

Maritime Disasters and Auspicious Images: A New Look at Hokusai's *Great Wave*

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Hokusai's print known as the *Great Wave*, from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, is among the most recognized works of art worldwide. Prior scholarship has addressed its production, circulation, and extensive afterlife. This paper, by contrast, enquires into what the subject actually means. Why did Hokusai make a representation of vessels in heavy seas, with a sacred mountain behind them? I question what Hokusai might have wanted to impart, and where his visual conceptualization could have come from. In this iconographic investigation, the argument will be made for the *Great Wave* being best understood in terms of Dutch maritime disaster painting. Such works were theological, offering the terror of death averted by some external divine intervention. Several examples were brought to Japan during the Edo period. It would not have seemed odd to Japanese viewers that ships were capable of supporting symbolic meanings. At the same time, there is no previous example of an independent Japanese depiction of ships in distress. Furthermore, Mt. Fuji offered precisely the promise of safety, its name punning on "no death."

Keywords: disaster, Dutch maritime painting, *Great Wave*, Hokusai, Nagasaki, *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*

Katsushika Hokusai's 葛飾北斎 (1760–1849) print *Under the Great Wave off Kanagawa* (*Kanagawa oki nami ura* 神奈川沖浪裏) is among the world's most recognizable works of art (figure 1). One might say that no other work of art has enjoyed such phenomenal worldwide fame.

Popularly known simply as Hokusai's *Great Wave* or even the *Great Wave*, this print was first published in the Edo 江戸 (1603–1868) period at the premises of Nishimura-ya Yohachi 西村屋与八, whose company operated under the name of Eijudō 永寿堂 (Hall of longevity), and by then had been in existence for eighty years. The work was part of a set, *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji* (*Fugaku sanjūrokkei* 富嶽三十六景), probably begun in 1830,

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Figure 1. Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the Great Wave off Kanagawa*, from *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, 1831. The British Museum, London.

likely at New Year, since Fuji was a New Year's theme.¹ The image is exciting, but it would also have had great novelty for viewers, as will be proposed below.

The set sold well, as can be inferred from the fact that the artist and publishers did not stop at the prescribed thirty-six views, but continued until they had produced forty-six (though still titled “thirty-six views”). The enterprise seems finally to have been discontinued in 1833. The *Great Wave* (as we will call it) was thus part of a three-year slew of publishing thrills that the public evidently relished. However, there are no Edo-period commentaries left on any prints. Historians today can only deduce authorial motivation, and the reasons for public appreciation.

Although envisaged as part of a series, the *Great Wave* now enjoys a largely independent existence, and perhaps it always did. Edo printing was on-demand, and inevitably some items enjoyed more acclaim than others, as is still the case, and so were issued in greater numbers. There are no contemporary comments about this, but scholars have estimated, on the evidence of block-wear, that some five thousand copies of the *Great Wave* were made. This is very much more than other items in the set, and very high for Edo prints overall.²

Perhaps by reason of its later fame and the dearth of information from its time of issue, scholarship has concentrated on the *Great Wave's* later life. Early European promoters of Japanese prints cited this work specifically. Edmond de Goncourt, one of the fathers of *Japonisme*, singled it out for praise in 1896, and his written comments are in fact the first ever made about the image. Whether his ideas were typical of French views, or even of Edo ones, is moot, but he was struck by the “religious terror of the formidable sea ... the

1 Oddly the images have no publisher's mark, and the identity is known only from an advertisement included in back matter to Ryūtei Tanehiko's 柳亭種彦 (1783–1842) novel, *Shōbon jitate* 正本製 (1830). This text is reproduced and translated in Smith 2005, pp. 254–255; the same translation appears in Guth 2015, p. 17.

2 Guth 2015, p. 172.



Figure 2. Anon, cover to score of *La Mer*, A Durand & Fils, 1905. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

full fury of the wave's ascent in the sky ... the rending of its crest as it dispersed in a rain of droplets formed as animal claws."³ It is telling that Goncourt saw in the *Great Wave* an image of fear—a point to which we will return.

Nine years later, Debussy's publisher used a pared-down borrowing of the *Great Wave* for the printed score to his "symphonic sketch for orchestra," *La Mer* (The Sea). Cropping the image and removing the boats and the mountain made the wave more assertive still (figure 2). And yet, Hokusai's work is not, in fact, about the sea. The great wave is but one element of three. If Goncourt's is the first written analysis, then Debussy's is the first twisting of the original conception of the *Great Wave*. For the image, I will argue, relies essentially on an interlocking of these three elements: sea, mountain, and boats.

Accumulating ever greater attention, and perhaps like its namesake gathering ever greater force, the *Great Wave* has gone on to adorn posters and postcards, and eventually ballpoint pens, mouse pads, and fridge magnets, all across the globe. Then, in 2011, it had a new lease of life, seemingly with a more profound resonance. This followed the devastating East Japan earthquake and tsunami.⁴ Hokusai does not, in fact, depict a tsunami (which are walls of water, not breakers), but nevertheless, it is relevant that many interpreters also perceived the image of this wave (or these waves) as a source of terror.

³ Goncourt 1896, pp. 132–128, cited in Forrer 1988, p. 266. Goncourt states the print, "should have been called the Wave, which it is." For more information, see Inaga 2003.

⁴ See for example, Winchester 2015, pp. 54–55. See also the Wikimedia commons image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tsunami_by_hokusai_19th_century.jpg (Accessed 11 November 2020).



Figure 3. Katsushika Hokusai, *Express Delivery Boats Rowing through Waves*, ca. 1803. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 4. Katsushika Hokusai, *Honmoku off Kanagawa*, ca. 1805. Kawasaki Isago-no-Sato Museum.

The history of interpretations was brought together by Christine Guth in a monograph of 2015.⁵ The *Great Wave* is the only single work of Japanese art to have an entire English-language book devoted to it. Guth has definitively covered the legacy of this famous print. Nevertheless, I would like to offer a new proposal for Hokusai's creative motivations in generating this extraordinary image, one which so far seems to have escaped consideration. In full acceptance that the sparseness of data makes proof impossible, I will marshal contextual works which seem to me to reflect concerns articulated by the *Great Wave*, and in so doing will address the question of what exactly Hokusai sought to convey in this print.

Form and Style

Scholars who inquire into the origins of the *Great Wave* have offered some formalistic observations, based on appearance. Two earlier Hokusai prints are routinely adduced as precursors. One is “Express Delivery Boats Rowing through Waves” (*Oshiokuri hatō tsūsen no zu* おしおくりはとうつうせんのかげ) of circa 1803. The other is “Honmoku off Kanagawa” (*Kanagawa oki honmoku no zu* 賀奈川沖本空之図) (figures 3 and 4).⁶ In both, Mt. Fuji is absent: we see only boats tossed among dangerously towering waves. Both prints have a Western feel to them in the use of perspective and, in the case of “Delivery Boats,” a horizon line. The use of perspective also prefigures the *Great Wave*. “Delivery Boats” is additionally labeled with vertical writing turned sideways. This is a convention often followed to mimic European script, sometimes for humor, sometimes more seriously.⁷ “Honmoku,” for its part, incorporates an entirely European printed frame. In short, the theme of tremendous waves endangering shipping, which had never before appeared as an independent theme in Japanese art, comes with distinctly Western associations. At this point Hokusai was clearly interested in waves and boats. Mt. Fuji would be added later.

The *Great Wave* is referred to in the singular (and Debussy's print shows only one). But the Japanese language does not differentiate singular and plural. Hokusai's three prints all depict a succession of massive waves, not just one. The prints are not about a great wave, but about heavy seas, and specifically, ships sailing in them. A better translation of the caption printed on the *Great Wave* would be “under the waves,” not “under the wave.” Still, the root subject is not in fact a wave, or even waves, but the vessels that confront these dangerous seas—and that are literally “under” them. A quarter-century—one third of Hokusai's creative life—divides the three images. The theme of imperiled shipping was evidently an enduring interest, and each time he engaged with it, he gave it a European flavor.

The Edo viewer would register this foreignness, but feel a familiarity too in the types of boat. Those shown off Honmoku are standard junks, but the other two prints depict high-speed vessels known as *oshiokuribune* 押し送り船. Such boats had six or eight oarsmen, and were used to deliver time-sensitive food to Edo's markets. Being swift, they were narrow and unstable. The boats are bringing some seasonal first catch, and huge profits awaited those who could get samples to market soonest. Thus, we might go further: the boats are probably the property of merchants who were risking human life on ferocious seas for vast financial rewards. The depicted figures are not subsistence fishers, nor self-employed, but rather are

5 Guth 2015.

6 Honmoku, usually written 本牧, is a cape near Kanagawa.

7 For a humorous example, see Santō Kyōden 1984, p. 104.

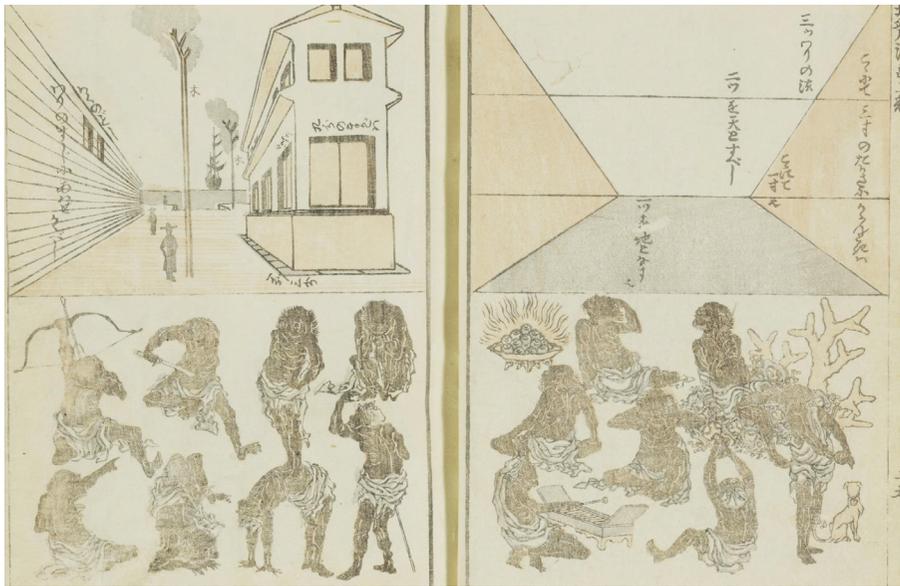


Figure 5. Katsushika Hokusai, from *Manga*, volume 3, after 1814. The British Museum, London.



Figure 6. Katsushika Hokusai, *Edo, Nihonbashi*, from *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, ca. 1830–1834. The British Museum, London.

individuals within a system of profit and return. The viewer participates in this too, as a likely consumer of such foodstuffs.

European Conventions

Let us examine further the conjunction of a local view with an imported imagistic overlay. Perspective had been used in Japan for decades before this time, though often ad hoc and loosely. Hokusai conducted specific perspective studies, some of the earliest extant, and he published these studies in volume 3 of his *Manga* 漫画 (figure 5). (“Manga” is hard to translate, but implies random pictures. The cavoring figures in the lower half of each page illustrated here are unrelated to the upper sections.)

Perspective, however, was not much followed in Japan. Perhaps this was because it seemed curiously arbitrary to separate importance from size merely on the basis of where in the pictorial space an object was located. In the *Great Wave*, Mt. Fuji looks sorely diminished. This is accurate mathematically speaking, but was it right and proper? Edo people called these types of work “floating pictures” (*uki-e* 浮絵), or alternatively “sunken pictures” (*kubomi-e* 窪絵) because the contents seemed either to well up from the page, or to invite the viewer to fall into them.⁸ They were thrilling, but only for a moment. The senior government artist Tani Bunchō 谷文晁 (1763–1841) was recorded as saying in 1811, “I used to have a quantity of European works in my collection, but I came to find them short on meaning (*imi* 意味).”⁹ He did not cite perspective as the feature that failed to interest him; but perspective was the overriding association of Western work in Japan. The assumption that European art was, in essence, little more than perspectives irked the overtly Western-style artist Shiba Kōkan 司馬江漢 (1747–1818). In seeking to promote the European mode, Kōkan stressed, “European pictures are more than just ‘floating images,’” and he went on, “Those who construe Western art as simply perspectives are entirely incorrect.”¹⁰

We may compare the *Great Wave* with another of Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*. This work shows Mt. Fuji from Nihonbashi 日本橋. Captured is Edo's central vista, looking down a canal to the shogun's castle (figure 6).

Here Hokusai has clearly used perspective for the central section, but Mt. Fuji and the castle have been removed from its grid; according to the rules of perspective, being so distant, both should be mere dots. To the Edo viewer, rendering them in that way would look odd, giving priority to orthogonal rectitude over an object's meaning. We can even speculate that, for the artist and his publisher, shrinking the shogun's residence would reveal an insufficiency of “awe” (*osore* 恐), the key response that government installations were supposed to elicit from commoners. In this picture, the castle exists in an independent spatial continuum, and so does the mountain. That was, after all, the expected way. The *Great Wave* therefore creates an outlandish construct of a familiar sight. Hokusai does not reduce Mt. Fuji to render it trivial, nor to show it without “awe.” The resulting image, and so surely Hokusai's aim, was to make the view more precise under imported pictorial codes.

8 The former term is well attested and often inscribed on perspective works. For the latter, from 1802, see Ishino 1980, p. 273. For a translation, see Screech 2003, p. 71.

9 Tani 1916, pp. 189, 212.

10 Shiba 1976, p. 492.

If such regimented perspective looked alien to the Edo viewer, then this sense would have been much augmented by the print's colors. Along with perspective, color was cited as a distinguishing feature of European art. When the senior functionary Hirasawa Tsunetomi 平沢常富 (1735–1813; penname: Hōseidō Kisanji 朋誠堂喜三二) came across a painting in the Western style, he wrote humorously of the experience. To him, the work was peculiar not, in this case, because of perspective, but because of the use of color:

What a picture to see in this land of ours!
Look at the shadows,
Look at the colors!¹¹

Tsunetomi's lord, Satake Yoshiatsu 佐竹義敦 (1748–1785), practiced the European mode, and it was he who had painted the work that provoked Tsunetomi's witty reaction. Yoshiatsu wrote Japan's first treatises on Western art in 1778, under the penname Shozan 曙山, accompanied by perspective study drawings, the first known in Japan. In 1785, Yoshiatsu went so far as to visit the official Dutch residence in Edo, extremely risky for someone in his position.¹² Between Tsunetomi and Hokusai, however, a striking change had occurred in terms of color, and specifically the color blue. Full color printing had been known in Japan since 1765, and images were sold under the label of "brocade prints" (*nishiki-e* 錦絵). But they had a deficiency. They were not in fact full-colored because no one had ever discovered a permanent, printable blue. Printed blues did exist, but were weak and rapidly faded to yellow. Across the whole range of Japanese woodblock prints, as we know them, there simply are no blues—until, that is, the color starts to appear circa 1830. This was the result of the invention in Germany of a rich, resilient blue that could be painted and printed. Available in Europe from 1724, "Berlin blue" (also known as "Prussian blue") took the art world by storm. Dutch merchants imported it to Japan, where the pigment acquired the local name of *bero* ベロ (from Berlin) or *bero-ai* ベロ藍 (*bero* blue).¹³ Its first proven use in Japan dates to 1765, but that was on a painting made for an elite temple, and even then, it was used sparingly.¹⁴ Satake Yoshiatsu, as a daimyo, was aware of *bero*. Chinese intermediaries imported this blue pigment in 1782, while Dutch records mention an import in 1798.¹⁵ Only from circa 1830 did Berlin blue come to Japan in quantities sufficient to lower the price to levels for use on popular works. This was a radical event in the history of Japanese prints. Berlin blue allowed designers and publishers to add landscape views to the staple themes of actors and bordellos. Painted landscapes have a long history in Japan, as do monochrome printed landscapes contained in gazetteers and topographies. Now, for the first time, enduring bright-blue skies, seas, and waterfalls appeared in loose prints. Hokusai stood in the fore of this development.

11 *Fusō ni mo kakaru on-e o miru koto yo kumadori to ii, irodori to ii* 扶桑にもかかる御絵を見ることよ隈取りと言ひ、彩りと言ひ。The verse is cited in Iwasaki 1984, p. 124, citing Hirafuku 1939 without page reference, but the verse cannot be found in that book, so its source (and *kanalkanji* usage) are moot.

12 Satake 1927, pp. 99–103. For his visit to the Dutch, see Blussé and Viallé 1996, p. 80.

13 The transmission of Berlin blue to Japan has been extensively researched. See, *inter alia*, Smith 2005, pp. 234–269, and Screech 2000, p. 288.

14 Berlin blue is used by Itō Jakuchū 伊藤若冲 (1716–1800) in his series *Dōshoku sai-e* 動植彩絵 (1755–1765). See Hayakawa 2012, p. 212.

15 Screech 2000, p. 288.

Symbols in Pictures

So much for pictorial conventions and materials. Hokusai combined a more emphatic use of perspective than was usual, and filled the surface with a novel blue. Viewers would register these striking features, and with them they would look, in a new way, at a picture of ships in heavy seas. It was a theme that Hokusai had experimented with before, but not one with which Edo viewers were at all familiar. In the *Great Wave*, Hokusai abandoned the mock inscription and frame, which were perhaps too-obviously Western. His third essay in ships in heavy seas is not couched as something playful or exoticizing; it is more than that. Hokusai demands the content be taken seriously: waves hanging over boats and threatening to crash down on them. It is a very dramatic moment. Left suspended is the heart-stopping question of what follows: Will the vessels ride through to safety, or will they be broken into pieces by the force of the water? This may seem abstract today, but many Edo communities were seafaring, or depended on those who were. Every Edo-ite knew how prices rose when delivery vessels were wrecked, so that their safe passage was a matter in which every family had a stake, even far from the coasts. The print exposes a keen anxiety, far more than its two precursors do.

In giving this theme a strong, European surface appearance, Hokusai was experimenting with something more. Its content was imported too. This is not a matter of “influence,” but of cooptation and adaptation. In 1794, Kōkan, mentioned above, explained to Edo readers that Western art (he called it Dutch art) depicted topics that were intended to be taken symbolically. He even concluded, “You can describe [Dutch paintings] as symbolic constructions (*tatōe* 喩).”¹⁶ He mentioned this more than once. On another occasion he retained the Dutch term *zinebeelt* (symbol), transliterating it as *shinebeeruto* シネベエルト.¹⁷ East Asian art also used symbols. Kōkan’s readers, and Hokusai’s viewers, would have had no problem with the concept. The difference lay in what was expounded in, and through, the vocabulary of tangential meaning. This, I propose, is what Hokusai was working on. When we think in these terms, we can surmise that the two precursor prints are not so much evidence of Hokusai’s attempt to create the perfect form of waves (as previous commentators have claimed), but evidence of ongoing experimentation with an imported pictorial theme, namely endangered shipping. In the West, as we shall see, this was an established metaphor with a theological meaning. Hokusai may or may not have known the specifics, but it is clear that in the *Great Wave* he went further than before. In the first precursor, *Express Delivery Boats*, the main vessel moves with the wave, utilizing its power; the predicament looks risky, but not deadly. In the second precursor, *Honmoku*, one ship sails obliquely under the wave, while the other (faint and uncolored) floats above it. Only in the *Great Wave* do we see utter threat to life, and it is shown in an imported mode.

Hardly any Japanese paintings have titles, and although prints sometimes do, many designations used today are the inventions of modern curators or collectors. The *Thirty-Six Views* are all titled, though these are merely geographical, stating the location, and perhaps manner, by which Mt. Fuji is captured. In this case, as we know, it is *Under the Waves off Kanagawa*. I venture to suggest another title: *Ships in Distress*. Such a title allows us to recognize what Hokusai was doing. The work is not only foreign to look at (in perspective

¹⁶ Shiba 1993a, pp. 108–109.

¹⁷ Shiba 1977, p. 5.



Figure 7. Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Travelling into Exile from Sagami Province, Encountering Waves at Tsunoda and Chanting the Mantra*, from the series *Short Biography of the Great Founder* 1835–1836. Tokyo National Museum.

and color), but also in theme. *Ships in Distress* was a major topic in one tradition of the period, that is, in Netherlandish art. Hokusai reconfigures that genre, and in so doing generates a work to be read as polyvalent and hybrid, but certainly also to be interpreted symbolically.

Ships in Distress

To clarify the condition that Hokusai depicts, we can compare *Ships in Distress* with a print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳 (1798–1861). Published as Hokusai's set came to a close in 1835–1836, this is also part of a series, this time a narrative one, telling the life of the great medieval monk Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282). One image is of Nichiren travelling into exile, a historical event that happened in 1272 (figure 7).

As the waves threatened his ship, Nichiren is said to have stilled them by invocation of the *Lotus Sutra*. The words he intoned were miraculously imprinted on the water, causing the waves to tremble and lose power—and this is what we see in the work. The waves in Kuniyoshi's print, like those in Hokusai's (which Kuniyoshi would have seen), threaten imminent death. But Nichiren's intervention ensures the ship is safe.

An early Dutch master of the theme was Simon de Vlieger, who died in 1653. He was followed by Willem van de Velde the Elder (1610–1693), probably a trained mariner, and who was appointed painter to the Dutch fleet. He sailed with naval vessels in the 1660s, allowing him to add a high degree of precision to his paintings. Van de Velde sent his son to study with de Vlieger, then continued to train him himself. Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633–1707), who lived into the next century, took Dutch maritime art into its "golden age." Their shared theme was sometimes ships in plain sailing, but far more often, in distress, either engaged in battle or confronting raging seas.



Figure 8. Abraham de Verwer, *The Battle of the Zuider Zee*, 1621.
Oil on canvas. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

In 1639, needing a suitably impressive gift for the shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu 徳川家光 (1604–1651), the Dutch East India Company, or VOC, commissioned and sent three paintings. There are copious documents relating to the arrival of these works from the Dutch side, though Japanese officials do not appear to have maintained equivalent records.¹⁸ Of the three imported paintings, one was a waterborne battle, and two were land fights. De Vlieger was in his prime, and he could well be the artist who painted the sea battle, which the VOC register enters as *The Count of Bossu's Naval Battle*. This was a seminal engagement of the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) also known as the Battle of the Zuiderzee, in which the Dutch destroyed a large Spanish fleet in 1573. The two land fights concern us less, but one is recorded as the *Battle of Flanders* (also known as the Battle of Nieuwpoort) of 1607, occurring later in the Eighty Years' War, and the other is an unspecified *Cavalry Skirmish*. The first two paintings, and probably the third as well, show the Dutch vanquishing the same Iberian enemies that Japan had recently expelled. Recall that although separate nations, Spain and Portugal were under the same king, Philip IV. Indeed, the new Dutch trading post in Nagasaki was the one vacated after the enforced departure of the Portuguese. The painting themes were very well chosen. The artists' names are unrecorded, but the values are given as *f*700, *f*1000, and *f*750 respectively. Rembrandt received *f*600 for a large work executed for the Dutch court at about the same time. This suggests that the works brought to Japan were exceptionally fine.

Abraham de Verwer painted what is now known as *The Battle of the Zuider Zee* in 1621, and although dating to rather earlier, it is a viable comparison with what must have been seen in Edo in 1639 (figure 8).

The Dutch put some effort into these matters, though not always with success. This can be seen in the case of another painting, which De Verwer undertook for the VOC. In 1639, he painted the *Battle of Gibraltar*, costing no less than *f*1200. This was a sea fight from 1607, when the Dutch surprised and destroyed a great portion of the Spanish fleet. The VOC first took Verwer's painting to Iran where it was offered for sale to Shah Safi,

¹⁸ Kobayashi-Sato 2014, pp. 268–290.

though he declined it.¹⁹ It then came to Japan and was offered to Iemitsu, though he too rejected it, perhaps because he had just received a similar work as a gift. De Verwer's *Battle of Gibraltar* then went on Ayutthaya, where King Prasatthong of Siam also refused it. The final home of the painting is unknown. It is worth noting that de Verwer's son, Justus, sailed with the VOC and deposited paintings in many Asian ports.²⁰

No other war pictures, whether maritime or land-based, were sent to Japan for a long time after the sad rejection of this expensive piece. Paintings of a quality to impress the Japanese (or Iranians and Thais) were expensive to commission and hard to transport without damage. They were highly acceptable as presents, but no ruler was interested in purchasing them, at least not for the sums demanded. Still, ensconced in the former Portuguese trading house, the VOC had made its point. Edo Castle had at least one fine Dutch maritime painting, *The Count of Bossu's Naval Battle*, and it showed ships in distress. Where this was kept and who viewed it are not known.

In 1646, the shogunate asked the VOC for pictures depicting European countries, "especially those that rule the seas."²¹ The next year, the great prelate Sessō Sōsai 雪窓宗崔 (1589–1649) visited Nagasaki where the Dutch laid on a demonstration for him of onboard gymnastics. Sailors dived from the rigging, and Sōsai toured the ships.²² He noted that while Iberian vessels had been filthy, those of the Dutch were wholesome. Sōsai was making comments about national character, as he understood it, and was using the imagery of ships to do so. The Spanish and Portuguese had been a menace to Japan, and the vileness of their bottoms proved this; the Dutch, on the other hand, were clean, and their sailors were well-trained. To use Kōkan's term of a century later, Sōsai was using ships as "metaphors" (*tatōe*).

After 1657

Under Iemitsu's son, Ietsuna 家綱 (1641–1680), a terrible fire struck Edo in 1657. This resulted in the loss of almost the entire city, including the castle. It so happened that a Dutch retinue was visiting at the time, and its leader, a German named Zacharias Wagenaer, recorded the horror with great frankness.²³ "Court trips" by the Dutch (D. *hofris*; Jp. *sanpu* 参府) were annual, and on the next one, in 1658, the VOC was approached with a particular request. A monk from the shogunal temple of Kan'eiji 寛永寺 had been deployed by Inoue Masashige 井上正重 (1585–1661), the *ōmetsuke* 大目付 (grand inquisitor), to bring up a matter of urgency: Ietsuna needed "a beautiful map of the world," and also "some paintings of battles on land and sea." Masashige seems to have been informed that certain items lost in the previous year's fire had to be replaced, and it was his job as *ōmetsuke* to do this; it is not clear why he used a monk as interlocutor. The new Dutch leader, Johannes Boucheljon, undertook to provide these, though it would take some time, he said, since original works would have to be commissioned in Amsterdam.²⁴

It was not until 1660 that Boucheljon was able to advise a retainer of Masashige that, "Some of the things his master had ordered two or three years ago from the Netherlands

19 Viallé 2014, p. 299.

20 Bok 2014, p. 199.

21 Blussé and Viallé 2001, p. 24.

22 Blussé and Viallé 2001, p. 289.

23 Blussé and Viallé 2005, pp. 294–298.

24 Blussé and Viallé 2005, pp. 340–343.



Figure 9. Willem van de Velde the Elder, *The Battle of Leghorn*, 1653. Ink pen on paper. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

[have] been shipped on the *Bul*.” They were thus en route, and “will be brought here next year.”²⁵ In the interim, on the next court trip in 1661, the VOC presented to Kan’ei’ji’s sister temple, Sensōji 浅草寺, a “small wooden ship,” which delighted the abbot.²⁶ Why he received this is not stated, but it must surely have been a “symbol” of some kind. Masashige’s paintings, intended for the shogun, arrived safely in 1663. However, Masashige was dead. He could not be the intermediary, but there was no reason why that should impede the paintings going to Ietsuna, as intended. They would remain in Nagasaki for several months until the next court trip. There is no mention of a map, and rather than “some” paintings, which Masashige had asked for, the Company had only brought two. However, both were major works, described by the new Dutch head, Wilhem Volger, as “two large paintings” in “heavy frames.” The prices paid for them in Amsterdam were over *f*300 a piece, far less than the three sent to Ietsuna’s father, though that was partly due to shifts in currency.²⁷ During the 1660s, exceedingly few Dutch paintings cost as much as *f*300.²⁸ Now arriving were paintings of a land battle and a sea fight. The former was again the *Battle of Flanders* (aka of Nieuwpoort), thus replicating, at least in terms of subject, the one lost to fire. The latter work is referred to as a “sea battle between the Dutch and the English.” With the Iberians gone from Japan, the Dutch may have wanted to show that they had a new enemy. It no doubt depicted a moment in the Anglo-Dutch War of 1652–1653, very likely the Battle of Leghorn (Livorno), since that was the most important Dutch victory (figure 9).²⁹

We have no makers’ names associated with the works. In the case of the naval piece, which concerns us more, Van de Velde the Elder is a possibility. He charged exactly the

25 Blussé and Viallé 2005, p. 407.

26 Blussé and Viallé 2010, p. 12.

27 The *Dutch Trade Journal* gives the cost at *f*607, 14 stuivers for the two (20 stuivers = *f*1), thus almost *f*608. I am grateful to Cynthia Viallé for this information. The cost equates to about two years’ work for a laborer. *f* is the abbreviation of guilder.

28 Montias 2002, p. 89 gives the proportion of paintings fetching this price as 0.1 percent.

29 For a history, see Jones 1996, pp. 107–144.

same fee, some *f*300, or least he did at the height of his career. In 1674, Van de Velde sold Cardinal de Medici a *Dutch Flag Ships at Sea in a Moderate Breeze under Easy Sail* for *f*325.³⁰

There are no records pertaining to these paintings from the Japanese side, although the Dutch recorded their estimation of Japanese reactions. The narrative does not differentiate between the naval and the land battle, but we learn that early in 1664, in preparation for the springtime trip to Edo, Volger sent the paintings to the Nagasaki governor (*bugyō* 奉行), Kurokawa Masanao 黒川正直 (1602–1680), for approval. Masanao was overwhelmed. He said (as the Dutch reported it) that Ietsuna would love them. Masanao was sorely tempted to borrow the works for display in his mansion, though he forewent this pleasure for fear of what might happen if they were damaged.³¹ Volger had a carpenter make stands for displaying the works in Edo, as framed pieces were too heavy to hang on Japanese non-masonry walls.³² A month later, in early February, Masanao called for the paintings again: this time he did keep them. On 9 February, however, the Dutch claimed, he had a tantrum. There was no reason for it that anyone could detect, but Volger confessed that he feared “heads would roll.” The governor’s rage was surely related to the paintings, for when Volger went to retrieve them, for packing prior to transfer to Edo, he was told that the splendid things were not suitable after all. They could not be given to Ietsuna since they showed “very sad scenes, such as dead people and the burning of ships.” This was inauspicious, and rendered the paintings, however fine, useless as gifts.³³ The governor’s words make it clear that his greatest disappointment at the newly-realized impropriety was specifically related to the maritime painting. Japanese paintings of battles exist, but it is true that they seldom depict hurt bodies, and where they do, such works would not be presentation items for a superior. Volger tried to counterargue, but to no avail because the governor was in such a rage that none of the interpreters dared convey the remonstrations to him. The paintings were shipped out, and were not heard of again.

Later Encounters

The VOC was fairly scrupulous with its records, but obviously not everything survives. Nor was everything ever set down in the ledgers and daily registers. The above exchanges, and failed exchanges, were at the highest level, but there were countless people in the chain of command, and many in the lower echelons also required gifts and bribes. There was also a growing community of Europeans, Chinese, and mixed-race residents in Southeast Asian ports who desired Dutch paintings. Given the means by which such people lived, ship art was no doubt attractive. The Dutch trading station at Batavia (now Jakarta) was the last port before Japan, and where all Nagasaki-bound ships sailed from and returned to. Abraham de Verwer’s son, mentioned above, was dispatched here, as was the more famous Frans Hals’ son, Reinier, who lived in Asia in 1641–1644; Hals’ two grandsons

30 Keyes 1990, cat. 3. An initial price of *f*400 was reduced. The work is in the Pitti Palace, entitled *Dutch Fleet under Sail*. However, all the dozen or so works known by Van de Velde are grisaille (including figure 9 here). Had the work sent to Japan been so, the Dutch merchants might have commented on the fact, making it unlikely that Van de Velde was the painter.

31 Blussé and Viallé 2010, p. 93.

32 Blussé and Viallé 2010, p. 98.

33 Blussé and Viallé 2010, p. 97. The Dutch disbelieved this reason. It is possible that inauspiciousness relating to Masashige’s death was a factor, though this was known well before, so would not account for the governor’s outburst.

(both called Jan) went to Asia too. The painter Cornelis Suijthoff was in Batavia in 1671–1691, and if he is not well-known today, his wife is, being Rembrandt's daughter, Cornelia. Jan Steen's grandson (also Jan), was in Batavia 1717.³⁴ Southeast Asia seems to have been the place to send “modestly talented descendants,” as one critic has cruelly put it.³⁵ Along with family portraits, maritime works were the most common subject matter. More eager administrators and merchants could acquire better work on their periodic voyages home. One of these was Rijckloff van Goens, governor of Sri Lanka (Ceylon), who commissioned several portraits and one maritime piece from Willem van de Velde the Elder, working with his son, Willem the Younger, when in Amsterdam in 1665.³⁶ Nothing is certain, but such works might have filtered into Japan.

Then in 1722, the shogun himself, Tokugawa Yoshimune 徳川吉宗 (1684–1751), asked for some Dutch paintings. This was not in response to the loss of prior works, but simply because he wanted some, five items to be exact. They duly arrived in 1726. One showed flowers, one birds and flowers, one “an elephant and tiger with a house by a waterfall.” There was also a hunt, and “armies fighting each other with a castle.” The shogun donated the two floral works to an Edo temple, Gohyaku Rakanji 五百羅漢寺, to be put on permanent public display, while he kept the three with more martial themes for himself.³⁷ However, none showed ships in distress.

Items in the shogunal collection were not widely viewed, and needless to say, the paintings ordered in vain by Inoue Masashige were not seen outside Nagasaki. The works Yoshitsune donated to the Edo temple attracted widespread attention, though not being maritime, they are outside the scope of this paper. Another body of data comes from paintings displayed in the VOC trading station in Nagasaki. Shiba Kōkan travelled to the port in 1788, funding his trip by showing pictures of famous sites in Edo, produced in the European manner using perspective, color, and shading. On arrival in Nagasaki, Kōkan gained admission to the Dutch compound, and although he was rather clipped about his visit (his presence there was not quite legal), he produced a sketch of the main reception room. This was published in 1794 in *Saiyū ryōdan* 西遊旅譚 (Account of a journey to the West) (figure 10).

On the evidence of Kōkan's sketch, the room had paraphernalia like chairs, table, decanters, and spittoons, but also seven paintings. Two are portraits, one is a Cupid, one a landscape, one has an unclear narrative theme, one is an indeterminate piece; however, one is a ship in full sail. The Kyoto physician Hirokawa Kai 広川齋, who resided in Nagasaki for six years, visited the same facility a few years after Kōkan. He stated in his journal, *Nagasaki bunken roku* 長崎聞見録 (Record of things seen and heard in Nagasaki), that the station had five paintings, not seven, and each was of maritime disaster averted. He said each was very large, at 4 x 6 *shaku* 尺 (120 x 180 cm). In Kai's understanding, they were a set that showed an actual event: “once long ago” a Dutch ship returning from Japan “got into distress,” and the paintings formed a narrative sequence of this (near) disaster. Kai saw, or perhaps had explained to him, the subject of each image. These were lowering skies and a storm brewing;

34 Bok 2014, pp. 184, 197–198.

35 Bok 2014, p. 185.

36 Adams 2009, p. 16.

37 Screech 1993.

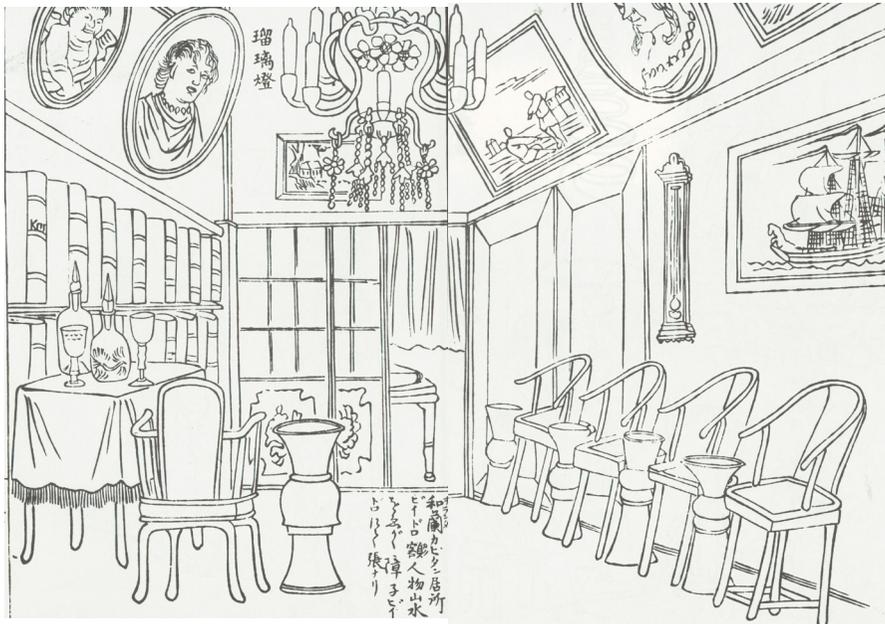


Figure 10. Shiba Kōkan, *Dutch Trading Station on Dejima*, from his *Saiyū ryōdan*, 1794. Waseda University Library.

persistent gales with only the sky visible; the swell rising and the ship losing control; the ship floundering, and finally, despite all this, the ship reaching port. Most likely the works were not a set and did not tell a specific story, since such a configuration would be anomalous in Dutch art. But Kai was correct in concluding that “they were painted as warnings; the purpose being that we must not forget the tribulations we encounter.”³⁸

From the end of the seventeenth century, Dutch pictures of ships in distress tended to detach from actual naval battles and become independent, meditative subjects. The key figure in this development was the painter Ludolf Backhuysen (1630–1708), who was actually German though working in Amsterdam, and was acknowledged as the top master of maritime art from the 1670s. In Backhuysen’s case, it was less enemies than tempests that assaulted the ships. One fairly early example is *Ships in a Storm* (1667), painted during a period in which he was seeking to differentiate himself from the legacy of Van de Velde (figure 11). These paintings were of the type Kōkan and Kai would have seen in Nagasaki.

Backhuysen’s ships, moreover, were merchantmen, not men o’war. Being non-military, his works do not speak of noble defiance by the Dutch state, but of diligent commerce. It is a lower-level but wider field of concern. These ships have owners, but their voyages ensure everyone’s prosperity. Backhuysen positioned ships between disaster and safety, as human life is so often found to be. The viewer is placed in a frozen moment between utter loss and

38 Hirokawa 1975, vol. 5, p. 81. He visited Nagasaki twice, in 1790 and 1795, and published his journal in 1800.



Figure 11. Ludolf Backhuysen, *Ships in a Storm*, 1667. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.

salvation. To the Dutch, all was in the hands of God. Backhuysen's ships are about to sink when clouds part and the sun bursts radiantly. It is not hard to see that Hokusai showed the very same thing. We now see the significance of integrating distressed ships with Mt. Fuji—the trio of waves, vessels, and the mountain. Mt. Fuji is not only hallowed, but its name puns on “no death” (*fu ji* 不死). It is a location of salvation. Including the mountain is akin to Kuniyoshi's depiction of Nichiren's miracle, but now rendered obliquely and symbolically as in Dutch art. Backhuysen and Hokusai, each in their own worldview, show a maritime disaster about to ensue, but with the promise of release.

The *Burgh* and the *Eliza*

No Japanese person had seen a Western ship actually get into distress. Ships certainly went down plying to and from Nagasaki, but those disasters happened invisibly, far out at sea. In 1772, for the first time, a VOC vessel ran into difficulty on approaching Japanese waters. As the head of the Dutch station in Nagasaki, Arend Feith, explained, a storm hit the *Burgh*, which lost “her masts, bowsprit, head, quarter-galleries &c.” It sprang a leak, with “a great quantity of water in the powder-room and hold.” The commander, Daniel Armenault, gave orders to abandon ship. The sailing companion, the *Margaretta Maria*, came into view just in time, similarly minus masts, but seaworthy. The men on the *Burgh* transferred with their valuables, and the *Margaretta Maria* made it to Nagasaki.³⁹ VOC rules forbade the abandoning of ships: they had to be either towed to land, or watched until they sank. Despite looking poised to disappear under the waves, the *Burgh* did not sink. Instead it

39 Blussé and Viallé 2010, pp. 109, 117.

drifted, eventually coming to rest on the coast of Satsuma 薩摩. This was reported to the authorities.

The *Burgh* was the first Dutch ship to which the shogunate had unfettered access. The inspectors dispatched to investigate were intrigued but also horrified. “The Japanese,” wrote Carl Peter Thunberg, a Swedish physician who visited Nagasaki a few years later, “having thus the ship at their disposal, discovered all her corners and hiding places, as also a great number of chests belonging to the principal officers, which were full of the most prohibited goods, and marked with their names.”⁴⁰ The Dutch hushed up the incident, and Feith’s official log claims only that he went to retrieve cargo. Yet many villagers along the coast must have watched as the *Burgh* listed shorewards and ran aground.

On arrival from Nagasaki, Feith was immediately asked to remove the ship’s carvings and figurehead “to forestall the possibility that the statues might be regarded as Portuguese religious statuary.”⁴¹ Unlike residents of Nagasaki, people in Satsuma had not seen a Western ship since the expulsion of the Spanish and Portuguese a century before. The authorities did not want them to think that Christian missionaries (whose wickedness the Japanese populace had been frequently warned about) were sneaking back. Feith had the ship stripped and towed to Nagasaki, where he tried to sell the hulk for five thousand taels, in the end accepting less than half. Some of the contraband was publicly burned in Nagasaki: ill-gotten gains benefit no one. In an equally symbolic gesture, the abbot of one of Nagasaki’s most elite temples, the “beautiful, fairytale-like” Kōtaiji 皓台寺, donated trees to be made into new masts for the *Margaretha Maria*.⁴²

This embarrassing episode was not made the subject of a painting, but in 1798, something even more consequential came to pass, which was that another Western ship found itself in difficulty, this time at the mouth of Nagasaki Bay itself, not while arriving, but at anchor, preparing to leave. This was the *Eliza*, a United States vessel. American ships were being used by the VOC because the Napoleonic Wars meant the Royal (that is, British) Navy would attack Dutch shipping. The VOC kept the shogunate in the dark about these changes in the international situation, and took down the stars and stripes on entering Japanese waters, running up their tricolor. The *Eliza*’s commander, William Stewart, was said to be “always drunk and quarrelsome,” which partly explains what occurred.⁴³ As the Dutch scribe, Leopold Ras, reported,

A rising southerly wind had cast the ship adrift and she had hit a reef we had not been aware of. This caused the ship to heel over so much that she could not straighten up and it was feared that she would capsize. The captain [Stewart] decided to cut down the three masts to see if that would right the ship and save the crew, ship and cargo. The ship was back on even keel, but shortly after a large leak had been discovered ...⁴⁴

40 Thunberg 2005, pp. 81, 83, 273, 306. Thunberg mistakenly calls the *Burgh* the *Burg*.

41 Blussé and Viallé 2010, p. 117.

42 This assessment of Kōtaiji is from a modern tourist website, <https://dreamofacity.com/2015/03/14/teramachi-寺町-or-a-pilgrims-tour-of-nagasakis-temple-quarter/> (Accessed 8 August 2020).

43 Blussé and Viallé 1997, p. xi.

44 Blussé and Viallé 1997, p. 115.

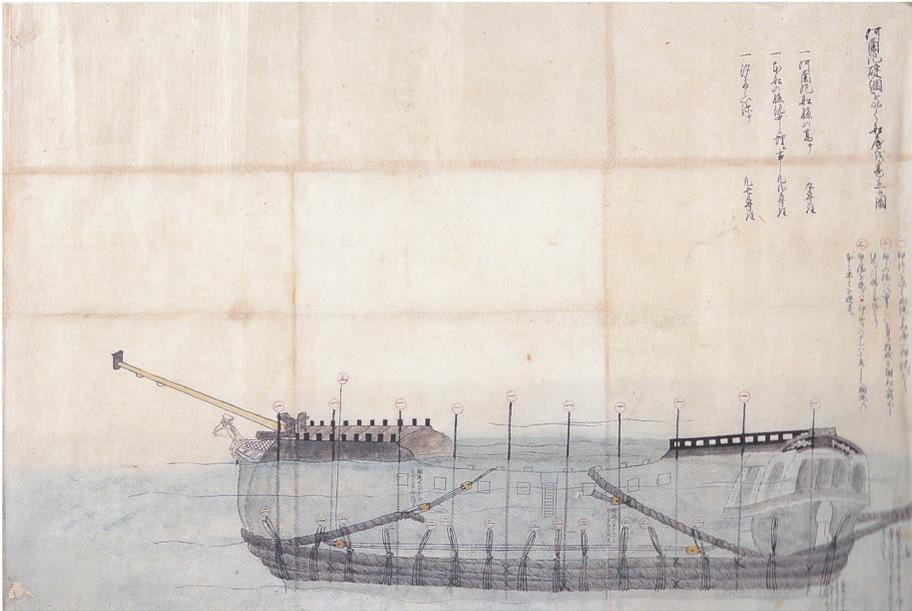


Figure 12. Anon, detail from handscroll, *Raising the Sunken Dutch Ship*, 1799. Ink and color on paper. Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture.

The ship was brought closer to shore and emptied, but then it sank with merely the prow protruding at low tide. This was all the more serious as, owing to the wars, the VOC was sending just one ship annually. The Dutch authorities in Batavia would have no way of knowing why the *Eliza* failed to arrive. Many times, the Dutch and Americans tried to refloat the vessel, once using three hundred empty saké barrels, but it was no use.⁴⁵ The ship sat in water, a monument to carelessness, for several months. Then a rich fisherman named Murai Kiemon 村井喜右衛門 (1752–1804) from the domain of Hagi 萩 in Suō 周防 Province, heard about it, and came to Nagasaki, offering help. He said he would raise the ship at his own expense. The VOC secretary Ras confided in his log,

He has already prepared everything. He does not want any reward if his plan succeeds, only a token present. He says he does not want money, but he would like the fame of having salvaged a Dutch [*sic*] ship. On behalf of both of us [Ras and Stewart] we offered him twenty canisters of powdered sugar, which pleased him.⁴⁶

This occurred two days before lunar New Year, that is, just prior to the main annual festival of renewal and felicity. The symbolism and auspiciousness of raising a ship for the incoming year would surely have appealed to Kiemon, and to the Japanese crowds watching from the shore: deliverance after disaster.

45 Blussé and Viallé 1997, p. 116.

46 Blussé and Viallé 1997, p. 119.

Ras went on, “I went to look at the contraption with which the ship will be salvaged. I do not doubt that they will succeed, for the fisherman is sparing neither trouble nor expense.” New Year came and went. A shogunal officer was sent to make drawings of the ship, and then a fortnight or so later, Kiemon managed to bring the ship up. A full scroll depicting the proceedings was produced in honor of the event (figure 12).

Kiemon’s lord, Mōri Narifusa 毛利斉房 (1728–1809), gave him the right to wear a *kamishimo* 袴 and swords, that is, he was raised to samurai rank.⁴⁷ This also entitled him to a family crest (*kamon* 家紋), and one was conferred and conceived in a “Dutch” way, showing a beaver hat and crossed tobacco pipes.⁴⁸ The Nagasaki governor, Asahina Masamoto 朝比奈昌始 gave him thirty pieces of silver and sent a letter in his praise to Edo.⁴⁹ As well as sugar, the Dutch gave Kiemon several bottles of saké.⁵⁰ It was a happy denouement. This incident became known at the highest levels in Edo, and a shogunal councilor (*rōjū* 老中) requested pictures to be sent without delay, and a model, which might be dispatched later. These were viewed by the shogun himself, Tokugawa Ienari 徳川家斉 (1773–1841), and all his close relations in the Three Noble Households (*gosanke* 御三家) and the Three Lords (*gosankyō* 御三卿).⁵¹ Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 (1759–1829), former head of the shogunal council, wrote about it, and perhaps also viewed the paintings and model. Sadanobu noted in his *Taikan zakki* 退閑雜記 (Leisure jottings) that the ship had proved impossible to raise, until “a man from the castle town of Hagi, named Kiemon” winched it up. For this, Sadanobu stated, he was presented with a gift of sugar by the Japanese (not Dutch), while Chinese merchants had his portrait painted.⁵²

With the *Eliza* floating, the abbot of Kōtaiji stepped in again to provide masts, this time receiving four hundred taels in thanks.⁵³ When summer came, the *Eliza* departed Japan. Not long afterwards, the next VOC ship, the *Franklin* (also a U.S. vessel) entered Nagasaki Bay, commanded by James Devereux. However, the *Eliza* then returned, having met a storm. When the weather calmed, it sailed out again, as the *Franklin* continued to unlade.

In addition to the documentary images mentioned above, two formal paintings were made of this sequence of events. After William Stewart brought the *Eliza* home to Boston, Massachusetts, the dangers through which he passed were depicted. Regrettably, the painting is unsigned and undated (figure 13).

God had evidently tested Stewart, but seeing his mettle (drunkenness being expunged from the exhilarating narrative), had brought him safely home to riches. On the Japanese side the ship was painted by Shiba Kōkan. He had visited Nagasaki a decade before, but was now living in Edo. Kōkan was not of high rank, but he was close to the elite Katsuragawa Hosai 桂川甫斎 (penname: Morishima Chūryō 森島中良 1756–1810), whose brother, Katsuragawa Hoshū 桂川甫周 (1751–1809), was a senior shogunal physician. Hoshū is

47 Katagiri 2017, pp. 44–45.

48 Blussé and Viallé 1997, p. xv.

49 Katagiri 2017, p. 42.

50 Katagiri 2017, p. 45. The empty bottles are extant; see figure 16.

51 Katagiri 2017, p. 51. For a reproduction and analysis of paintings and prints on the raising of the *Eliza*, see pp. 56–98.

52 Matsudaira 1980, pp. 241–242.

53 Blussé and Viallé 1997, p. 123.



Figure 13. Anon, *The Eliza Floundering off Japan*, ca. 1800. Oil on canvas. Peabody-Essex Museum, Salem, MA.

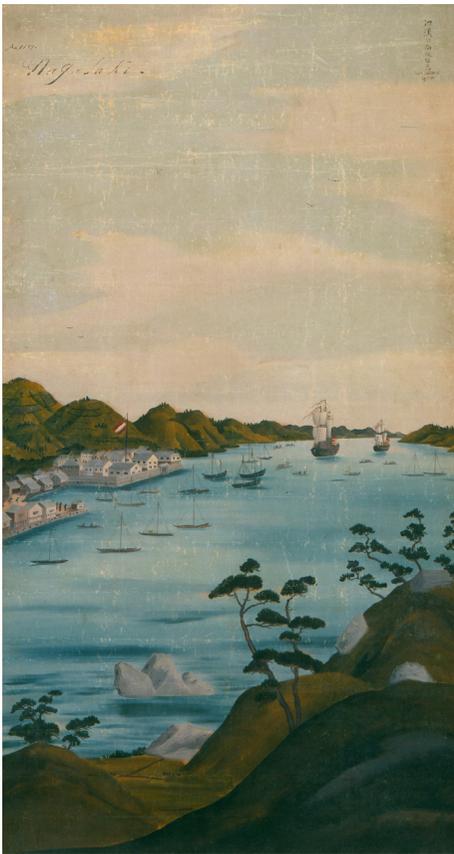


Figure 14. Shiba Kōkan, *The Eliza and the Franklin in Nagasaki Bay*, 1799. Ink and color on silk. Peabody-Essex Museum, Salem, MA.

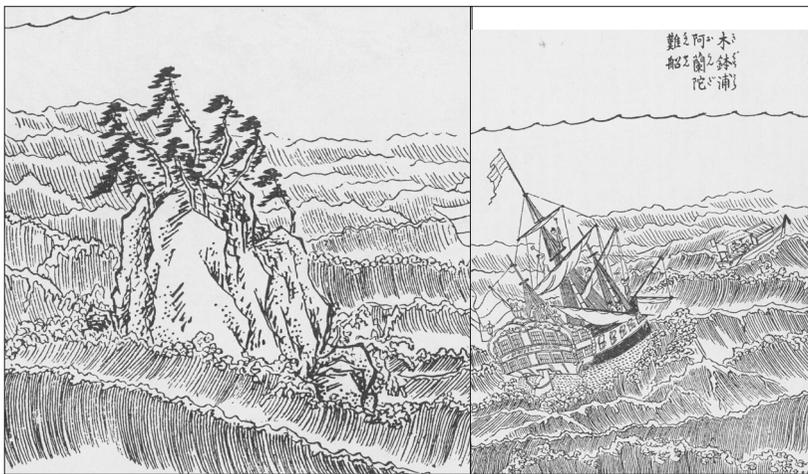


Figure 15. Ichibashi Chikuun, from Nigita Yugi and Noguchi Bunryū, *Nagasaki meishō zue*, ca. 1820. In Etchū 1975 series 1 vol. 3, pp. 212–213.

recorded as having viewed the paintings and model sent up from Nagasaki, and may have been in a position to furnish much more information besides.⁵⁴ Via Kōkan, the rescue surely became widely known.⁵⁵ Who might have commissioned such a work is open to question. The Japanese painting is in hanging scroll format, so it was for display, not just for reference, and labeled in Western fashion, “An: 1799 Nagasaki” (*anno* = year) (figure 14). The *Eliza* and *Franklin* lie at anchor, which gives a window of about four months, from summer to autumn.

The wreck and escape of the *Eliza* were drawn for publication, and hence for wider circulation still. They were selected for inclusion in a guidebook to Nagasaki, commissioned in 1818 by the then magistrate, Tsutsui Masanori 筒井政憲 (1778–1859, under the title of *Nagasaki meishō zue* 長崎名勝図会 (Illustrated famous places in Nagasaki).⁵⁶ The text was provided by Nigita Yugi 饒田諭義 (1772–1833) a Confucian scholar, and Noguchi Bunryū 野口文竜 who also wrote an important, though undated, literary reference work, *Nagasaki saijiki* 長崎歳時記 (The Seasons of Nagasaki). Pictures for the governor’s book were supplied by Uchibashi Chikuun 打橋竹雲 and others (figure 15).

Thus, some twenty years after the event, this unique chance to see a “Dutch” ship in distress was “famous.”⁵⁷ Even some twenty years later this was still the case, for one of Chikuun’s images was reworked for another guide to the city, *Nagasaki kokon shūran meishō zue* 長崎古今集覧名勝図絵 (Illustrated old and new collected famous places in Nagasaki), by Ishizaki Yūshi 石崎融思 (1768–1846) in 1841, though this post-dates Hokusai’s *Great Wave* (figure 16).⁵⁸ Neither of the “Nagasaki famous places” anthologies was published, remaining only in manuscript.

54 Katagiri 2017, p. 51.

55 Naruse et al. 1993, pp. 354–355.

56 The date is generally said to be unknown, but 1818 is given in Goree 2020, p. 7.

57 Nigita and Nomura 1983, pp. 210–215.

58 Ishizaki 1975.

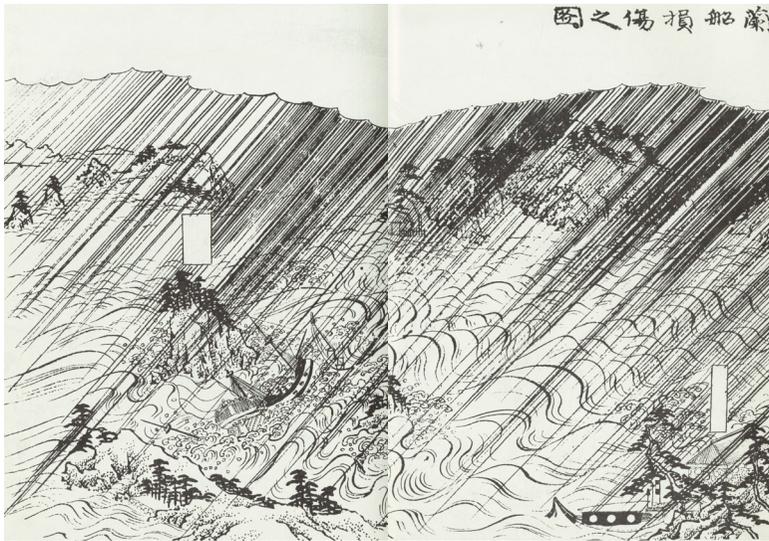


Figure 16. Ishizaki Yūshi, from *Nagasaki kokon shūran meisshō zue* 1841. In Etchū 1975, series 2, vol. 1, pp. 188–189.

Auspicious and Inauspicious

In 1814, before these books were compiled and long before Hokusai's *Great Wave*, Shiba Kōkan wrote of something he had heard. It is a clear articulation of an understanding of the meaning of imagery of ships in distress, and how these relate to Japanese artistic expectations.

Once in the past when the Dutch came on their tribute mission to Edo, one of the men fell ill in their residence, and it seemed that he might die. Fortunately, he recovered and so they held a celebratory banquet. They hung pictures to the left and right of his seat, which they displayed in frames. The subjects were ships in distress. A Japanese person who was present asked why they did this. The Dutchman replied, "It's a lesson that we should never forget danger."⁵⁹

Kōkan wrote this in formal language (*kanbun* 漢文), making it objective and official. But then he continued in the vernacular, indicating that this was his own gloss, rather than what he had been told:

If someone is deathly sick but makes a full recovery so that a celebration is held, we Japanese hang in the display alcove [a picture of] cranes, terrapins, pine and bamboo. [We feel that] if you just dwell on the matter [of sickness], it's a recipe for further ill health.⁶⁰

59 Shiba 1993b.

60 Shiba 1993b.



Figure 17. Maruyama Ōkyo, *Cranes with Pine and Terrapins with Bamboo*. 1777. Diptych of hanging scrolls, ink and color on silk. Egawa Museum, Nishinomiya.

Indeed, while there are next to no pictures of distressed ships in Japanese art, *Cranes with Pine* and *Terrapins with Bamboo* are legion. They are the ultimate in auspicious images, cranes being said to live for one thousand years, and terrapins for ten thousand, while pines and bamboo are evergreen, and so unchanging. Often the theme was rendered in the form of a diptych (figure 17).

Conclusion

Hokusai's print has now been positioned, I hope, in a line of Japanese engagements with Dutch maritime painting, and especially depictions of imminent disaster. Albeit faltering and interrupted, this line stretched over some two centuries. We do not need to prove—we cannot do so—that Hokusai saw any of the above works. But equally, the large number of lost imports, and the paucity of records of all kinds, mean that we cannot say that the incidents listed above are the full complement of what came to Japan. Cheaper Dutch prints came in their thousands, but all are lost.

Hokusai, somehow, encountered an imported theme—ships in distress—and worked on it across half of his long, productive life, at least from circa 1803 to circa 1832. He retained the foreign orientation, unhidden, though progressively homogenizing it, to invest it with meaning for his audience, while never disguising the alterity. The *Great Wave* does not show foreign ships in Japanese or foreign waters, but local vessels at a local place which his viewers would know, and even visit; the boats convey goods that his viewers would consume, thanks to the endeavors of crewmen to whom these same viewers could well be related. The maritime undertaking depicted is perilous, but lucrative, and rich in symbolic meaning. What Hokusai is surely not trying to do is banally show “express delivery boats” bringing food to market. The elements threaten, but Mt. Fuji offers security.

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