

Reading Japanese Art: Classicism and the Traps of Western Perception

Ewa MACHOTKA

Ph.D. Candidate, Gakushūin University

I would first like to explain one issue related to the title of this paper. Although I have introduced the word “Western,” it would perhaps be more accurate to say “Eastern” or “Central-European” or just “Polish traps of perception,” conforming with the fact, however grotesque, that the process of incorporation of Poland into so-called “Western societies” started only a bit longer than fifteen years ago, resulting in the European Union accession in 2004. Taking into consideration the purpose of our gathering today at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, which is sharing our experiences in researching Japanese art, I would like to talk about my personal observations which in some points might be slightly different than those of the members of, what I would like to call, “legitimate Western societies.” However, to adjust to conventional divisions between “East” and “West” enclosing the notion of “us” and “the others,” as well as not to cause further confusion, I have decided to label my personal traps of perception as “Western.” Moreover, I presume that regardless of the differences caused by the political history of Europe, the issue I would like to point at today concerns Japanese art studies in more of a general sense.

To draw our attention to the characteristics of so-called “Western” perception, first I would like to quote Feliks Manggha Jasioński (1861-1929)—one of the most significant figures of Polish cultural movements at the turn of the twentieth century—as his work in many ways is still a pivotal point in the development of Japanese art studies in Poland (Figure 1).

Japan is the only nation around the entire world—besides the Greeks—for whom continuous and the most extensive satisfying of artistic needs was one of the indispensable elements of existence. For hun-

dreds of millions of fanatic admirers of art, millions of artists created a million works of art.¹

Jasieński wrote in typical spirit of the age, formulating his ideas on the basis of idealism and exoticism characteristic for the description of “East” at the time. In the passage that follows,

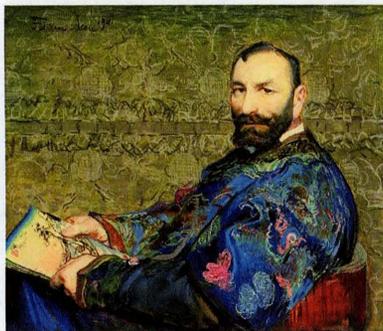


Fig. 1. Wyczolkowski Leon, *Portrait of Feliks Jasieński*, 1911. The National Muzeum in Kraków, Poland.

The Japanese Museum in Kraków provides the best lesson for Polish artists and Polish society. Yet, art should be created in one’s own country, for one’s own community, in one’s own way; it should be in such demand and the artists should be respected in such way.²

he also declares the idea of creating Polish national art based on Japanese art.³

Jasieński, owing to his diverse activities concentrated on animating the Polish art scene by means of sponsorship, writings, or collection as well as promotion of Japanese art culminating in the foundation of the basis of the Japanese art collection of the National Museum in Kraków, gained an exceptional position within Polish culture, the echo of which is still audible.⁴

¹ Jasieński 1906, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p.19.

³ Ewa Machotka, *The Conception of Polish National Art According to Feliks Manggha Jasieński: The Function of Japanese Works of Art, from Idea to Realization*. Master thesis, The Jagiellonian University, Kraków, 1998.

⁴ Not surprisingly, when the Center of Japanese Art and Technology in Kraków was opened in 1994 (mainly to store and exhibit the Museum’s collection), its founders (Andrzej Wajda and Krystyna Zachwatowicz) selected Jasieński’s pen-name “Manggha” as the name for the new institution.

But let us reconsider the circumstances: for decades, the most extensive research on Japanese art was conducted by the Department of Far Eastern Art at the National Museum in Kraków—as the keeper of the largest collection of Japanese artifacts in Poland (about twelve thousand objects).⁵ Similar to the majority of Western collections of Japanese art, the Museum collection was founded on the basis of a stream of private donations, which began in 1892, reached its zenith in 1920 with Jasiński's deed, and continued in the postwar time. Because Jasiński's collection, which was assembled mainly in the nineteenth century, constitutes the core of the Museum collection, it naturally presents art tastes of the *époque* of japonisme. The predominance of ukiyo-e works in early European collections, crowned with prints of Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) and Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), is easy to observe simply by analyzing the number of objects in Jasiński's collection: almost five thousand ukiyo-e prints, including more than two thousand of Hiroshige's landscape pictures. With regard to this, the collector point of view was prevalent in the development of Japanese art studies.

Quite naturally, in the center of interests were the problems of authentication and classification of the objects by means of description, attribution, dating, etc., which put the art historian in a custodial position. Undoubtedly the work done at that time deserves the highest respect, but the circumstances did not encourage scholars to question or look for new ways of art interpretation.

Japanese art was not taught at any Polish universities—neither in the history of art nor Japanese studies departments. Due to the nineteenth-century “science revolution” which imposed strict divisions on science disciplines, the universities, for fear of being accused of “dilettantism,” rejected any kind of interdisciplinary approach such as including Eastern art in the history of art curriculum or including history of art in the Japanese studies program. Subsequently, although the history of Japanese studies in Poland extends back to 1919, institutionalized teaching of Jap-

⁵ Among the other Polish institutions which collected Japanese art objects are the National Museum in Warszawa (2,000 objects), the National Museum in Wrocław (500 objects), and the Poster and Design Gallery and Museum of Applied Art in the National Museum in Poznań (2,200 objects).

anese art history as such did not exist until quite recently, when a seminar in Japanese esthetics was held in the Japanese studies department of Warszawa University.

Here I am—a curator of the Department of Far Eastern Art of the National Museum in Kraków and a graduate of both the Department of History of Art and the Department of Japanese Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. My research is focused on ukiyo-e, and what is more, with Hokusai as my prime area of interest. Since I am a successor of the traditions described above, undoubtedly they form a trap for my perception of Japanese art, which I would like to talk about today and which I hope to overcome in the future.

This paper refers to the study on classicism or restoring the past practice within ukiyo-e art of the late Edo period. It focuses on a series of Katsushika Hokusai's woodblock prints, *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki* (*Hyakunin isshu* as Explained by the Wet Nurse), illustrating Fujiwara Teika's (1162-1241) anthology of classical Japanese poetry.

The poems, first canonized by Fujiwara Teika in his anthology, became a subject of *kaigaka* or pictorialization process, which changed their ontological status and transformed them from the domain of text to the domain of image. I have attempted to examine how *Hyakunin isshu* was received in the new medium of ukiyo-e, and especially, how and why the text was interpreted, revaluated, and transformed by Hokusai. As we shall see, the poems were read and then pictorialized in a highly innovative and individual manner, which causes serious difficulties in the perception of the pictures. These difficulties seriously put to the test the interpretational abilities of a researcher. The problem, I would argue, has its roots in nineteenth-century based Western perceptions of art and its continuous legacy which is imposed on culturally alien Japanese works of art.

However, let me first introduce a few of Hokusai's illustrations from the series and compare them with the other *Hyakunin isshu* pictures in order to grasp Hokusai's individual pictorialization manner. Although Hokusai completed one hundred sketches in the *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki* series, only twenty-seven of these were made into woodblock prints. The rest of the pictures exist in different forms, predominantly as *hanshita-e* (preliminary sketches).⁶ The circumstances accompanying the

publishing process and the reasons for its suspension are not entirely clear. The first five prints were published by Nishimuraya Yohachi (Eijudō, ca.1730s-1840s)⁷ in 1835,⁸ then the work was presumably continued by Iseya Sanjirō (ca.1790s-1840s),⁹ but soon after, for unknown reasons, the publication was suspended for good.¹⁰ Hokusai continued his work on the sketches, probably until 1838, but the remaining pictures were not made into color prints.¹¹

Hokusai's prints have been analyzed and investigated in the context of historio-biography and in relation to the work which lay at their origin, i. e. *Hyakunin isshu*, in relation to the commentary on this work, as well as in contrast to the other illustrations. The prints were compared

⁶ From the total number of 91 pictures designed by Hokusai which are known today, 27 exist as color woodblock prints, one as key-block print, 55 as original drawings, 4 as photomechanical reproductions of original drawings made in the late nineteenth century (so-called "Gillot prints"), and 4 as color woodblock prints made in 1921 by Satō Shōtarō.

⁷ The last volume of a novel entitled *Azami no hana koi ōguruma* (Carriage of Thistle Flower Love) by Shinsui (illustrated by Utagawa Sadahide), published by Eijudō in 1835 includes the announcement of forthcoming *daishinpan* (new big print series) made by Hokusai.

⁸ Print number 98 bears inscriptions with the exact date—summer of the year 1838.

⁹ The phonetic value of the seal "Eijudō" remained the same, but it consisted now of different Chinese characters. Instead of a seal inscribed with *nagaikotobuki* 永寿堂 characters on the prints, a new signature appears with the characters *sakaeruki* 栄樹堂—as suggested by Suzuki Juzō and Roger Keyes. See Morse 1989, p. 14.

¹⁰ Poem numbers: 1, 2, 3, 6, 9. According to the historical sources, Nishimuraya Yohachi's publishing house collapsed soon after 1835, presumably because of the sudden death of its owner. Nevertheless, Eijudō's date of death still remains unknown.

¹¹ The reasons for suspension of the publication have not yet been clarified. One widely accepted explanation is due to the general historical background, i.e. the Tenpō era (1830-1844) economical crisis (*Tenpō no daikikin*; 1834-37), which undoubtedly limited possibilities for publishing this vast and expensive series.

with the *hanpon* (printed book) *Hyakunin isshu zōsan shō* (Commentary on the Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, with Portraits and Inscriptions) created in 1678 by Hishikawa Moronobu (? - 1694).¹² Hokusai's pictures have also been examined in reference to *nishiki-e* prints by Suzuki Harunobu (1725-1770) from around 1767¹³ and with the series *Hyakunin issu no uchi* (From *Hyakunin issu*) made by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861) probably between 1842-1843.¹⁴

I have chosen two poems—Sōjō Henjō (no. 12 in the anthology) and Ono no Komachi (no. 9)—as they exemplify two different poem-picture relations revealed within an image and, at the same time, two different pictorialization manners applied by Hokusai in *Hyakunin issu uba ga etoki*.

Regarding the English translations of the poems, I have taken the liberty to quote Joshua Mostow's translations contained in his study on *Hyakunin issu* pictorialization.¹⁵

Sōjō Henjō's original poem:

*amatsu kaze / kumo no kayoi-ji / fuki-tojiyo
otome no sugata / shibashi todomen*¹⁶

English translation:

O heavenly breeze,
blow so as to block
their path back through the clouds!
For I would, if but for a moment,
detain these maidens' forms.¹⁷

¹² Mostow 1996, p. 98.

¹³ The prints were executed between 1767 and 1768. It is not clear how many illustrations for *Hyakunin issu* poems were accomplished, since only sixteen prints are known today.

¹⁴ The existence of only fifty-eight woodblock prints has been confirmed.

¹⁵ Mostow 1996.

¹⁶ Ariyoshi 2001, p. 60.

Most of the artists tended to represent the actual circumstances accompanying the composition of the poem as described in the *Kokinshū*'s (Collection of Early and Modern Japanese Poetry; 905) headnote—*gosechi no maihime o mite yomeru* (composed on seeing Gosechi dancers).¹⁸ Typical pictorialization of the poem represents the courtiers watching either the actual dancers or the heavenly maidens described in the poem. As we can see, the court event inspired both Moronobu (Figure 2) and Kuniyoshi (Figure 3). Both artists depicted the poet as a monk. Also, Hokusai presents the moment when Sōjō Henjō composed the poem, but his version represents the poet as a courtier maintaining historical accuracy (Figure 4).¹⁹ Hokusai follows thus the traditional illustrating pattern and includes the imaginary portrait of a poet depicted while reciting a poem.



Fig. 2. Hishikawa Moronobu, Sōjō Henjō, *Hyakunin isshu zōsan shō*. Atomi Junior College Library 跡見学園女子大学短期大学部図書館.

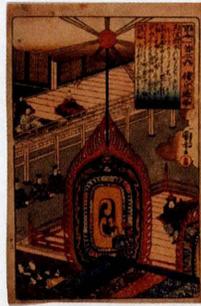


Fig. 3. Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Sōjō Henjō, *Hyakunin isshu no uchi* (From *Hyakunin isshu*, 1842-1843). Nakagawa-machi Bato Hiroshige Museum of Art 那珂川町馬頭広重美術館.

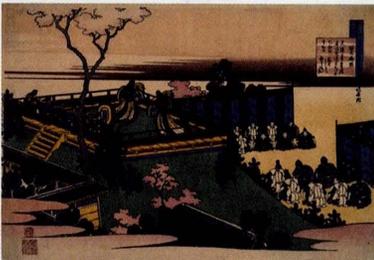


Fig. 4. Katsushika Hokusai, Sōjō Henjō, *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*. Machida Museum of Graphic Arts 町田市国際版画美術館.

¹⁷ Mostow 1996, p. 178.

¹⁸ Ariyoshi 2001, p. 60.

¹⁹ According to historical sources, Sōjō Henjō had composed the poem before he changed his secular dress to monk's robes.

Subsequently, let us observe how Hokusai pictorialized Ono no Komachi's poem.

Ono no Komachi's original poem:

*Hana no iro wa / utsurinikeri na / itazura ni
wa ga mi yo ni furu/ nagame seshi ma ni*²⁰

English translation:

The color of the flowers
has faded indeed
in vain
have I passed through the world
while gazing at the falling rains.²¹

In spite of a variety of interpretative possibilities offered by the poem's punning character resulting from the use of numerous *kakekotoba* (pun-



Fig. 5. Hishikawa Moronobu, Ono no Komachi, *Hyakunin isshu zōsan shō*. Atomi Junior College Library 跡見学園女子大学短期大学部図書館.



Fig. 6. Suzuki Harunobu, Ono no Komachi, *Hyakunin isshu*, ca. 1767-1768. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 1946.

²⁰ Ariyoshi 2001, p.48.

²¹ Mostow 1996, p.168.



Fig. 7. Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Hyakunin isshu no uchi* (From *Hyakunin isshu*, 1842-1843). Nakagawa-machi Bato Hiroshige Museum of Art 那珂川町馬頭広重美術館



Fig. 8. Katsushika Hokusai, *Ono no Komachi, Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*. Machida Museum of Graphic Arts 町田市国際版画美術館.

ning words), traditional pictorialization of the text was limited to presenting the imaginary portrait of Komachi. Moronobu (Figure 5), Harunobu (Figure 6), and Kuniyoshi (Figure 7) presented similar pictorializations of the poem focusing on Komachi.

However, instead of portraying the beauty, Hokusai presents a picture of a busy day in a village (Figure 8). The sophisticated atmosphere of the poem is replaced by the bustle of everyday life. However, we might ask—what is the subject of the picture and does it refer to the poem? If it refers to the poem, what is the basis of this relation? How did Hokusai read and pictorialize the poem? The only common element connecting the poem and the picture seems to be a cherry tree, placed in the center of the picture. Presumably, Hokusai also depicted the poetess herself in this picture. According to popular beliefs, Komachi in her old age left the court and became a wanderer.²² But is it really Komachi herself?

²² This theme was developed in the last episode of the noh play entitled *Nana Komachi* (Seven Komachi), *Sotōba Komachi*, written primarily by Kannami (1333-1384) and his son Zeami (1364?-1443).

And what about all the other pictorial details—what is their meaning? These and similar questions pervade our perception of the picture. I will not attempt to give “ready-made” answers for any of them, especially concerning the details surrounding the cherry tree. I suppose that the puzzle given us by Hokusai is something more than just word-image literal translation. Although such an interpretational attempt has already been made before, it does not seem to be based on research of vocabulary from the Edo period.²³ Undoubtedly, a study on word-image correspondence could bring light to our understanding of the pictures, and as such is a future goal for researchers. Instead I would like to try and find the explanation for the reasons of Hokusai’s unique approach; in other words, where in the cultural environment of the late Edo period can we find elements resonating with this specific attitude, which might get us closer to the understanding of the pictures.

However, to pursue my investigation, I would need a methodology which suits not only descriptive but also interpretative purposes. Empirical and monographic study of monuments, artists, styles, or periods—as “traditional” art history is with its Hegelian roots—does not seem to meet the requirements of the present-day research in the same way in Western as in Japanese art studies. Nineteenth-century creation with its formalistic methodology, fixed hierarchies, and restricted boundaries forms a trap for our perception of culturally alien forms of art.

I would blame the notion of strict divisions separating visual arts and literature—the domain of image and text—for our incompetence in interpreting Japanese art. The nineteenth-century “science revolution” has much to do with our Western understanding and opinions on arts relations. A notion of the “Sisters Arts” or close correspondence between poetry and painting pervaded European philosophy from the dawn of time: when the philosopher Simonides from Kos (d. 469 BC) declared it for the first time²⁴ and later Horatio (65-8 BC) expressed his famous *Ut pictura poesis* (As is painting so is poetry). However, it was seriously criticized by Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) in *Laokoon oder Ueber die*

²³ e.g. Morse 1989.

²⁴ *Poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens* (Poetry is a speaking picture, painting is silent poetry).

Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie (Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Poetry and Painting, 1766) in the second half of the eighteenth century or at the beginning of the formation of modern sciences. Rejecting so-called “dilettantism” and preferring narrow specializations also resulted in the birth of the history of art as a new discipline. Lessing’s ideas separating fine arts from their sisters were as important for this process as the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768). Consequently, they founded the basis of art history and formed a kind of canonical notion of art still persistent in institutionalized art history teaching, both Western and Eastern. However, their usefulness (especially within Japanese art studies) has been questioned. As a result, we might need to be open to non-Western methods of art appreciation and one of the basic characteristics of traditional Eastern arts—no strict boundaries between the domain of text and the domain of image. Due to ideographic writing systems, text and image have always stayed close to each other with text embracing visual qualities. The artistic category of *shoga*—denoting both calligraphy and painting and foregoing the Western import of the term *kaiga* (painting)—is an example of this unique relation. Moreover, in the eleventh century, the Chinese poet Su Dongpo (Jp. Sotōba, 1036-1101) declared that *gachū shi ga ari, shichū ga ga aru*, or “Paintings are mute poetry and poems are speaking pictures,” emphasizing the notion of arts’ sisterhood. The idea of close relations between literature and visual arts stimulated both Japanese art creation as well as art appreciation throughout its long history. Therefore, to understand Hokusai’s method of *Hyakunin isshu* pictorialization, we may need a new strategy in analyzing and interpretation, and perhaps we may need to leave behind our Western bias and turn to the Japanese notion on the poem/picture relation and this notion’s practical application.

The poem-picture tradition, as Joshua Mostow points out, can be divided into two main patterns: imaginary poet-portraits (*kasen-e*) and pictures related to the poems.²⁵ However, the latter can be divided into even more specific trends. Depending on the poem-picture relation, it is possible to distinguish illustrations that are visual equivalents of the poem’s substance—known as *uta-e* (poem-pictures)—and pictures illustrating

²⁵ Mostow 1996, p. 88.

the circumstances that accompanied the creation of a specific poem, which might be called *sakka bamen no zu*.²⁶ Despite the controversy concerning the original use of these terms, they can be treated as relevant terms of designation for the purpose of the present research. In this respect, Hokusai's *Hyakunin isshu* illustrations can be divided into two main groups: first, *sakka bamen no zu* and second, *uta-e* pictorialization. In the first group, here exemplified by Sōjō Henjō's poem illustration, Hokusai follows traditional pictorial interpretation and depicts the probable circumstances of composing the poem, where the condition *sine qua non* is incorporation of the poet's imaginary portrait into the picture. This group of prints is characterized by a direct association between the poem and the picture, and consists of six prints and five non-*nishiki-e* pictures (drawings, Gillot prints).

However, more interesting is the second group of prints characterized by indirect poem-picture associations. As seen in the case of Ono no Komachi's poem, the artist avoids its traditional interpretation and, what is more important when we consider the distant text/image relation depicted in the picture, he leaves behind the poem and ventures into new realms of illustration. Usually, a picture is a kind of visual equivalent of the poem's essence, which does not necessarily mean that it has to follow the content of the original poem very closely or that it has to be a literal translation of its words. The poet's imaginary portrait—in its legitimate form—does not appear in the image.

This method of pictorial reference to a text, which originates in the *byōbu-uta* decorating practice,²⁷ does not seem to be an isolated case in Japanese art, especially if we consider the popularity of the *mitate de-*

²⁶ Mostow observes: “ (...) contemporary documents clearly shows that the people of the time saw at least two distinct modes of pictorialization, one of which was *uta-e*. What the other was labeled we cannot say (...)”, however it referred to the circumstances of poem composition as described in *Eishō gonen shichigatsu nijūrokunichi Saki Reikeiden no Nyōgo Enshi no uta awase* (The Former Lady Reikiden Enshi's Poem-Picture Contest of 1050). (Ibid., pp. 92-93).

²⁷ *Byōbu-uta* (screen poems) denote the Heian period practice of pasting car-touches of decorative paper with inscribed poems on a folding screen—pairing of picture and poem.

vice²⁸ in the Edo period. However, it could be quite new for the Western viewer, causing interpretational difficulties. Moreover, indirect text/image correspondence manifests as well in the process of transforming the atmosphere of a poem. Hokusai transposes the sophisticated elements related to court life into the realm of experience of commoners and, in a more general sense, the domain of court poetry into the domain of commoner ukiyo-e prints. Here, referring to social changes occurring during the Edo period, we could point to the phenomenon of *tsūzokuka* (cultural changes from *ga* towards *zoku*), where *ga* indicates traditional sophisticated elements derived from the court milieu, and *zoku* refers to new elements associated with the commoners' popular culture.²⁹ Due to the development of the publishing industry and growing literacy, the new successful group of commoners began to amass cultural capital. As described in the contemporary book *Chōnin bukuro* (The Merchant's Wisdom Bag, 1719), "Now that the townspeople have piled up a lot of money, they proudly attempt to raise their status by aping the manners of the aristocracy and the samurai."³⁰

This kind of *ga/zoku* transposition is one of the main characteristics of the *uta-e* pictorialization of *Hyakunin issshu uba ga etoki* poems. Hokusai transposes the poem's *ga* (refined) world into the domain of *zoku* (mundane). Therefore, the pictures belonging to this group can be described as both *uta-e* and *zoku* pictorialization. The group consists of twenty-one prints and fifty-six non-*nishiki-e* pictures (drawings, Gillot, and Satō Shōtarō prints).

The artist presented a new manner of pictorialization and transferred the poems into a new domain of interpretation. A work of art that originates in the process arises on the border of the two domains of text and image, even though it may belong to neither of them. Therefore, to un-

²⁸ *Mitate* is a literary and artistic device of comparing different contents within one piece of art, popular in the Edo period.

²⁹ As Nakano Mitsutoshi has pointed out, *ga* and *zoku*, the two main cultural streams that may be distinguished in the Edo period, emerged from distinct sources but soon intermingled to form the culture of the times. (See Nakano 1992, p. 7).

³⁰ Nishikawa Jōken (1648-1724). See Ikegami 2005, p. 150.

derstand and interpret it, we ought to cross the boundaries imposed on us by the conventional notions of art history or literature methodology. Only by juxtaposing visual and textual elements may we get closer to understanding Japanese art. However, textual elements do not refer merely to *Hyakunin isshu* poems; they comprise the anthology commentaries as well as the variety of texts related to it. As visual arts in the East have always maintained close relations with the textual world, we do not merely “see” a picture, we ought to “read” it in its textual context as well.³¹ Therefore, let me continue my study of Hokusai’s prints with reference to a selected group of textual sources, as well as certain social and cultural trends revealed within the late Edo period, which might bring light to our understanding and interpretation of *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki* prints.³²

As indicated before, the interpretative manners adopted by Hokusai reveal a wide range of dissimilarities from the canonical interpretation as well as pictorialization of *Hyakunin isshu* poems. The majority of Hokusai’s prints can be described as *uta-e*, as well as *zoku* pictorialization. Hokusai concentrates on the poem itself. Moreover, while aiming at depicting his contemporaries—commoners presented while working, traveling, or resting—Hokusai frequently modifies the content poems by their transposition from *ga* to *zoku* world.³³

In order to reveal probable motives of Hokusai’s “classicism” mode employed in the series, let us “read” and reconsider its title, which may be divided into three meaningful components: *hyakunin isshu, uba, etoki*. The first element—*Hyakunin isshu*—from the medieval period was regarded as the preeminent court poetry anthology and the subject of nu-

³¹ Eastern calligraphy is a good example of the practice.

³² Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) already initiated the study of art in socio-historical context and claimed that art is a product of its time and could be historically understood if it was mapped against a panorama of cultural, social, and especially literary meaning.

³³ Several assumptions were made with regard to this phenomenon. As Richard Lane pointed out, “Hokusai has placed man at the center of his work (...)” See Fabienne Delpy, “Human Figures in Hokusai’s Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, *Andon* 68, p. 24.

merous commentaries. It was especially appreciated as a kind of manual for the poetry novice. In the Edo period, it was nominated as a prime educational source, especially for women, as a result of Confucian-gendered visions of literature³⁴ and developing women's literacy.³⁵ Further popularized by the *karuta* game as a form of entertainment for girls, *Hyakunin issshu* became one of the essential elements of a woman's trousseau.

The second element—*uba* or a wet nurse—is a woman (in the Edo period, a commoner) taking care of children fully or partially substituting for a mother. The *uba* was in charge not only of the physical aspects of children's growth, but she also played an instrumental role in the education process. According to R. P. Dore, a large part of the group of teachers in *terakoya* or "schools for commoners" (literally, temple schools) was formed by women retired from this kind of service in wealthy mansions.³⁶

The third element—*etoki* or "picture explaining"—is one device in the process of knowledge transfer already employed in the Heian period (794-1185) as a practice of explaining Buddhist dogmas by utilizing visual sources. The interpreter of the pictures plays an essential part in the process because the content of the transferred message is subject to change according to the narrator's choices or abilities.

Subsequently, we can mark out several findings important for further

³⁴ Gender-divisions of the literary world go back as far as to the Heian period, when official writings in Chinese characters were associated with masculine (*otokode* or "male hand"), whereas private emotions were expressed in Japanese phonemes which were associated with feminine (*onnade* or "female hand").

³⁵ Especially during the late Edo period, literacy grew considerably among female commoners. An interesting record is found in *Kankoku kōgiroku* (Official Records of Filial Piety, 1801), a work commissioned by Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758-1829), which notes that in 1795, Iwa—the daughter of Denbee from Hongō Haruki-chō (in Edo)—was officially awarded for reading books to her father. See Nishiyama 1997, p. 75. Moreover, only in the haikai world do we find 130 publications written or edited by women. (Ikegami 2005, p. 187).

³⁶ About a third of the teachers reported in the 1883 survey were women. See Dore 1965, p. 257.

investigations: first, Hokusai's way of poem interpretation can be considered as a part of the broader phenomenon of *tsūzokuka* (cultural changes from *ga* towards *zoku*), which determined the mass popularity of the *Hyakunin issu* anthology among the common people (especially women) as a source of gender-oriented education. Second, this process is reflected in the introduction of *uba* as a narrator of the *etoki* process (picture explaining). Hokusai seems to have used *uba* as a kind of disguise or alter-ego, by means of which he avoided identifying himself with presented visual interpretations of the poems. Instead, he points at the *uba*—a woman and a commoner—as an interpreter, who presumably, for educational purposes, used the pictures to explain the content of the poems.

Therefore, the series title may be reworded as a gender-oriented educational literary text of *Hyakunin issu* as taught by a female-commoner-educator *uba* who explains its meaning by utilizing visual sources of *ukiyo-e*. As such, does it resemble any other phenomenon emerging within the Edo culture? Can we find any matching element, which enables us to attempt a reconstruction of Hokusai's mode of referring to the past?

Let me call to our attention the genre of *ōraimono* (epistolary textbooks), which was employed in the educational curriculum of Edo period *terakoya*.³⁷ As a source of basic learning, *ōraimono*³⁸ dates back to the Heian period, but the Edo period's growing literacy resulted in introducing the genre into the commoners' culture.³⁹ As Koizumi Shigenaga has pointed out, the group of 3,000 versions of women-oriented

³⁷ Between 1789 and 1829 there were 207 *shijuku* (private schools) and 40 *han* schools, while 1,286 *terakoya* and 42 *gōkō* (village schools) existed. Between 1830 and 1867, there were 796 *shijuku*, 56 *han* schools, 8,675 *terakoya*, and 48 *gōkō*. See Rubinger 1982, p. 5.

³⁸ From printed evidence we may assume that among many hundreds of different existing texts, one of the most widely used was *Teikin ōrai* (Household Lesson Letters, 1350) and *Imagawajō* (Letters from Imagawa Ryōshun, 1326-1414) — both written in the Sino-Japanese manner. Koizumi Yoshinaga states that at least 10,000 *ōraimono* were produced during the Edo period, including 3,000 textbooks for women. See Koizumi 2005, p. 56.

ōraimono consisted of *Onna imagawa* (Women's Imagawa, 1700),⁴⁰ *Onna daigaku* (Great Learning for Women, early eighteenth century), and *Hyakunin isshu*. Almost 1,200 publications featured Teika's anthology either as single-subject books or combined with the other texts.⁴¹ The textbooks for women were written in pure Japanese following the Confucian gendered vision of society. *Onna daigaku*⁴² recommends that "to teach the way of sophistication, let [the girls] read old poems."⁴³ The idea appeared also in *Joyōchie kagami* (The Mirror of Wisdom for Women) from 1720, which states: "When a girl is seven or eight to practice her hand [calligraphy] let her read *Hyakunin isshu* or *Kokinshū*."⁴⁴ In contrast, *Hyakunin isshu* was not used as a primary textbook for boys, whose education was mainly based on Chinese texts.⁴⁵ However, it does not mean that boys were not familiar with the anthology.⁴⁶ At the early stage, the poems were taught at home, usually by a mother or wet nurse *uba*, who were both prepared to realize their social role from the female-oriented education. As it was expressed in a *senryū* poem: *Imagawa wa chichi, Hyakunin isshu haha oshie* (Father Imagawa, mother teaches *Hyakunin isshu*).⁴⁷ Moreover, the *ōraimono* usually contained pictures, either monochrome or colorful, which change *ōraimono* into a mixture

³⁹ An estimated 40 percent of boys and 10 percent of girls were literate at the end of the era. See Jansen 2000, p.190.

⁴⁰ *Imagawajō* was modified by Sawada Kichi into *Onna imagawa* (Women's Imagawa, 1700)—a compilation of precepts for women.

⁴¹ Koizumi 2005, p. 56.

⁴² Commonly attributed to Kaibara Ekiken (1630-1714).

⁴³ Koizumi 2005, p. 60.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁵ No example of *Hyakunin isshu* published as *ōraimono* for male students can be found. (*Ibid.*, p. 66).

⁴⁶ "On rarer occasions and at a more advanced level, students read literary texts such as *Selected Tang Poems (Tōshisen)*, Teika's *Hyakunin isshu*, part of *The Tale of Genji [Genji monogatari]*, the kana preface to the *Kokinshū*, or *Wakan rōeishū* (Sino-Japanese Anthology for Rōei, 11th century), which were used for calligraphy practice." See Shirane 2000, p. 231.

⁴⁷ Koizumi 2005, p. 66.

of visual and textual elements. Hokusai himself illustrated a few textbooks. Around 1835, close to the presumed date of the first printing of *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*, he was involved in at least two more projects of producing the pictures for *ōraimono: Ehon teikin ōrai* (Illustrated Household Lesson Letters)⁴⁸ and *Ehon onna imagawa* (Illustrated Women's Imagawa).⁴⁹

If we compare our previous findings, we may observe close similarities between *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki* and the Edo period's women-oriented *ōraimono* based on the *Hyakunin isshu* anthology. Moreover, we discovered that Hokusai was familiar with *ōraimono* form as such, and was working on illustrations for two of the most popular examples of the genre in the 1830s when *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki* prints appeared. Thus we may assume that it could have influenced his perception of *Hyakunin isshu* as well as the method in which *Hyakunin isshu* was pictorialized. But can we also assume that Hokusai created a specific visual type of *ōraimono* aiming at a female Edo audience? To answer this question, let us re-examine Hokusai's picture-poem relation and his interpretative manner with regard to *ōraimono*.

If we think about the main purpose and hallmarks of the Edo-period *ōraimono* as a source of basic education, we would undoubtedly point to its simplicity, which enables readers to understand and learn. On the other hand, if we recall Hokusai's illustrations, in contrast to this, one of the main characteristics is a highly individual way of pictorialization causing difficulties in understanding the pictures and thus, the poems. This feature of the series was even suggested as one of the reasons for suspension of its publishing.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, let me call to our attention remarks

⁴⁸ *Ehon teikin ōrai* was serialized into three parts, which were published subsequently in 1828, in the 1830s, and in 1848.

⁴⁹ On stylistic premises, *Ehon onna imagawa* is dated to the late 1820s, while its first dated edition is marked from 1848.

⁵⁰ Yamaguchi Keizaburō assumes in turn that it was the character of the series, and in particular, Hokusai's individual interpretative approach to the poems, which made the pictures so difficult to construe, that caused the lack of wide public interest, and thus financial problems for the publisher, who had to suspend the publication. See Yamaguchi 1977, p. 11.

made by Takai Ranzan (1762-1838) in 1822 in the preface to *Onna imagawa sonōnotake*,⁵¹ which might bring some new light into our discourse. “Although all the girls are taught by *Hyakunin isshu* and there are also *utakaruta* games, there are girls who even as they grew older, learned only prattle and mistakes because they were taught by somebody who does not know the way of poetry.”⁵²

The notion of *uta no michi* (the way of poetry)⁵³ indicates the monopolization of learning and production of canonized interpretational version of poems, established by a hereditary poetry family, and associated with the Dōjō poetry court circle.⁵⁴ Thus, Ranzan emphasizes the importance of a teacher deriving from that canonical tradition. Therefore, due to expanding *tsūzokuka* process, *Hyakunin isshu* gained unprecedented popularity, but, much for the same reason, its canonical medieval interpretation privatized by court poetry lineage was about to fade away in the Edo period. In the process of reinterpreting the classics, besides the Kokugaku (School of Native Learning),⁵⁵ which was searching for “pure” Japanese tradition, a secondary role was played by the wider audience—also female-commoners.

In summary, let us once again look at Hokusai’s *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki* and focus on the pictures with close regard to our previous findings. The *Hyakunin isshu* anthology—a preeminent court poem anthology and major women-oriented *ōraimono* text of the Edo period—was read and thus interpreted by *uba* or wet nurses. *Uba*, or a female-commoner, can be regarded as an agent of the women-education process of the Edo period, who stands in between—both as a female student and a

⁵¹ See Koizumi 2005, p. 65.

⁵² Ibid., p. 65.

⁵³ The way of poetry (*uta no michi*), being the heart of *wagaku* (Japanese studies), was established in the late twelfth century as a practice of studying with one of the hereditary poetry families (*uta no ie*), which monopolized certain text and knowledge as family possessions. See Shirane 2000, p. 224.

⁵⁴ Dōjō (or Tōshō) poetry circle was organized around the imperial court.

⁵⁵ Kokugaku derived from philological studies of the Japanese classics, which led to defining the essential elements of Japanese tradition and Japanese cultural identity.

female teacher. Thus *uba* take an active part in *Hyakunin isshu* popularization by realizing its educational function in society. By utilizing visual sources such as *nishiki-e* prints, she is a narrator of the *etoki* (picture explaining) practice, explaining the content of the poems to the wider audience. She educates according to her best understanding and ability as the representative of *zoku* (plebeian) culture—a commoner and a female. As such, she rejects a canonical interpretation and follows her own life experience-based understanding of the poems, regardless of the standard or the unavoidable mistakes and misunderstandings incidentally happening within her lectures.

Therefore we can point to *uba*—a narrator—as a key to revealing Hokusai’s individual pictorialization method and the artistic mode of referring to the past. *Uba* represent the Edo period with one of its characteristics that commoners are not only the consumers of the culture but producers as well. In the process of assimilating *ga* (sophisticated) elements from the noble past, *Hyakunin isshu* became “the property” of *zoku* (plebeian) culture with *shomin* (commoners) as its producers. Therefore, Hokusai refers not to the past itself, but to the past created within the present—with *uba* as its maker. His pictorializations can be regarded as a kind of parody regarding specific poem-picture relations, but it can be assumed that more than being a parody of *Hyakunin isshu* itself, it is a parody of the text re-produced within the Edo culture. Furthermore, regarding the way of text re-producing and its function in women’s education, it can be assumed that Hokusai parodied *ōraimono*—a textbook for basic female learning.

Therefore, we may assume that Hokusai does not refer directly to a specific object from the past—here *Hyakunin isshu*—but to the past which has been already transferred and adapted according to needs and requirements of the present—here women-oriented *ōraimono*. Moreover, in this case, the process of “referring” places emphasis on the parodying practice.

In conclusion, I would like to recall Shirane Haruo’s observation that “Canon formation (...) has served as a vehicle both for control and for liberation.”⁵⁶ The course of years and changing political and social

⁵⁶ Shirane 2000, p.12.

conditions of the Tokugawa period, together with the stable life conditions and high literacy rate, brought to *Hyakunin isshu* a new wider audience of urban citizens (*chōnin*) and a new medium of proliferation—woodblock prints. The so-called “classics” were absorbed by the *shomin* culture and then re-produced in an open process creating endless variations that changed not only its characteristics, but its status as well. Once the traditional monopoly of poetry learning held by the court circle was broken, *Hyakunin isshu* also became the “property” of the commoners, especially women, who emerged as an important group of popular literature consumers in the second part of the Tokugawa period. Thus, the status of the adopted “classics” has changed considerably due to a changing audience—from a cultivated male audience of court milieu to the female commoner of the late Edo period. Traditionally, access to the canon has been used as a means of maintaining social hierarchies by the dominant groups. However, in the process of its popularization in the Edo period, due to a new audience recognition, the canon was re-produced and furnished with new cultural values.

Thus, court poetry primarily canonized by Fujiwara Teika was privatized by a new audience, which freely adapted the canon to their needs, as it was shown by Katsushika Hokusai’s parodying practice revealed in *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki* pictures. The canon was utilized as a means of liberation by the Edo *shomin* who attempted to establish their own identity as high-culture consumers.

Although it is only a thesis which enables us to trace Hokusai’s unique classicism mode and get closer to understanding *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki* pictures, we would not be able to pose it without revising conventional methodologies related to the traditional Western-based and Western-oriented history of art studies. Although expressing the relation between sciences as well as using an interdisciplinary approach are presently the dominant tendencies in humanities, the traditional university system maintains its status quo. Similarly, although postmodernist theory and art practice questioned the notions of purity and autonomy of the individual arts, Western methodology still tends to separate them when we deal with traditional arts, which I would point out as one of the traps of perception of art—especially Japanese art.

The unique relations between text and image characteristics for

some phenomena of Japanese art (and Far-Eastern art in general) require a special treatment, as they are located on the borderlines of visual arts and literature. Therefore, our perception of a work of art depends not only on “seeing” it, but what is more important, “reading” it as well. And by “reading” Japanese art, I mean a perception emphasizing the textual context of a work of art.

Although this trap of perception (which I have been talking about today and attempt to evade) is formed on the basis of my personal history, I would venture an assumption that it goes beyond the limits of private experience and concerns, to some extent, of both so-called “Westerners” as well as “Easterners.”⁵⁷ Moreover, being a “Westerner” or being “the other” in this case might bring some advantages as well, as it is a comparative approach, and frees us from our limitations.

*This work was supported in part by a scholarship awarded to the author from the College Women’s Association of Japan.

REFERENCES

Akiyama 1998

Akiyama Chūya 秋山忠彌. “Edo shomin ni miru *Hyakunin isshu*” 江戸庶民にみる百人一首. In *Hyakunin isshu no bunkashi* 百人一首の文化史. Suzusawa Shoten, 1998.

Ariyoshi 2001

Ariyoshi Tamotsu 有吉保. *Hyakunin isshu* 百人一首. Kōdansha Gakujutsubunko, 2001.

⁵⁷ Both strong legacy of a collector on one side, and definite divisions between different branches of science on the other side, create a kind of undercurrent in Japanese art studies. Moreover, taking into consideration the development of Japanese history of art as a discipline, I would say that regardless of the differences in historical circumstances, and certain time gap, similar phenomena—to some extent—were experienced broadly (e.g. in America or Western Europe), as Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan pointed out in her report from 2001. See Yiengpruksawan 2001.

Bernstein 1991

Gail Lee Bernstein. *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*. University of California Press, 1991.

Dore 1965

Ronald P. Dore. *Education in Tokugawa Japan*. University of California Press, 1965.

Fenollosa 2000

Ernest F. Fenollosa. *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. New York, Tokyo, Osaka & London: ICG Muse, Inc., 2000.

Guillory 1993

John Guillory. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Hayakawa 2003

Hayakawa Monta 早川聞多. "Edo kaiga ni okeru 'sei' to 'zoku'" 江戸絵画における「聖」と「俗」. *Sei naru mono no katachi to ba* 聖なるものの形と場. International Symposium No. 18. International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2003.

Ikegami 2005

Ikegami Eiko. *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Jakobson 1989

Roman Jakobson. "O językoznawczych aspektach przekładu." *W poszukiwaniu istoty języka I, Wybór pism*. Warszawa: PIW, 1989.

Jansen 2000

Marius B. Jansen. *The Making of Modern Japan*. Cambridge, Massachusetts / London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000.

Jasieński 1906

Feliks Manggha Jasieński. *Przewodnik po dziale japońskim oddziału Muzeum, Narodowego*. Kraków, 1906.

Jasieński 1911

Feliks Manggha Jasieński. Manggha. *Miesięcznik Literacki i Artystyczny*, (9) 1911.

Kawada 1995

Kawada Masayuki 河田昌之. "Uta-e-seiritsu to tenkai" 歌絵—成立と展開. *Uta-e: Tokubetsuten* 歌絵：特別展. Izumi-shi Kubo Sō Kinen Bijutsukan, 1995.

Koizumi 2005

Koizumi Yoshinaga 小泉吉永. "Joshiyō ōrai to *Hyakunin issu*" 女子用往来と百人一首. *Hyakunin issu mangekyō* 百人一首万華鏡. Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 2005.

Lillehoj 2005

Elizabeth Lillehoj, ed. *Critical Perspectives on Classicism in Japanese Painting, 1600-1700*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.

Mitchell 1986

W. J. T. Mitchell. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Morse 1989

Peter Morse. *Hokusai One Hundred Poets*. New York: G. Braziller, 1989.

Mostow 1996

Joshua Mostow. *Pictures of the Heart: The Hyakunin Isshu in Word and Image*. University of Hawai'i Press, 1996.

Mutō 1998

Mutō Sadao 武藤禎夫. *Edo no parodī: Mojiri Hyakunin isshu o yomu* 江戸のパロディー: もじり百人一首を読む. Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1998.

Nagata 1990

Nagata Seiji 永田生慈. "Katsushika Hokusai nikuhitsu kanshō (30), (31) han-shita-e '*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki: Kōkō Tennō*' ichimai/ '*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki: Mibuno Tadamine*' ichimai." 葛飾北斎肉筆鑑賞(30), (31) 版下絵「百人一首乳母がえとき 孝光天皇」一枚/「百人一首姥が衛登喜 壬生忠見」一枚. *Kobijutsu* 93 (1990).

Nakano 1992

Nakano Mitsutoshi 中野三敏. *Edo bunka hyōhanki* 江戸文化評判記. Chūō-kōshinsha, 1992.

Nakano 1993

Nakano Mitsutoshi 中野三敏, ed. *Nihon no kinsei* 日本の近世. Chūō Kōron Sha, 1993.

Nishiyama 1997

Nishiyama Matsunosuke. *Edo Culture: Daily Life and Diversions in Urban Japan, 1600-1868*. University of Hawai'i Press, 1997.

Ozaki 1973

Ozaki Masayaoshi 尾崎雅嘉. *Hyakunin issu hitoyogatari* 百人一首一夕話. 2 vols. Iwanami Shoten, 1973.

Rubinger 1982

Richard Rubinger. *Private Academies*. Princeton University Press, 1982.

Shirane 2000

Shirane Haruo, ed. *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity and Japanese Literature*. Stanford University Press, 2000.

Tabata 2005

Tabata Yasuko 田端泰子. *Uba no chikara: Rekishi o sasaeta onnatachi* 乳母の力：歴史を支えた女たち. Yoshikawa Kōbunkan Rekishi Bunka Raiburari, 2005.

Yamaguchi 1977

Yamaguchi Keizaburō 山口桂三郎. “Hokusaihyitsu *Hyakunin isshu uba ga eto-ki ni tsuite*” 北斎筆「百人一首うばがえとき」について. *Nihon ukiyo-e geijutsu* 55 (1977).

Yiengpruksawan 2001

Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan. “Japanese Art History 2001: The State and Stakes of Research - Bibliography.” *Art Bulletin* 83. (March 2001).

Yoshida 1972

Yoshida Kōichi 吉田幸一. “Ishu Hyakunin isshu 異種百人一首.” *Bessatsu taiyō: Hyakunin isshu—Nihon no kokoro* 別冊太陽 百人一首 日本のこころ. Heibonsha, (1)1972.

Yoshida 1988

Yoshida Kōichi 吉田幸一. “Hyakunin isshu-e: Kasen-e hanpon to ukiyo-e” 百人一首絵：歌仙絵版本と浮世絵. *Bessatsu taiyō: Hyakunin isshu—Nihon no kokoro*. Heibonsha, (84) 1994.

Yoshikai 1997

Yoshikai Naoto 吉海直人, ed. *Hyakunin isshu nenpyō* 百人一首年表. Musashi Murayama: Seishōdō Shoten, 1997.

Yuzawa 1994

Yuzawa Kenosuke 湯沢賢之助, ed. *Kinsei shuppan Hyakunin isshu shomoku shūsei* 近世出版百人一首書目集成. Shintensha, 1994.