

Selected Japanese Prints in the Kendall Collection of the New Bedford Whaling Museum

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**Part 1: Kuniyoshi and the Prosperity of Seven Shores:
A garland of Japanese woodblock prints of whales and whaling,
with a short history of whaling in Japan**

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Introduction — A Short History of Whaling in Japan

Petroglyphs in caves at remote coastal sites in Japan and Korea indicate that a rudimentary onshore whale fishery was prosecuted on the Sea of Japan and East China Sea in the Neolithic era, employing longboats and harpoons. But apart from these rock pictures, little is known about prehistoric whaling in Japan or about how widespread the practice may have been. Analogous cave petroglyphs of equivalent vintage have been found in Siberia and Norway, suggesting contemporaneous parallel developments among these widely separated cultures.¹ Meanwhile, an aboriginal form of whaling was practiced by the Ainu, an ethnic minority in the extreme northern part of Japan. While the origins of Ainu whaling are likewise obscure and little material record remains, it was likely indigenous, as any mutual influence accruing from limited Ainu contact with Siberia, Korea, and Japan is speculative at best.

Several communities on Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu claim to be the original birthplace of a seasonal whale hunt in medieval times, but the issue of primacy among conflicting claimants has not been satisfactorily settled nor conclusive evidence convincingly presented. Japanese village-based whaling was an amateur hunt, a sideline of farmers and fishers whose principal livelihood lay elsewhere, prosecuted in small boats along shore during the whales' northward and southward migratory seasons. It evidently arose in Japan at roughly the same time as medieval Norse and Basque shore whaling, and to have utilized similar methods. This compelling historical and anthropological parallel cannot be explained in terms of causal relationships or influence in either direction. Nor can the coincidence be easily explained that a regular, sustained seasonal whale hunt emerged in Japan virtually simultaneously with the advent of European pelagic whaling, likewise without any realistic possibility of influence. Pioneered by Spanish and French Basques on the subarctic coast of Newfoundland in the mid sixteenth century, and with tentative forays by English mariners to waters east of Greenland in the 1590s, seasonal voyages from Europe to Spitsbergen—and eventually to Jan Mayen Island, Greenland, and the Davis Strait—were regularized by the British, beginning in 1610; and by the Dutch, who, beginning in 1611, ultimately came to dominate the trade.

¹ Su Young Hwang and Myung Dae Moon, *Ban-gu Dae: Rock Picture in Ul-ju* (Seoul: Dongguk University, 1984). The text and photo captions are in Korean, followed by Moon's English abstract, pp. 254-259, where notice is taken of the Norwegian and Siberian analogues. I am indebted to John Day for the citation and for the copy of the book in the Kendall Collection (New Bedford Whaling Museum). Norwegian examples are documented as rubbings in the Norsk Sjøfartsmuseum (Oslo) by the late Jules Van Beylen at the Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum (Antwerp), and by Detlev Ellmers in the Deutsches Schiffahrtsmuseum (Bremerhaven).

The genesis of sustained whaling in Japan is ascribed by tradition to Wada Yorimoto, scion of a powerful family in the village of Taiji, on the Boso Peninsula (Kii Peninsula) of Honshu in modern-day Wakayama Prefecture. Taiji is the centermost of a string of villages perched on the rugged Pacific coast, stretching from Koza (adjacent to Oshima Island) to Kumano-ura, about 85 km south of Kyoto and 425 km southwest of Tokyo. Sometime between 1590 and 1610, Wada organized a successful shore fishery that was prosecuted in longboats with harpoons and lances. As had been the case in earlier manifestations of village whaling, lookouts were posted during the whales' migratory seasons, and when whales were sighted boats were launched from the beaches in pursuit. The essential difference in Taiji-style whaling was that the whole process, while still community-based, was highly structured, with pronounced specialization of function and compartmentalization of responsibility. Teams of several hundred men, in fleets of locally-built boats and wielding locally-made, specialized gear, would chase, capture, and kill the whales and tow them to shore according to highly orchestrated procedures. Virtually everyone would participate in hauling in the carcasses and processing the meat, blubber, and bone.

Around 1677, also at Taiji, the founder's grandson, Wada Yoriharu, introduced net whaling, a refinement that resulted in greater efficiency and fewer lost whales. Instead of merely chasing whales and trying to harpoon them in open water (as had been done before), now twenty or more boats would encircle the whale and make a racket, gallying the animal and driving it towards the shallows, into nets wielded by a second group of six boats. There the harpooneers would do their work in four boats of their own. The nets made escape more difficult; and in its struggle to wrest itself free, the whale tired sooner. Still entangled in the net, the weary animal was mortally wounded with lances and towed to shore. Separate classes of boats were devised to drive the whales, to harpoon them, to carry and deploy the nets, and to tow the carcass to shore, where they were hauled onto the beach using a *kagura* winch. Netmaking and net handling were so highly rarefied that, in some villages (including Taiji), experts were called in from outside to weave the nets, supervise their storage and repair, and wield them in the boats during the hunt.

Taiji whaling methods were widely adopted throughout Japan, notably on the Pacific Ocean coast of Honshu and Shikoku, and the East China Sea coast of Hizen Province in the extreme west: the Goto Archipelago, Ikitsuki and Hirado islands, and adjacent Kyushu. These are the locales most often depicted by Japanese painters, printmakers, and *emaki* scroll scribes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at the height of the fishery. Though usually sponsored and managed by a local *daimyo* (feudal lord), whaling was a large-scale enterprise that characteristic-ally involved the entire community and in which the entire village shared in the proceeds.

A successful whale hunt was a tremendous boon to the community and a great cause for celebration. In the words of a famous Japanese proverb that (with variations) became a recurring theme in prints of whales and whaling, "One whale makes seven shores prosperous (The catch of one whale makes seven villages wealthy)."

Japanese villagers primarily hunted four whale species: *semi-kujira* (right whale), *zato-kujira* (humpback whale), *nagasu-kujira* (finback whale), and *ko-kujira* (gray whale). Right whales, humpbacks, and finbacks could be hunted with nets but, as Richard Ellis notes, "the gray whale fought savagely enough to destroy the nets, so it was chased down and harpooned" (*Men and Whales*, 86). Some modern whalers of Taiji and Ayukawa prefer sperm-whale meat over other kinds, but in former times, according to Ellis, "only when the stocks of the better tasting whales were exhausted did the Japanese eat the meat of the *makko-kujira* [sperm whale]" (*Ibid*, 82).

The advent of net whaling occasioned the development of the different classes of watercraft, all propelled by oarsmen (never by sails); and over the years there were undoubtedly minor im-

provements in the methods and materiel of boatbuilding, netmaking, the use of signal flags, and the crafting of harpoons, lances, winches, flensing tools, and other apparatus of the hunt. However, once Taiji-style whaling was established and the technology disseminated throughout Japan, little change occurred in the prosecution of the fishery until the twentieth century. And as Japan remained officially closed to all foreign contacts beyond a strictly sequestered number of Dutch trading vessels, limited to one per year, licensed to call at Nagasaki, influence from the burgeoning British and American whaling industries — which penetrated the Pacific Ocean in the 1780s and reached the Japan coast in the first quarter of the nineteenth century — was virtually nil. Despite various attempts, foreign ships, including increasing numbers of Americans whaling on the so-called Japan Grounds, were not permitted to land. The Tokugawa government prohibited even the most casual contact with foreigners. As late as 1851, in *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville mourns the fact that the fragrant archipelago, so close at hand, remains “impenetrable,” and, with prophetic irony scarcely three years before the Perry Expedition landed at Yokohama, predicts that “If that double-bolted land, Japan, is ever to become hospitable, it is to the whale-ship alone to whom the credit will be due; for already she is on the threshold.” Meanwhile, like most things in Tokugawa Japan, the whale fishery was impervious to foreign corruption.

Unknown to Melville, Manjiro returned to Japan in 1851 with rudimentary English and a comprehensive practical understanding of New Bedford whaling methods. As a young fisherman in 1841—the same year that Melville sailed from Fairhaven, Massachusetts, on the Pacific whaling voyage that was to provide him the experiential materials for *Moby-Dick*—Manjiro and four companions were shipwrecked on a barren island off Japan’s Pacific coast. They were rescued a few months later by a New Bedford blubber hunter. However, as any contact with foreigners was forbidden and potentially punishable by death, the castaways declined to be put ashore and instead accompanied the Yankee whaler to Honolulu, where four of them elected to remain, thus becoming the first Japanese residents of what is now the United States. Manjiro, known to his shipmates as John Mungero or John Mung, was adopted by the captain and returned with him to his home in Fairhaven, becoming the first Japanese resident of North America and the first to receive a Western education. Illiterate in Japanese but already gaining fluency in English, he was enrolled in church and in school, and subsequently (1846-49) made a second whaling voyage, attaining the exalted rank of second mate. He could not have risen to or lasted long in this berth had he not been a competent seaman, boatsteerer, boatheder, and harpooneer.²

Manjiro returned to Japan in 1850 with scrimshaw, whaling pictures, navigation books, celestial tables, and the intention to introduce efficient American whaling methods in Japan. Had he been able to do so, he might have left a significant imprint on Japanese whaling for at least a generation or two, until the modern, mechanized Norwegian whaling technology supplanted all of the older forms — Japanese, European, and American alike. However, so soon after being

² After arduous interrogation and debriefing (in what must have been a narrow escape from execution), Manjiro was elevated in social rank, was clandestinely assimilated into the entourage that greeted the American naval expedition under Matthew C. Perry in 1854, and appears to have helped interpret the provisions of the forthcoming treaty that opened Japan to foreign trade. He was also a member of subsequent Japanese naval diplomatic missions to the USA in 1860 and to Europe in 1870, both before and after the Meiji Revolution toppled the Tokugawa regime in 1868. The narrative of Manjiro’s original sojourn as a castaway in America, based on his dictation, was published in Japanese as *A Record of Drifting* (1852), and he personally prepared Japan’s first English grammar. The definitive biography is by Tetsuo Kawasumi, *Nakahama Manjiro Shusei, Or The Manjiro Memorabilia* (editorial contributions by Tsurumi Shunsuke, Nakahama Hiroshi, and Stuart M. Frank; Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1990; Second Edition, slightly expanded, Shogakukan, 1992).

emancipated from centuries of isolation and the Tokugawa's unyielding resistance to "corrupt" foreign influences, Japan was not yet ready to adapt. Revisionist hopes were further confounded by the complicated technology of Yankee whaling methods, which depended upon a highly evolved class of vessels, narrowly specialized apparatus, and sophisticated navigation, with which the Japanese were entirely unfamiliar at the time. These defeated Manjiro's purpose.

Manjiro was not the last to make the attempt. Gyokuran Hashimoto's treatise "A Record of Personal Experiences with Foreigners at Yokohama" (circa 1862-64)³ and Sankei Fujikawa's "Whaling Illustrated" (1889)⁴ explicitly illustrate American whaling methods and implicitly invite their adoption. Experimental Yankee-style whaling ventures were actually mounted, but without lasting result. It appears that the only enduring legacy of these efforts was a body of endearing stories about the principals (Manjiro especially has been much popularized in recent years); a Western-style bark, rigged for American-style whaling, which survives as an exhibit on the lawn of a maritime academy at Shinagawa; and a small handful of contemporaneous pictures that are interesting for their cross-cultural provenance and which testify to Japan's short-lived foray into the bafflement of American whaling methods.⁵

What ultimately succeeded in supplanting traditional Japanese net whaling was the same technology that simultaneously defeated Yankee hand whaling. Modern Norwegian methods were introduced into Japan in the early twentieth century, and eventually Japan emerged as a significant factor in the international whaling economy. Beginning in 1908 at the village of Ayukawa (Oshika Town) on the Pacific coast of northeastern Honshu, steam- and, later, diesel-powered catcher-boats based at shore-station factories hunted whales along the entire length of the archipelago. They prosecuted the hunt with explosive harpoons fired from cannons mounted on the prows of highly maneuverable watercraft that could outrun any whale, dramatically increasing the efficiency of the hunt and expanding the repertoire of prey species to include the hitherto elusive blue and finback whales. By the 1930s, floating factories of large tonnage were carrying crews of several hundred on months-long pelagic voyages to the Antarctic. Stimulated by a joint Allied program to rehabilitate Japan's devastated economy after World War II, and continuing over the next four decades, an increasingly large fleet of massive factory-ships and deadly catcher-boats based at Tokyo achieved primacy in the whaling industry worldwide. Even when,

³ *Yokohama kaiko kenbun shi* [A Record of Personal Experiences with Foreigners at Yokohama], Yokohama, n.d.

⁴ *Hogeishi zushiki* [Whaling Illustrated], 3 vols., Kobe and Osaka, 1889.

⁵ For example, an anonymous book entitled *Hogeishi* ["About Whales"] (Tokyo: Kozanbo, 1896) reproduces as monochrome woodblock prints a ship portrait entitled "Whaling Schooner Amelia, of New Bedford, Mass." and other illustrations by American artist Charles Sidney Raleigh (1830-1925), which are copied from illustrations in the authoritative U.S. Government compendium by James Brown Goode, *The Fisheries and Fishing Industries of the United States* (5 vols. Washington, 1887), V:186 (Raleigh's original oil painting of circa 1876 is in the Kendall Collection, NBWM). Analogously, a polychrome triptych of circa 1890 by the minor *ukiyo-e* printmaker Chikanobu (1838-1912), entitled *The Many Uses of Whales*, extols the many virtues of a prosperous whale hunt, but not the traditional Japanese net-whaling encountered in all other *ukiyo-e* whaling prints up to this time. Rather, it is orthodox Yankee sperm-whaling of the type Manjiro introduced to Japan in 1851. The vessel, though flying a Japanese flag, is a Western-type brig, which is *cutting-in* (butchering) a whale alongside to starboard, Yankee-style, with several erroneously-drawn but identifiably American-style whaleboats in pursuit and another brig similarly engaged in the distance. The inscription begins, "There are 10,000 animals living in the sea, among which no animal is more useful than the whale. As the saying goes, "One whale makes seven villages prosperous." (Lothrop Collection, Peabody Essex Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, USA; and Forbes Collection, MIT Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA; illustrated in Elizabeth Ingalls, *Whaling Prints in the Francis B. Lothrop Collection*, Salem, 1987, #346.)

for reasons both economic and humanitarian, most other nations abandoned commercial whaling in the 1960s and '70s, Japan remained the principal consumer of whale products, dominating the hunt itself and purchasing most of the rest of the world's commercial catch.

Traditional coastal whaling, employing colorful rowboats, hand-wielded harpoons, locally produced nets, and a labor force comprising entire communities, persisted for more than three centuries in rural Japan. Among practitioners, the fishery provided not only a livelihood but also a source of local pride and collective self-identity. Over generations, the customs and rituals involved with whaling became deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the community, exerting a profound influence that, if anything, increased with the introduction of mechanized Norwegian technology in the twentieth century. Today, specialty restaurants in Tokyo and Osaka feature a wide variety of whale-meat and whale-blubber preparations, and the consumption of whale meat is actively promoted by the government as healthful and culturally correct. Annual festivals at Taiji, Ayukawa, and the western islands symbolize veneration of the whale and celebrate the traditions of the hunt. There are whales-and-whaling museums at Taiji, Ayukawa, and Muroto, and whale shrines at Nagasaki, Osaka, and the Tokyo suburb of Shinagawa. The Shinagawa Whale shrine is devoted to a humpback that created a sensation when it entered Edo Bay in 1798 [Figs. 3 and 5]. Lesser shrines are dedicated to the memory of individual whales all over Japan, and the sites of Wada's residence and tomb at Taiji are revered as secular shrines to the founder. The incorporation of whale motifs in secular and religious ritual is evident throughout Japan, notably in the festival of Suwa at Nagasaki as well as in smaller festivals in other parts of the country. Whaling culture remains vital and intact in village tradition even in hamlets from which whales were never hunted, and is regarded with deferential respect in the universities and great cities.

In the context of these historical considerations and the proliferation of whaling throughout coastal Japan, it should be emphasized that the *ukiyo-e* or "floating world" genre of Japanese art is primarily one of attitude and stylistic orientation — really a whole spectrum of attitudes and stylistic orientations. These are well epitomized in the title of Richard Lane's book, *Images from the Floating World* (1978): *ukiyo-e* is art and not history, and as such is devoted to *images* of the world rather than to the world itself or to worldly things. The intention is seldom historical, but rather aesthetic and cultural, often also symbolic or emblematic; the subject-matter is frequently the vernacular and commonplace, though it is often devoted to the grandiose, the preternatural, the mythological, and the spectacular. Whaling, by virtue of its inherent status as a vernacular, even rusticated occupational fishery, becomes a subgenre which in the hands of different artists seems to embrace all of these facets in various permutations, combining the ingenuous, the provincial, the rustic, the commonplace, and the extraordinary — from the urbane sophistication and restrained palette of Shuntei, the graceful pastel textures of Hokusai, the subtle humor and cryptic allegorical subtexts of Kuniyoshi, and the straightforward realism and vivid blues of Hiroshige II.

Of the few artists who turned their hands to prints of whales and whaling over the centuries that the traditional hunt was in florescence, Kuniyoshi (1797-1861) was both the most productive and the most subtle. Not only did he produce ten of the approximately thirty full -scale Japanese *oban* prints and triptychs on whales-and-whaling themes,⁶ but he managed — as he did in virtually all of his work — to capitalize upon it to articulate larger themes and ironies of the *ukiyo-e* sensibility. In fact, in a landmark exhibition of Japanese woodblock prints mounted in Japan by

⁶ *Oban* is the standard size of a single sheet woodblock print. The sheet may be oriented either vertically ("portrait" format) or horizontally ("landscape format"). Actual sizes range from 20 x 30 cm to ±27 x 37 cm. A *triptych* is an ensemble of three such sheets encompassing a single panoramic scene, approximately 36 x 75 cm.

the Museum Fine Arts of Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1994, Kuniyoshi — who had hitherto been unjustifiably neglected and overlooked by art historians in Japan and elsewhere — was featured as the seminal, pivotal figure in *ukiyo-e* printmaking; and the centerpiece of the exhibition was Kuniyoshi’s triptych depicting Japan’s legendary samurai swordsman, *Miyamoto Musashi and the Whale* of circa 1848-52 [Fig. 7].⁷

Ukiyo-e Whaling Prints

Ukiyo-e—literally “floating world”—is the predominant and characteristic genre of Japanese woodblock prints and other artworks produced to illustrate and interpret Japanese life and culture — especially popular, vernacular, theatrical, and occupational subjects — during the Tokugawa and Meiji eras, roughly circa 1675-1910. The *ukiyo-e* has been seen as a social mechanism to circumvent or transcend the debilitating restrictions and regimentation imposed by the Tokugawa establishment, an opinion corroborated in part by its brilliant florescence in the Edo period and its gradual decline after the Meiji Revolution of 1868. A comparatively small number of whales-and-whaling prints span virtually the entire *ukiyo-e* era, beginning with monochrome book illustrations in the wake of the introduction of net whaling in 1677, through the full-scale, full-color woodblock prints that arrived in the mid eighteenth century and rose to greatness in the nineteenth century in the hands of Hokusai, Kuniyoshi, and Hiroshige II. The swan song was the comparatively minor efforts of Meiji Era artists working between 1868 and 1910.

Throughout this period of two centuries and more, traditional hand-whaling thrived in the outports of Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu, and the Western Islands. Consistently with the spirit of *ukiyo-e*, the prints themselves do not explicitly address historical issues of whaling in Japan, or the socio-economic factors that may have caused its rise and fall, or the metamorphoses that inevitably occurred after the Meiji Revolution, or the introduction of American whaling methods or Norwegian whaling technology. Rather, they reflect the emerging popular significance of whaling; even more, they epitomize the cultural traditions and iconographical conventions that distinguish the milieux in which the pictures were created.

The earliest manifestations — monochrome woodcuts produced as book illustrations — were a rehearsal for the full-color masterworks yet to come. Hambei (fl. circa 1660-92) illustrated one of the classic novels of Ihara Saikaku in 1688. Around 1754 Mitsunobu (fl. circa 1720-60) made diptych woodcuts for the nonfiction treatise by Tetsusai Hirase, *Famous Japanese Products from Mountain and Sea*;⁸ Jiemon Kajitoriya included a whale diptych in his *Treatise on Whales*, circa 1758-60;⁹ and the great Shiba Kokan (1747-1818) illustrated his famous book *A Journey to the West* (1790) with pictures of whaling at Ikitsuki Island.¹⁰ Meanwhile, whaling themes had also

⁷ The catalogue, *Ukiyo-e from The Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, MA*. (Tokyo: Kokusai Art, 1994), with text in English and Japanese, is itself a seminal work, especially with regard to its revisionist treatment of Kuniyoshi as the pivotal, watershed figure at the center of the *ukiyo-e* genre.

⁸ Tetsusai Hirase, *Nihon sankai meibutsu zu-e* [“Famous Japanese Products from Mountain and Sea”]; alternatively, “Collections of Pictures of Famous Products from Mountains and Sea in Japan”], 5 vols., Osaka, 1754.

⁹ Kajitoriya [AKA Kandoriya], né Haruna Yamase, using the pseudonym Josuiken; author and illustrator, *Geishi* [“Treatise on Whales”], edited by Kyokuzan Toda, Kyoto, 1760.

¹⁰ Shiba Kokan, *Saiyu ryotan [Gazu saiyu tan]* [“A Journey to the West”], 5 vols., Osaka, 1790 and 1803.

become incorporated into the repertoire of a very few mainstream printmakers, of whom the first was almost certainly Shigenaga in *Harpooning a Whale at Mikazuki* (circa 1735-45) [Fig. 2].

The book illustrations and the Shigenaga print laid the groundwork for what was to become an evocative, often symbolic, and often elusive genre.

With respect to these observations, five attributes consistently emerge. First, that the printed pictures are coeval with and indebted to narrative traditions established in the *emaki* scrolls — manuscripts, illustrated with watercolors, that were the original means of publication before the introduction of the printed word and printed pictures [Fig. 1]. The scroll tradition persisted in *samurai* circles even after the advent of print, and the whaling scrolls ultimately resulted in the watershed printed book *Isana-tori Ekotoba*, published in 1832.¹¹

Second, in the hands of the printmakers the occupational character and provincial folkways of whaling tend to be simultaneously realistic and symbolic. That is, the prints reflect certain empirical realities about life and breadwinning, while at the same time (especially when it comes to Kuniyoshi) embodying more universal subjects and themes — irony, travel, interaction with Nature, pastoralism, urban life, beauty, and the balanced dualities that typify the floating world. *Ukiyo-e* prints of whales tend to be simultaneously vernacular and transcendental.

Third, art about whales is not autonomous, but rather is integrally involved with mainstream interests and themes of the floating world. Not a single *ukiyo-e* artist passed his entire career in pursuit of whaling images; in fact, whales and whaling constitute only a small fragment of the output of even the most prodigious producer of whale pictures, Kuniyoshi. It is clear that *ukiyo-e* pictures of whales and whaling differ from other “images from the floating world” in specific subject-matter only, and not in kind.

Fourth is the profound influence and enduring prestige of the so-called Shinagawa or Kansei Whale, which emerges as an archetype of the genre. In the tenth year of Kansei (1798), a hump-back whale unexpectedly entered Shinagawa Bay, causing a sensation in nearby Edo (Tokyo). This whale occasioned a handful of prints [Figs. 3 and 5] and book illustrations which, together with the portentous interpretations placed upon the event itself, took hold in the popular imagination and established an indelible iconography that would persist through the nineteenth century and well into the Meiji Era. *Ukiyo-e* images of whales produced after 1798 that are not humpbacks traceable to the Shinagawa Whale are the exception, rather than the rule. Japanese whale iconography, especially among the *ukiyo-e* printmakers, continually hearkens back to Shinagawa

Finally and perhaps most importantly, throughout the history of printmaking in Japan, and especially after the galvanizing appearance of the Shinagawa Whale in 1798, whales are universally depicted as symbols of good fortune and prosperity, joining cranes, tortoises, and various types of seafood in the canon of good-luck symbols in Japanese art. These convey a specific, almost palpable meaning. Wherever pictures of whales appear, the artists keep returning to the text that accompanies virtually every *ukiyo-e* whale emblem, a text that in various forms keeps reappearing like echo-symbolism in an Ibsen play: the famous Japanese proverb *Nanaura tairyō hanjyo no zu*, “One whale makes seven shores prosperous.”

¹¹ *Isana-tori Ekotoba* is accessible in English translation at the web site of the New Bedford Whaling Museum <www.whalingmuseum.org>, and in an alternative translation under the variant title *Yogotoru Eshi*, in G. Pilleri, ed., *Investigations on Cetacea*, Volume XIV, Supplement (Berne: Institute of Brain Anatomy, 1983).

The Prosperity of Seven Shores

Among the earliest, perhaps the earliest full-scale *ukiyo-e* print of a whaling scene is “Picture of Harpooning a Whale at Mikazuki in Kinokuni” by Shigenaga (1697-1756), circa 1725-35 [Fig. 2]. It has no mottoes or symbols referring to good luck or prosperity, as there often are in subsequent Japanese whaling prints (the banners merely label the boats “Nº 1 Harpoon,” “Nº 2 Harpoon,” and so on), and there are no explicit clues to a specific subtext. However, despite such deceptively “realistic” overtones, the print is nevertheless vaguely symbolic and utopian. The title is sometimes given as “Harpooning a Crescent Whale at Kinokuni,” but “crescent” actually refers to the setting, the imaginary utopian village of Mikazuki, which means “Crescent Moon” (literally, “three days past the New Moon”). The name was likely suggested by the crescent shape of the shore, and the locale by the enduring fame of Taiji, the traditional birthplace of regular seasonal whaling and net whaling. Kinokuni is another name for Wakayama, the prefecture that includes Taiji, and in this region whaling remained a mainstay of the economy for 350 years, becoming the focus of cultural self-identity to a degree affecting virtually every facet of the community. It would be another generation or two until the ulterior significances of whaling were explicitly melded into the iconography, symbolism, and text of *ukiyo-e* whaling prints.

A seminal cause was the humpback whale that created a popular sensation when it entered Shinagawa Bay (adjacent to Tokyo, then called Edo) in 1798. Crowds gathered from all over that corner of Japan. Takanawa, a highland overlooking the bay, was an ideal vantage point. The contemporaneous triptych by Shuntei, “Seeing the Whale in Shinagawa Bay at Takanawa” [Fig. 3], unaccountably shows not one whale but two, a cow and a calf. But his emphasis is on the popular and social aspects of the event, featuring the courtesans of the House of Yamakuchi (“Yamakuchiya”), depicted here as pedestrians and onlookers on the strand, passengers in the boats, and patrons of the *oyasumi dokoro* refreshment pavilion in the third panel foreground. The fanfare here makes an interesting comparison with Dutch stranded whale pictures of two centuries earlier [Fig. 4], which likewise stress the presence of curious onlookers from every class of society. Even moreso the Japanese rendition than the Dutch, it is a celebration of the infusion of an extraordinary, even portentous event into the everyday lives of ordinary people.

The same event was handled very differently in Kuniyoshi’s paean some fifty years after the fact [Fig. 5]. The Shinagawa Whale was universally interpreted as a good luck portent, and the proverb “One whale makes seven shores (seven villages) prosperous” was often quoted or paraphrased in connection with it. Kuniyoshi alludes to it in his title here — “A Big Whale Catch Makes for Prosperity”; his vantage point is carefully selected to include in the background a view of Mount Fuji, Japan’s most portentous and enduring good luck symbol; and cranes fly overhead, another unequivocal harbinger of good fortune. There is also a pun embedded in the title, *Tairyō kujira no nigiwai* (“A Big Whale Catch Makes for Prosperity”), where *nigiwai* means both *prosperity* and *busy*: Shuntei shows that the beach is busy with spectators [Fig. 3], but Kuniyoshi focuses on the bay itself, busily crowded with boats as they converge on the whale [Fig. 5].

Kuniyoshi reiterates the prosperity theme in an undated triptych explicitly entitled “Seven Shores (Seven Villages) Made Prosperous by a Whale Catch” [Fig. 6], in emulation or fulfillment of the famous proverb. Again the people in the foreground and the boats in the middle ground suggest Kuniyoshi’s more-than-empirical interest in whales, and that whaling may be a source of more than merely material prosperity. Kuniyoshi’s earlier triptych entitled “Catching Whales at Goto and Hirado in Hizen Province (Kii Province), with a list of the types of whales taken” (circa 1840) presents a panoramic, encyclopedic view of village whaling, with details of topography, manning the boats, winching and flensing operations, and various species hunted, all highly

empirical and styled after drawings by Shiba Kokan (1747-1818). Elsewhere, Kuniyoshi relies heavily upon the traditional, highly stylized iconography of the Shinagawa Whale. But here, in “Seven Shores Made Prosperous” [Fig. 6], he presents instead a more anatomically correct humpback whale that bears his own original stylistic imprint. Note the contours of the whale’s back, jaw, and flukes, the turbulence of the sea and dramatic angles of the boats as they plow through the waves, and the sparkling sea-spray on the whale’s back that become indistinguishable from what may be intended as barnacles or callosities. This splendid whale prefigures the luxuriant humpback in Kuniyoshi’s tribute to “Miyamoto Musashi and the Whale” [Fig. 7]. The Musashi whale is anatomically sound (though Kuniyoshi unaccountably identifies it as the wrong species) and, at the same time, festooned with ribbons and spangles that seem to emanate from and merge with the animal itself, creating a magical or transcendental atmosphere appropriate to the exploits of the dragon-slaying swordsman, a kind of samurai Beowulf.¹²

Kuniyoshi’s later uses of whale motifs relate to whaling only obliquely. These single-sheet *oban* prints, more intimately than the explicitly “prosperous” triptychs, capture darker ironies and whimsical flights-of-fancy of the floating world. The triptychs are epic panoramas on a grand scale; they are about whales and the communal whale hunt. By contrast, the later *oban* prints are lyrical and subtle, reflecting the private meditations of individuals, what the Japanese frequently refer to as *inner landscape*.

Two portraits of “fashionable” (or “chic”) women from a series entitled “Happy Occasion Pictures” (1852) play upon the counterpoint between the “happy occasion” of the village’s prosperity in the capture of a whale, and the pervasive melancholy of the women’s unhappiness in love. At first the titles seem incongruous: “Hirado Whale” and “Whale of Iki Province” [Fig. 8] show whales only through a window or as pictures on the wall, and it seems odd that these are the titles of portraits, in which whales are purely incidental and consigned to the background. In both cases the subjects are women who doubt the constancy and fidelity of their lovers. The cryptic titles, along with cleverly contrived textual and visual vignettes — including the whales in the background — are clues to decoding Kuniyoshi’s subterfuge, where he playfully contrasts the notions of happy and unhappy occasions through elaborate puns and philological *double entendre*, employing the colorful local whale fishery (and universal familiarity with the “Prosperity of Seven Shores” proverb) as an emblematic backdrop. A third print from the same series, “The Courtesan Nanaoka, who belongs to the Sugata-ebiya House, Kyomachi,” also has a pictorial whale allusion, in this case a motif on the courtesan’s elaborately embroidered *kimono*. Beyond the beauty and charm of the woman herself, the atmosphere is not entirely “happy,” and the textual hints — which again consist of a series of puns and double meanings, alluding to happy-occasion seafood and to “getting something for nothing”—imply a melancholy contrast between love that is freely given and freely returned, and love that is purchased. Happiness in these so-called “Happy Occasion Pictures” is counterbalanced by unhappiness, or with an implication of

¹² The subject is one of the most dramatic episodes in the semi-legendary career of one of Japan’s greatest heroes, Miyamoto Musashi (1582-1645), a samurai warrior who was also a painter and the author of a definitive treatise on the zen of swordsmanship. The inscription explains all: “Miyamoto Musashi, famous swordsman, was a native of Higo Province (Kyushu) who served under the *daimyo* of the Buzen clan. Later he went about the country testing his skill. One day he met a huge whale in the ocean and by putting his sword through the back of the creature, he killed it.” He was a kind of champion athlete, fighting duels with wooden samurai swords to prove his virtuoso skills without inflicting actual harm, and (according to Tetsuo Kawasumi) “a knight errant, like Lancelot,” imbued with chivalrous honor and universally venerated for his prowess. His *Book of Five Rings* has endured for 450 years and remains in print in many languages, lately having undergone a vigorous revival with the resurgence of interest in martial arts.

unease and unrest. Part of the beauty of Kuniyoshi's work is its philosophical sophistication: on the lyrical scale of inner landscape, his floating world is never simplistic and is characteristically imbued with a tragic sense of being.

Complexity of subtext, subtlety of the clues, a certain whimsical charm, and nonconforming originality are qualities that pervade much of Kuniyoshi's work and are especially visible in his "Shiojiri" print from a series entitled "Sixty-Nine Stations of the Kisokaido (Kiso Highway)," also published in 1852. On the surface, "Takagi Toranosuke Viewing the Capture of a Whale" [Fig. 9] is merely a travelogue, part of a standard series of authorized views that attracted a host of mainstream Japanese printmakers. The great Kiso Highway ("Kisokaido") ran east-west like a backbone across Honshu and Kyushu, connecting Edo (Tokyo) with Kyoto (the former capital) and Nagasaki. Convention prescribed the sequence and vantage points from which the renderings were to be made; these are usually translated into English as *posts* or *stations*; hence the "Sixty-Nine Stations of the Kisokaido," the 69 authorized views than any artist was expected to render. Shiojiri is one of the post stations and would appear in any comprehensive Kisokaido series. The two distinguishing features of the place are that it is about as far from the sea as it is possible to be anywhere in Japan, and that it fronts on a mountain pass leading to Suwa Lake. Most artists who produced a Kisokaido series did a straightforward view of Shiojiri Pass — the prescribed scene. Kuniyoshi defers to tradition by incorporating the pass as a vignette in the upper left of his print (demonstrating that he knows the tradition, and that any departure from it is a matter of his deliberate choice). But Kuniyoshi transcends and surpasses the tradition. For him, the main attraction is Suwa Lake, where he captures the elusive spirit of floating world reverie. Takagi Toranosuke, the traveler here, is a kind of heroic figure in Japanese lore, a knight-errant from Kyushu who traveled throughout Japan to perfect his swordsmanship. As he gazes upon the lake, he is inspired by its great expanse, and is *reminded* of the sea and of whaling, which he sees *in his mind's eye* (but, of course, there are no actual whales). The textual clues to the artist's vision are a chain of allusions pivoting on two puns. *Shio*, which forms part of the place-name Shiojiri, implies *shiofuke*, the spout of a whale. *Suwa*, the name of the lake, is also the name of an important sacred figure and hence of a famous shrine at Nagasaki—the traveler's ultimate destination, if he is to view all 69 stations of the Kisokaido. The Suwa Festival is a major event at Nagasaki and at the nearby whaling community of Yorozuya-machi: its central feature is a procession featuring a float in the image of a whale. The empirical landscape of Shiojiri and Suwa Lake inspire the whale-reverie of the traveler's inner landscape.

Melville's reverie in one of the "pictorial" chapters of *Moby Dick* (1851) resonates with Kuniyoshi's Shiojiri epiphany as a kind of companion text — parallel emblems of inner landscape, inspired by the ghost-images of whales:

In bony, ribby regions of the earth, where at the base of high broken cliffs masses of rock lie strewn in fantastic groupings upon the plain, you will often discover images of the Petrified forms if the Leviathan partly merged in grass, which if a windy day breaks against them in a surf of green surges.

Then, again, in mountainous countries where the traveller is continually girdled by amphitheatrical heights; here and there from some lucky point of view you will catch passing glimpses of the profiles of whales defined along the undulating ridges. But you must be a thorough whaleman, to see these sights; and not only that, but if you wish to return to such a sight again, you must be sure to take the exact intersecting latitude and longitude of your first stand-point, else — so chance-like are such observations of the hills—your precise, previous stand-point would require a laborious rediscovery.

Kuniyoshi and Melville have charted these latitudes and longitudes, and provide us with Ishmael and Takagi Toranosuke as guides.

Captions for Illustrations

Fig. 1. **Japanese *emaki* whaling scroll.** Watercolor and ink on mulberry paper. Anonymous, 2 vols., circa 1829. Length 14.17 m and 10.21 m . [Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, O-344.]

Traditional hand-whaling in Japan was a community enterprise that typically occupied entire villages. Beginning as early as the first quarter of the eighteenth century, local feudal lords occasionally commissioned manuscript scrolls chronicling the whale hunt in words and pictures. These were customarily produced in several copies and circulated privately among the nobility. Some of these scrolls measure as much as 14 metres in length and are encyclopedic in scope, with step-by-step descriptions of whaling methods, anatomical elevations and internal organs of various whale species, and detailed drawings of whaleboats, gear, shore factories, topography, and ceremonial activities. The *Isana-tori Ekotoba*, which may be translated as “Pictorial Explanation of Whaling,” or simply “Whaling Illustrated,” is a folded book by Oyamada Tomokiyo [Yamada Yosei] (1783-1847), written in 1829, profusely illustrated with monochrome wood-block prints, and published privately in two volumes at Edo (Tokyo) in 1832. It is the great, encyclopedic, watershed classic of Japanese shore whaling, the heir to and culmination of a century of *emaki* scrolls. This particular scroll is a manuscript version of *Isana-tori Ekotoba*.

Fig. 2. **Picture of Harpooning a Whale at Mikazuki in Kinokuni (Wakayama Prefecture).** Oban woodblock print by Shigenaga (1697-1756), circa 1725-35. 33 x 45.7 cm. [Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, P-J 3112-A.] 2001.100.6673

Despite its vaguely “realistic” appearance, this early depiction of Japanese whaling is largely symbolic, and refers to an imaginary community on the crescent-shaped coast of Wakayama Prefecture, where regularized whaling and net whaling originated a century earlier.

Fig. 3. **Seeing the Whale in Shinagawa Bay at Takanawa.** Woodblock triptych by Shuntei (1770-1820), 1798. 38.7 x 80 cm. [Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, P-J 3122-A.] 2001.100.6683

Artists’ renderings of the Shinagawa Whale of 1798 defined the vocabulary of Japanese whale iconography that persisted in book illustrations and woodblock prints until the end of the classic *ukiyo-e* era in the early twentieth century.

Fig. 4. **The Whale beached between Scheveningen and Katwijk on 20 or 21 January 1617, with elegant sightseers.** Oil on canvas by Esaias van den Velde (Dutch, 1587-1630), circa 1617. 84 x 132 cm. [Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, O-378.] 2001.100.4763

The painting is analogous to a scene of similar vintage by Adam Willaerts (Kendall Collection) and both are based on elements of the archetypal whale stranding print by Jacob Matham (1571-1631) after Hendrik Goltzius (1558-1617), published in 1598; later re-engraved by Gilliam van der Gouwen (1684) with the title *Een Walvisch. Lang 70 voeten, gestrandt op de Hollandse zee-kust, tusschen Scheveningen en Katwyk, in Spokkelmaandt, 1598* [“Whale, 70 feet long, stranded on the Dutch seacoast between Scheveningen and Katwijk, in February, 1598”]. This family of Dutch whale-event pictures was not a source or influence for Shuntei’s analogous rendering of the Shinagawa Whale, but captures the same spirit of community interest and participation, right down to the temporary refreshment pavilions hurriedly erected to serve the curious onlookers.

Fig. 5. **A Big Whale Catch Makes for Prosperity** [Big Catch. Prosperity of the Whale]. *Tairyō kujira no nigiwai*. Woodblock triptych by Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), circa 1847-52. 37 x 77 cm. [Kendall Collection, NBWM, P-J 3100-A.] 2001.100.6659

Fig. 6. **Seven Shores (Villages) Made Prosperous by a Whale Catch**. Woodblock triptych by Kuniyoshi, undated. 34.3 x 71.1 cm (13 1/2 x 28 inches). [Collection of the MIT Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts USA, XJ-91. Kendall Whaling Museum photo by John Miller.]

Fig. 7. **[Miyamoto Musashi and the Whale.]** Woodblock triptych by Kuniyoshi, circa 1848-52. 36.6 x 75 cm. [Kendall Collection, NBWM, P-J 3106-A.] 2001.100.6667

Fig. 8. **Whale of Iki Province.** Oban woodblock print by Kuniyoshi, from a series of “Happy Occasion Pictures,” 1852. 35.9 x 25.1 cm. [Kendall Collection, NBWM, P-J 3118-A.]

This print exemplifies Kuniyoshi’s characteristic humor and subtle irony. An inscription next to the wall-hanging in the background specifies *Iki-kujira* (“whales of Iki Province”), which is a pun in Japanese, as *iki* also means “fashionable” or “chic,” apparently in reference to the woman. This is also a pun in alluding to the phrase *iki no ii*, meaning “high spirited,” which reflects on both the whale and the woman. Additionally, the character *tai*, meaning “I wish you happiness,” reinforces the central theme of a “happy occasion”; and in this explicit fisheries context it also implies another meaning of the same character: *tai*, a kind of fish, called in English red snapper, which, perhaps because of its name in Japanese, is customarily served at happy occasions in Japan. Yet the whole is cast under the ironic shadow of the apparent unhappiness of the subject: she meditates on a letter from her lover which implies his imminent departure, possibly with another woman (an old catalogue entry in the Forbes Collection at the MIT Museum describes the image as “A woman reading a letter, presumably from her lover to another woman”). The inscriptions express her “fervent wish to stop him” and her “wish that he would come.” A successful whale hunt — epitomized in the labeled drawings of whales hanging behind her — is the only truly “happy occasion” in this otherwise melancholy portrait.

Fig. 9. *Takagi Toranosuke Viewing the Capture of a Whale*. Oban woodblock print by Kuniyoshi, from a series entitled “Sixty-Nine Stations of the Kisokaido (Kiso Highway),” 1852. 34.3 x 24.8 cm. [Kendall Collection, NBWM, P-J 3114-A.] 2001.100.6675

This is one of Kuniyoshi’s most complex prints, but not necessarily one of his most enigmatic: clues to its subtle humor and possible secondary meanings abound. On the surface it is mere travelogue, part of a standard series of authorized views that attracted a host of *ukiyo-e* artists. But in Kuniyoshi’s hands the convention is turned on its head, and it becomes a reverie of inner landscape.

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Strange New World: Pictures of Yankee Whaling in Meiji Japan

by Stuart M. Frank

Portions of the following were originally posted with illustrations on the now defunct online magazine AntiquesAmerica.com (Boston, December 1999). It has here been greatly revised and expanded.

In 1854, employing hard-nosed military strategy, with a squadron of warships and plenty of Yankee pomp-and-circumstance, Matthew C. Perry pressured Japan into opening itself to trade with the West. For the preceding two centuries under the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan had been shut tight. Foreign trade was excluded, except for carefully monitored access permitted to China and Korea and a limited license for one Dutch ship to call each year at the port of Nagasaki in the extreme western part of Japan, almost as far as possible from the capital, Edo (Tokyo). And even at Nagasaki the foreigners were not given the run of the city, and were not normally permitted to step ashore, but were restricted to the island enclave of Deshima (Dejima). All other contact with foreigners was in theory prohibited; violations were theoretically punishable by death (though there were a few notable transgressions). Even foreign books were banned, though by the 1790s there arose covert “schools” of scribes and illustrators who copied out by hand Dutch, German, and possibly other European tracts on engineering and ordnance. The shipwrecked and castaway Japanese fishermen who were occasionally rescued by foreign ships feared for their lives should they be returned to Japan; most were expatriated abroad without ever returning to the homeland (though again there were a few notable exceptions). Foreign vessels, even ships in distress, were mostly turned away; whalers sailed nearby but were not permitted to land; in *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville ruminates about “locked Japan” and “that double-bolted land, Japan.” Meanwhile, this otherwise highly developed island civilization had no deepwater vessels of its own, as there was no need to visit any foreign port (all trade with China and Korea was conducted in Japan, with the goods carried in Chinese and Korean vessels). What was once a great seafaring nation — there is cartographic evidence that Japanese mariners in former times visited the coast of North America, mapped the Bering Strait, and passed through into the Arctic Ocean and Beaufort Sea¹³ — was now at a standstill, insular, isolated, without knowledge of the West.

Now, for the first time in centuries, American ships, British ships, European ships, and the men and occasionally women who sailed in them, were walking the streets of Yokohama and the few other treaty ports to which the Japanese grudgingly granted access. Japanese art exploded onto the scene in Europe and America, exerting profound influence on a host of artists, perhaps most notably Winslow Homer and James A. McNeill Whistler. Even more, Western ideas and Western technology — especially American ideas and Yankee technology — exploded into the Japanese consciousness and into Japanese art. The centuries old tradition of *ukiyo-e* (“floating world”) printmaking, hitherto obsessed with the intricate varieties of Japanese landscape, Japanese social mores, Japanese mythological subjects, Japanese vernacular occupations, Japanese folkways, and other aspects of ancient Japanese culture, now suddenly turned its attention to the colorful panoply of new phenomena invading Japan from the West — big caucasian noses, red hair, Paris fashions, flowered hats, banjos, blackface minstrels, railroads, naval ordnance, fire-breathing steamboats, coal-fired steam engines, navigable balloons, and mostly fanciful views of foreign landscapes and imaginary cityscapes.

¹³ See the Chinese *Mappa Mundi* of Li Zhizao and Matteo Ricci, circa 1602-10 (Kendall Collection).

In the midst of all this, and in part because of it, came the Meiji Revolution of 1868 and the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate, ushering in a new era of modernization and Westernization for Japan. As time would tell, some of these newfangled notions to root and thrived; others did not. In any case, by the time of the Russo-Japanese war at the dawn of the twentieth century, Japan had become a modern military and naval power, and truly a force to contend with.

Steamships and railroads captured the popular and official imagination in Japan and were major successes. Powerful armed vessels, a steam locomotive, blackface minstrels, and banjos were among the Western Wonders brought to Japan by Perry to dazzle and intimidate the locals. They fulfilled this original intention at the time by fostering Japanese compliance. However, the Japanese easily saw the advantages of Western weaponry, steam navigation, and transportation by rail. The subsequent history of the Imperial Japanese Navy is a matter of record. So, too, the Japanese merchant fleet. And today, while Japan's highways and vehicular traffic leave much to be desired, even compared with the most congested North American cities, the Shinkansen is arguably the greatest and most efficient railroading entity in the world. The Japanese rail system has today become a model for the West.

Yankee whaling was not a success in Japan. American sperm-whaling methods, which had sustained Nantucket and New Bedford and a host of other ports since around 1712, and which had been adopted with varying degrees of success in the nineteenth century by France, Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia, Hawaii, Chile, Peru, and the Azores, flunked the test in Japan.

In theory, by the time Perry arrived in, Japan was already poised to exploit its rich offshore whaling grounds using Yankee technology. British and American whalers had penetrated the Pacific Ocean in the 1780s and reached the coast of Japan in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. But despite various attempts, foreign ships, including increasing numbers of Americans whaling on the so-called Japan Grounds, were not permitted to land. As late as 1851, in *Moby Dick*, Melville mourned the fact that the fragrant archipelago, so close at hand and often seen by mariners from offshore, remained "impenetrable"; and, with prophetic irony scarcely three years before Perry landed at Yokohama, predicted that "If that double-bolted land, Japan, is ever to become hospitable, it is to the whale-ship alone to whom the credit will be due; for already she is on the threshold." And like most things in Tokugawa Japan, eve in the Meiji era the indigenous whale fishery was impervious to any foreign corruption.

However, unknown to Melville at the time, the celebrated former castaway Manjiro returned to Japan in 1850 with a rudimentary knowledge of English and a comprehensive practical understanding of New Bedford whaling methods. As a teenage fisherman in 1841—the same year that Melville sailed from Fairhaven, Massachusetts, on the Pacific Ocean whaling voyage that was to provide him the experiential materials for *Moby Dick*—Manjiro and four older companions were blown out to sea and shipwrecked on a barren island off the Pacific coast of Shikoku. They were rescued some months later by a New Bedford blubber hunter, the *John Howland* of New Bedford commanded by William H. Whitfield. Fearing reprisals, perhaps even possible execution by the Tokugawa government for their inadvertent brush with Westerners, the five castaways declined to be put ashore and instead accompanied the *John Howland* to Honolulu. There four of them elected to remain, thus becoming the first Japanese residents of what is now the United States. Manjiro, known to his shipmates as John Mungero or John Mung, was informally adopted by the captain and returned with him to his home in Fairhaven, becoming the first Japanese resident of North America, the first to receive a Western education, and the first to live among Americans as an American. Illiterate in Japanese but already gaining some fluency in English, he was enrolled in church and in school: Whitfield, chastised by the congregation of which he was originally a

member for bringing a foreign heathen into the fold, in an admirable act of liberality, switched the Whitfield family allegiance to the local Unitarian congregation in which Manjiro was made welcome and in which he learned something of Western low-church theology and practice.¹⁴ He also served at least part of a formal apprenticeship as a cooper; and in the middle 1840s, he made a second whaling voyage, attaining the exalted ranks of second mate. He could not have lasted long in this berth were he not a competent seaman, boatsteerer, boatheader, and harpooneer.¹⁵

Manjiro determined at last to take his chances and return to Japan, hoping that his new knowledge as an English-speaking cooper and professional whaleman might get him off the hook for repatriation. On a second cruise to the Pacific he purchased a used whaleboat and convinced his American captain to drop him and a companion (one of his fellow fishermen castaways who had been living on Oahu) close to the Japanese shore, where they landed, unheralded. His precarious hopes were vindicated. After arduous interrogation and a relentless debriefing, he was elevated in social rank and appears to have been assimilated behind the scenes into the official entourage that greeted the Perry Expedition in 1854, clandestinely helping to interpret the provisions of the forthcoming treaty that opened Japan. He was afterwards a member of pioneering Japanese naval diplomatic missions to the United States in 1860 and 1870. His role went largely unnoticed until the mid twentieth century, but he has lately emerged as something of national hero — as one of several biographies puts it, “The Man Who Discovered America.” The narrative of his original sojourn as a castaway in America, based on his dictation — for, though he could read and write English (of a sort), he was illiterate in Japanese — was published in Japanese as *A Record of Drifting* (1853)¹⁶ and he personally prepared Japan’s first English grammar.¹⁷

Manjiro proved to be an inveterate whaleman. He brought scrimshaw and pictures of Yankee whaling home with him to Japan, also navigation books with celestial tables. Evidently his fondest hope was to introduce efficient Yankee whaling methods in Japan. Had he been able to do so he might have left a significant imprint on the Japanese whale fishery for at least a generation or two. However, so soon after being emancipated from centuries of isolation and unyielding resis-

¹⁴ The distinction between the non-doctrinal, only semi-Christian beliefs and practices of Unitarianism, and those of mainstream Protestants in the mid nineteenth-century New England, has eluded most modern Japanese scholars and certainly eluded Manjiro’s contemporary officialdom in Japan, who suspected him of having been converted to, and been brainwashed, and thus corrupted, by Christianity. As a non-trinitarian and (essentially) a non-Christian, he was easily and without dissembling able to pass whatever religious tests threatened to thwart his re-entry into Japan.

¹⁵ The nomenclature of Manjiro’s whaling career when translated into Japanese resulted in another misunderstanding by modern scholars: the terms “boatsteerer” (meaning the *harpooner*, who steers the boat while the officer-in-charge wields the killing lance) and “boatheader” (the officer-in-charge of the boat, which would have been Manjiro’s function as a second mate) led to the mistaken notion that Manjiro was a whaling *captain* (i.e., captain of the *ship*) rather than, as it were, chief officer of his boat — or, in Japanese terms, captain of the *boat*.

¹⁶ *Manjiro hyoryo ki* [“Manjiro: A Record (or Chronicle) of Drifting”], 8 woodblock illustrations, Nagasaki, 1852.

¹⁷ Manjiro Nakahama, *Ei bei taiwa sho kei* [“Introduction to English Conversation”] (Edo: Chikado, 1854 or 1859; repr., with an explanatory booklet by Nakaguni Junya, Kochi: West Kochi Rotary Club, 1990). Popular biographies in English include: Emily V. Warriner, *Voyager to Destiny* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956); Hisakazu Kaneko, *Manjiro: The Man Who Discovered America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956); Donald R. Bernard, *The Life and Times of Manjiro* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1992); and especially Hyosun Kiryaku, editor, *Drifting Toward the Southeast: The Story of Five Castaways told in 1852 by John Manjiro* (New Bedford: Spinner Publications, 2003), in which appear a host of contemporaneous illustrations and my own article, “Manjiro: A Portrait of the Castaway as a Young Man.” The definitive biography is in Japanese, by Tetsuo Kawasumi, *Nakahama Manjiro Shusei, or The Manjiro Memorabilia* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1991; Second Edition, slightly expanded, 1992).

tance of the Tokugawa regime to the corrupting and subversive influences of foreign ideas, the Japanese were not yet ready to adapt. Revisionist intentions were further confounded by the complicated technology of American whaling methods, which depended upon a highly evolved class of vessels, narrowly specialized apparatus, and sophisticated navigation, with which the Japanese were entirely unfamiliar at the time and which Manjiro had not the resources to replicate. Despite his best efforts, these defeated Manjiro's purpose.

Nor was Manjiro the last to make the attempt. Notably, another was Yukichi Fukuzawa, the founder of Keio University in Tokyo and fellow veteran of the 1870 Japanese mission to the United States. According to Fukuzawa's autobiography,¹⁸ he spent much of his youth as one of the scribes who copied and translated European technical books for surreptitious circulation in Japan; later he traveled widely in America and (among other things) studied the moral theology of Francis Wayland, President of Brown University and author of (among other things) *The Claims of Whalemen on Christian Benevolence* (1843). But Fukuzawa also failed to mobilize support for a sustained Yankee-style whale-hunt in Japan; and it appears that the only enduring results of Manjiro's and Fukuzawa's separate efforts to promote Yankee whaling methods were a body of endearing stories about the two principals, who have been much popularized in Japan in recent years; and a small handful of contemporaneous pictures, which are interesting for their cross-cultural provenance and which testify to Japan's short-lived foray into the bafflement of American whaling methods.

Historically, these pictures are part of the endeavor to introduce and sustain in Japan an efficient "modern" whaling technology, based on the New Bedford model — with all the trimmings: Western-style naval architecture, Yankee-type harpoons and lances, even Greener swivel-guns (bow-chasers) to fire harpoons and exploding grenades. These latter, though of British invention and perfected in 1837 by a British gunsmith, had become a sometime standard in America, too. Various Yankee contraptions, even those like the shoulder gun (introduced in 1846) and darting-gun (1865) were never able entirely to supplant the Greener gun. Charles Melville Scammon, who was perhaps the greatest American whaling captain of all time, extolled its virtues in print in 1874: "Were it not for the utility of Greener's gun, the coast fishery would be abandoned, it being now next to impossible to 'strike' with the hand-harpoon. At the present time, if the whale can be approached within thirty yards [27.5 m], it is considered to be in reach of the gun-harpoon."¹⁹ Interestingly, Greener guns are clearly visible in the most important Japanese prints showing the Japanese experiments with American whaling technology.

Aesthetically, prints of this ilk from the Meiji era (1868-1910) have been roundly dismissed by some critics as products of a depreciated tradition in the hands of mediocre practitioners in an adulterated culture — as though the influx of Western images and the influence of Western technology had somehow spoiled Japanese chastity and thus degraded the worth of *ukiyo-e* art of the celebrated "floating world" genre that thrived in Japan a couple of centuries and was now coming to a close. But art and nostalgia are seldom the same thing. Japanese art, no less than its Western counterpart, has frequently been at the forefront of social and cultural foment. Japanese art, no less than Western art, can be both a mirror and a harbinger. There is no premium to be placed

¹⁸ Yukichi Fukuzawa, *The Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi, with Preface to the Collected Works of Fukuzawa*, transl. by Eiichi Kiyooka (Tokyo: Hosuseido Press), 1960.

¹⁹ Charles Melville Scammon, *The Marine Mammals of the North-western Coast of North America: Together with an Account of the American Whale-fishery* (San Francisco, 1874; repr., Dover, 1968).

upon wishing art had stayed the way it had been in the past. Art is of its time; at its best, art may be slightly ahead of its time.

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The Prints

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Illustration in the book by Gyukuran Hashimoto, *Yokohama keiko kenbun shi* [“A Record of Personal Experiences with Foreigners at Yokohama”], circa 1862-64. Diptych, 13.3 x 20.4 cm (5 1/4 x 8 inches). Kendall Collection. Library

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A Great Whale Catch.

Woodblock print triptych by the Meiji Era artist Masanobu [Baido Masanobu], 1884. Size 36.6 x 70.5 cm (14 x 27 3/4 inches). Kendall Collection. 2001.100.6680

The compelling feature of this colorful, somewhat frantic scene of Japanese whaling is that, in place of the traditional flags or streamers customarily used for signaling among the whaleboats, there are parodies of the flags of three western nations with which Japan had only recently established contact — from left to right, Great Britain, the United States, and France (or the Netherlands, if this flag be interpreted as oriented sideways, as the American flag is). The boat in the center flies the Rising Sun, the national ensign of Japan. The title *Tairyō kujira* is ambiguous in translation, and could be rendered “A Large Whale Fishery” or “A Great Whale Catch.” As usual among prints of traditional Japanese whaling, the literal allusion is to prosperity from the whale hunt, here infused with Meiji Era enthusiasm for Japan’s expanding horizons in its newly-forged diplomatic and commercial contacts with the West. However, *ukiyo-e* prints often have a secondary or symbolic meaning, and the secondary implication here may be that those foreign contacts — and the ostensibly good portents they hold for the future of Japan—are themselves a “great

catch.” Accordingly, a dizzy jumble of inscriptions speaks not only of the hunt and of fisheries, but of Nature and various classes of people. But it refers also to sadness and difficulty, implying that the “great catch” could be a mixed blessing.

The Many Uses of Whales.

Woodblock print triptych by Chikanobu [Toyohara Chikanobu] (1838-1912), circa 1890. 36.8 x 69.9 cm (14 1/2 x 27 1/2 inches). [Forbes Collection, MIT Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, #XJ-429. Kendall Whaling Museum photo by Mark Sexton.]

This Meiji Era extravaganza extolls the virtues of a prosperous whale hunt and the bounties of its many products, but without the pessimistic undercurrent of Masanobu. The method shown, however, is not traditional Japanese net-whaling, but rather orthodox Yankee sperm-whaling of the type Manjiro brought to Japan in 1850 and which Yukichi Fukuzawa afterwards tried unsuccessfully to promote. The vessel, though flying a Japanese flag, is a Western-type brig, cutting-in (butchering) a whale alongside to starboard, Yankee-style, with several erroneously-drawn but identifiably American-style whaleboats in avid pursuit. Another brig is similarly engaged in the distance. The inscription begins, “There are 10,000 animals living in the sea, among which no animals more useful than the whale. That is because every part of the whale from head to tail can be made useful. It is compared with the palm tree found in India. It is the best tree in the world. Its trunk is used for lumber and its bark is used for rope, so one palm tree makes a man rich. As the saying goes, One whale makes seven villages prosperous.” The remainder is true to the title, enumerating various species of whales and promoting a bevy of whale products and recipes—from meats that can be eaten fresh, canned, or salted, to agricultural fertilizer. Note the British Greener gun (bow-chaser cannon) in one of the boats.

Attacking a Whale in Unison [Attacking a Whale Together]. Woodblock triptych by Shoson [Ohara Shoson] (1877-1945) using the *go* (pseudonym) Koson, circa 1890-1911. 36.8 x 76.2 cm (14 1/2 x 30 inches). [Forbes Collection, MIT Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts. #LJ-430. Kendall Whaling Museum photo by Mark Sexton.]

In this late Meiji Era production, the vessels and activities engaged in American-style whaling are closely related to and may be derived directly from Chikanobu’s “Many Uses of the Whale” (above). The affinities between the two prints go further than faithful adhesion to accurate naval architecture and correct whaling methods would require. A similar Western-style brig has similar whaleboats similarly engaged in similar postures, right down to the Greener-type bow-chaser guns visible in both prints — the type that Captain Charles Melville Scammon, writing in 1874, claimed were indispensable to shore whaling in his day; and in some instances (such as improper deployment of oars and oarsmen in the boats) both prints are guilty of identical technical shortfalls. Shoson’s foreground is dominated by a sperm whale very unlike the humpbacks one sees in earlier *ukiyo-e* prints, and very unlike Chikanobu’s whale. Shoson, a modern academician who taught at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and served as an advisor to the Tokyo Museum, was greatly influenced by Western art, and his whale is more indebted to nineteenth-century French and American whale portraiture than to indigenous Japanese forms. As the triptych is signed Koson, it is presumed to have been made before 1911, when the artist changed his *go* (adopted name) from Koson to Shoson.

Part 2: Strange New World: Pictures of Yankee Whaling in Meiji Japan

by Stuart M. Frank

Portions of the following were originally posted with illustrations on the now defunct online magazine AntiquesAmerica.com (Boston, December 1999). It has here been greatly revised and expanded.

In 1854, employing hard-nosed military strategy, with a squadron of warships and plenty of Yankee pomp-and-circumstance, Matthew C. Perry pressured Japan into opening itself to trade with the West. For the preceding two centuries under the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan had been shut tight. Foreign trade was excluded, except for carefully monitored access permitted to China and Korea and a limited license for one Dutch ship to call each year at the port of Nagasaki in the extreme western part of Japan, almost as far as possible from the capital, Edo (Tokyo). And even at Nagasaki the foreigners were not given the run of the city, and were not normally permitted to step ashore, but were restricted to the island enclave of Deshima (Dejima). All other contact with foreigners was in theory prohibited; violations were theoretically punishable by death (though there were a few notable transgressions). Even foreign books were banned, though by the 1790s there arose covert “schools” of scribes and illustrators who copied out by hand Dutch, German, and possibly other European tracts on engineering and ordnance. The shipwrecked and castaway Japanese fishermen who were occasionally rescued by foreign ships feared for their lives should they be returned to Japan; most were expatriated abroad without ever returning to the homeland (though again there were a few notable exceptions). Foreign vessels, even ships in distress, were mostly turned away; whalers sailed nearby but were not permitted to land; in *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville ruminates about “locked Japan” and “that double-bolted land, Japan.” Meanwhile, this otherwise highly developed island civilization had no deepwater vessels of its own, as there was no need to visit any foreign port (all trade with China and Korea was conducted in Japan, with the goods carried in Chinese and Korean vessels). What was once a great seafaring nation — there is cartographic evidence that Japanese mariners in former times visited the coast of North America, mapped the Bering Strait, and passed through into the Arctic Ocean and Beaufort Sea²⁰ — was now at a standstill, insular, isolated, without knowledge of the West.

Now, for the first time in centuries, American ships, British ships, European ships, and the men and occasionally women who sailed in them, were walking the streets of Yokohama and the few other treaty ports to which the Japanese grudgingly granted access. Japanese art exploded onto the scene in Europe and America, exerting profound influence on a host of artists, perhaps most notably Winslow Homer and James A. McNeill Whistler. Even more, Western ideas and Western technology — especially American ideas and Yankee technology — exploded into the Japanese consciousness and into Japanese art. The centuries old tradition of *ukiyo-e* (“floating world”) printmaking, hitherto obsessed with the intricate varieties of Japanese landscape, Japanese social mores, Japanese mythological subjects, Japanese vernacular occupations, Japanese folkways, and other aspects of ancient Japanese culture, now suddenly turned its attention to the colorful panoply of new phenomena invading Japan from the West — big caucasian noses, red hair, Paris fashions, flowered hats, banjos, blackface minstrels, railroads, naval ordnance, fire-breathing steamboats, coal-fired steam engines, navigable balloons, and mostly fanciful views of foreign landscapes and imaginary cityscapes.

²⁰ See the Chinese *Mappa Mundi* of Li Zhizao and Matteo Ricci, circa 1602-10 (Kendall Collection).

In the midst of all this, and in part because of it, came the Meiji Revolution of 1868 and the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate, ushering in a new era of modernization and Westernization for Japan. As time would tell, some of these newfangled notions to root and thrived; others did not. In any case, by the time of the Russo-Japanese war at the dawn of the twentieth century, Japan had become a modern military and naval power, and truly a force to contend with.

Steamships and railroads captured the popular and official imagination in Japan and were major successes. Powerful armed vessels, a steam locomotive, blackface minstrels, and banjos were among the Western Wonders brought to Japan by Perry to dazzle and intimidate the locals. They fulfilled this original intention at the time by fostering Japanese compliance. However, the Japanese easily saw the advantages of Western weaponry, steam navigation, and transportation by rail. The subsequent history of the Imperial Japanese Navy is a matter of record. So, too, the Japanese merchant fleet. And today, while Japan's highways and vehicular traffic leave much to be desired, even compared with the most congested North American cities, the Shinkansen is arguably the greatest and most efficient railroading entity in the world. The Japanese rail system has today become a model for the West.

Yankee whaling was not a success in Japan. American sperm-whaling methods, which had sustained Nantucket and New Bedford and a host of other ports since around 1712, and which had been adopted with varying degrees of success in the nineteenth century by France, Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia, Hawaii, Chile, Peru, and the Azores, flunked the test in Japan.

In theory, by the time Perry arrived in, Japan was already poised to exploit its rich offshore whaling grounds using Yankee technology. British and American whalers had penetrated the Pacific Ocean in the 1780s and reached the coast of Japan in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. But despite various attempts, foreign ships, including increasing numbers of Americans whaling on the so-called Japan Grounds, were not permitted to land. As late as 1851, in *Moby Dick*, Melville mourned the fact that the fragrant archipelago, so close at hand and often seen by mariners from offshore, remained "impenetrable"; and, with prophetic irony scarcely three years before Perry landed at Yokohama, predicted that "If that double-bolted land, Japan, is ever to become hospitable, it is to the whale-ship alone to whom the credit will be due; for already she is on the threshold." And like most things in Tokugawa Japan, eve in the Meiji era the indigenous whale fishery was impervious to any foreign corruption.

However, unknown to Melville at the time, the celebrated former castaway Manjiro returned to Japan in 1850 with a rudimentary knowledge of English and a comprehensive practical understanding of New Bedford whaling methods. As a teenage fisherman in 1841—the same year that Melville sailed from Fairhaven, Massachusetts, on the Pacific Ocean whaling voyage that was to provide him the experiential materials for *Moby Dick*—Manjiro and four older companions were blown out to sea and shipwrecked on a barren island off the Pacific coast of Shikoku. They were rescued some months later by a New Bedford blubber hunter, the *John Howland* of New Bedford commanded by William H. Whitfield. Fearing reprisals, perhaps even possible execution by the Tokugawa government for their inadvertent brush with Westerners, the five castaways declined to be put ashore and instead accompanied the *John Howland* to Honolulu. There four of them elected to remain, thus becoming the first Japanese residents of what is now the United States. Manjiro, known to his shipmates as John Mungero or John Mung, was informally adopted by the captain and returned with him to his home in Fairhaven, becoming the first Japanese resident of North America, the first to receive a Western education, and the first to live among Americans as an American. Illiterate in Japanese but already gaining some fluency in English, he was enrolled in church and in school: Whitfield, chastised by the congregation of which he was originally a

member for bringing a foreign heathen into the fold, in an admirable act of liberality, switched the Whitfield family allegiance to the local Unitarian congregation in which Manjiro was made welcome and in which he learned something of Western low-church theology and practice.²¹ He also served at least part of a formal apprenticeship as a cooper; and in the middle 1840s, he made a second whaling voyage, attaining the exalted ranks of second mate. He could not have lasted long in this berth were he not a competent seaman, boatsteerer, boatheader, and harpooneer.²²

Manjiro determined at last to take his chances and return to Japan, hoping that his new knowledge as an English-speaking cooper and professional whaleman might get him off the hook for repatriation. On a second cruise to the Pacific he purchased a used whaleboat and convinced his American captain to drop him and a companion (one of his fellow fishermen castaways who had been living on Oahu) close to the Japanese shore, where they landed, unheralded. His precarious hopes were vindicated. After arduous interrogation and a relentless debriefing, he was elevated in social rank and appears to have been assimilated behind the scenes into the official entourage that greeted the Perry Expedition in 1854, clandestinely helping to interpret the provisions of the forthcoming treaty that opened Japan. He was afterwards a member of pioneering Japanese naval diplomatic missions to the United States in 1860 and 1870. His role went largely unnoticed until the mid twentieth century, but he has lately emerged as something of national hero — as one of several biographies puts it, “The Man Who Discovered America.” The narrative of his original sojourn as a castaway in America, based on his dictation — for, though he could read and write English (of a sort), he was illiterate in Japanese — was published in Japanese as *A Record of Drifting* (1853)²³ and he personally prepared Japan’s first English grammar.²⁴

Manjiro proved to be an inveterate whaleman. He brought scrimshaw and pictures of Yankee whaling home with him to Japan, also navigation books with celestial tables. Evidently his fondest hope was to introduce efficient Yankee whaling methods in Japan. Had he been able to do so he might have left a significant imprint on the Japanese whale fishery for at least a generation or two. However, so soon after being emancipated from centuries of isolation and unyielding resis-

²¹ The distinction between the non-doctrinal, only semi-Christian beliefs and practices of Unitarianism, and those of mainstream Protestants in the mid nineteenth-century New England, has eluded most modern Japanese scholars and certainly eluded Manjiro’s contemporary officialdom in Japan, who suspected him of having been converted to, and been brainwashed, and thus corrupted, by Christianity. As a non-trinitarian and (essentially) a non-Christian, he was easily and without dissembling able to pass whatever religious tests threatened to thwart his re-entry into Japan.

²² The nomenclature of Manjiro’s whaling career when translated into Japanese resulted in another misunderstanding by modern scholars: the terms “boatsteerer” (meaning the *harpooner*, who steers the boat while the officer-in-charge wields the killing lance) and “boatheader” (the officer-in-charge of the boat, which would have been Manjiro’s function as a second mate) led to the mistaken notion that Manjiro was a whaling *captain* (i.e., captain of the *ship*) rather than, as it were, chief officer of his boat — or, in Japanese terms, captain of the *boat*.

²³ *Manjiro hyoryo ki* [“Manjiro: A Record (or Chronicle) of Drifting”], 8 woodblock illustrations, Nagasaki, 1852.

²⁴ Manjiro Nakahama, *Ei bei taiwa sho kei* [“Introduction to English Conversation”] (Edo: Chikado, 1854 or 1859; repr., with an explanatory booklet by Nakaguni Junya, Kochi: West Kochi Rotary Club, 1990). Popular biographies in English include: Emily V. Warriner, *Voyager to Destiny* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956); Hisakazu Kaneko, *Manjiro: The Man Who Discovered America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956); Donald R. Bernard, *The Life and Times of Manjiro* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1992); and especially Hyosun Kiryaku, editor, *Drifting Toward the Southeast: The Story of Five Castaways told in 1852 by John Manjiro* (New Bedford: Spinner Publications, 2003), in which appear a host of contemporaneous illustrations and my own article, “Manjiro: A Portrait of the Castaway as a Young Man.” The definitive biography is in Japanese, by Tetsuo Kawasumi, *Nakahama Manjiro Shusei, or The Manjiro Memorabilia* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1991; Second Edition, slightly expanded, 1992).

tance of the Tokugawa regime to the corrupting and subversive influences of foreign ideas, the Japanese were not yet ready to adapt. Revisionist intentions were further confounded by the complicated technology of American whaling methods, which depended upon a highly evolved class of vessels, narrowly specialized apparatus, and sophisticated navigation, with which the Japanese were entirely unfamiliar at the time and which Manjiro had not the resources to replicate. Despite his best efforts, these defeated Manjiro's purpose.

Nor was Manjiro the last to make the attempt. Notably, another was Yukichi Fukuzawa, the founder of Keio University in Tokyo and fellow veteran of the 1870 Japanese mission to the United States. According to Fukuzawa's autobiography,²⁵ he spent much of his youth as one of the scribes who copied and translated European technical books for surreptitious circulation in Japan; later he traveled widely in America and (among other things) studied the moral theology of Francis Wayland, President of Brown University and author of (among other things) *The Claims of Whalemen on Christian Benevolence* (1843). But Fukuzawa also failed to mobilize support for a sustained Yankee-style whale-hunt in Japan; and it appears that the only enduring results of Manjiro's and Fukuzawa's separate efforts to promote Yankee whaling methods were a body of endearing stories about the two principals, who have been much popularized in Japan in recent years; and a small handful of contemporaneous pictures, which are interesting for their cross-cultural provenance and which testify to Japan's short-lived foray into the bafflement of American whaling methods.

Historically, these pictures are part of the endeavor to introduce and sustain in Japan an efficient "modern" whaling technology, based on the New Bedford model — with all the trimmings: Western-style naval architecture, Yankee-type harpoons and lances, even Greener swivel-guns (bow-chasers) to fire harpoons and exploding grenades. These latter, though of British invention and perfected in 1837 by a British gunsmith, had become a sometime standard in America, too. Various Yankee contraptions, even those like the shoulder gun (introduced in 1846) and darting-gun (1865) were never able entirely to supplant the Greener gun. Charles Melville Scammon, who was perhaps the greatest American whaling captain of all time, extolled its virtues in print in 1874: "Were it not for the utility of Greener's gun, the coast fishery would be abandoned, it being now next to impossible to 'strike' with the hand-harpoon. At the present time, if the whale can be approached within thirty yards [27.5 m], it is considered to be in reach of the gun-harpoon."²⁶ Interestingly, Greener guns are clearly visible in the most important Japanese prints showing the Japanese experiments with American whaling technology.

Aesthetically, prints of this ilk from the Meiji era (1868-1910) have been roundly dismissed by some critics as products of a depreciated tradition in the hands of mediocre practitioners in an adulterated culture — as though the influx of Western images and the influence of Western technology had somehow spoiled Japanese chastity and thus degraded the worth of *ukiyo-e* art of the celebrated "floating world" genre that thrived in Japan a couple of centuries and was now coming to a close. But art and nostalgia are seldom the same thing. Japanese art, no less than its Western counterpart, has frequently been at the forefront of social and cultural foment. Japanese art, no less than Western art, can be both a mirror and a harbinger. There is no premium to be placed

²⁵ Yukichi Fukuzawa, *The Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi, with Preface to the Collected Works of Fukuzawa*, transl. by Eiichi Kiyooka (Tokyo: Hosuseido Press), 1960.

²⁶ Charles Melville Scammon, *The Marine Mammals of the North-western Coast of North America: Together with an Account of the American Whale-fishery* (San Francisco, 1874; repr., Dover, 1968).

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The Many Uses of Whales.

Woodblock print triptych by Chikanobu [Toyohara Chikanobu] (1838-1912), circa 1890. 36.8 x 69.9 cm (14 1/2 x 27 1/2 inches). [Forbes Collection, MIT Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, #XJ-429. Kendall Whaling Museum photo by Mark Sexton.]

This Meiji Era extravaganza extolls the virtues of a prosperous whale hunt and the bounties of its many products, but without the pessimistic undercurrent of Masanobu. The method shown, however, is not traditional Japanese net-whaling, but rather orthodox Yankee sperm-whaling of the type Manjiro brought to Japan in 1850 and which Yukichi Fukuzawa afterwards tried unsuccessfully to promote. The vessel, though flying a Japanese flag, is a Western-type brig, cutting-in (butchering) a whale alongside to starboard, Yankee-style, with several erroneously-drawn but identifiably American-style whaleboats in avid pursuit. Another brig is similarly engaged in the distance. The inscription begins, “There are 10,000 animals living in the sea, among which no animals more useful than the whale. That is because every part of the whale from head to tail can be made useful. It is compared with the palm tree found in India. It is the best tree in the world. Its trunk is used for lumber and its bark is used for rope, so one palm tree makes a man rich. As the saying goes, One whale makes seven villages prosperous.” The remainder is true to the title, enumerating various species of whales and promoting a bevy of whale products and recipes—from meats that can be eaten fresh, canned, or salted, to agricultural fertilizer. Note the British Greener gun (bow-chaser cannon) in one of the boats.

Attacking a Whale in Unison [Attacking a Whale Together]. Woodblock triptych by Shoson [Ohara Shoson] (1877-1945) using the *go* (pseudonym) Koson, circa 1890-1911. 36.8 x 76.2 cm (14 1/2 x 30 inches). [Forbes Collection, MIT Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts. #LJ-430. Kendall Whaling Museum photo by Mark Sexton.]

In this late Meiji Era production, the vessels and activities engaged in American-style whaling are closely related to and may be derived directly from Chikanobu’s “Many Uses of the Whale” (above). The affinities between the two prints go further than faithful adhesion to accurate naval architecture and correct whaling methods would require. A similar Western-style brig has similar whaleboats similarly engaged in similar postures, right down to the Greener-type bow-chaser guns visible in both prints — the type that Captain Charles Melville Scammon, writing in 1874, claimed were indispensable to shore whaling in his day; and in some instances (such as improper deployment of oars and oarsmen in the boats) both prints are guilty of identical technical shortfalls. Shoson’s foreground is dominated by a sperm whale very unlike the humpbacks one sees in earlier *ukiyo-e* prints, and very unlike Chikanobu’s whale. Shoson, a modern academician who taught at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and served as an advisor to the Tokyo Museum, was greatly influenced by Western art, and his whale is more indebted to nineteenth-century French and American whale portraiture than to indigenous Japanese forms. As the triptych is signed Koson, it is presumed to have been made before 1911, when the artist changed his *go* (adopted name) from Koson to Shoson.

Part 3: Japanese Labels from “100 Treasures of the Kendall Whaling Museum”

Shuntei (1770-1820). Japanese.

Seeing the Whale in Shinagawa Bay at Takanawa.

Woodblock triptych, 1798. Kendall Collection. P-J 3122-A

2001.100.6683

A humpback whale created a popular sensation when it entered Shinagawa Bay (near Tokyo, then called Edo) in 1798. Takanawa is a highland overlooking the bay, and is thus an ideal vantage point. Crowds gathered from all over that quarter of Japan. Unaccountably, Shuntei’s contemporaneous triptych shows not one whale but two—a cow and a calf. But his emphasis is on the popular and social aspects of the event, featuring the courtesans of the House of Yamakuchi (“Yamakuchiya”), depicted here as pedestrians and onlookers on the strand, passengers in the boats, and patrons of the oyasumi dokoro refreshment pavilion in the third panel foreground. The fanfare here makes an interesting comparison with the Dutch stranded whale pictures of almost 200 years earlier in our Dutch Gallery.

Whaling scroll. Watercolor and ink on mulberry paper.

Anonymous, Japanese, circa early 19th century. Kendall Collection. O-155

Traditional whaling in Japan was a community enterprise that typically occupied entire villages, overseen by the local *daimyo* (feudal lord). Beginning as early as the early 18th century *daimyos* sometimes commissioned manuscript scrolls chronicling and illustrating the whale hunt in words and pictures. The scrolls were customarily produced in several copies and circulated privately among the aristocracy. To facilitate distribution, additional copies were often made, usually with editorial additions. In fact, re-editing and re-working were commonplace, sometimes spanning a century or two; and of course traditions and protocols arose that guided each successive scribe. There are about 25 such scrolls and significant fragments in the Kendall Collection. A few measure as much as 46 feet (14 metres) long and are encyclopedic in scope, containing step-by-step descriptions of whaling methods, anatomical illustrations of various whale species, and detailed drawings of whaleboats, gear, flags, shore factories, topography, and ceremonial activities. This particular scroll, at only 13 feet 9 1/2 inches (4.21 m) long, is more modest in scale but is infused with humor and unusually charming, closeup views of the whalers.

Kuniyoshi (1797-1861). Japanese.

Takagi Toranosuke Viewing the Capture of a Whale.

Woodblock oban print, from a series entitled “Sixty-Nine Stations of the Kisokaido (Kiso Highway),” 1852. Kendall Collection. P-J 3114-A

2001.100.6675

On the surface this is travelogue, part of a standard series of authorized views that attracted a host of mainstream Japanese artists. The great Kiso Highway — Kisokaido — ran east-west like a backbone across Honshu and Kyushu, connecting Edo (Tokyo) with Kyoto and Nagasaki. Convention prescribed the sequence of vantage points from which the renderings were to be made; these are usually translated into English as posts or stations; hence the “Sixty-Nine Stations of the Kisokaido.” Shiojiri is one of the post stations and would appear in any comprehensive Kisokaido series. The two distinguishing features of the place are that it is about as far from the

sea as it is possible to be in Japan, and that it has a mountain pass leading to Suwa Lake. Most artists who produced a Kisokaido series did a straightforward view of Shiojiri Pass — the prescribed scene. Kuniyoshi defers to tradition by incorporating the pass as a vignette in the upper left corner of his print. But for him, the main event is Suwa Lake, where he captures the elusive spirit of “floating world” reverie. Takagi Toranosuke, the traveler here, is a kind of heroic figure in Japanese lore, a knight-errant from Kyushu who traveled through Japan to perfect his swordsmanship. As he gazes on the lake, he is inspired by its great expanse, and is reminded of the sea and of whaling, which he sees in his mind’s eye (but, of course, there are no actual whales).

The artist’s vision is a chain of allusions pivoting on two puns. *Shio*, which forms the main part of the place-name Shiojiri, implies *shiofuke*, the spout of a whale. *Suwa*, the name of the lake, is also the name an important sacred figure and hence a famous shrine at Nagasaki — the traveler’s ultimate destination, if he is to see all 69 views of the Kisokaido. The Suwa Festival is a major event at Nagasaki and at the nearby whaling community of Yorozuya-machi: its central feature is a procession featuring a float in the image of a whale.

Kuniyoshi (1797-1861). Japanese.

Hirado Whale and **Whale of Iki Province**

Two woodblock oban prints, from a series entitled “Happy Occasion Pictures,” 1852.

Kendall Collection. P-J 3108-A and P-J 3118-A

2001.100.6669 and 2001.100.6679

Hirado Island is a whaling community in Iki Province, in the western extremity of Japan. In two pictures explicitly located there, Kuniyoshi playfully contrasts the notions of happy and unhappy occasions, using the colorful local whale fishery as an emblematic backdrop.

Hirado Whale commemorates the villagers having taken a whale — suggested by the inscribed title, of course, and by a symbolic vignette visible through the window. Inscriptions reinforce the subject’s excitement on the “happy occasion”: *medetai zu-e*, literally “lucky picture,” alludes to a famous proverb, “The catch of one whale makes seven villages prosperous”; but another inscription, “I am impatient to see (to watch),” has a dual meaning: impatient “to watch the whale hunt” — or alternatively, impatient “to hunt a man.”

Whale of Iki Province exemplifies Kuniyoshi’s characteristic humor and irony. An inscription next to the wall-hanging in the background specifies Iki-kujira (“whale of Iki Province”), which is a pun, as iki also means “chic” or “fashionable,” apparently in reference to the woman. It becomes a second pun by alluding to the phrase iki no ii, meaning “high spirited,” reflecting on both the whale and the woman. Additionally, the character tai, meaning “I wish you happiness,” reinforces the theme of a “happy occasion” but, in this explicit fisheries context, also implies another meaning of the same character iki: a kind of fish, called in English red snapper. Because tai means both red snapper and I wish you happiness, red snapper is customarily served at happy occasions in Japan. Yet Kuniyoshi casts the whole under the ironic shadow of the woman’s evident unhappiness: she meditates on a letter from her lover that implies his imminent departure, possibly with another woman. Inscriptions express her “fervent wish to stop him” and her “wish that he would come” to her. Apparently, a successful whale hunt, epitomized in the drawings of whales hanging on the wall behind her, is the only truly “happy occasion” in this otherwise melancholy portrait.

Part 4: Japanese Labels from “Classic Whaling Prints” at the NBWM

■ Fig. 69. *Big Catch. Prosperity of the Whale.* Triptych woodblock print by Kuniyoshi, circa 1847-52. This is the artist’s paean to a humpback whale that came into Shinagawa Bay in 1798, some fifty years earlier. The Shinagawa Whale — also known as the Kansei Whale because according to the Japanese calendar it arrived in the tenth year of Kansei — was universally interpreted as a good luck omen, and the Japanese proverb “One whale makes seven shores (seven villages) prosperous is often quoted in connection with it. The vantage point is carefully selected to include in the background a view of Fuji-san (Mount Fuji), Japan’s most portentous and enduring good luck symbol; and cranes fly overhead, another unequivocal symbol of good fortune. 14-1/4" x 29-5/8" (36.2 x 72.2 cm). 2001.100.6659

■ Fig. 70. *Catching Whales at Goto and Hirado in Hizen Province (Kii Province), with a list of the types of whales taken.* Triptych woodblock print by Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), from a series entitled “Complete List of Well-Known Japanese Products,” circa 1840. 14-1/2" x 30-1/4" (36.8 x 76.8 cm). 2001.100.6668

Hirado is a hilly island northwest of Kyushu, above the Goto Archipelago on the China Sea coast of western Japan. On these islands the villagers earned their living primarily from fishing and agriculture, but for centuries seasonal whaling figured importantly in the local economy and cultural traditions. Kuniyoshi’s panoramic triptych, produced in far-away Edo (now Tokyo), is the best known, most comprehensive, and most literal of Japanese depictions of whales and whaling, providing a catalogue of the species hunted and an encyclopedic overview of local topography, technology of the hunt, and the winching and flensing operations in which the entire population of a village was involved.

■ Fig. 71. *Catching Whales at Goto, Hizen Province.* Woodblock print by Hiroshige II (1826-1869), from “One Hundred Views of Famous Places Throughout the Provinces,” circa 1860. 13" x 8-1/2" (33 x 21.6 cm). 2001.100.6664

This famous view by Hiroshige II (Hiroshige Shigenobu) presents a very different vision of essentially the same event in the same locale as Kuniyoshi’s picture (Fig. 70), juxtaposing an exaggerated and highly stylized rendition of whale flukes against a simply rendered background shorescape, to celebrate the enormous size and towering presence of the whale itself. Here is less a sense of commerce and industry than of majesty and wonder.