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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[1]

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.[2] 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 appears 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.

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 harpooners 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 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 typically 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 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 improvements 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 limited number of Dutch trading vessels 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, for-

eign 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 at the time, Manjiro returned to Japan in 1850 with a rudimentary knowledge of 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 Ocean 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 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 Mate. He could not have risen to or lasted long in this berth had he not been a competent seaman, boatsteerer, boatheader, and harpooneer.

Manjiro returned to Japan in 1850[3] 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 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)[4] and Sankei Fujikawa's "Whaling Illustrated" (1889)[5] 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.[6]

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 archi-

pelago. 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, 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-made 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 whale that created a sensation when it entered Tokyo Bay in 1798 [q.v. 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 virtually 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)[7]: *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; and the subject-matter is frequently the vernacular and commonplace – though, it would seem, it is equally 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 have embraced all of these facets in a variety of permutations, combining the ingenuous, the provincial, the rustic, the commonplace, and the extraordinary – from the urbane sophistication and restrained palette of Shuntei, the graceful aesthetics and pastel textures of Hokusai, the subtle humor and cryptic allegorical subtexts of Kuniyoshi, and the straightforward realism and vivid colors of Hiroshige II.

Of the few artists who turned their hands to prints of whales and whaling over the three 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[8], 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 the Museum of 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].[9]

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 under the Tokugawa regime 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

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 meters 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 woodblock 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.*

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*[10]; Jiemon Kajitoriya included a whale diptych in his *Treatise on Whales*, circa 1758-60[11]; and the great Shiba Kokan (1747-1818) illustrated his famous book *A Journey to the West* (1790) with pictures of whaling at Ikitsuki Island.[12] Meanwhile, whaling themes had also 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.[13]

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 Shinagawa Whale, which emerges as an archetype of the genre. In the tenth year of Kansei (1798), a humpback whale unexpectedly entered Shinagawa Bay, causing a sensation in nearby Edo (Tokyo). This so-called Shinagawa or Kansei Whale (*Kansei no kujira*) 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 throughout the nineteenth century 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,

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

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.

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 tairyo hanjyo no zu,* "One whale makes seven shores prosperous."

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

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

Japanese whaling prints (the banners merely label the boats "N° 1 Harpoon," "N° 2 Harpoon," and so on), and there are no explicit clues to a specific subtext. However, despite these 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 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 (near Tokyo, then called Edo) in 1798. Crowds gathered from all over that quarter 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.

Fig. 4 Esaias van den Velde (1587-1630), *The Whale beached between Scheveningen and Katwijk on 20 or 21 January 1617, with elegant sightseers.* Oil on canvas, circa 1617. 84 x 132 cm. [Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, O-378.]
The painting is akin to a similar 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 Hollandtse zee-kust, tusschen Schevelingen 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 by no means a source for or influence upon Shuntei's analogous rendering of the Shinagawa Whale, but captures some of the same spirit of community interest and participation, right down to the temporary refreshment pavilions hurriedly erected to serve the curious onlookers.

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, *Tairyo 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].

Fig. 5 Kuniyoshi, *A Big Whale Catch Makes for Prosperity.* Woodblock triptych, circa 1847-52. 37 x 77 cm. (Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, P–J 3100-A.) (See Appendix II)

Kuniyoshi sustains the prosperity theme in an undated triptych explicitly entitled "Seven Shores (Seven Villages) Made Prosperous by a Whale Catch" [Fig. 6], in emulation 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. In an 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), Kuniyoshi had presented a panoramic, encyclopedic view of village whaling, with details of local topography, manning the boats, winching and flensing operations, and the 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 Miyamoto 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.[14]

Kuniyoshi's later uses of whale motifs relate to whaling only obliquely. These are single-sheet *oban* prints that, more intimately than the explicitly "prosperous" triptych panoramas, capture the darker ironies and whimsical flights-of-fancy of the floating world. The triptychs are epic panoramas on an grand scale; they are about whales and the communal whale hunt. Even the Miyamoto Musashi print is a tribute to the epic achievements of a great, semi-legendary hero famous throughout Japan. 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" – implies a melancholy contrast between love that is freely given and freely returned, and love that is purchased. Happiness in these "Happy Occasion Pictures" is counterbalanced by unhappiness, or with an implication of 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),"

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

Fig. 7 Kuniyoshi. [*Miyamoto Musashi and the Whale.*] Woodblock triptych, circa 1848-52. 36.6 x 75 cm. [Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, P–J 3106-A.] [See Appendix III]
The warrior and the whale are gloriously realized, but Kuniyoshi errs in one particular. In the inscription he refers to the adventurer having slain a *sebi-kujira* (right whale), but the picture is of a *zato-kijira* (humpback).

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 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 that 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.

Fig. 8 Kuniyoshi, *Whale of Iki Province.* Oban woodblock print, from a series of “Happy Occasion Pictures,” 1852. 35.9 x 25.1 cm. [Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, 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 Kuniyoshi, *Takagi Toranosuke Viewing the Capture of a Whale.* Oban woodblock print, from a series entitled "Sixty-Nine Stations of the Kisokaido (Kiso Highway)," 1852. 34.3 x 24.8 cm. [Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, P-J 3114-A.]

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.

Herman Melville's reverie in one of the "pictorial" chapters of *Moby-Dick* (1851) eerily 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. (Ch. 57)

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

Acknowledgments:
I am deeply indebted to Prof. Dr. Tetsuo Kawasumi of Keio University, Tokyo, who, in many long sessions over the past two decades – while exercising remarkable patience and transcendent kindness – imparted invaluable insights into Japanese history, art, and culture, guided me to and through landmark shrines of the Japanese whaling milieux, provided indispensable assistance with Japanese philology and translation, generously invited me to collaborate in several very instructive projects of his own, and graciously vetted portions of this manuscript. I am also indebted to Hisayasu Hatanaka, Hiroko Makino, and Hayato Sakurai on myriad points of language and syntax; to John Arrison and Warren Seamans for access to the Forbes Collection at the MIT Museum; to Elizabeth Ingalls for access to the Lothrop Collection at the Peabody Essex Museum of Salem; and to Michel Zilberstein, Mark Sexton, John Miller, Hayato Sakurai, and Michael Lapides for photography.

Notes:

1 This article was originally presented in a different form as a lecture at the triennial whaling history symposium at the Deutsches Schiffahrtsmuseum in November 2000.

2 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).

3 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 United States 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).

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

5 *Hogei zushiki* ["Whaling Illustrated"], 3 vols., Kobe and Osaka, 1889.

6 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 the American artist Charles Sidney Raleigh (1830-1925), which are copied from monochrome 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, New Bedford Whaling Museum). 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 after 1850. 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).

7 Secaucus, N.J.: Chartwell Books, 1978.

8 *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 approximately 27 x 37 cm. The *triptych* is merely an ensemble of three such sheets, each of which is customarily oriented vertically, the ensemble encompassing a single panoramic scene approximately 36 x 75 cm. *Diptychs*, consisting of two oban sheets spliced together, were also produced, but less often.

9 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.

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

11 Kajitoriya [Kandoriya, né Haruna Yamase, using the pseudonym Josuiken] (author and illustrator), *Geishi* ["Treatise on Whales"], edited by Kyokuzan Toda, Kyoto, 1760.

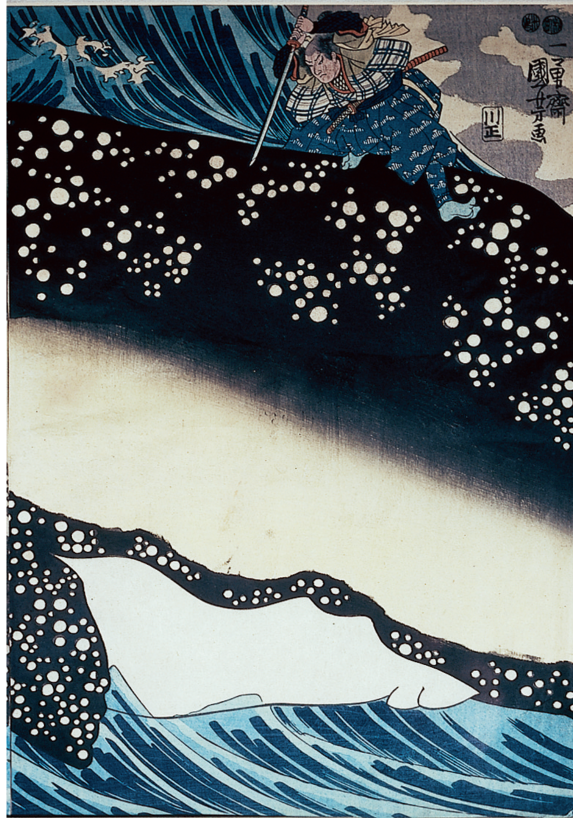
12 Shiba Kokan, *Saiyu ryotan* [*Gazu saiyu tan*] ["A Journey to the West"], 5 vols., Osaka, 1790 and 1803.

13 *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 *Yogiotoru Eshi*, in G. Pilleri, ed., *Investigations on Cetacea*, Volume XIV, Supplement (Berne: Institute of Brain Anatomy, 1983).

14 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." Musashi was a kind of combination champion athlete, fighting duels with wooden samurai swords to prove his virtuoso skills without inflicting actual harm, and (according to Professor Tetsuo Kawasumi) "a knight errant, like Lancelot," imbued with chivalrous honor and universally venerated for his prowess. His classic *Book of Five Rings* has endured for 450 years and remains in print in several languages, lately having undergone a vigorous revival with the resurgence of interest in martial arts.

Appendix I: Fig. 3 Shuntei, *Seeing the Whale in Shinagawa Bay at Takanawa,* 1798

Appendix II: Fig. 5 Kuniyoshi, *A Big Whale Catch Makes for Prosperity,* circa 1847-52



Appendix III: Fig. 7 Kuniyoshi, [*Miyamoto Musashi and the Whale*], circa 1848-52

Kuniyoshi und der Reichtum der Sieben Küsten: Ein Bilderbogen japanischer Holzschnitte von Walen und Walfang, mit einer kurzen Geschichte des Walfangs in Japan

Zusammenfassung

Walfang spielt in der japanischen Geschichte eine ganz besondere Rolle. Obwohl neolithische Felsbilder eine Art Küstenwalfang mit Langboot und Harpune belegen, ist er offenbar bis zum Ende des Mittelalters nur gelegentlich von den Fischern und Bauern betrieben worden. Dauerhafter Walfang soll im 17. Jahrhundert im Wakayama-Distrikt an der zerklüfteten Pazifikküste begonnen haben, und zwar als wohldurchdachter und -organisierter Fang- und Verarbeitungsprozeß, an dem Hunderte von Dorfbewohnern beteiligt waren. 1677 ist die Fangtechnik mit Netzen eingeführt worden, bei der mehrere Boote einen Wal umzingeln und die Netze sein Entkommen verhindern. Diese Methode erhöhte die Beute beträchtlich. Gejagt wurden in erster Linie Nordkaper, Buckelwale, Finnwale und Grauwale. Der blühende Pottwalfang beeinflußte Japan, das ja ein verschlossenes Land war, in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts nicht. Erst ab 1851 versuchte Manjiro, der als Schiffbrüchiger auf einen amerikanischen Walfänger geraten war und dort modernen Walfang kennengelernt hatte, solche Methoden in Japan einzuführen. Entscheidend veränderte jedoch erst die neue norwegische Fangmethode den japanischen Walfang. Im Laufe des 20. Jahrhunderts stieg Japan zu einer der führenden Walfangnationen auf.

Über drei Jahrhunderte ist der traditionelle Netzwalfang im bäuerlichen Japan betrieben worden, und er hat tiefe Spuren in der gesamten Volkskultur hinterlassen, nicht zuletzt auch in der Kunst. Die Tradition der *ukiyo-e*-Kunstwerke, der Bilder der »schwimmenden Welt«, ist Bildern der Welt verpflichtet, nicht der realen Welt selbst. Seit dem Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts entstanden *ukiyo-e*-Holzschnitte, die in Rollen-Büchern publiziert wurden. Der wohl größte Künstler dieses Genres war Kuniyoshi (1797-1861). Wir verdanken ihm eine ganze Reihe von Farbholzschnitten, darunter viele mit Wal-Motiven.

Fünf Punkte sind für diese Art der Kunst entscheidend:

Bilder und Erzähltraditionen sind gleichzeitig und beeinflussen sich gegenseitig.

Die Holzstiche sind gleichzeitig realistisch und symbolisch.

Die Kunst mit Wal-Motiven ist integriert in die Hauptströmungen der »schwimmenden Welt«.

Es ist ein dauerhafter, bedeutender Einfluß des Shinagawa-Wals festzustellen, eines Buckelwals, der 1798 in der Bucht von Tokyo bei Shinagawa erschien und gewaltiges Aufsehen erregte. Ihm wurde in dem Vorort Tokyos ein Schrein errichtet.

Wale wurden in Japan als Symbole von Glück und Wohlstand aufgefaßt.

Einige der vorzüglichsten Wal-Holzstiche werden im einzelnen vorgestellt und interpretiert, Bilder von Shigenaga (1697-1756), Shuntei (1770-1820) und Kuniyoshi. Letzterer schuf verschiedene Triptycha, in denen besondere Ereignisse dargestellt und in die »schwimmende Welt« übertragen werden. Später tritt die Bedeutung von Walen in Kuniyoshis Schaffen zurück, und nun entstanden hauptsächlich *oban*-Drucke, intimere Kunstwerke von nur einem Druckstock, darunter sein weltweit wohl bekanntestes Werk, die »69 Stationen des Kisokaido«, eine Darstellung der bedeutendsten Punkte der großen Kiso-Straße, die Edo (Tokyo) mit Kyoto und Nagasaki verbindet. Das Walbild dieser Serie stellt ausgerechnet die Gegend von Shiojiri dar, die am weitesten von der See entfernt ist. Dies Meisterwerk hat Herman Melville in seinem 1851 erschienenen »Moby-Dick« gewürdigt.

Kuniyoshi et la Prosperité des Sept Côtes: une série de gravures sur bois japonaises ayant pour sujet des baleines et la chasse à la baleine, ainsi qu'une brève histoire de la chasse à la baleine au Japon

Résumé

La chasse à la baleine joue au Japon un rôle tout particulier. Bien que des peintures rupestres néolithiques témoignent d'un genre de pêche à la baleine côtière sur un canot et avec des harpons, jusqu'à la fin du Moyen Âge, elle n'a visiblement été pratiquée que sporadiquement par des pêcheurs et des paysans. Une chasse à la baleine régulière semble avoir commencé au 17ème siècle, dans le district de Wakayama, sur la côte déchiquetée du Pacifique, et ceci comme un processus – aussi bien pensé qu'organisé – de capture et de transformation, auquel participaient des centaines de villageois. En 1677, la technique de capture avec des filets fut introduite, pour laquelle plusieurs bateaux encerclaient la baleine, les filets empêchant sa fuite. Cette méthode augmenta considérablement les prises. Ce sont en premier lieu le rorqual commun, la baleine à bosse, la baleine grise et la baleine franche du Pacifique qui sont chassés. La chasse au cachalot qui florissait au cours de la première moitié du 19ème siècle n'influença pas le Japon, qui était alors un pays fermé. C'est seulement à partir de 1851 que Manjiro, rescapé d'un naufrage et sauvé par une baleinière américaine, découvrant à son bord les méthodes modernes de chasse, tenta de les introduire au Japon. Cependant, c'est uniquement avec la nouvelle méthode de capture norvégienne que changea notablement la chasse à la baleine japonaise. Au cours du 20ème siècle, le Japon s'éleva au rang de l'une des premières nations chassant la baleine.

Durant trois siècles, la pêche à la baleine traditionnelle avec des filets a été pratiquée dans le Japon rural et a laissé de profondes traces non seulement dans la culture populaire mais aussi dans les arts. La tradition des œuvres d'art *ukiyo-e*, des images du «monde flottant», est basée sur des images du monde, et non sur le monde réel lui-même. Depuis la fin du 17ème siècle apparurent des estampes *ukiyo-e*, publiées dans des livres. Le plus grand artiste de ce genre fut Kuniyoshi (1797-1861). Nous lui devons toute une série d'estampes en couleur, parmi lesquelles celles avec des motifs de baleines sont nombreuses.

Cinq points sont déterminants pour ce genre artistique:

Les traditions picturales et narratives sont simultanées et s'influencent réciproquement.

Les estampes sont à la fois réalistes et symboliques.

L'art représentant des motifs de baleines est intégré dans les courants principaux du «monde flottant».

Une influence durable et significative de la baleine Shinagawa est à relever, une baleine à bosse qui apparut en 1798 dans la baie de Tokyo, près de Shingawa, et qui fit sensation. Une châsse lui a été dédiée dans une banlieue de Tokyo.

Au Japon, les baleines furent comprises comme des symboles de chance et d'aisance.

Quelques-unes des plus remarquables estampes de baleines seront présentées et commentées en particulier, des images de Shigenaga (1697-1756), de Shuntei (1770-1820) et de Kuniyoshi. Ce dernier effectua différents triptyques, sur lesquels des évènements particuliers sont représentés et transcrits dans le «monde flottant». Plus tard, la signification des baleines dans l'œuvre de Kuniyoshi diminuera pour faire place principalement aux estampes de format *oban*, des œuvres plus intimes d'une planche unique; parmi elles, son œuvre la plus connue dans le monde entier, les «69 stations du Kisokaido»: la représentation des plus importants points de la grande route Kiso, qui relie Edo (Tokyo) avec Kyoto et Nagasaki. L'estampe de la baleine de cette série représente précisément la région de Shiojiri, la plus éloignée de la mer. Ce chef-d'œuvre a été célébré par Herman Melville dans son «Moby Dick», paru en 1851.