843, woodblock-printed book, page 8⅝ × 5⅞ in. (22 × 15 cm). British Museum, London, 1979.0305.0.460 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

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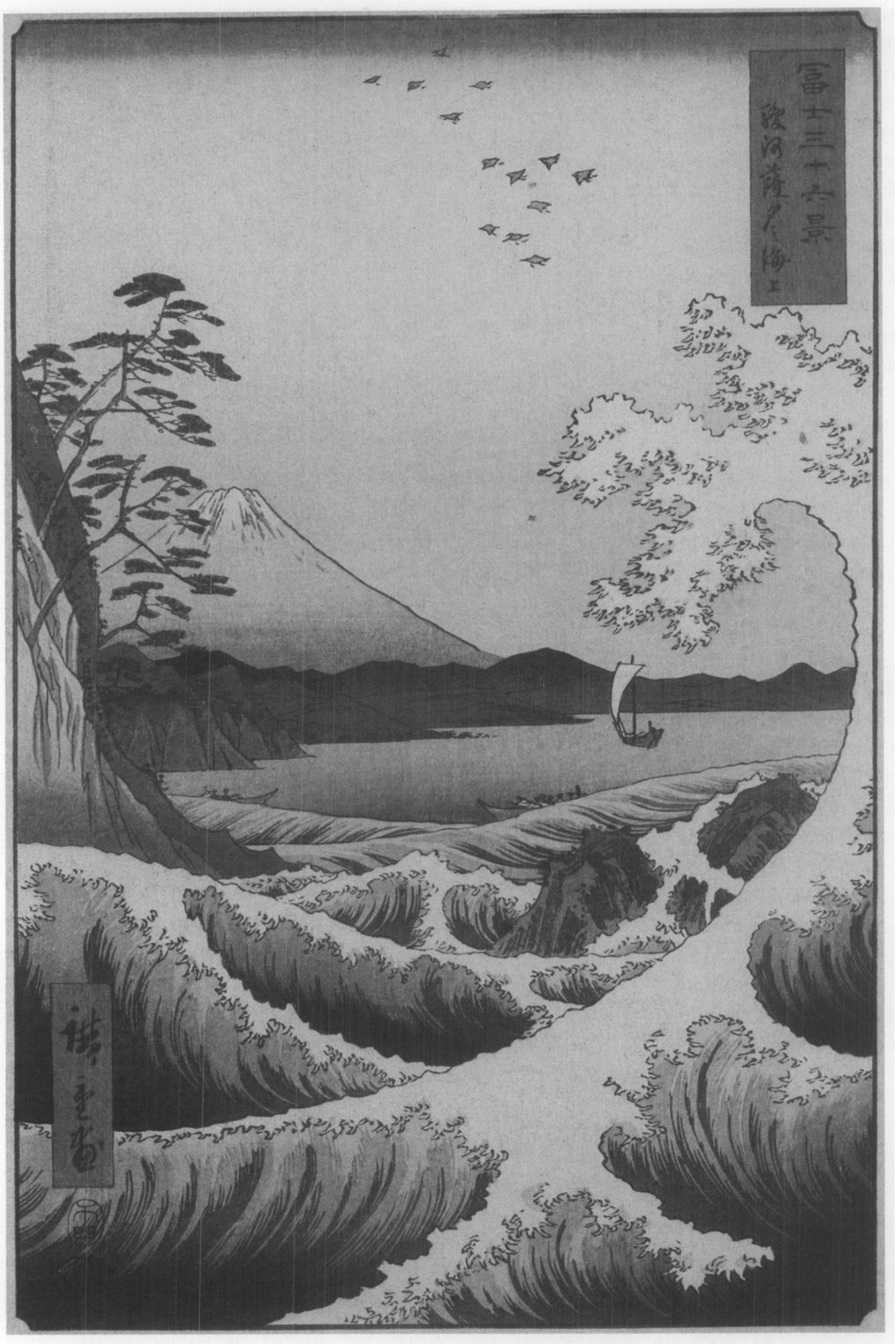

13 Utagawa Hiroshige, *The Sea at Satta in Suruga Province,* from *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji,* ca. 1858, color woodblock print, 14 × 9⅝ in. (35.4 × 24.3 cm). British Museum, London, 1902.2-12.0396 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

inexpensive *kawaraban* were an especially important medium of mass communication about topical issues. The lengthy caption on this one announces in part, "on the night of the seventh day of the fourth month of 1834, following volcanic tremors and a rainstorm, snowslides from melting snow poured down from the Fifth stage of the great mountain with resultant loss of life. . . ." As Richard Lane has written in his study of Hokusai, this print "cleverly twisted the intent of Hokusai's design to imply floods *from* the mountain, rather than waves from the sea."[64] Although this broadsheet is ostensibly informational, the wave of mud was represented as an unnatural phenomenon, whose destructive consequences could be understood as a divine sign of bad governance.

Great waves are a recurring theme in the prints of Hokusai's contemporary Utagawa Kuniyoshi, who knowingly engaged in politically fraught subject matter, for which he barely escaped imprisonment.[65] An artist who specialized in warrior themes, Kuniyoshi adapted one of Hokusai's illustrations for his portrayal of Tametomo performing one of his Ten Heroic Deeds amid the turbulence of giant waves (Fig. 16).[66] A print in a series from 1835–36 that recounts the life of the thirteenth-century monk Nichiren, the founder of a

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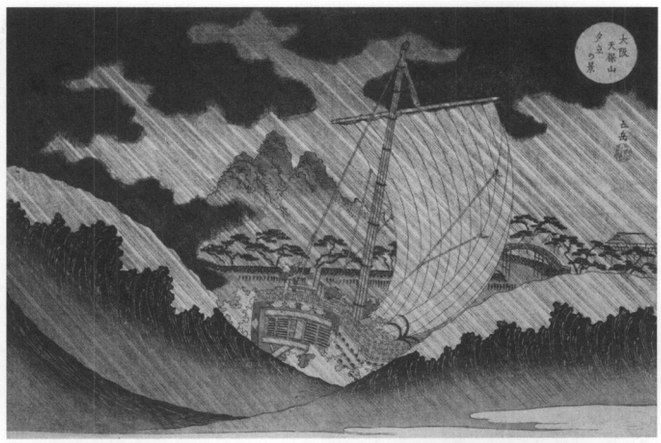
religious sect whose many adherents included both Hokusai and Kuniyoshi, represents an especially creative reinterpretation of both *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* and Hokusai's juxtaposition of heroes and waves (Fig. 17). The mountain in the distance evoking the shape of Mount Fuji represents Sado Island, where Nichiren has been exiled. En route there, Nichiren stands precariously but fearlessly on a small boat facing a great wave as he invokes the name of the Lotus sutra. As he does so, the very words he utters, *namu myōhō rengekyō* (honor to the wonderful Lotus sutra), appear on the calm surface of the water beneath the threatening wave.[67] For Nichiren's followers, this image demonstrated the saint's superhuman power to calm the stormy seas through faith in the Lotus sutra, a scripture central to the sect he founded. This scene, however, would have taken on broader connotations in light of the fact that Nichiren's prayers were widely held to have brought about the divine wind that caused the destruction of the invading Mongol fleets. Viewers of the time are likely to have made the implied connection between the historical and present-day threats of invasion.

An evocative nocturnal scene of the monk Benkei standing at the prow of a ship in a print from 1886 by Kuniyoshi's follower Tsukioka Yoshitoshi suggests the enduring symbolic power of this dual vision of the wave as both a cause of fear and an opportunity to demonstrate the bravery required to transcend its threat (Fig. 18).[68] Yoshitoshi's design recalls a mythic moment in the twelfth-century battle of Dannoura between the rival forces of the Taira and Minamoto, in which Minamoto no Yoshitsune's faithful retainer Benkei saves their ship by his prayers to Kannon when great waves are summoned up from the depths of the sea by the vengeful spirit of Taira no Tomomori. Earlier, Kuniyoshi had brought out many interpretations of this epic battle, often in the form of panoramic triptychs. In one published about 1851, the wave is a huge mound that towers above the ship, and the scene is made more menacing still by the silhouetted forms of the ghosts of the drowned Tomomori and his cohort in the background (Fig. 19).[69] Images of these clashes were especially frequent in prints from the 1850s and 1860s, just before the arrival of Commodore Perry and following the opening of the treaty ports, a period marked by a profound sense of social disorientation. Pictorializations of these familiar yet traumatic historic events provided a coherent framework that reassuringly reminded viewers that, just as such disruptions had been resolved in the past, so, too, they would again.



14 Yashima Gakutei, *View of Rainstorm at Mount Tenpō at Osaka,* from *Eight Views of Osaka,* 1830s, color woodblock print, 9⅞ × 15 in. (25.2 × 37.9 cm). British Museum, London, 1931.0427.0.10 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

At a time of dramatic changes marked by intensified perceptions of vulnerability with respect to the European powers, the wave became a rhetorical device in depictions of the Mongol invasion as well. In a print from 1863 by Kawanabe



15 Broadsheet with Mount Fuji, 1834, woodblock print, 14⅜ × 19⅛ in. (36.5 × 48.5 cm). Tokyo University, Ono Collection (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Tokyo University)

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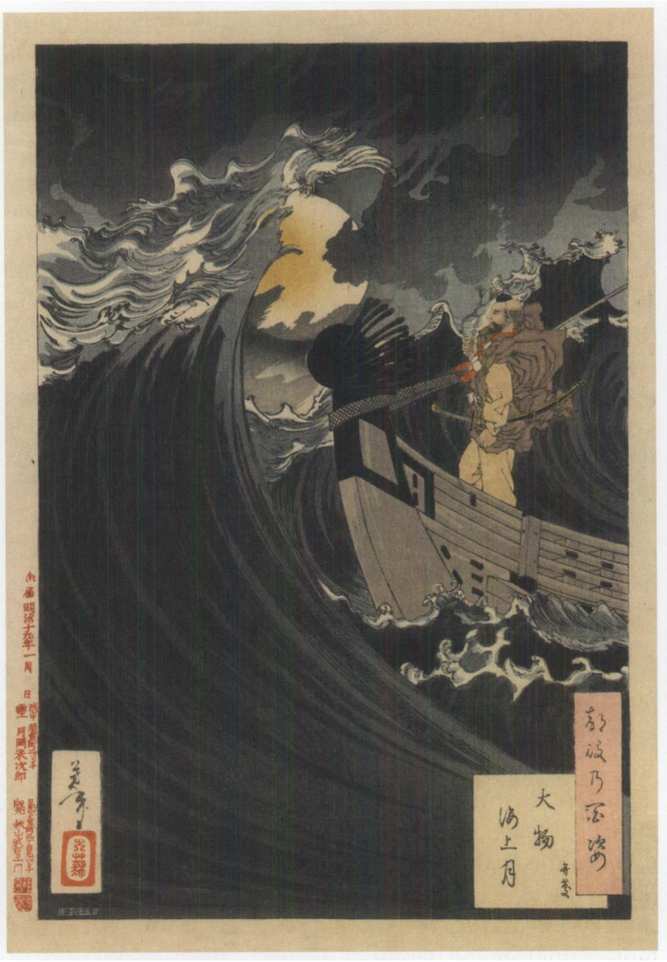
16 Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Tametomo Swimming,* from *Tametomo's Ten Heroic Deeds,* 1847–50, color woodblock print, 14⅝ × 9⅞ in. (37 × 25 cm). Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., The Anne van Biema Collection, S2004.3.185 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)



18 Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *Benkei and the Moon at Daimotsu,* from *One Hundred Aspects of the Moon,* 1886, color woodblock print, 14¾ × 9⅞ in. (37.5 × 25 cm). Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., The Anne van Biema Collection, S2004.3.313 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)



17 Kuniyoshi, *On the Waves at Kakuda on the Way to Sado Island,* from *Concise Illustrated Biography of the Monk Nichiren,* ca. 1835, color woodblock print, 10 × 14⅞ in. (25.4 × 37.8 cm). British Museum, London, 2008.3037.12109 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Trustees of the British Museum)

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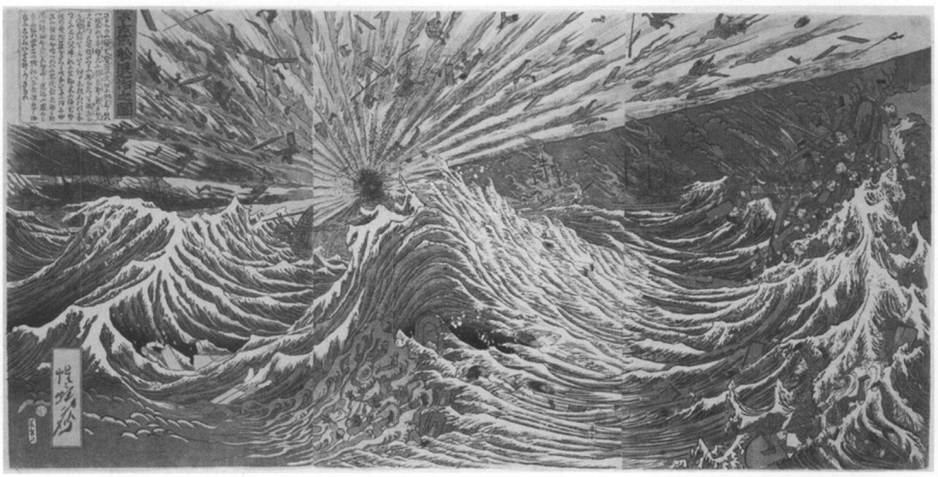
19 Kuniyoshi, *Yoshitsune's Ship Attacked by Ghosts of the Taira,* ca. 1851, color woodblock print, triptych, 14¼ × 29⅜ in. (36.2 × 74.5 cm). Israel Goldman collection, London (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Israel Goldman)



20 Kawanabe Kyōsai, *Repelling of the Mongol Pirate Ships,* 1863, color woodblock print, triptych, 14⅛ × 29⅝ in. (35.9 × 75.3 cm). Israel Goldman collection, London (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Israel Goldman)

Kyōsai, a giant mound of a wave fills the center panel of a triptych where ships have been destroyed, but Mongol ships have been replaced by foreign vessels, and the figures being thrown about by the blast are dressed in European uniform (Fig. 20). This print is thought to have been issued after the forces of Chōshu fief, on the southern island of Kyushu, opened fire on British ships, and the British retaliated by bombarding Satsuma, the capital of nearby Satsuma fief.[70]

Hokusai's originality lay in singling out the wave, customarily represented as part of a sequence, arresting its movement, and magnifying it in a theatrical manner that gave it a recognizable identity. Stewart, writing of the gigantic, observed that "aesthetic size cannot be divorced from social function and social values."[71] The individualized great waves that became ubiquitous in the visual culture of nineteenth-century Japan underscore her recognition that scale is part of a complex system of signification that is temporally and spatially contingent. While not all of the great waves figuring in the prints and book illustrations of Hokusai and other artists make explicit the danger of foreign invasion, with their dramatic scale and frequent combination with warriors and elements of Western perspective, they formed part of a new and culturally specific maritime lexicon that was widely recognized and understood to signal geopolitical changes.

Hokusai's great waves gained exposure and became worthy of critical attention through their replication. Commercial opportunism led other print artists to draw on the cultural capital encoded in the market-tested Hokusai "brand" and in so doing opened the waves to interpretations that kept them fresh. This practice, made possible by the print medium, enabled artists and audience alike to take part in an evolving dialogue about how the lived space of Japan was to be constructed. Instantiating both the island nation's vulnerability to foreign invasion and its power to resist it, waves encoded a perspective at once defensive and outward-oriented. Even as they constituted a fluid boundary whose breaching opened up opportunities for foreign encounters, by their relentlessness and magnitude, they also gave intimations of Japan's own expansionist potential. Socially and culturally constructed boundaries play a crucial role in the preservation or transformation of a given worldview, one that often goes unexamined as long as the environment remains stable and ordered. When circumstances change, however, new, more meaningful codes are required. Hokusai's great waves arose in just such a context, offering the promise of a global flow of people and goods, even as their circulation helped to fashion an imagined community that solidified the symbolic boundaries of the nation.

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Notes

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1. Quoted in Okakura Tenshin, *Nihon bijutsu shi* [History of Japanese art] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2001), 137.
2. Examples of this approach include Kobayashi Tadashi, "Katsushika Hokusai no fugaku sanjūrokkei" [Hokusai's thirty-six views of Fuji], in *Ukiyo-e taikei* [Compendium of ukiyo-e], vol. 13, *Fugaku sanjūrokkei* [Thirty-six views of Fuji] (Tokyo: Shūisha, 1976); Suzuki Jūzō, "Fugaku sanjūrokkei shiken" [Studies of the thirty-six views of Fuji], in *Ehon to ukiyo-e* [Picture books and ukiyo-e] (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 1979), 293–301; and Kondo Ichitaro, introduction to *The Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji by Hokusai,* trans. Charles S. Terry (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1966), 5–18. For studies of this print focusing on Hokusai's waves, see Yura Tetsuji, "Hokusai ni okeru namiura no keifu- Hokusai geijutsu no ikōsatsu" [The pedigree of waves by Hokusai], *Ukiyo-e geijutsu* 16 (1967): 8–27; and Tsuji Nobuo, *Kisō no keifu* [The lineage of eccentricity] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1989), 47–73.
3. For its broad-ranging and thought-provoking discussion of social and historical constructions of the ocean, I am indebted to the introduction by Karen Wigen and other essays in "AHR Forum: Oceans of History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006): 717–80.
4. For a good, though somewhat dated, overview of the foreign threat, see John W. Hall et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan,* vol. 5, *The Nineteenth Century,* ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 259–307.
5. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 74.
6. Line from a poem by the eighth-century poet Hitomaro, trans. Ian Hideo Levy, *The Ten Thousand Leaves: A Translation of the Man'yōshū, Japan's Premier Anthology of Classical Poetry,* vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton Library of Asian Translations, 1981), 173.
7. *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697,* trans. W. G. Aston (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), 230.
8. On the tradition that a divine wind (*kamikaze*) destroyed the Mongol fleet, see Thomas D. Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan,* Cornell East Asian Series (Ithaca, N.Y.: East Asian Program, Cornell University, 2001). For a general discussion of *shinkoku* (Land of the Kami), see Kuroda Toshio, "The Discourse on the 'Land of the Kami' (Shinkoku) in Medieval Japan: National Consciousness and International Awareness," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 23, nos. 3–4 (1996): 353–86. On nativism, see Susan L. Burns, *Before the Nation: Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).
9. Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention,* 11.
10. From Engelbert Kaempfer's comments on ships as cited in *Kaempfer's Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed by Engelbert Kaempfer,* trans. and ed. Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 252.
11. See *Secret Memoirs of the Shoguns: Isaac Titsingh and Japan, 1779–1822,* annot. and intro. Timon Screech (London: Routledge, 2006), 46–51.
12. See Ronald P. Toby, "Reopening the Question of Sakoku: Diplomacy in the Legitimation of the Tokugawa Bakufu," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 323–63.
13. Quoted in Timon Screech, *The Shogun's Painted Culture: Fear and Creativity in the Japanese States, 1760–1829* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 221. For discussion of the preoccupation with "the new outside" and "sealing" Japan, see esp. 220–38.
14. Quoted in Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe, 1720–1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 39.
15. Translation by Allen Hockley, "The Study of Western History and Its Effect on Japan's Self-image and World View," MS, 1994, 19, courtesy of the author.
16. Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, "Opium, Expulsion, Sovereignty: China's Lessons for Bakumatsu Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 47, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 16.
17. For an account of Hokusai's Sōri period and the place of this print within it, see Roger Keyes, " 'My Master Is Creation': Prints by Hokusai Sōri (1795–1798)," *Impressions,* no. 20 (1998): 39–51. See also Richard Lane, "Hokusai's Exotic Decade," *Andon* 8 (1988–89): 61–74.
18. See Carolyn Wheelwright, "Tōhaku's Black and Gold," *Ars Orientalis* 16 (1986): 1–31.
19. Nakamachi Keiko, "The Patrons of Tawaraya Sōtatsu and Ogata Kōrin," in *Critical Perspectives on Classicism in Japanese Painting, 1600–1700,* ed. Elizabeth Lillihoj (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 86–87. For more extended treatment of the iconographic connotations of these screens, see Ota Shōko, *Tawaraya Sōtatsu hitsu Matsushima-zu byōbu: Zashiki kara tsuzuku umi* [Tawaraya Sōtatsu's Matsushima screens: The sea depicted from the reception room] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1995).
20. For an example of Bunchō's coastal sketches, see *Edo kara Meiji e* [From Edo to Meiji], in *Nihon bijutsu zenshū* [Compendium of Japanese art], ed. Takashima Shūji, vol. 21 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1991), fig. 55.
21. This book is in two volumes; the first was published in 1815 and the second in 1826. It is briefly discussed in Jack Hillier, *The Art of the Japanese Book* (London: Sotheby, 1987), vol. 2, 659–61.
22. Images that can be securely identified as tsunami are rare. For examples, see Ono Hideo, *Kawaraban monogatari: Edo jidai masu comi no rekishi* [Broadsheets: The history of mass communication in the Edo period] (Toyko: Yūzankaku, 1960), 165–67.
23. Calvin L. French, *Shiba Kōkan: Artist, Innovator, and Pioneer in the Westernization of Japan* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1974), 102–3.
24. For examples of similar designs, see Lane, "Hokusai's Exotic Decade."
25. On these and related prints, see Roger S. Keyes, "Western Influences in Hokusai's Art," in *Hokusai,* ed. Gian Carlo Calza (London: Phaidon, 2003–), 23–31.
26. The illustrations are reproduced and the text summarized in Suzuki Jūzō, *Hokusai yomihon sashie shūsei* [Compendium of Hokusai's illustrations for novels], 5 vols. (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 1971–73), vol. 4. On ghosts at sea, see Iwasaka Michiko and Barry Tollken, *Japanese Death Legends and Vernacular Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1994), 103–8.
27. See *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma,* trans. Leon Hurvitz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 316.
28. Marcia Yonemoto, "Maps and Metaphors of the 'Small Eastern Sea' in Tokugawa Japan (1603–1868)," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (April 1999): 170.
29. The near-total absence of large waves in the votive paintings that sailors offered to shrines for safe passage is testimony of this. See Makino Ryōshin, *Nihon no fune ema-hokuzensen* [Japanese votive plaques of ships] (Tokyo: Kashiwa shōbo, 1977).
30. On this subject, see Kawai Masatomo, "Hokusai and Western-style Painting," in *Hokusai Paintings: Selected Essays,* ed. Gian Carlo Calza (Venice: International Hokusai Research Center, University of Venice, 1994), 149–64.
31. Lawrence Otto Goedde, *Tempest and Shipwreck in Dutch and Flemish Art: Convention, Rhetoric, Interpretation* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 12.
32. Tōgasaki Fumiko, in "Hokusai sakuhin ni okeru kihonteki kōzu ni tsuite no sho kōsatsu" [Certain aspects of the basic compositional elements in Hokusai's work], *Ukiyo-e geijutsu* 51 (1976): 19, 20, reproduces two possible models for ships in stormy seas.
33. Timon Screech, "The Birth of the Anatomical Body," in *Births and Rebirths in Japanese Art,* ed. Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere (Leiden: Hotei, 2001), 110–11.
34. The advertisement is reproduced in Henry D. Smith II, "Hokusai and the Blue Revolution in Edo Prints," in *Hokusai and His Age: Ukiyo-e Painting, Printmaking and Book Illustration in Late Edo Japan,* ed. John Carpenter (Leiden: Hotei, 2005), 255.
35. On the cult of Fuji, see Martin Collcutt, "Mt. Fuji as the Realm of Miroku: The Transformation of Maitreya in the Cult of Mt. Fuji in Early Modern Japan," in *Maitreya the Future Buddha,* ed. Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 248–69. For an overview of images related to the cult, see Naruse Fujio, *Fujisan no kaiga shi* [The history of paintings of Mount Fuji] (Tokyo: Chūo kōron bijutsu shuppan, 2005); and Timothy Clark, *100 Views of Mount Fuji* (London: British Museum Press, 2001).
36. On Hokusai's obsession with Fuji, see Henry D. Smith II, *Hokusai: One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji* (New York: George Braziller, 1988), 7–20.

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37. Kishi Fumikazu, *Edo no enkinhō: Uki-e no shikaku* [Perspective systems of Edo: The viewpoints of *uki-e*] (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1994), 1–4. As Kishi points out, the introduction of perspective was also mediated by Chinese prints.
38. Quoted in Smith, "Hokusai and the Blue Revolution," 254.
39. For excellent reproductions, see Kobayashi, "Katsushika Hokusai no fugaku sanjūrokkei."
40. It is reproduced in Nagata Seiji, ed., *Hokusai no e-dehon* [Hokusai's illustrated manuals], 5 vols. (Tokyo: Iwasaki Bijutsusha, 1985). For further discussion, see Christine M. E. Guth, "Hokusai's Geometry," in *Translation in Modern Japan,* ed. Indra Levy, Contemporary Japan Series (London: Routledge, 2011), 125–40.
41. Tōgasaki Fumiko, "Hokusai sakuhin ni okeru kihonteki kōzu ni tsuite no sho kōsatsu," pts. 1 and 2, *Ukiyo-e geijutsu* 50–51 (1976): 3–26, 14–26.
42. On Hokusai's performance painting, see Richard Lane, *Hokusai, Life and Work* (New York: Dutton, 1989), 110.
43. On this print, see Dean Schwaab, *Osaka Prints* (London: John Murray, 1989), 195.
44. The advertisement is reproduced and discussed in Smith, "Hokusai and the Blue Revolution," 255.
45. Ibid., 244.
46. Ibid., 256–59.
47. Variations among some of the surviving impressions are discussed by Matthi Forrer, *Hokusai Prints and Drawings* (Munich: Prestel Verlag; London: Royal Academy of Art, 1991), nos. 11–32.
48. The complex publishing history is summarized in Smith, *Hokusai: One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji,* 21.
49. On the problematic question of print runs, see Chris Uhlenbeck, "Production Constraints in the World of Ukiyo-e: An Introduction to the Commercial Climate of Japanese Printmaking," in *The Commercial and Cultural Climate of Japanese Printmaking,* ed. Amy Reigle Newland (Amsterdam: Hotei, 2004), 11–22.
50. Forrer, *Hokusai Prints and Drawings,* no. 11. Timothy Clark, interview by the author, August 12, 2010.
51. For illustrations and a synopsis of the text, see Suzuki, *Hokusai yomihon sashie shūsei,* vol. 1. On this series in the context of Hokusai's illustrated books, see Richard Lane, "Hokusai's Gothic Connection: The Yomihon," *Andon* 6, no. 24 (1986): 87–96. Bakin's epic is also discussed in Mark Sandler, "The 'Yomihon' Illustrations of Katsushika Hokusai" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1977), 52–61.
52. See Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie and Rockcliff, 1973), esp. chap. 5, "The Two Bodies."
53. Yokoo Tadanori's 1969 poster for Mishima Yukio's Kabuki play based on *Chinsetsu yumiharizuki,* for instance, reproduces Hokusai's design almost exactly, but in deliberately garish colors. For a reproduction, see Koichi Tanikawa, *100 Posters of Yokoo Tadanori* (New York: Images Graphiques, 1978), 47.
54. See *Water Margin* [Shuihu zhuan], trans. J. H. Jackson (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1976). On its history in China and Japanese acculturation, see Inge Klompmakers, *Of Brigands and Bravery: Kuniyoshi's Heroes of the Suikoden* (Leiden: Hotei, 1998), 18–25.
55. On the Tenpō crisis, see Jansen, *The Nineteenth Century,* 116–67. On new censorship carried out in 1842 as part of the Tenpō reforms, see Sarah E. Thompson and Harry D. Harootunian, *Undercurrents in the Floating World: Censorship and Japanese Prints* (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1992), 72–85.
56. The *Water Margin*'s martial subjects spawned dramatic prints of its muscular warriors with their bodies covered in multicolored tattoos; previously, tattooing had been a form of stigmatization associated primarily with criminals. The series created by Kuniyoshi about 1828 was especially influential in promoting this trend. See Klompmakers, *Of Brigands and Bravery.*
57. See Suzuki, *Hokusai yomihon sashie shūsei,* vol. 1.
58. On this and other books on the warrior theme, see Hillier, *The Art of the Japanese Book,* vol. 2, 884–93.
59. Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 94–95.
60. This book is reproduced in Suzuki, *Hokusai yomihon sashie shūsei,* vol. 5; and briefly discussed in Jack Hillier, *The Art of Hokusai in Book Illustration* (London: Sotheby Parke-Bernet; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 227–44.
61. This work is discussed briefly in Hillier, *The Art of Hokusai in Book Illustration,* 237.
62. On this subject, see Julia Meech-Pekarik, "The Flying Horse: Transmission of the Valāhassa Jātaka Imagery from India to Japan," *Artibus Asiae* 43, nos. 1–2 (1981): 111–28. For an early nineteenth-century painting of a "flying horse" in great waves, see *Ishiyamadera engi* [Miraculous legends of Ishiyama temple], in Tanaka Ichimatsu, ed., *Nihon emakimono zenshū* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1958–69), vol. 22, colorpl. 7.
63. For examples of this, see Julie Nelson Davis, *Utamaro and the Spectacle of Beauty* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), chap. 5; and Melinda Takeuchi, "Kuniyoshi's *Minamoto Raikō and the Earth Spider*: Demons and Protest in Late Tokugawa Japan," *Ars Orientalis* 17 (1987): 5–38.
64. Lane, *Hokusai, Life and Work,* 192.
65. See Takeuchi, "Kuniyoshi's *Minamoto Raikō and the Earth Spider.*"
66. This print is reproduced in Ann Yonemura, *Masterful Illusions: Japanese Prints from the Anne van Biema Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 258.
67. On this print, see Timothy Clark, *Kuniyoshi: From the Arthur R. Miller Collection* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2009), 198. This biographical series also includes a view of Nichiren standing on a rocky promontory overlooking the ocean, praying for rain; the resulting downpour has miraculously caused a small cresting wave. See Robert Schaap, *Heroes and Ghosts: Japanese Prints by Kuniyoshi, 1797–1861* (Leiden: Hotei, 1998), 187.
68. For discussion of this print, see John Stevenson, *Yoshitoshi's One Hundred Aspects of the Moon* (Seattle: San Francisco Graphic Society, 1992), no. 12. Though the complex intertextuality of this image is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that Benkei was the subject of both a Noh and a Kabuki play.
69. It is discussed briefly in Clark, *Kuniyoshi,* 90; and Schaap, *Heroes and Ghosts,* 101. For another version by Kuniyoshi's student Yoshikazu, see Yonemura, *Masterful Illusions,* 92.
70. Kyōsai's *Repelling the Mongol Pirate Ships* is discussed in Timothy Clark, *Demon of Painting: The Art of Kawanabe Kyōsai* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), no. 74. For another example, see Toyoharu Kunichika's *Attack on the Enemy Mongol Ship* (1859), reproduced in Amy Reigle, *Time Present and Time Past, Image of a Forgotten Master: Toyoharu Kunichika, 1835–1900* (Leiden: Hotei, 1999), fig. 3.
71. Stewart, *On Longing,* 95.

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