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PICTURES: A PICTORIAL
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OLD
JAPANESE LIFE (AN
INTRODUCTION TO HOKUSAI
MANGA'S FULL EDITION WITH
COMMENTARIES")**

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**ENDLESSLY VARIEGATED PICTURES: A PICTORIAL
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OLD JAPANESE LIFE
(AN INTRODUCTION TO HOKUSAI MANGA'S FULL EDITION
WITH COMMENTARIES)²**

Hokusai Manga (HM) is the biggest and the best known work of Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) which consists of ca. 900 pp. published in 15 volumes from 1814 to 1875. This publication discusses the phenomenon of *HM* and its place in the context of Japanese picture books. Was it a drawing manual or comic cartoons or perhaps a pictorial encyclopedia? What are the historical meanings and etymology of the word *manga*?

The special attention is devoted to the principles of compilation of *HM* and to the ways of organization of the compositional unity of its volumes. This research offers a major revision of the textual nature of this famous, yet insufficiently studied, masterpiece. Contrary to the common belief that *HM* is a chaotic jumble of random disjointed pictures, every volume is actually composed as a sophisticated whole with the help of elaborate schemata deeply imbedded in the traditional Japanese ways of textual organization.

JEL Classification: Z

Keywords: Hokusai, manga, Japanese art, illustrated books, woodblock prints

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Introduction

Many consider Hokusai (1760-1849) to be possibly the most popular and significant of all Japanese artists. It is widely known that during the course of his long life he drew and published albums (or picture books – *ehon*) which he called *Manga*: “random, whimsical, or funny pictures.”³ It is widely held that these albums were the forerunners of contemporary manga – the comics or graphic novels that have become a colossal subculture with millions of fans and billions in market value. These contemporary manga are far removed from Hokusai and are more of a cheap mass culture. Thus, it is very important to closely examine Hokusai’s *Manga* to determine, inter alia, how popular, mass-market, artistic production was constructed in his time. In fifteen volumes containing slightly under nine hundred pages with about four thousand figures and motifs, Hokusai created, in plain words, a pictorial encyclopedia of old Japan, from gods and ancient heroes to the amorous mores of his times, from household utensils to martial arts and landscapes.

Hokusai Manga (HM) has a sacred status for connoisseurs of Japanese art, but does it truly merit this high esteem? It is a great masterpiece, indeed, but its admirers sometimes ascribe to it what is not there – using epithets such as “first” or “foremost.” Under close scrutiny it appears that this seemingly well known oeuvre posits more questions than it offers ready answers. In other words, *HM* is a cult name, but for what exactly? This paper examines a number of questions about the work.

Let us take the authorship: it is quite feasible that the First volume has included not only Hokusai’s drawings but also those of several of his disciples. Such doubts extend beyond the individual drawings: if we look closely at the design of the pages and double-spreads, we might question whether it was Hokusai himself who composed them. In many cases, they were designed by his editors. The composition of the whole volumes should be considered, i.e. the thematic order and progression of the pages. The majority of specialists believe that there is no order in the sequence of pages at all, whereas in many cases it is possible, in my opinion, to suggest a rather strict compositional schema organized in a detailed fashion and based on subtle associations.

Second, the pragmatic purpose of *HM*: there are some indications that it was created as a manual for fledgling artists or as collections of humorous pictures and cartoons for sheer amusement, or as a pictorial thesaurus of things Japanese. How do we reconcile these different interpretations? Or, take the editions: what should we call the canonical edition of *HM*? After the success of the first edition of the first volume, there followed numerous additional printings and

³ The title *Hokusai Manga* repeated in each of the fifteen volumes means *Hokusai’s Manga*. A detailed analysis of this term - so difficult to understand and translate - is provided below.

reprints or restrikes of some worn-out woodblocks that may have deviated from the original in minor details, with differences in inscriptions, or printed in black-and-white or variously colored versions. The lax ideas about intellectual property and individual versus collective authorship prompted various manipulations of the published books of *HM*. They have been reissued many times with all kinds of modifications (pirates restruck the blocks with the omission of certain original details and printed them in different colors). Often users rebound these *HM* books in a different format (for instance, changing a codex to an accordion-style book). Often they would cut and paste different parts of the pages in their own albums according to their individual whims. But possibly the most striking example of a change in the original meaning as well as the axiological and material status of *HM* was the circumstance of its first appearance in the West: pages of these books were used as wrapping paper for imported Japanese antiques and objects of decorative art.⁴ Spotted by accident in Paris around 1856, they set the fashion for things Japanese. Today *HM* is usually published as an arbitrary selection of pages or a thematic selection of motifs. This adaptation makes it easier to perceive and enjoy but destroys the original integrity of the whole oeuvre.

Another interesting issue to be explored is how these books were used – for amusement during drinking parties, for respectful solitary viewing, or for study by artists as pictorial manuals and a source of subjects? There is even some doubt as to whether *HM* is an art object itself or possibly a collection of ideas for art.

A contextual study of the adventurous life of *HM* books and their physical transformations, East and West, sheds interesting new light upon the notion of the masterpiece and its post-production life. All these problems (and many others, such as the issue of Hokusai's originality versus traditionalism, or the very interesting question of how Hokusai could have known so much about so many different areas) I will discuss further.

My research consists of two main parts:

The first part is an introduction to *HM* studies with a historical background, an etymological analysis, and a study of the *HM* composition. It offers a major revision of the textual nature of this famous, yet insufficiently researched, masterpiece. The result of this work is the contextualization of *HM* by placing it in a broad cultural milieu and offering a new way of looking at the formal mechanisms in text-generation in pre-modern Japan.

⁴ Although this story might very probably be a later myth, there is a similar little known testimony about the low market and aesthetic value of *HM* in certain corners of Europe as late as at the turn of the 20th century. The woodblock artist Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva wrote in her memoirs, "In 1906 an acquaintance of mine presented me with twelve [volumes] of "Manga" which he brought from Kiev from his relation. The latter bought them at the [peasants'] market for her children as coloring books." Ostroumova-Lebedeva, Anna. *Autobiographical Notes*. Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1974. Vols 1-2 [published in one book], pp. 274-275.

The second part occupies the major volume of this work and consists of a detailed commentary on all the characters, figures, and motifs in *HM*. The current article presents a summary of the first part and samples from the second.

The necessity of the commentary is evident because, for the most part, not only are the meanings of the subjects and identities of the figures obscure to the general public, but they are also frequently not evident to specialists, Western and Japanese alike. In this respect it is good to recall Michener's observation in his *Selections from the Manga*: "Doubtless, only a Japanese student, and only one deeply versed in the traditions of his country and the times of Hokusai, could ever hope to identify and explain all the subjects depicted in Manga. Surprisingly enough, no one has yet made the attempt."⁵ No such attempt has been made in the fifty years that have elapsed since then. In a recent *Encyclopedia of Hokusai Sketches*,⁶ captions often consist of but one word: *otoko* ("man") or *sō* ("monk"), however, in many cases, it is possible to put a name to this "man" and/or to describe his background. For example, vol. 1, p. 35, #5 reproduces a figure with a huge brush standing on a long scroll of paper. The caption says "writing with a bamboo broom." It is not mentioned that this is an episode from *Ikkyū-banashi* 一休咄, the collection of apocryphal stories about the famous monk and calligrapher Ikkyū Sōjun 一休宗純 (1394-1481) (see *HM*, vol. XI, p. 26r, bottom). The story tells how Ikkyū won the contest for writing the biggest character by running along the long scroll and drawing the single line for the hiragana character *shi* し. One can argue that this story would have been readily understood by many (which I personally doubt), but even if it had, the reference to this motif could have been included in the name index, where one can find two other references to Ikkyū. And cases like this are quite numerous in this *Encyclopedia*. Many more pages have never been published at all, possibly because of their obscure subjects.

The exploration of the subject matter – with its historic, literary, religious and numerous other contexts – also serves another important purpose: it helps us to better understand the method of Hokusai's work and the principles of organization of the *HM* composition.

⁵ Michener, James A. *The Hokusai Sketchbooks: Selections from the Manga*. Rutland, VT-Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1958. P. 141.

⁶ *Hokusai E-Jiten*. Nagata Seiji ed. Tokyo: Tokyo Bijutsu, 2005 (2nd ed.) 北斎絵事典, 永田生慈. (An Encyclopedia of Hokusai's drawings. Ed. By Nagata Seiji).

Brief Notes on Hokusai

I will not retell the biography of Hokusai, as it is well known and has been studied in numerous publications.⁷ Here, I touch upon only the basic facts and stress what is salient to our subject: his preparedness for working on *HM*.

In his introduction to the edition of *One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji* (1834), Hokusai wrote:

From around the age of six, I had the habit of sketching from life. I became an artist, and from fifty on began producing works that won some reputation, but nothing I did before the age of seventy was worthy of attention. At seventy-three, I began to grasp the structures of birds and beasts, insects and fish, and of the way plants grow. If I go on trying, I will surely understand them still better by the time I am eighty-six, so that by ninety I will have penetrated to their essential nature. At one hundred, I may well have a positively divine understanding of them, while at one hundred and thirty, forty, or more I will have reached the stage where every dot and every stroke I paint will be alive. May Heaven, that grants long life, give me the chance to prove that this is no lie.⁸

He died at the age of 88 – on the verge of discovering the essential nature of things.

Hokusai was born in Edo to a family of small-time craftsmen, and he initially bore the name Kawamura Tokitarō 川村時太郎. At the age of four he was sent to another family where he was given the name Nakajima Tetsuzō 中島鉄蔵 and began his apprenticeship as a future engraver of metal mirrors. This provided him with skills that he was subsequently able to use to cut blocks for prints. Before he reached the age of eighteen, he had dallied with occupations such as bookstore assistant, book street peddler, and itinerant signboard and advertising artist. This early involvement with books provided him with his cultural background. In his free time he copied pictures from these books, and this practice has a direct connection to his work in *HM*.

At the age of eighteen Hokusai entered the studio of one of leading masters of *ukiyo-e* prints, Katsukawa Shunshō 勝川 春章 (1726-1792) and was given the artistic name Shunrō 春朗. After the death of the master, he fell out with Shunshō's heir, Shunkō 春好, and was expelled from the Katsukawa School. For some time he studied classical painting with the Kanō School artist Kanō Yūsen 狩野融川. In the course of his training, Hokusai learned the technique of ink and color painting that went back to the great masters of the 15th and 16th centuries; he

⁷ See, for instance, a few of the last decade: Calza, Giancarlo. *Hokusai*. London, New York: Phaidon, 2003; Carpenter, John, ed. *Hokusai and His Age: Ukiyo-e Painting, Printmaking and Book Illustration in Late Edo Japan*. Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2005; Nagata Seiji, ed. *Hokusai*. Berlin: Nikolai, 2011.

⁸ Nagata, Seiji. *Hokusai: Genius of the Japanese Ukiyo-e*. Kodansha, Tokyo, 1999.

also studied Chinese pictorial sources and their technique. Along the way, Hokusai obtained some knowledge of the extensive iconography used by the Kanō masters. In the studio of Yūsen, he gained access to the treatises on painting written by members of the Kanō School and collections of iconographic sketches and samples which had limited circulation and were virtually inaccessible outside the inner circle. This experience would also be put to use in his *Manga*. Besides the sinified Kanō painting, Hokusai also studied the art of *Yamato-e*, or the national style of Japanese painting going back to the old Tosa School. His teacher in this pursuit was Sumiyoshi Hiroyuki (or Naiki) 住吉広行 (内記), but he was inspired most of all by the art of another representative of this style, Tawaraya Sōri. As a mark of respect for this master, in 1795 Hokusai took for himself the name Sōri 宗理. Later in his work, Hokusai tried to synthesize these two main traditions in Japanese painting. In 1798 Hokusai began to use the name under which he entered history: Hokusai. This means The Northern Studio (or Pavilion) and is an abbreviation of The Northern (or Polar) Star Studio (Hokutosai). The depictions of the Polar Star or the Ursa Magna (or various allusions to them) appear in *HM* more than once. Later, when he was about forty, Hokusai came up with another pseudonym: Gakyō Rōjin 画狂老人 (An Old Man Mad About Drawing).

At this time – the turn of the 19th century – Hokusai began to study Western art, in particular the laws of perspective, and this interest is reflected in many landscapes in *Manga*, especially in some perspectival diagrams in the Third volume. Alongside this, Hokusai was actively engaged in the *surimono* genre – the privately and lavishly published prints with elaborated thematic programs from Chinese mythology or Japanese antiquity. All this, and the illustrations he contributed to dozens of books with historical, mundane or erotic themes, helped him to acquire a huge repertoire of subjects he would later use in the thousands of sketches for *HM*. During his work on the first few volumes of *HM*, Hokusai used the name Taito 戴斗 – a further variation on the theme of the Polar Star. This name appears several times in the introductory texts to the first few volumes. On the title page of the Twelfth volume a new name appears: Iitsu 為一. It can be rendered as [The One Who] Reached One. Hokusai took this name in 1820 when he turned sixty; in other words, he had lived for one sexagenarian calendar cycle and had entered the second – or began again from the first year. This combination of characters can also be interpreted as Doing One [Thing], which means concentrating solely on one pursuit. Finally, the Introductions to many volumes of *HM* call Hokusai simply Okina – which is often translated as “Master”; however, because it means “the [respected] elder,” I prefer to render it as The Venerable.

Journey to the West⁹ and the Birth of *Hokusai Manga*

A testimony to the origin of the First volume of *HM* (and there was not even the slightest hint of further installments) can be found in the Introduction by Hanshū Sanjin 半洲散人 (1772-1824):

This autumn the Venerable set off for the journey to the Western [provinces] and made a stop in our land. We all met together at Gekkōtei Bokusen, and it was an immensely joyous time. During that time more than three hundred of all sorts of sketches were made – from [Daoist] immortals and Buddhist saints to warriors and women, down to birds and beasts and all kinds of plants and trees.

Detailed commentaries will be put aside for now (they can be found in the full translation of this Introduction in the appropriate chapter); however, they tell of Hokusai's journey in 1812 to the provinces west of Edo, when he made a stop at Nagoya and participated in a drawing event (or a few events) with a group of local artists at the house of a certain Bokusen. From the language of the text it is not clear whether it was a single party or whether they gathered several times. The verb form (*urete*) can designate one occasion: “gathered once.” Because of this, many previous authors wrote that, on the occasion of the visit of the celebrity from the capital (Hokusai was slightly over fifty, and it was the time of the beginning of his fame), the local artists and other people of the brush (calligraphers and poets) gathered for a party in his honor. During the party, with Hokusai and the whole company in high spirits because of spirits and lofty conversation, an impromptu drawing marathon ensued. This kind of gathering with brushes to hand (not to mention wine cups) was popular among artists and lovers of painting. The genre might be described as something midway between a speed drawing contest and a demonstration of virtuosity and wit in the treatment of a certain theme. Such gatherings were sometimes called “battles in ink” and were known by their representation in prints or prose. As a genre, they perfectly correspond with the communal and agonial (collaborative-competitive) character of the traditional Japanese forms of creative acts. They can be called a visual parallel to poetic contests *uta-awase* 歌合せ, or meetings for the collective composition of linked poetry (*rengakai* 連歌会). As was the case with poems and individual strophes composed during such gatherings, they were gathered, arranged and published as a single volume. Therefore, the supporters of this point of view claim that the First volume of *HM* is the output of this one super-productive night and is thus a chaotic agglomerate of inspired sketches with no unifying plan or organizing idea.

⁹ These words are an allusion to the classical Chinese novel *Journey to the West* 西遊記 (*Xi You Ji*, Jap. *Saiyūki*, ca. 1590) which is alluded to in the Introduction to the First volume written by Hanshū Sanjin (see below).

While I am sympathetic to the idea of inspired (and even untrammelled) drawing during a convivial meeting of colleagues and admirers, I do not support the legend that it all occurred on a single night. More than three hundred sketches are mentioned by Sanjin; it would be impossible to draw so many at one sitting. Let us say it was exactly three hundred for the sake of an easy count. If the merrymaking lasted eight hours (which is quite a long time), the time available for the uninterrupted process of drawing works out at 1.6 minutes for one sketch – without any breaks for talking, drinking and toilet visits. And there is no time at all for thinking and planning what else to draw. If we imagine that the party lasted for ten hours (which is rather difficult to imagine), this gives precisely two minutes for each drawing - equally difficult. Certainly, some small sketches are simple enough to be jotted down in a few seconds, but there are many others, large and detailed, that would not have been easy to draw even in five minutes. And, of course, although Hokusai was “mad about drawing,” he was not a robot who required no breaks. In order to salvage the ‘one night’ theory, one might suggest that a good half of the drawings had been executed not by the master himself but by other participants. If we talk about two or three, or perhaps, fifteen, it may possibly have taken place. The volume was composed within a period of two years by two of Hokusai’s disciples: the same Bokusen and Hokuun. Both were good artists, and both issued their own picture books with drawings typologically similar to Hokusai’s. Nevertheless, the signed albums of both Bokusen and Hokuun differ in an obvious way from the drawings in *HM*. At the same time, the majority of drawings there – whether scrupulously finished or sketchy and abbreviated – betray Hokusai’s own hand.

Thus, the idea of one great night should be abandoned. Hokusai stayed in Nagoya for several days, and there may have been more than one drawing party. As Hokusai’s journey lasted a few months, he accumulated a huge quantity of all kinds of sketches – from street scenes and landscapes to depictions of animals and birds. In the world’s museums hundreds of his drawings, made on scraps of paper of various sizes and forms and pasted on album pages, can be found. It is more than feasible that, in Bokusen’s studio, Hokusai not only drew but also demonstrated his road sketches. Before his departure he left them to his local admirers. After two years they were organized into a compact volume.

How the Volumes of *Hokusai Manga* Were Made

How was this first *HM* prepared? Having secured the support of the publisher Eirakuya Tōshirō 永楽屋東四郎 (perhaps through his direct initiative, as publishers were actively building up their stock), two artists – Bokusen and Hokuun – selected the required number of drawings to fill the traditional volume of thirty double pages, in other words sixty pages minus two pages for the

introductory text. To do this, they first had to compose the pages. Hokusai drew many little drawings on scraps of paper of various forms and sizes which later were organized by his editors to make a page – like a collage. To create a page or a double spread in *HM*, it was necessary to assemble, according to a certain system, images from different sheets – uniting disparate sketches or, conversely, cutting the sheets with various scenes. To make a draft of a page, they created a preparatory drawing on tracing paper, which had been placed over the original. It was possible to execute several transparent sheets for a single page, each one more and more detailed. After that came the final contour drawing (*hanshita*) which was used for the preparation of the woodblock. The *hanshita* was glued to the board face down and was cut through during the process of engraving. To make the original sketches fit the page, the artists could redraw them to scale to make them smaller or larger. Finally, the prepared pages (or double spreads, as two pages were cut on one block) were put in sequence to make a composition. The principles of the organization of the volume's composition will be examined below. Now let us try to answer the following question: who carried out all these preparations? What was the role of Hokusai compared to his disciples-cum-editors and his publisher? It is impossible to give a definite answer about each page and even about each volume; however, it is clear that the greater part of the post-production and the preparation of the sketches was carried out by Hokusai's students. He may have supervised the work or suggested the general scheme, but the huge and as yet unacknowledged role in the forming of *HM* was played by Hokusai's editors and compilers. The leading position in this process belonged most probably to Gekkōtei Bokusen 月光亭墨僊 (1775-1824), a mature artist who had already studied with Utamaro but turned enthusiastically for his tutoring to Hokusai. Judging by the fact that in Nagoya the entire artistic society gathered at his house to celebrate Hokusai's arrival, he was a well-to-do man. Moreover, we should not forget that he had already published a few picture books of his own that bore some similarities to *HM*. Jack Hillier wrote about the importance of Bokusen: "The Nagoya artist Gekkōtei Bokusen played, probably, the key role in preparing Hokusai's sketches to the publication as a book."¹⁰

According to the colophons, five disciples and followers of Hokusai took part in the preparation of his *HM* in Nagoya and Edo. Bokusen and Hakuun contributed to the First volume, and for the Second volume they were joined by Totoya Hokkei 魚屋北溪 (1780-1850) and Tōenrō Hokusen, both from Edo. (These two are listed in the colophons above the Nagoya members, i.e. Bokusen and Hakuun.) In the Ninth and Tenth volumes, Gessai Utamasa 月齋歌政 (1787-1864, Nagoya) worked in place of Hakuun. The editors were distributed across the volumes in the following fashion:

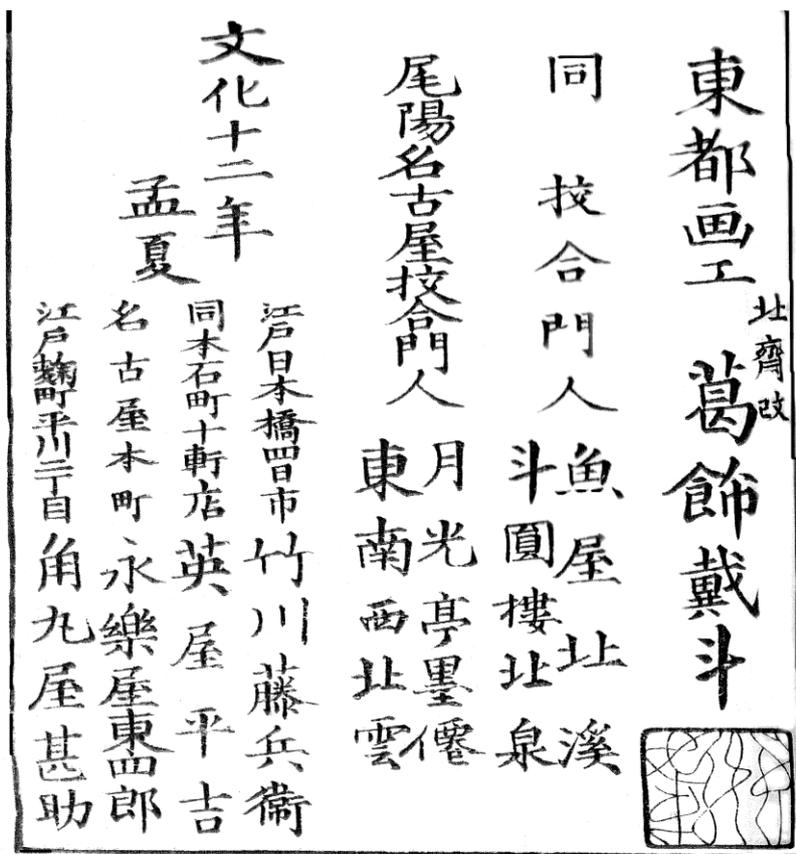
¹⁰ Hillier, Jack, *The Art of the Japanese Book*, London: Sothebys, 1987. Vol. II, pp. 816—18.

- I 1814. Hokutei Bokusen, Tōnansai Hakuun;
- II 1815. Totoya Hakkei, Tōenrō Hokusen, Hokutei Bokusen, Tōnansai Hakuun;
- III 1815. Totoya Hakkei, Tōenrō Hokusen, Hokutei Bokusen, Tōnansai Hakuun;
- IV 1816. Totoya Hakkei, Tōenrō Hokusen, Hokutei Bokusen, Tōnansai Hakuun;
- V 1816. Totoya Hakkei, Tōenrō Hokusen, Hokutei Bokusen, Tōnansai Hakuun;
- VI 1817. Totoya Hakkei, Tōenrō Hokusen, Hokutei Bokusen, Tōnansai Hakuun;
- VII 1817. Totoya Hakkei, Tōenrō Hokusen, Hokutei Bokusen, Tōnansai Hakuun;
- VIII 1817-18. Totoya Hakkei, Tōenrō Hokusen, Hokutei Bokusen, Tōnansai Hakuun;
- IX 1819. Totoya Hakkei, Tōenrō Hokusen, Hokutei Bokusen, Gessai Utamasa;
- X 1819. Totoya Hakkei, Tōenrō Hokusen, Hokutei Bokusen, Gessai Utamasa;
- XI before 1834. Editors-and-compilers not listed;
- XII 1834. Editors-and-compilers not listed;
- XIII 1849. Editors-and-compilers not listed;
- XIV after 1849. Editors-and-compilers not listed;
- XV 1878. Editors-and-compilers not listed.



The names and personal seals of Bokusen and Hokuun appear in the colophon of the First volume. There is also an inscription: “By the brush of Katsushika Hokusai” and the impression of his seal “Raishin” 雷震 (lit. “The Thunder Blast”). On the left-hand side is the publisher’s seal (See Ill. 1).

Ill. 1. Colophon, Volume I.



In the following volumes the seals of the artist and the editors are absent. Instead of this, on the right in small characters is written “aratame of Hokusai,” and in the next line in bigger characters his name, Katsushika Taitō, is written; below the *aratame* itself is a seal with thin intertwined special (not *kanji*) signs. (See Ill. 2). The first ten volumes were issued within five years; it took more than half a century to produce the next five.

Ill. 2. Colophon, Volume III.

After the tremendous success of the First volume, all subsequent volumes of *HM* were published concurrently in Nagoya (by Eirakuya) and in Edo. It should be mentioned that in the first edition of the First volume there were no captions to the pages or any of the figures. They appear in the next edition of the First volume and in the succeeding volumes. Evidently, the ability of the general audience to understand pictures without inscriptions had originally been overestimated.

In Edo, the preparatory work was carried out for the most part in the studio of Hokkei. The permanent publishers of the volumes from the Second to the Tenth in Edo were Kakumaruya Jinsuke, Hanabusaya Eikichi and Takegawa Tōbei, who joined Kakumaruya for volumes II, IV-X. Volumes XI-XIII were published by Eirakuya only, and the Fourteenth was made in Edo by Izumiya Ichibei. The Fifteenth and final volume was published in Nagoya by Katano Tōshirō (the son of the original publisher Eirakuya Tōshirō).

The Term *Manga*

These days, when they speak of *manga*, people usually mean thick volumes of comics or graphic novels for (often young) adult audiences. This kind of picture book appeared at the end of the Meiji era in Japan and gained enormous popularity in the following decades when it worked out its own themes (sentimental juvenile love affairs or brutal adventures), style (black-and-white precisely drafted figures with a minimum of background and with dialogue texts in bubbles), and poetics (dynamic action; combination of general views with large fragments in their own frames on one page, etc.) This modern *manga* can be only partially linked with the *manga* of Hokusai's times. To a substantial degree, the new *manga* is also the fruit of familiarity with Western magazine cartoons.

When Hokusai titled the first issue of his *manga* "*Hokusai Manga*," this word was rare enough, and the colossal success of this and the following volumes precipitated imitations in the genre and in the usage of the word "*manga*" itself. Since those times, and up to the present day, Hokusai is often called the progenitor of *manga* – and by "*manga*," both contemporary comics and certain picture books of his era are meant.¹¹ Neither assertion is entirely correct. Hokusai was not the first to create such books and was not even the first to use the word in a book title. We now discuss the history of the term "*manga*" in more detail.

Hanshū Sanjin, the author of the Introduction to the First volume, wrote that Hokusai himself, when asked what he would like to call the book, answered: *Manga*. Usually, it is translated as "random pictures." (There is also a popular rendering as *Hokusai Sketchbooks*, but *HM* are far more than just sketches.) The dictionary entry for the character *man* 漫 gives the meaning "random, not organized," but in the case of *HM* it is incorrect, for the pictures in *HM* are not random and disjointed; they are organized in a certain way into a coherent compositional entity; see the discussion below. For now, it is important to say that, thematically, the content of the First volume was "three hundred odd of all kinds of sketches – from [Daoist] immortals, Buddhist saints, men and women, to birds, beasts and various plants," as Sanjin has written in his Introduction. Thus, judging by the multifarious and comprehensive content of the *HM* volumes, it would be better to translate this binominal combination of characters as "pictures (*ga*) of all sorts."

However, the semantic area of the character *man* includes meanings such as "any, various, irregular, not in order, random, curious, caricaturistic, humorous, or motley." Thus, it presumes a certain core of free sketchiness, the grotesque, and humor. There are chapters in *HM* bearing titles such as "comic (or crazy) pictures" (*kyōga* 狂画) or "sketchy (abbreviated) pictures"

¹¹ See, for instance, Bouquillard, Jocelyn and Marquet, Christophe, *Hokusai, First Manga Master*. N. Y.: Abrams, 2007.

(*ryakuga* 略画). These terms as well as similar ones – “sketchy (abbreviated) brush” (*ryakuhitsu* 略筆), “running brush” (*sōhitsu* 走筆), “crude pictures” (*soga* 粗画), “mischievous pictures” (*giga* 戯画) and a dozen of others – were known years before Hokusai. They were often used in the titles of books. The word *manga* factually combines all these terms in an all-embracing one, similar to how the encyclopedic omnitude of *HM* formed a synthesis of numerous picture books of his forerunners and contemporaries. Nevertheless, he was not the first to use this word.

By some surprising historical fortuity, in 1814 the same year the First volume of *HM* was published, another picture book with the word “*manga*” in its title appeared. It belonged to a virtually unknown artist, Aikawa Minwa, and was called *Manga Hyakujo* (*One Hundred Women in the Manga Style*).¹² The day and month of its release are unknown. It cannot be precluded that Aikawa saw *HM* or perhaps heard from his friends that such a book was in preparation and quickly picked up on this very apt title. But I would like to think that he did not steal the felicitous discovery of Hokusai – he may simply have been thinking along the same lines and caught the idea that was floating in the air, as sometimes occurs even with artists of modest talent.

The word *manga* already existed at that time. The master of comic verse Karai Senryū 柄井川柳 wrote a haiku:

<i>Manga to wa</i>	Dubbed “sketchy comics”
<i>iedo midari wo</i>	They are still inadvertently
<i>nai tehon</i>	Decent portrayals.

Here, the wordplay is based on the polysemantic meaning of the words *manga* and decent. In one sense we can say, “although these pictures are called grotesque, they are pretty truthful,” and in another we can say “although they are called rude pictures, they are not so improper.”¹³ Judging by this, pictures known as *manga* had been known at least since the 1780s (Senryū died in 1790).

In 1798 the word *manga* was used by the renowned writer Santō Kyōden 山東京伝 in the Introduction to the picture book of the artist Kitao Shigemasa 北尾重政 under the title *Passerby for Every Season* (*Shiki no yukikai* 四時交加). This book engaged the public’s interest and, moreover, Hokusai was well acquainted with Kyōden (who himself began as an artist as a disciple of Shigemasa, under the name Kitao Masanobu) and they collaborated in the 1790s.

But this was not the first usage. Thirty years before Santō Kyōden, in 1769, a book of drawings in a free humorous style from the brush of the famous painter Hanabusa Itchō 英一蝶

¹² Aikawa Minwa 合川珉和. *Manga Hyakujo* 漫画百女. Publisher Maekawa Rokuzaemon 前川六左衛門 et al., 1814.

¹³ This poem and its translation is borrowed from the book: Kern, Adam. *Manga from the Floating World: Comicbook Culture and the Kibyōshi of Edo Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 142.

(1652-1724) was published, in three small volumes. Itchō had long been dead by then, and the drawings were compiled and prepared for this edition by the artist Suzuki Rinshō 鈴木鄰松, (1732-1803). The book has the word *manga* in its title, but it is not easy to translate it in a succinct way. It can be rendered as *The Sketches of [the master named] The Nest of Butterflies Who Excelled in Drawing*.¹⁴ The drawings in this book, funny street scenes and depictions of merchants and artisans, in some respects foretell the drawings of Hokusai.

The reading *mankaku* instead of *manga*, as Isao Shimizu suggested, has a serious justification important to our investigation of the sources of this term and of its semantics. Shimizu found that these characters with the reading *mankaku* are explained in the Introduction to the book by the writer Suzuki Kankyō 鈴木煥卿 (alias Rōkai Ittoku 撈海一得) under the title *Mankaku Zuihitsu* 漫画随筆, which may mean, according to the dictionary definitions of its characters, *Variously Sketched Essays*, or simply *Zuihitsu in the Manga Manner*. Shimizu wrote that he had originally accepted the first version,¹⁵ but later found the book (initially he dealt only with its title) and realized that it was a collection of literary essays in the *zuihitsu* genre without pictures and without discussion of *manga* pictures. In the *kambun* Introduction to this book¹⁶ in the very first line it is said that *mankaku* (or *manga* – no readings are provided) is a bird. Indeed, in Chinese lexicons the characters *manhua* (Jap. *mankaku* or *manga*) are explained as the name of a certain bird.¹⁷ In Japan, where it could be seen until the end of the 19th century, it was called *berasagi* 篋鷺 (Lat. *Platalea leucorodia*), a spoonbill, because of its long beak with a round widening at the end. Hokusai, by the way, depicted it in III-251.

This is what is said in the Introduction to *Mankaku Zuihitsu*:

In the Great Ocean there lives a bird. All day long it flies over the waters, catches little fish and eats them, but cannot be sated. [...] Often people, not so [refined] spiritually, play music and chess, and write and draw – they amuse themselves with hundreds of arts, but they have no mastery of any single one. As for me, I like only to read and to write. All day long I am engrossed in it, but still crave it more and more – as that *mankaku* 漫画 bird.¹⁸

¹⁴ It is not easy even to give a definite reading of the characters 漫画図考群蝶画英: It may be *Mankaku zukō gunchō kakuei* (this is the opinion of the researcher of the early *manga* Isao Shimizu – see Shimizu Isao 清水勲, *Edo no Manga: taihei no yo no esupuri* 江戸のまんが: 泰平の世のエスプリ [Manga of the Edo Time: The Spirit of the Great Epoch], Tokyo: Kodansha, 2003, p. 178) or *Manga zukō gunchō gaei* (several library catalogues).

¹⁵ Shimizu Isao, *Manga no Rekishi* 漫画の歴史 [History of Manga], p. 19.

¹⁶ See the photograph of it in Shimizu 2003, p. 176, ill. 84.

¹⁷ It was noted at the same time by another Japanese researcher, Miyamoto Hirohito, but he did comment on any possible connection between the bird and the genre of pictures. See: Miyamoto Hirohito 宮本大人. “Manga: Gainen no jūōka katei” // *Bijutsu* 「漫画」概念の重層化過程—近世から近代における。美術史, #154, vol. LII, No. 2(2003), p. 319.

¹⁸ Translation is mine from the photograph in Shimizu 2003, p. 178.

Thus, the title *Manga Zuihitsu* can be translated as *The Essays of Insatiable* or *Sketches that are Never Enough*.

As with the *mankaku* bird, insatiability became the distinctive feature of the *manga* genre, concludes Shimizu. It is appropriate to stress here that the investigation of remote and unexpected sources of this term is useful not only for purely scholastic interest – where and when it emerged - but also because it adds significantly to the clarification of its semantics. Thus, the title *Hokusai Manga* we can now render as *Hokusai's Endlessly Variegated Pictures*. This insatiability perfectly corresponds with Hokusai's obsession (or craziness) with pictures (*ga* 画) or the art of drawing (*kaku* 画), for this is exactly what he called himself: Gakyō Rōjin 画狂老人 (The Old Man Crazy About Painting).¹⁹

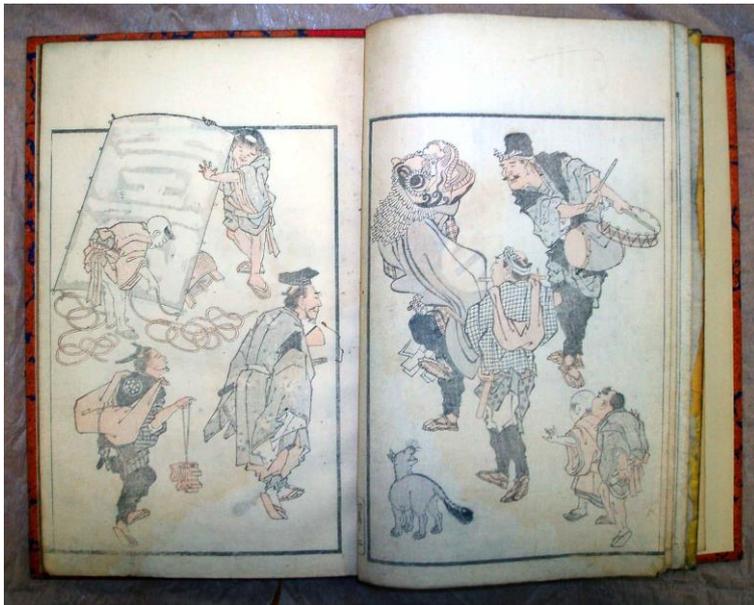
I have already mentioned that, in the year of publication of the First volume of *Hokusai Manga* (1814), another picture book with the word *manga* in its title was printed. After Hokusai's runaway success, other books with the word *manga* in their titles began to appear – other artists or publishers wanted to catch the moment and capitalize on the success of *HM*. In 1817, an album called *Kōrin Manga*, a collection of drawings by the great painter Ogata Kōrin (1658-1716), was issued. The publishers Eirakuya and Kadomaruya (who had published *HM*) used drawings by Tatebayashi Kagei 立林何帛 (1st half of the 18th c.), an artist of the Rimpa School who collected and edited many of Kōrin's drawings of flowers, plants and butterflies. It is a black-and-white and not particularly attractive edition.

The following year, 1818, saw the publication of *Hokumei Manga* 北明漫画. The publisher is not known, and Hokumei was a little-known disciple of Hokusai who worked from 1804-1830.

He was born to the Inoue family, and because of his affiliation with Hokusai's school he was called Katsushika Hokumei; for an artist's name (*gō* 号) he chose the one closely resembling his teacher's: Gakyōjin 画狂人 (Crazy About Painting). In 1823 an anonymous book *Kokkei Manga* 滑稽漫画 (*A Humorous Book*) appeared.²⁰

¹⁹ At the end of this story one should point out two things: did Hokusai really read the Introduction to the *Mankaku Zuihitsu* book? Because there is no documented evidence of this, one can admit that he may not have done so. However, he might have heard about such a bird with its strange name and such a memorable description of its habits. This is likely as he was very familiar with numerous Japanese editions of Chinese compendia and encyclopedias.

²⁰ Mentioned in Shimizu 2003, p. 180.



Ill. 3 A double-page from *Hokuun Manga*. The British Museum.

The editors of *HM*, Hokuun and Hokkei also created their own books of *manga* during the next few decades: Hokuun in 1818-1830 and Hokkei in 1830-1844.

In total, during the lifetime of Hokusai about fifteen books with the word *manga* in their title, prepared by various artists, were published.²¹ (See Ill. 3).

The Volume Titles of *Hokusai Manga*



Ill. 4. The title of the First Volume of *Hokusai Manga*.

The majority of editions of *HM* have vertical strips of paper with the title glued on the left side of the cover. These strips are called *daisen* 題簽. In the upper part of a *daisen*, the text is written in two columns (*tsunogaki* 角書き) with two little characters in each column (see below). Underneath these are the large characters *Hokusai Manga* and the number of the volume from the Initial issue (*shohen* 初編) to the Second and on to the Fifteenth.

The four small characters *denshin kaishū* 傳神開手 in the upper part of the strip serve as a sur-heading which often appeared in old Japanese books. Usually, *denshin kaishū* is understood as “a drawing manual” in a few variations:

1. “The education of beginners by the spirit of things.”²²
2. “Das Wesen Vermitteln und das malen lernen.”²³
3. “L’initiation a la transmission de l’essence des choses.”²⁴
4. “Transmitting the Spirit, Revealing the Form of Things.”²⁵

²¹ See the general list in the aforementioned article by Miyamoto *Manga: gainen no jūshōka katei*.

²² <http://www.japanesegallery.co.uk/default.php?Sel=mmanga&Submenu=4>

²³ Nagata Seiji (Ed.). *Hokusai*. Berlin: Nikolai, 2011, S. 205.

²⁴ Christophe Marquet. “La réception au Japon des albums de peintures chinoises du XVIIe siècle”. *Histoire et civilisation du livre – Revue internationale*. Vol. 3. Paris: Droz, 2007, p. 110.

²⁵ <http://metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/57682?img=3>

There are rather convoluted explanations: “Denshin Kaishu means “imparting the essential nature of a subject to the viewer so that they can also learn the art of painting,”²⁶ and there is the commendably simple: “Meaning unknown.”²⁷

Because the meaning of this locution is very important for an understanding of the essence of *HM*, it deserves thorough investigation. Where did it come from to become the title of *HM*?

It first appeared as a seal’s impression on the publisher’s wrapping band (*fukuro* 袋) of the first volume of *HM*, printed in the first month of 1814. Besides this, it is written as the heading of the Introduction to this volume: “The Introduction to *densin kaishū*”. The author of this text was Hanshū Sanjin 半洲散人, about whom not much is known apart from the fact that he was amongst the group of artists who hosted Hokusai in Nagoya in 1812. Hanshū Sanjin used the two parts of this expression (*denshin* and *kaishū*) separately in his eulogy. *Denshin* goes back to one of the primeval concepts of Chinese aesthetic theory, *chuanshen*, “the transmission of the soul or essence” in a work of art. The origin of this concept can be traced back to the teaching of *wenqi* (Jap. *bunki* 文氣) proposed by the poet and theorist Cao Pi (曹丕, 187-226). *Wenqi* is often translated as “the pneuma of literature;” in a broader context it can be understood as the emanation of culture. The idea of *chuanshen* was treated in a detailed way by the great Song poet Su Shi (蘇軾, 1037-1101), whose depiction appears several times in the pages of *HM*. He taught that, in poems and paintings, it is necessary to capture the true spirit or essence of the object. For some artists, such as the famous painter of the Jing dynasty Gu Hutou 顧虎頭 (better known as Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之, 344—ca. 405), this spirit is located in the pupils of the eyes, while other artists place their indomitable spirit points in other locations.²⁸

In other words, “the transmission of the essence” was understood as capturing a certain spiritual wave emanating from an object and its fixation by the artist in his material representation (thus being perceptible to a spectator as an emanation from the artist’s work.) Hence, in his wording, Hanshū Sanjin connected Hokusai to the thousand-year-old venerated traditions of the spirited Chinese artists and poets.

At the end of his Introduction, Hanshū Sanjin used the combination of *kaishū* (lit. “opened hand”) in the sentence where he said that those who wish to master truthful drawing should use this *kaishū*. This binôme is found only in a very specific usage in the art of karate (“the mode of the open hand”); its usage in the meaning “a manual” is not known in dictionaries.

²⁶ www.berlinerfestspiele.de/.../mgb11_presse

²⁷ <http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/49557/random-sketches-by-hokusai-lx>

²⁸ See more in: *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present*, ed. and translated by Faye Chungfang Fei. Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan, 1999. (First paperback 2002 p. 30), and Lee Won-gyu. “Sushi’s Theory of Chuanshen” // *The Journal of Chinese Language and Literature*, vol. X (1998, August).

Because of this, the editors who issued a modern edition of *HM* explained this expression as *nyūmonhen* 入門編 (“introductory handbook”). But the genre of *HM* does not look like a manual for novice artists (the genre specificity will be discussed later). It is clear that it can be used for instruction, but how exactly? I think that, with the combination of the classical Chinese aesthetic term *denshin* and the nonce word *kaishū* in the heading of his Introduction, Hanshū Sanjin had in mind something along these lines: [*The Manual*] *Opening how by Hand the Spirit can be Transmitted*, or *The Guide, Opening how to Transmit the Essence*, or, in accordance with the two-tact principle of translation of four-character Chinese formulae, *The Transmission of Spirit and Opening of Skills*. In the semantic field of the character *shū*, “hand,” there are meanings such as “skills, dexterity, or manual.”

As a result of all these meanings, the felicitous find of Hanshū Sanjin was transferred to the wrapping of the book in the form of an aphorism engraved on a seal. Perhaps it was done at the last moment, as the style of the engraving is rather crude. In the following editions, the cover wrappings bear impressions of different, better seals with the same text. Thus, the expression *Denshin kaishū* became a part of the title of *HM* and found its way onto the *daisen* and later to bibliographic descriptions as a sur-title.

Genres of Picture Books before Hokusai

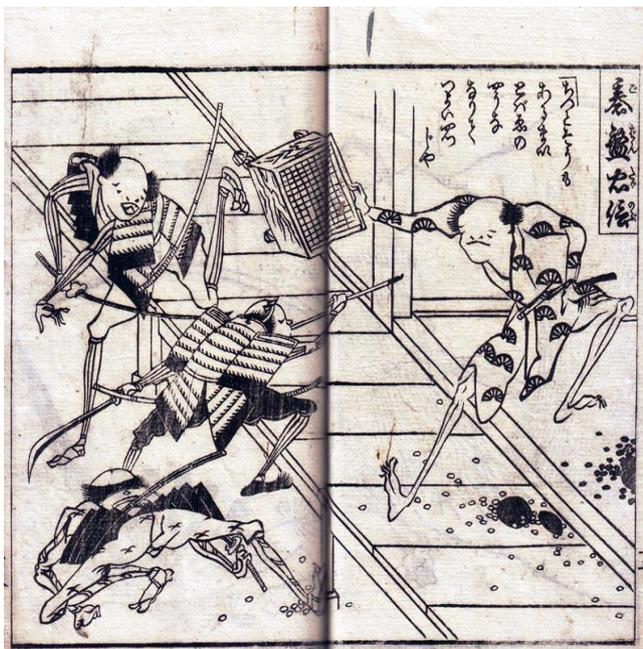
It is important to know the history of the term *manga* but no less important to place *HM* in the context of picture books by Hokusai’s predecessors even if their books did not have the word *manga* in their titles. To this end we can mark out four main groups:

1. Books with drawings of comic subjects or grotesque characters.
2. Collections of classical subjects and iconographic samples, which often served as reference books for young artists.
3. Manuals of drawing of various content.
4. Illustrated dictionaries and thematic compilations.

The first group is significant not only for *HM* but for all *manga* of the 20th century. Its history, according to Shimizu Isao, “is still not known well enough for the broad audience in Japan.”²⁹ Shimizu brings the beginning of the comic *manga* to the early 18th century – the books of caricatures (*toba-e* 鳥羽絵) that have a remote ancestor in *Chōjū giga* 鳥獸戯画, the famous hand scroll of the 12th century of animals frolicking, attributed to Toba Sojō 鳥羽 僧正. Prominent representatives of this style were Takehara Shunchōsai 竹原春潮齋 (first half of the 18th c.) and Hasegawa Mitsunobu 長谷川光信 (mid-18th c.). The *toba-e* style was recognizable

²⁹ Shimizu 2003, p. 62.

by the grotesque caricaturist drawings with skinny figures, which resembled sticks (for example, *Toba-e ogi no mato* 鳥羽繪扇の的, [A Target Shaped as a Fan in the Toba Style], the artist Ooka Shunboku 大岡春卜, the publisher Terada Yoemon, 1720) and the more lively compositions of Shunchōsai in a book *Toba-e akubi dome* 鳥羽繪欠び留 (*Humorous Toba-e Pictures to Stop Yawning*, 1720, the second edition of 1793, which Hokusai would probably have known). Hokusai himself resorted to this manner, such as in his book *Fūryū odoke hyakku*



Ill. 5. Hasegawa Mitsunobu. *Toba-e fudebyōshi*, 1724.

風流戯百句 (*One Hundred Poems with Risqué Jokes*, ca. 1811). Some subjects from this book closely resemble the humorous pages in the Twelfth volume of *HM* (see, for instance, XII-71-8r). Even more correlations with *toba-e* can be seen in Hokusai's motifs and the grotesque shapes of his figures, cf. the composition with Sato no Tadanobu forcing his way with the help of a *go* board through a group of attackers (IV-41) and the similar composition in Hasegawa Mitsunobu's book *Toba-e fudebyōshi* 鳥羽繪筆拍子 (*Brush Rhythms in the Toba Style*), 1724. (See ill. 5 and 6).



Ill. 6. Hokusai *Manga*, IV-41.

Besides *toba-e*, numerous picture books in the genres *kyōga*, *giga* and *ryakuga* belong to this first group. Hokusai produced “comic (or crazy) pictures” (*kyōga*) himself, and his disciples were involved with this genre too. For example, shortly before the release of the First volume of *HM*, Bokusen published *Kyōgaen* 狂画苑 (*The Garden of Comic Pictures*) in three volumes. Many subjects and the manner of representation foreshadowed Hokusai (such as human figures with enormously long arms and legs, or people playing the *janken* game, or heroes of the past

shown in a risible manner). As for the “sketchy (or abbreviated, or simplified) drawing” *ryakuga*, Hokusai was preceded by Kitao Masayoshi 北尾正美 (alias Kuwagata Keisai 鋏形蕙齋, 1764-

1824), who published two albums in 1795: *Ryakuga shiki* 略画式 (*The Method of Simplified Drawing*) and *Shoshoku ekagami* 諸職畫鑑 (*The Mirror of Images of All Craftsmen*). The first book is divided into two parts: “Playing animals” and “People.” Keisai represented many specific postures and attitudes of various animals – for instance, 54 postures of cats and 24 of tigers. In the second part he depicted many artisans working at their crafts. Soon, this interesting artist was practically forgotten, obscured by the deep shadow cast over him by Hokusai.³⁰ The genre of such pictures actually has a long tradition going back to mediaeval scrolls of contests between artisans (*Shokunin uta-awase* 職人歌合わせ). Hokusai must have known this. Moreover, it is evident that he had thoroughly absorbed Keisai’s method and developed it further. This fact was already noticed by one of the first enthusiasts and connoisseurs of Japanese art in Europe, Theodore Duret: “In publishing his *Mangua*, Hokusai was simply taking the same path that the other artist had already gone down [ryakuhitsu], and enlarging it.”³¹

There are numerous games depicted in the Eleventh volume of *HM*, and Hokusai would not only have seen them in the real world but could also have borrowed them from the picture book *Ehon otona asobi* 絵本大人遊 (*A Book of Pictures of Adults’ Games and Amusements*, 1792-93). There, he would have seen many comically treated expressions, which he included in his Tenth volume in large quantities.³²

The second group consists of old Chinese and Japanese compendia of samples of paintings. There are such well-known books as *The Instruction of Painting from The Studio of Ten Bamboo* (Ch. *Shizhuizhai huapu*, Jap. *Jitchikusai shogafu* 十竹齋書画譜), 1627-33, compiled by Hu Zhengyang, and *The Transmission of Painting from The Mustard Seed Garden* (Ch. *Jieziyuan Huazhuan*, Jap. *Kaishien gaden* 芥子園画伝), 1679-1701, compiled by Li Yu. The latter was especially popular in Japan, and his influence on Hokusai will be discussed later. We should also mention *A Collection of Eight Kinds of Painting* (Ch. *Bazhong huapu*, Jap. *Hasshu gafu* 八種画譜, 1620-28) compiled by the Hangzhou scholar Huang Fengchi 黃鳳池 (1558-1626). In Japan it was first published in Kyoto in 1672 and reprinted in 1710. It included 421 full-page illustrations, 213 of which dealt with the realm of nature. There were also illustrations to the subjects of Chinese classical poetry and reproductions of famous Chinese paintings. For Japanese artists, *Hasshu gafu* was the first extensive source of information on

³⁰ See the reproduction of these albums in a book with a telling title: *The Edo Draftsman Kuwagata Keisai: The Man Shaded by Hokusai* (Atsumi Kuniyasu, *Edo no kufusha Kuwagata Keisai: Hokusai no kesareta otoko*. Tokyo: Shohan, 1996. 渥美國泰著, 江戸の工夫者鋏形蕙齋: 北齋に消された男).

³¹ Quoted in Marquet 2007, p. 22.

³² See, for instance, reproductions from *Ehon orona asobi* in an article by Suzuki Shigemi “The Examination of the Subjects in Hokusai’s Picture Books” in the book *Picture Books and Ukiyo-e (Hokusai ehon daizai kentō* 鈴木重三「北齋絵本の題材検討」、絵本と浮世絵), Tokyo: Bijutsu Shūppansha, 1978, pp. 214-215.

Chinese painting – both in compositions and in technique. It was especially popular amongst the artists of the Nanga School. Subsequently it yielded its popularity to *The Mustard Seed Garden*.

On top of this, another Chinese book gained popularity in Japan: *Liexian quanzhuan* (Jap. *Ressen zenden* 列仙全伝, *The Complete Biographies of the Host of Immortals*), compiled by Wang Shechin. It included numerous legends about Daoist immortals and was published in ten volumes in 1650, reissued in three volumes in 1775. In Japan it was printed in Kyoto in 1791 in eight illustrated volumes (*Uzō ressen zenden* 有象列仙全傳). Hokusai would certainly have known both this and the collection of comic verse about various people from this book, which was published slightly later (*Kyōka ressen zenden* 狂歌列仙画像集).

The texts of masters of the Kanō School and other classical artists who made annotated lists of subjects and motives for their disciples are important Japanese sources. First of all there were the books of Tachibana Morikuni 橘守国 (1679-1748). He drew and wrote several manuals which were very popular up to the publication of *HM*. Amongst Tachibana's books were the following: *Ehon shahōbukuro* 絵本寫宝袋 (*A Book of Pictures: A Sack of Precious Images*, 1710, reprinted in 1770) in ten volumes; *Ehon shoshin hashira date* 絵本初心柱立 (*A Book of Pictures: The Pillar for Beginners*, 1715); *Shasei kimono zuga* 写生獸図画 (*The Drawings of Animals in the Truthful Style*, 1719); the monumental *Ehon tsuhōshi* 絵本通宝志 (*A Book of Pictures: The Collection of the Treasures of the World*, 1729) and *Ehon nezashi takara* 絵本直指宝 (*A Book of Pictures: The Treasure of Direct Learning*, 1745) – more than thirty volumes in total.

Another important source for studying the laws of painting, as well as themes and subjects, was the book by Hayashi Moriatsu 林守篤 (beginning of the 18th c.) *Gasen* 画筌 (*The Dagnet of Pictures*, 1721) which contains six volumes. According to the Introduction, it was written in 1712. Moriatsu was a disciple of the famous Kanō Tan'yū 狩野探幽 (1602-1674). The first volume includes theoretical discourses; the next four demonstrate samples of landscapes, plants, animals, birds, and Chinese and Japanese figures, as well as recommendations on how to depict them correctly. The last volume gives advice on how to mount paintings and how to care for scrolls. As a student of the Kanō School in his younger years, Hokusai would surely have studied this book.



Ill. 7. Hayashi Moriatsu. *Gasen*. Scenes of Hell.

For technical drawings, such as armour and weapons, or Western motifs, Hokusai could have sought guidance in the book *Kōmō zatsuwa* 紅毛雜話 (*Various Observations on the Red Haired [Peoples]*, 1787). It was a treatise by Morishima Chūryō 森嶋中良 (1754-1810?), which was a free adaptation of the Dutch version of the French *Dictionnaire Oeconomique* by Abbé Noel Chomel (1633-1712) brought to Nagasaki by Isaac Titsingh in the early 1780s. It was published in 1787 with illustrations by Shiba Kōkan and Kitao Masayoshi. Hokusai made a close copy of a bear trap with a gun in front of a den (see XIII-15l-16r).

The **third** group includes numerous books with the words *edehon* (“manual of drawing”) or *gafu* (“tutorial of painting”) in their titles. Hokusai himself produced quite a lot of them. Amongst his immediate predecessors, Kawamura Bunpō 河村文鳳 (1779-1821), published three volumes of *Bunpō gafu* 文鳳画譜 (*Bunpō’s Tutorial of Painting*) with numerous small figures of men and beasts in 1811-12.

The **fourth** group comprises books of an encyclopedic nature, such as the Chinese *Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會 (*The Compilation of Three Natures in Pictures*, 1607) compiled by the scholar Wang Qi. This fundamental edition was popular in Japan both in its original form and in a Japanese adaptation by the Osaka scholar Terajima Ryōan 寺島良安. His work under the title *Wakan sansei zue* 倭漢三才圖會 (*Japanese-Chinese Compilation of Three Natures in Pictures*) was published in 1712-15 in 81 volumes. It contains 105 chapters about pretty much everything – from celestial constellations to plants to descriptions of crafts. One more important source was the compendium of Buddhist iconography *Butsuzō zui* 佛像図彙 (*The Collection of Buddhist Imagery*) compiled in 1690 by Kanō Hidenobu 狩野秀信 based on Chinese materials. It contains more than eight hundred sample images of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other Buddhist figures alongside Buddhist ritual objects and implements. A new edition was issued in 1783; Hokusai made extensive use of the images from this book .



Ill. 8. Kanō Hidenobu. *Butsuzō zui. Scenes of Hell and other characters.*



Ill. 9. Hokusai Manga, II-6r. *Scenes of Hell.*

Even more important as a source of information was the bestiary of another Kanō artist, Toriyama Sekien 鳥山石燕 (1712-1788). His book *Gazu hyakki yakō* 画図百鬼夜行 (*The Night Parade of Hundreds of Demons*) was published around 1776 and additional volumes were published in 1779, 1780 and 1784. It depicted all kinds of ghosts, demons, devils, animated musical instruments and home utensils etc. Sekien relied on the scrolls of the artists of the Tosa School, who drew “one hundred demons” back in the Muromachi epoch. For example, there is a hand scroll traditionally attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu (1434-1525), *Hyakki yakō emaki* 百鬼夜行絵巻 (*The Hand scroll of the Night Parade of Hundreds of Demons*), which belongs to Shinjuan sub-temple of Daitokuji monastery and is ranked a National Treasure. The earliest extant scroll is that of Tosa Yukihide (alias Fujiwara Yukihide 伝土佐行秀, who worked from 1410 to 1430). In 1770, pictures from

his *Hyakki yakō* were engraved and published in the collection *Kyōgaen* (The Garden of Comic Pictures) in Kyoto by an artist named Sōkensai (or Suzuki Rinshō 鈴木鄰松). These images

were most certainly used by Sekien and, most probably, by Hokusai. In *HM* there are more than thirty images of ghosts and fantastic creatures that look very similar to Sekien's.

At the end of this section let us outline the broader context of *HM* – comparing it with typologically similar European works. Hokusai's *Manga* can be compared with the genre of mediaeval encyclopedias and compendia *summa universalis*, which were compiled throughout the Middle Ages, beginning with *De Universo* by Hrabanus Maurus (ca. 789-856). The closest visual similarity to Hokusai in old Europe is perhaps the album of drawings by Villard de Honnecourt (13 c.), although the quantity (ca. 250) and the level of compositional organization are not as significant as in Hokusai's work. Nevertheless, Villard, as well as Hokusai, represented religious subjects and motifs, architectural drawings, various technical implements and machines, people, and animals.³³ Perhaps, to many savant readers, *HM* resembles the albums and notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, but let us mention in passing that Leonardo was inspired by a totally different artistic strategy: *varietà*.³⁴

The Genre of *Hokusai Manga*

With this lengthy list of forerunners and sources (those mentioned above do not constitute an exhaustive list but serve as typological samples), defining *HM*'s genre is not easy. The Introductions to several volumes of *HM* describe the circumstances of *HM*'s creation. Hanshū Sanjin wrote in the First volume, “Verily, those who really desire to learn how to draw should open [this book] as a manual.” But he made this conclusion after praising the incompatible art of Hokusai in depicting everything in the world. In other words, this does not mean that *HM* was originally envisioned as a manual for disciples.

Two other Introductions tell us more directly that Hokusai had intended to provide his disciples with a teaching aid. Kōzan Gyoō 絳山漁翁 in his Introduction to the Fourth volume says, “Indeed, the master created a guidebook for his disciples! His care and kindness make him a real teacher.” The same Gyoō elaborated on this subject in the Introduction to the Eighth volume:

Many [aspiring artists] flocked to [Hokusai's] gate to study his art. However, the Venerable said, “There are no teachers in drawing. One ought to realistically recreate [life], and then you get everything by yourselves.” But those who entered the gate were saddened by these [words.] One of them uttered persuasively, “The Venerable is the founder of the art family Katsushika. The juniors who gathered here crave for [learning]

³³ Now in Biblioteque Nationale, Paris, MS Fr 19093.

³⁴ The category of *varietà* is dealt at length in the book: Баткин Л.М. *Леонардо да Винчи и особенности ренессансного творческого мышления* (Leonardo da Vinci and the Characteristics of the Renaissance Creative Mind). Moscow: Iskusstvo Publishing, 1990, or, in a shorter form in: Batkin, Leonid. *Leonardo da Vinci*. Bari: Latezza, 1988.

this style. Naturally, there is no one besides the Teacher who can be asked [to instruct] in this. [...] If the disciples who came to the gate of the Venerable do not get the book of his samples, they will not grasp the spirit of [the] Katsushika [School.] Is it not evident?" [...] The Venerable absorbed these words and began to depict mountains and waters, human figures, beasts and birds, plants and trees, pots and utensils. By letting [all this] be engraved, he endowed his disciples with it.

The “book of samples” (*rimpon* 臨本) can also be translated as a “book for copying.” It was a generic name for teaching aids for art students – for example, *The Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* was defined by this word but, as we will see later, *HM* can by no means be reduced to drawing samples and how-to aids. (That said, some images could be used, of course, in this capacity.)

Besides the opinion of Kōzan Gyoō, there were other reasons for the creation of *HM*. Ryūtei Tanehiko 柳亭種彦 (1783-1842) in his Introduction to the Eleventh volume wrote about “amateurs” who should be understood as admirers of Hokusai’s art in general and his *Manga* in particular. “Since that year of Bunka, he freely released his mind and feelings and, following his brush, this way and that he created ten volumes of engraved drawings. Nevertheless, urged by his insatiable admirers, the Venerable took up his brush again and, collecting those [subjects] that somehow poured out, promptly prepared this volume.” This point of view looks, in my opinion, more feasible. As for the allegations of specially envisioned and designed manuals for disciples, they had been expressed by only one author out of all the Introductions.

Hokusai himself prepared a lot of teaching aids and they bore the words *edehon* (“the drawing manual”) or *gafu* (kind of “tutorials” or “formulae of pictures”). His *edehon* minutely demonstrate the types of brushstrokes exemplified by the strokes of Chinese characters and enumerate the order of these strokes in the drawing of this or that picture. In his book *Santai gafu* 三體画譜 (*The Formulae of Pictures in Three Styles*), Hokusai draws landscapes in various styles and manners and marks these styles with special notation. *HM* is radically different from these types of technical (yet aesthetically appealing) books.

Perhaps the best definition of *HM* would be “a pictorial encyclopedia of Japanese life”. It includes images from the ancient mythology and religions of China and Japan, historical tales and narratives, literary stories, geography, crafts and occupations, mores, humor and games, and the worlds of plants and beasts. In its breadth *HM* is simply unique.

With the abundance of predecessors to *HM* – iconographic compendia, manuals for artists, and illustrated encyclopedias – a question emerges: was Hokusai original in his *Manga*, and if so, to what extent? Why is his *Manga* so famous while many other books are known only

to a narrow circle of specialists? In what respects does *HM* differ from other similar picture books? Its fame is, to a certain extent, a matter of chance: the issues of *HM* were printed in huge runs and were brought to Europe early, and it was in Europe that the notion of his grandiose uniqueness was formed, whereas other artists who worked in similar genres were known only to a few well-informed connoisseurs. This fact, incidentally, explains the bewilderment of educated Japanese at the end of the 19th century, believing that Western admirers were elevating the fame of Hokusai to too high a level. Here, we witness a typical overvaluation of a figure beyond his context. On the other hand, Hokusai is by no means a typical artist, and although not as unique as the first European aficionados thought, he is undoubtedly great. In *HM* his grandeur was revealed in his use of many different sources to create something principally new and of higher quality. First, it has thematic broadness. Second, it has genre broadness: to the body of traditional art manuals and compendia he added a humorous element – the drawings in comic styles, such as *kyōga*, *ryakuga*. On top of the simple comic effect he often added a satirical dimension based, inter alia, on wordplay (see, for example, the Twelfth volume). This was quite new. Finally, one should not forget that, while borrowing from iconography, Hokusai drew in his own style – which means in a more aesthetically interesting and skillful way than the majority of his forerunners. Many of them, being painters, considered their picture books of samples as technical aids, and because of this they often drew quite schematically. Hokusai, to the contrary, being a born draughtsman, viewed this work as self-contained. In other words, the unique character of *HM* lies in its universality and aesthetic qualities.

The Composition – An Avalanche? A Debauch? A Cyclone?

The Problem of Inner Organization in *Hokusai Manga*

I propose that, contrary to the common belief that *HM* is a chaotic jumble of random disjointed pictures, every volume is actually composed with a sophisticated unity with the help of elaborate schemata deeply imbedded in the traditional Japanese ways of textual organization. But first, let us look at a few examples to demonstrate the traditional view of *HM*. The following opinions belong to the highly knowledgeable connoisseurs who left many excellent descriptions and observations about individual images or pages of *Manga* but who did not look at it contextually.

Virtually all scholars who wrote about *HM* described it as something great but totally disorganized. Here is a selection of typical expressions: “avalanche de dessins” (Edmond de Goncourt),³⁵ “a debauch of sketches” (Ernest Fenollosa),³⁶ “cyclonic pages” (James Michener),³⁷

³⁵ See the new edition: Goncourt, Edmond de. *Hokusai*. New York: Parkstone Press, 2008, p. 127.

“distressing chaos” (Arthur Ficke),³⁸ “random sketches” (Kawakita-Saito),³⁹ and my favorite – “higgledy-piggledy” (Jack Hillier).⁴⁰ These and other authors explained this opinion in more detail: “...There is no continuity from page to page and even a single page may contain figures from well-known legends mingled higgledy-piggledy with quite inconsequential ‘doodles’ of birds and fishes.”⁴¹ “...the lack of plan, of homogeneity.”⁴² “The Manga is the haul of an indiscriminate dragnet drawn through his incessant output.”⁴³ “Without organisation, central idea, or any apparent logical concept governing its selection of material, it simply provided a catchall of sketches.”⁴⁴ “The material has not been arranged systematically by subject and has been left to the student’s own sensibility to guide him through the iconographic forest.”⁴⁵

Because of this “randomness”, many authors who published selections from *HM* tried to arrange Hokusai’s work “systematically by subject,” (bringing together “people,” “animals,” “plants” or “history”). All these authors (Michener, Nagata, Bouquillard and Marquet) have in fact re-arranged Hokusai’s original composition and thus seriously changed the overall perception of his visual narrative. Analyzing *Manga* as a whole in the light of various textual practices inspires very different conclusions.

In general, *HM* is composed according to three strategies: 1) the subjects and their order follow certain general patterns, as in many books before Hokusai; 2) there are certain compositional devices in matching the beginning pages in each volume with the final ones; and 3) there are associations or various thematic links between adjacent pages.

In patterns of organization, Hokusai (or his editors) followed not only the visual resources mentioned above but also literary texts. As an example, we can mention an anthology (from which he borrowed stories), *A Collection of Tales Heard, Present and Past* 古今著聞集, *Kokon Chomon-shū*), compiled by Tachibana Narisue 橘成季, ca. 1254, with the following rubrics: “Gods, Buddhism, Politics and loyalists, Imperial matters, Literature, Court poems, Music and dance, Calligraphy, Medicine and the occult, Filial piety and parental love, Amorous affairs, Martial arts, Archery, Horsemanship, Sumo and the strong, Art and painting, Kickball, Gambling, Robberies, Auspicious matters, Plaintive matters, Entertainments, Attachments, Fighting; Humor and clever remarks; Mysteries, apparitions; Eating and drinking; Plants and trees; Fishes, insects, birds, animals.” Hokusai borrowed subjects from this text and followed the order of the topics,

³⁶ Reported by A.Ficke: Ficke, Arthur. *Chats on Japanese Prints*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915, p. 365

³⁷ Michener, Op. cit., p. 12.

³⁸ Ficke. Op. cit., p. 365..

³⁹ Hokusai Manga. Introduction by Michiaki Kawakita and George Saito. Kyoto: Unsōdō, 1962, s.p.

⁴⁰ Jack Hillier, *Hokusai: Paintings, Drawings and Woodcuts*. London: Phaidon, (3d edition 1978; 2nd impression 1985), p. 53.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 54.

⁴³ Ibid. , pp.54-58.

⁴⁴ Michener. Op. cit., p. 13.

⁴⁵ Gian Carlo Calza, *Hokusai*. London: Phaidon, 2003, p. 453.

sometimes very closely. For example, in the Sixth volume he produces a long block of four consecutive topics from the above: “Martial arts, Archery, Horsemanship, Sumo and the strong.” In the First volume and others, the connected sequences of “plants and trees; fishes, insects, birds, animals” are standard. This does not imply that Hokusai uncritically followed any single source. It means that he (and his editors-cum-compilers) worked within the tradition of certain compositional patterns, and the detailed exploration of *HM*’s adherence to this tradition is a substantial and innovative part of this research.

The third level is the most subtle level of compositional principles. Evoking the title of the seminal article by Konishi Jin’ichi, about the principles of the organization of poetic anthologies, we can call it association and progression.⁴⁶ From image to image and page to page, Hokusai progresses with his visual narrative, using various compositional devices, sometimes evident, sometimes subtle, to weave unity by association. His textual strategy in many cases resembles those employed in *renga*, the linked stanzas. As in a *renga* chain, every volume of *Manga* consists of interchanging sequences of “men” and “animals,” “mountains” and “water,” literary references, human affairs, and seasonal indicators (his visual counterpart of poetic *kigo* – “season words”) etc. For example, the Fifth volume pp. 17r-25l deals with images of the ancient poets and heroes, often tragic, exiled or killed. But inside this sequence there is one double page (23r-24l) showing Mt. Fuji, whose placement there appears totally random at first glance. The reason is as follows. On the preceding page appears the poet Yamabe no Akahito 山部赤人. His poem about Mt. Fuji is included in the anthology *Hyakunin Isshū* 百人一首. Upon seeing his image, the *H*’s targeted audience should turn their thoughts to that famous poem. Turning the page they see the actual Fuji. The next page begins with a portrait of the poet Bun’ya no Yasuhide 文屋康秀. His posture suggests that he is looking at Mt. Fuji on the previous page, and his own poem in the same anthology is full of mountain imagery. The evocation of these poems, not explicitly present in Hokusai’s visual text, is prefigured by the fact that four or five poets who appeared on the immediately preceding pages were represented in *Hyakunin Isshū* too.

In short, I argue that in *HM* Hokusai factually aimed to create an exhaustive visual repertory of traditional Japanese art, religion, literature, history and everyday life. The commentary will render his images comprehensible: it will be like a form of translation – from the language of Japanese pictorial idioms of the early 19th century to the modern reader, Eastern and Western.

⁴⁶ Konishi Jin’ichi, “Association and progression: Principles of Integration in Anthologies and Sequences of Japanese Court Poetry, A.D. 900-1350,” translated by Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 21, December, 1958, pp. 67-127.

Supplement: Sample entries of commentaries

II-3r



In the upper left, there is an **ōryū** (Ch. *yinglong* 應龍, をうりやう, lit. “responsive dragon.”) It was usually depicted with feathered wings, looking more like a bird than a snake. In Chinese mythology, a *yinglong* was connected to the prehistoric Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, especially the Yellow Emperor and his descendant King Yu. Qu Yuan’s *Chuqi* (3-2 cc. BCE) says that a *yinglong* helped Yu, the founder of the Xia dynasty, to control the Great Deluge and stop the incessant flooding. He accomplished this task by digging canals, and the *yinglong*’s role was to draw the future water-beds with its tail. That is why it was called “responsive.” This dragon is also dealt with in *Shanghaijing* (two chapters in “The Great Wilderness”) and *Huainanzi*, where it is mentioned in three chapters. Thus, the chapter “Earthly forms” says that the *yinglong* was the

progenitor of all quadrupeds, which is why he was usually depicted with four wings. “All beasts: winged or covered with hair or scales, descend from this dragon.” The primordial couple Fuxi and Nuwa used two *yinglongs* for their chariot.

Below to the right there is a lizard-like dragon with open jaws. This is a **daryū** (Ch. *toulong* 鼉龍). Hokusai (or his editors) wrote only one character and supplied it with furigana だりやう. This character is seldom used in Japanese texts and was most probably borrowed from *Sancai Tuhui* or Terajima Ryōan’s *Wakan Sansai Zue* (ch. 45). *Hokusai E Jiten* (vol. 1, p. 82-2) calls it *amaryū*, which is hardly correct. It is a quite common depiction of a dragon-lizard which in reality goes back to an alligator common to the Yangzi river (Lat. *Alligator sinensis*).

Although a *daryū* was connected to the rain, as were all water creatures, the principal rain dragon *amaryū* 雨竜 is a little dragon below the *ōryū*. He was in charge of sending or stopping the rains. He could be depicted coiling around a double-edged sword as Kurikara Fudō (see *HM-XIII-21*)

or as Ama Kurikara because, according to tradition, such a sword belonged to the Shingon School founder Kūkai and could draw rain.

The boa (𧈧蛇) at the bottom is not easy to identify. In modern Japanese texts it is rendered as “■蛇 (■ = 虫 + 冉)” for the absence of the character 𧈧. This beast was mentioned in *Shanhaijing* and was called *ranshe* (J. *zenja*). Hokusai probably knew it via *Wakan Sansai Zue*.

In China *ranshe* was connected with *bashe* 巴蛇. *Bencao Ganmu* 本草綱目, 1578 (*Compendium of Materia Medica*) in its entry on *ranshe* refers to it as the *bashe* of *Shanhaijing*. The dictionary *Zhengzi tong* 正字通 (1671) says that *ranshe* is the same as *bashe*. According to *Shanhaijing* (*Haineinanjing*, ch. 10), this snake subsists on elephants, which it swallows whole once every three years. After three years it disgorges the undigested bones (which could be used for medicines). The Guo Pu commentary relates *bashe* to *ranshe* and says that the bones come out through the monster's scales. *Shanhaijing* says that *bashe* are green, yellow, red, or black. This is possibly why its relative *ranshe* was called *nishikihemi* in Japan: Minakata Kuwasugu, in an article in *Minzoku Gaku* (1928, October), explains the origin of the word *nishikihemi* differently, suggesting that it came from 冉 (*ya* – red color).

According to *Sōzan Chomon Kishū* 想山著聞奇集 (1849), in the Middle Ages in Japan this *ranshe/zenja* monster was called *wohohemi* ヲホヘミ (modern *ōhemi*), (capable of changing its appearance), or *shikakuihemi* (deer-eating snake). But the gloss Hokusai wrote reads *uwabami*, which was the word for giant anacondas and pythons. *Sōzan Chomon Kishū* pointed out that *zenja/nishikihemi* could not be called *uwabami*, which Hokusai evidently did not know or did not accept. Still, it is clear that Hokusai did not mean a simple anaconda *uwabami* but a mythological monster *ranshe/zenja*, appropriate on a page with dragons. He also used the word *uwabami* meaning the monster in his print with Wada no Heida Tanenaga on the subject from *Azuma Kagami*.



This is from a cluster of several pages with puns and double entendres based on proverbs (*kotowaza*) and sayings.

In the upper part, a skinny and almost naked man pulls himself by the loincloth as though attempting to lift himself off the ground. The scene is called “A solitary sumo” (*hitori zumo* 獨相撲). This was an ancient Shinto rite when a priest engaged in ritual combat with an invisible deity of rice ears. But here the caption is used

humorously and should not be

understood literally. The left inscription says: “Assistance from a hungry ghost from Mt. Kumogake” (*kumogakesan gaki no suke* 雲崔山餓鬼之助); the second character has not been identified with certainty, but it bears little relevance to the main idea. With this name, Hokusai may have been alluding to a certain pathetic sumo wrestler whom he depicted as a hungry ghost. But this is not the principal point. A drum and a fan suggest that this is a beggar performing a comic sketch. The word for “beggar” is *komokaburi* 薦被り, literally “clad with a straw mat.” (And rather than a *mawashi*, the figure wears this straw, small apron-cum-loincloth.)

An alternative meaning of *komokaburi* is “a cask wrapped in a straw mat”, which directs us to the lower part of the drawing: a mortar wrapped in a straw mat. The caption reads *tachiusu ni komo wo maku* 立臼に薦を巻く reads exactly like this: “The mortar wrapped in a straw mat.” This should be understood not verbatim but as a jocular saying about a short fat woman wearing a wide *obi* sash. The two seemingly so different scenes are united by the similar expressions. Their affinity is based on a double contrast. Firstly, there is a thin man and a plump woman, and secondly, a cask in a straw mat is hinted through the picture of a man whereas a woman is hinted at by the drawing of a mortar in a straw mat. There is a short plump woman with an undone *obi* is shown in the right half of this double page.

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