IMAGINING THE JAPANESE NATION: THE POLITICS OF Mt. FUJI, 1760-1825.

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Abstract

The Edo period (1603-1868) saw the dawn of commercial publishing and the appearance of a Japanese mass market. Amidst these developments, a growing number of intellectuals, from all walks of life, started a cultural and political debate seeking to define the boundaries and center of their nation. A wide variety of schools of thought contributed their particular views to the question but two scholars of Dutch studies, or *rangaku*, offered one of the most drastic and creative solutions to define “Japaneseness.” The writer-scientist Hiraga Gennai (1728-1779) and the painter-geographer Shiba Kôkan (1747-1818) attempted to articulate Mt. Fuji as the symbol of a culturally and politically integrated Japan through their written and visual works. This thesis attempts to show the various forces contributing to and the process by which these two polymaths came to conceive and then propagate the idea of Mt. Fuji as a national symbol of their country. In order to do so, we will first focus on the life of Hiraga Gennai and the ideas contained in his most famous work of fiction, the *Fûryû Shidôken Den* (published in 1763), then move to the visual and scholarly output of his spiritual successor, Shiba Kôkan.
# Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................. ii  
Table of Contents......................................................................................................................................................................................................................... iii  
List of Figures ......................................................................................................................................................................................................................... iv  
Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................................................................................................................. 1  
Chapter 2: Textual Images of Mt. Fuji: the Case of Hiraga Gennai ................................................................. 16  
  2.1: Gennai’s life and thought ......................................................................................................................................................................................... 16  
  2.2: The treatment of Mt. Fuji in the *Fûryû Shidôken den* ................................................................................................................................. 24  
Chapter 3: Visual Images of Mt. Fuji ............................................................................................................................................................................ 38  
  3.1: Towards landscape paintings: Ike Taiga ............................................................................................................................................................ 47  
  3.2: The advent of the western gaze: Shiba Kôkan and Mt. Fuji as a national symbol ................................................................. 54  
    3.2.1: Kôkan and Mt. Fuji ......................................................................................................................................................................................... 61  
    3.2.2: The iconography of power ........................................................................................................................................................................... 66  
    3.2.3: Kôkan’s Fuji propaganda ........................................................................................................................................................................ 74  
Chapter 4: Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................................................................................ 85  
Bibliography ....................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 126
List of Figures

Fig 1: “At the Foot of Mt. Fuji,” NIPPON, no. 6 (1936): 22–23. From Weisenfeld 2000, p. 762.................................................................95
Fig 3: 500-yen bonds, 1878. From Trede 2008, p. 92.........................................................97
Fig 5: Nakabayashi Chikutô, Shinshû Kikanzu. From Kano 1994, pp. 58-59. ......................99
Fig 6: Katsushika Hokusai, Fugaku Sanjûrokkei, Gohyakurakanji. From Calza 2003.....100
Fig 7: Ike Taiga, 500 Arhats. Accessible online at < .........................................................101
Fig 8: Ike Taiga, Fuji in the 12 Months. From Takeuchi 1992, pp. 54-61. ............................102
Fig 9: Ike Taiga, True view of Mt. Asama. From Takeuchi 1992, pp. 46-47....................103
Fig 10: Ike Taiga, Minô Waterfall. From Takeuchi 1992, p. 6...............................................103
Fig 11: Shiba Kôkan, Minô Waterfall. From Seiyû Ryotan, 1794. University of British Columbia, Rare Books and Special Collections, Japanese Maps, G155.J2 S5 1794. 104
Fig 12: Shiba Kôkan, Minô Waterfall. Private Collection. From Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 45.........................................................................................................................104
Fig 13: Hiraga Gennai, Seiyô Fujinzu. From Johnson 2005, p. 35. ..............................105
Fig 14: Odano Naotake, Takazu. Private Collection. From Naruse 1995, honbunron, p. 89..............................................................................................................................106
Fig 15: Shiba Kôkan, Kôkan Hahazô. Private Collection. From Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 75.................................................................107
Fig 16: Odano Naotake, Fujigakuzu. From Johnson 2005, p. 86....................................107
Fig 17: Shiba Kôkan, Enoshima Fujibôenzu. Private Collection. From Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 293.................................................................107
Fig 18: Odano Naotake, Enoshimazu. Private Collection. From Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 293.................................................................108
Fig 19: Shiba Kôkan & Satake Shozan, Seiyô Danjozu. From Johnson 2005, p. 145. ......108
Fig 20: Tani Bunchô, Kôyo Tanshôzu. From Screech 2000, p. 65...............................109
Fig 21: Shiba Kôkan, Sôshû Kamakura Shichirigahamazu. From Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 166.................................................................109
Fig 22: Shiba Kôkan, Kisarazu Uranozu. From Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 176. ........110
Fig 23: Shiba Kôkan, Sunshû Satsuda Fujisanzu. Private Collection. From Naruse 1995,


Fig 27: Katsushika Hokusai, *Fugaku Hyakkei, Raichôno Fuji*. Accessible online at <.....>


Fig 29: Okamura Masanobu, *Chôsenjin Raichônozu*. From Toby 1986, p. 427.


Fig 34: Katsushika Hokusai, *View of Famous Places on the Tokaidô at a Glance*. From...


Fig 38: *Fuji Môde Hitori Annai*. From Yokota 1999, p. 20.

Fig 39: Naraya Kurohaku (publisher), *Map of the Seven Hot Springs of Hakone*. From...

Fig 40: *Map of Suruga Province*. From Yamashita 1998, p. 75.

Fig 41: Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave at Kanagawa*. From Calza 2003, p. 418.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Mt. Fuji is a “beautiful, almost perfect cone. Since ancient times, people have regarded it as sacred—some even worshipped it as a god. Today, about 300,000 people make the climb every year, realizing their dream to get to the top at least once in their lifetime. Mount Fuji continues to have a special place in the hearts of the Japanese,” states an article in the “special feature” section of Nipponia, a government-sponsored multilingual magazine aiming at introducing Japan and its culture to a foreign audience.1 In The Daily Yomiuri as well, we learn, with photo evidence, that “Mt. Fuji is a … true symbol of Japan” and that “indeed, many non-Japanese think of Mt. Fuji when they think of Japan.”2 Fuji holds a distinguished place on the website of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as on a number of Japanese embassies’ websites in countries ranging from China to Austria.3

That Mt. Fuji is a symbol of Japan is common knowledge. It is worshiped in about 1300 Sengen (浅間 also read Asama) shrines all over the country, appears behind a branch of cherry blossoms on the back of the 1000 yen bill, as a watermark in the Japanese passport, and figures on an ever increasing number of postage stamps—both in Japan and


abroad—since its introduction in the 1922, 4/8/20 sen series. The fact that the Fuji-san offers great value in terms of identification has not gone unnoticed by creators of popular culture either. The dazzling views of Mt. Fuji as seen from the Tokyo Bay, inherited from 19th-century woodblock prints, regularly appear as a transition in movies and animation whenever the director needs to impress the change to a Japanese setting onto the spectator. Indeed, since Japan entered the modern world, decades of smart domestic and overseas governmental advertisement in the realm of public relations has successfully branded Fuji as one of the archipelago’s most potent national emblems along with the red rising sun (日の丸, hinomaru), the cherry blossom (桜, sakura) and the imperial crest (菊花紋章, kikukamonsho, also called 菊の御紋, kiku no gomon).

Tokens of a very peculiar preoccupation for integrative political propaganda, national symbols are strongly associated with the rise of the nation-state. Modern nations are greedy entities; they require tremendous sacrifices, up to the ultimate one, sometimes for unspecified reasons (the infamous raison d’état) in the name of a special kind of love, patriotism, emanating from a special kind of subject, the citizen. But human beings are not naturally born citizens of national collectivities. Communication alone, via deliberate use of sign and symbols, can agglomerate disparate bodies into communities of shared

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5 See for example the scene depicting the arrival of Captain Nathan Algray to Japan in the movie “The Last Samurai”.

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experience. Myths, heroes, national monuments, anthems, flags, crests or national mottos have come to constitute the sensory range of the publicity scheme of great nations to foster loyalty, inspire respect and soften differences in the fatherland while making foes and allies abroad aware of their physical and cultural boundaries.

Advertisement as an agent of government marketing, particularly its successful use in the creation of citizenry and promotion of governmental support both at the turning point between the pre-modern and modern world as well as in our contemporary societies has been the subject of increasing focus in scholarly discussion over the past two decades. Jonathan Rose has demonstrated its crucial use in creating and promoting the myth of Canadian identity from the 19th century onward; Peter van Ham, writing about state-public relations in Europe, has concluded that the application of the European Union logo to a wide range of products will make it one of the world’s most trendy brands; and Joan Landes, looking at republican visual communication during the 1789 French revolution, has argued for the prevalence of allegories such as “La Republique” in nurturing the young state. From these works, it clearly follows that national symbols are the keystone of a

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propaganda enterprise that seeks to sell a new perception of civilization and overcome resistance to integration through an efficient management of desire and subjectivity.

By nature, national symbols are most visibly articulated during periods of increased political tension. Japan is no exception. Ancestor of our modern *Nipponia*, the magazine *NIPPON*, published in the 1930s for the same foreign audience and benefiting from the same government backing as its modern equivalent, does not disappoint in giving the reader an idealized view of Mt. Fuji in English, French, German and Spanish. Assuredly, we learn that for the community living near the giant, “the spirit of the mountain is [a] guide in life, its mysterious influence fills their days with happiness from childhood to old age, and they are never discontented, nor forget to thank Fuji-san for the deep comfort it gives.” The statement is supported by a graphic design work that is not in any way inferior to the best of our contemporary magazines (fig 1). A dynamic diagonal and counter diagonal composition of glossy photographs featuring local scenery and close-ups of smiling children’s faces gives a great sense of depth in the page; state of the art typesetting and the use of a friendly calligraphic typeface for the title welcomes the viewer into a rustic yet sleek Fuji fairyland.

Still skimming backwards through the archive of Japanese propaganda, one will inevitably stumble across the imagery left by the demise of the Tokugawa *bakufu* and the

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Meiji Restoration of 1868 which marks the birth of the Japanese nation-state. Over the span of the Meiji period (1868-1912) various pressures from western countries in combination with the recurring nationalist language of the nativist (国学, kokugaku) heritage of the late Tokugawa (德川, also called Edo, 江戸, 1603-1868) period fostered a series of religious policies intended to frame a symbolic legitimacy for the state via the construction of a myth of cultural identity. This myth, brought forth by various concurring movements organized around calls such as “loyalty to the emperor and patriotism” (忠君愛国, chûkun aikoku), the cleansing of the “divine nation” (神国, shinkoku), or the formation of a “national polity” (国体, kokutai), crystallized in the creation of the national ideology of State Shintô. The forced separation between Buddhism and Shintô (神仏分離, shinbutsu bunri), the promotion of national kami, as well as the forced enshrinement of Ise talismans in Japanese homes during the Great Promotion Campaign (大教宣布運動, taikyô senpu undô), and the abolition of class divisions, illustrate the endeavor of the state to force its new doctrine onto a body of so-perceived original symbols of “Japanesness,” including Mt. Fuji, in order to instill in its citizenry the concept of their belonging to a unified spiritual entity centered around the emperor as the true head of state, in a supposedly unbroken line of descent since the legendary creation of the country by the gods Izanagi and Izanami.9

As national symbols are handy devices in legitimating transformations of a nation’s authority structure, the Meiji government was particularly concerned with the

adequate articulation, projection and recognition of its propaganda apparatus.\textsuperscript{10} Demonstrating this priority, the maiden public communication given by the emperor addressed the Japanese in these terms: “we [the Meiji emperor] intend personally to rule over the entire country, to comfort you, the numberless people, and in the end to open up the ten thousand leagues of ocean waves, to proclaim the glory of our country to the world and bring to the land the unshakable security of Mt. Fuji.”\textsuperscript{11} This superimposition of Fuji-san on the Japanese nation was graphically translated into a number of prints, among which is the interesting “Maple Leaves at New Palace” triptych (fig 2.)

In an effort to provide the masses with a guide to the assimilation of modernity and impress upon them the just return to imperial rule, this woodblock unites in the visual field a number of Japanese symbols old and new. Traditionally dressed ladies-in-waiting, human echoes of the autumnal maple leaves reminiscent of the lyric heyday of the Heian court, serve to frame an emperor in western military uniform. The pavilion wraps its western furniture, framed painting and European curtains in a classical domestic architecture prominently adorned with the imperial crest—the \textit{kikukamonsho} mentioned earlier. Finally, the setting itself, a traditional garden, serves both as a tangible anchor securely fastened to the Japanese land as well as a pretext for an elaborate political


metaphor. *Via the use of shakkei* (借景, lit: borrowed scenery), a technique by which the garden designer imports elements of the far landscape into the garden itself, **Fuji** is brought to the emperor, father of all Japanese. The nation has submitted to its new ruler. It comes as no surprise then that the first military vessel selected to receive an imperial visit during a naval display was appropriately the “**Fuji**,” flagship of the recently created navy.12 Evidence of the efforts deployed by the Meiji state to master the art of cultural politics, Meiji-period advertisement discourse seeks to selling products and services that have a civilizing effect on its freshly unified market. The 1878 500-yen national bonds, issued to finance new transportation developments (fig 3), visually unified old and new symbols: Empress Jingû sits in the foreground presiding over a landscape in which working peasants welcome a steam engine. Mt. Fuji, rising tall in the background, lends its all-encompassing unifying gaze to vouch for the success of modernization. Similarly, a late Meiji postcard showcasing in the foreground the N.Y.K. Awa Maru, the first ship assigned to link Japan and England (fig 4), boldly articulates Fuji-san as an all-powerful metaphor of the glorious nation-state and its new citizenry. Old means of travel are represented in the picture by a drawing of traditional footwear in the foreground and a caravan climbing a rocky hill in the background. These are contrasted with a photograph of a modern means of transportation, the steam ship Awa Maru.

However, I think that rather than testifying to a genuine trademark creation within the domain of nationalistic visual rhetoric, the passage from the old to the new world is

12 *ibid*, p. 165.
here more evocative of an evolution and systematization resulting from the widespread adoption of science and technology. It is probably this widespread systematization emanating from the will of a centralized government which led Mary Elisabeth Berry to comment that “the work of nationalism, and the creation of essentially new symbols, was the work of Meiji.”\(^{13}\) But this infatuation with Fuji-san as a signifier of a monolithic Japan was not, contrary to expectation, created with the modern state. In fact, by the time the Meiji government appropriated it, Mt. Fuji had already benefited from at least a century of recurring refinement as a symbol of a unified Japanese entity.

In his *Studies in the Intellectual History of Japan*, published in three parts between 1940 and 1944, Maruyama Masao argues that the emergence of Japan as a nation-state in the late 19th century was a natural consequence of its cultural development over the Edo period, which he characterized as a significant cultural integration lacking political consciousness. Yet, looking at the rhetoric constructed around Mt. Fuji by a number of Tokugawa intellectuals, one can hardly conclude that their message was totally disengaged from political concerns. In fact, I would like to argue that the use of Fuji as a national symbol was both produced, as well as encouraged, by a movement of cultural cohesion developing over the second half of the Tokugawa era.

I am, however, well aware that speaking of national integration in a society founded on class differences can be precarious and that it would be foolish to attribute to

the Edo period the same widespread enforced homogeneity that Meiji society achieved after the Russo-Japanese War. Differences were pervasive under shogunate rule. As suggested by the often overtly polarized accounts of the land left by a wide body of travel diaries from this period, early modern Japan was a patchwork of dialects, customs, beliefs and faiths, further divided by the tension between rulers and ruled, tax payers and tax consumers, esthetes and rustics. The multiplicity of regional authorities, too, akin to the pre-Bismark German principalities in their legislative and economic independence from the shogunate, fractured the political landscape into more or less autonomous “countries” (国, kuni).¹⁴ So how can it be possible to speak of a national integration in a society whose raison d’être seems to be the daily reinforcement of social schism?

Equally suggested by this body of travel diaries is the pervasive tendency of early modern members of Japanese collectivities to seek, record, compare and debate information about their surroundings. Not only travel diaries, but virtually all media joined this information revolution. From playing cards and board games to popular literature, encyclopedias and commercial listings, early modern Japanese subjects fervently exposed the intricacy of their world, and commodified a culture that was once solely in the hands of the aristocracy and clergy. The system of alternate attendance (参勤交代, sankin kôtai) under which the great domainal lords (大名, daimyô) and their retinues were forced to move back and forth between residences in Edo and their fiefs on a regular basis, upheld

the demographic boom of the capital. The Gokaidô highways (五街道) linking major city centers and their myriad relay stations, originally a military enterprise of the bakufu, became the arteries and hubs of a distribution network that fed an audience more and more eager to learn how to define themselves as Japanese. Commoners, too, happily joined this new culture of movement and, despite being originally regulated by a system of passports, the practice of leaving on touristic pilgrimage without permission (抜参り, nukemairi) became so wide-spread by the end of the 18th century that the bakufu, tired of issuing unsuccessful directives to contain the movement, fundamentally relaxed its regulation.¹⁵

Exploring the many famous sites (名所, meisho) en route, commoner and samurai gradually delineated the border of the comprehensive entity we know as Nippon. As culture became a matter of choice, the public sphere became saturated with brothels and restaurants to satisfy the bodily hungers of this unstoppable flux of people and, in the cities, provided the space to accommodate the reunions of literary circles or firefighter guilds while entertaining the masses with exhibitions of paintings, calligraphy or dance spectacles. In fact, the demand for places of social intercourse developed to such an extent that, by 1804, Edo was dappled by 6165 restaurants, not counting street stands and various noodle shops.¹⁶


However, these developments alone cannot account fully for the central role played by media in early modern society. Even if, in many media images were preponderant to the text and the clever use of signs such as family crests (家紋, kamon) frequently ensured that even illiterates could identify the origin of the message, limited literacy was often required to fully comprehend it or grasp the subtle puns pervasive in Japanese cultural production.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, a brief discussion of literacy levels is necessary.

Most scholars agree that, especially in the city centers, schooling for both boys and girls under a variety of accommodations was common in Tokugawa times. Aside from the domainal schools (藩校, hankō) which were usually reserved for the more advanced training of samurai, early modern Japan saw a multiplication of primary schools, the terakoya (寺子屋), as well as large scale self-supporting private academies (私塾, shijuku), offering advanced and/or specialized training in the arts, humanities or sciences. Richard Rubinger, in his study of private academies, provides the following data: in the years 1751 to 1788, there were 38 shijuku, 47 terakoya and 40 han schools listed in Japan. By the time of the restoration, these numbers had reached 1076 for the shijuku, 10,202 for the terakoya and 225 for the han schools.\textsuperscript{18} This boom in education had several profound consequences for Japan’s early modern society. First, as both the primary schools and private academies

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17}Ekkehard May. \textit{Die Kommerzialisierung der japanischen literatur in der spaten Edo-Zeit (1750-1868)}. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983, p. 133.
\end{itemize}
accepted commoners, status no longer prevented access to knowledge. The terakoya usually limited themselves to providing the rudimentary education necessary to grasp simple texts, that is to say primarily the knowledge of kana and basic kanji, sometimes a little arithmetic and Confucian studies. However, the publishing industry’s practice of adding ample furigana glosses next to all but the simplest kanji, made a wide range of texts accessible to those of only limited education. Besides, by the end of the period, city terakoya curriculum offered training sufficiently elaborated to even awaken in their pupils a keen sense of contemporary political issues.19 As a result, educated commoners not only gradually replaced samurai and priests as primary teachers in long-standing schools but also, following the drive for entrepreneurship, many established new schools, thereby exponentially stretching the area in which education was available.20

Moreover, the increasing demand by the domains for specialists promoted the development of yūgaku (遊学) scholarship programs under which provincial young men


20 Brian Wesley Platt, looking at the evolution of teachers during the Edo period, shows that the percentage of commoner teachers increased as the period progressed. At the close of the period, the percentage of commoners engaged in teaching reached about 84% in the Shinano province. See Platt Brian Wesley. “School, Community, and State Integration in Nineteenth-Century Japan”. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1998, p. 23.
were sent to study in city *shijuku*, creating opportunities for widening their experiences and knowledge of the land beyond their local community through first-hand interaction in a diversified student body. Understandably, such commonly-found arrangements helped in breaking regional barriers and promoting a more unified national culture. This heightened need for advanced training also provided opportunities for social mobility as well as class erosion, as the sharing out of maintenance duties and the merit-based evaluation systems in private academies took no account of students’ difference in origin.\(^{21}\)

This dissemination of urban learning to the peripheries, in return, fostered the development of regional culture. From the numerous records remaining of wealthy aspiring scholars leaving the countryside for Edo or Kyoto outside of *yûgaku* arrangements in order to get advanced training, one can see that many returned to their provinces with books and prints to open a school and transmit their knowledge. Frequently, these scholars stayed in contact with their former classmates and teachers in the city, thereby establishing nationwide intellectual networks along which information flowed. For example, Kaya Shirao (1737-1791), after opening his own *haikai* school in Edo, frequently returned to his native Shinano province during the summer and winter to instruct aspiring commoner poets, many of whom became *haikai* teachers themselves.\(^{22}\) By the 19th century, schooling had become so commonplace in Japan that visiting foreigners never ceased to marvel at how integral a part of urban and rural landscape literacy was. In 1858, British captain

\(^{21}\) Rubinger 1982, pp. 15, 23, 80, 97, 149.

\(^{22}\) Platt 1998, pp. 33-34.
Sherard Osborn, spending a few weeks in Edo, wrote "a knowledge of reading and writing is very general amongst these people, more so we fear than in England."23

Finally, it should be remembered as well that, especially in small-scale communities such as villages, given the proximity of people and their daily interaction, one reader alone could actually enlighten the collective whole. Through public reading and second-hand intelligence, people with little or no reading ability could acquire information and participate in political discourse.24 Generally too, the impact and pervasiveness of ideals carried by the media is reinforced by the fact that each individual exposed, through his membership in smaller collectivities would propagate the message in oral conversation.

For the reasons cited above, we can assume that, after 1750 and at least in Edo, Kyoto and Osaka, as well as in regional castle towns and along the Gokaidō network, a significant portion of the Japanese population were given both the necessary tools and a sufficient degree of exposure to media in order to participate in the making of a shared consciousness. As a number of scholars have already suggested, fundamentally speaking, the class-free intelligence osmosis resulting from the underemployment of the samurai caste, the development of communication networks and the rise of literacy, might well be


the most important characteristic of the Edo period. This is what contrasts it the most with the middle ages and is its surest link to the contemporary world.25

In this thesis, I will try to demonstrate, mainly through the works of Hiraga Gennai and Shiba Kôkan, how Mt. Fuji was articulated as a political tool for cultural integration during the late Edo period. First focusing on Gennai’s most famous work of fiction, the Fûryû Shidôken den, I will then examine the writings and paintings of Kôkan. Through this investigation, I hope the use of Mt. Fuji as a national symbol of the Japanese nation before its transformation into a modern nation-state will become evident.

2.1: Gennai’s life and thought

Among the great intellectuals who animated the various discourses operating in Japanese intellectual circles during the Edo period, Hiraga Gennai (平賀源内, 1728-1779) was certainly one of the most colorful. Gennai’s career was extremely varied. His multiple endeavors spanned fields as diverse and distant as natural sciences (or more exactly honzógaku 本草学), rangaku (蘭学), mining, painting and literature. His vitriolic writing style was ambitious to a degree sometimes bordering on egotism, and his multiple talents, coupled with a rather unorthodox stance vis-à-vis a feudal system that severely limited his prospects, would ensure Gennai’s marginal but astonishing existence a legendary status even during his lifetime. Indeed, so singular was his life that his friend Sugita Genpaku (杉田玄白, 1733-1817), shocked by Gennai’s unexpected death26, composed the following poem:

اذ عاش قوم

Ah, an extraordinary man!

خليال شئ

He was fond of extraordinary things

What he did was extraordinary
But why must his death be so extraordinary?27

In order to analyze a particular discourse about Mt. Fuji that Gennai held in one of his most famous works of fiction, the Fûryû Shidôken den (風流志道軒伝, 1763), I would like to start by giving a short account of the author’s life. Gennai was born a low ranking samurai (ashigaru 足軽) in a small coastal city in the Takamatsu fief. Very little is known about his childhood, but by 1744 we know that the daimyo of Takamatsu, Matsudaira Yoritaka (松平頼恭, 1739-1771), recognizing the young prodigy’s talent for the field of honzôgaku, employed him as pharmacist (kusuri bôzu 薬坊主).

Honzôgaku, originally a Chinese tradition, was a discipline annexed to the medical sciences, which focused on the study of trees, herbs and plants (sometimes minerals as well) for their therapeutic value. The so-called honzôgakusha tried to draw an inventory of the natural resources that were available in the land and determine their correct name, taste and possible usage in medicine. It is here worthy of note that this particular frame of mind, this particular way of looking at the land to put its resources to practical use, fundamentally influenced Gennai.

In 1752, the same daimyô sent Gennai to Nagasaki to learn western medical techniques, probably under one of the numerous physician-translators who ensured

communication between the small Dutch community stationed on Dejima island and Japanese officialdom. This first encounter with the West profoundly impressed the young scholar who, once back in Takamatsu after a year spent in Nagasaki, took a series of rather drastic measures to disengage himself from the *han* and realize his ambition of a career at the national level.

Gennai spent the next two or three years traveling in the Kansai region, sojourning in Osaka and Kyoto. These years attest to his first invention and commercial endeavor: a compass, certainly based on a Dutch model he acquired in Nagasaki, realized at the demand of Kimura Wataru (who would become a minister of Yoritaka), and the establishment of a small pottery manufacturing industry in the region of Shido. The interest Gennai took in pottery stemmed from his awareness of the trade imbalance that plagued Japanese exchanges with China and the Dutch. In the 1750s Japanese pottery was of too poor a quality to be favorably considered for export by foreign dealers in Nagasaki. On the contrary, Japan imported large quantities of pottery goods made in Holland and China, quality products highly appreciated by masters of the tea ceremony. Gennai must have also learnt in Nagasaki the techniques necessary to replicate foreign earthenware and, after finding appropriate soil, thought that stimulating the production of ceramics that were qualitatively equal to those that Japan imported, would prove useful to his country. National benefit (*kokueki* 国益) is indeed a recurring theme in Gennai’s writing and motivated most of his endeavors, as we will also see with his efforts to follow

Tanuma’s policy to increase mining resources.\textsuperscript{29} Eliminating the cost of ceramic imports and providing Japan with a new export product should have been a seductive idea for the authorities but, unfortunately, despite repeated efforts over the course of his lifetime, these \textit{Gennai-yaki} (源内焼) never attracted the attention Gennai foresaw they would receive and our entrepreneur-inventor moved on to seek fame elsewhere.

Gennai arrived in Edo in 1757 and first stayed in Kanda at the Shôheikô, which was the official center of Confucian studies in Edo until the early 1760s.\textsuperscript{30} Since it is clear from Gennai’s writing that he did not hold Confucian scholars in high esteem, his motivation for staying at the Seidô must have been other than scholarship; most likely he saw in his registration no more than a means to get affordable accommodations in the city.\textsuperscript{31} After settling down, he enrolled in the school of the famous \textit{honzôgakusha} Tamura Ransui (田村藍水, 1718-1776) and that of the \textit{kokugakusha} Kamo no Mabuchi

\textsuperscript{29} Jones 1968, pp. 32 & 118.

\textsuperscript{30} Under the direction of the Hayashi family, teaching members of the Shôheikô (originally known as the Seidô) were in charge of instilling a state backed version of Confucianism, initially into a select audience (including the Shogun). Following the directive of Shogun Yoshimune, the audience of the daily lectures offered by this institution widened considerably and, by the time Gennai reached Edo, audience was also granted to people outside the samurai class. See Maes Hubert. \textit{Hiraga Gennai et son Temps}. Paris: École Française d’Étreme Orient, 1970, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{31} ibid.
(賀茂真淵, 1697-1769.) The relation he had with Ransui was more productive and continuous than his attendance at Kamo no Mabuchi’s school; yet both men had a clear influence on Gennai’s thought.

Ransui, who conceived nature as a realm that man ought to utilize, distinguished himself from previous honzôgakusha by the distance he maintained from the Chinese tradition and his focus on extensive cataloging of the natural products available throughout Japan. He also experimented with the cultivation of new crops, notably ginseng (thus far an expensive import from Korea) to develop the national economy. With Ransui, Gennai organized the first exhibitions of natural products (bussankai) in Japan, which would grant him the fame that he was looking for. Of the samples displayed (around 2000 total), about half came from the personal collection of the organizers and the remaining half from private contributors from all over Japan. The goal of this exhibitions was twofold: first educational, by showing the public the various components of contemporary medications as well as allowing other honzôgakusha to attach the correct name to a particular object; and also entrepreneurial: to foster research


and prospects on a national scale.\textsuperscript{35}

The first exhibition was such a success that it was soon followed by a number of other events of the same kind, not only in Edo but also in Osaka, Kumamoto and Kyoto. The phenomenon reached its height of popularity in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, when \textit{bussankai} were held on a regular basis in all the major provincial towns.\textsuperscript{36} According to Mary Elizabeth Berry, this great movement of enumeration, assessment, and cataloging of resources and products is characteristic of Japanese early-modernity. Over the course of the Edo period, writers of guidebooks, mapmakers and publishers of information about the land gradually claimed an open and egalitarian access to Japan’s cultural landscape. Through this process, cultural literacy became more important than social status to claim membership in society. By the mid-Edo period, inquiry was no longer limited to the physical characteristics of the nation as many writers started to turn towards social criticism—a trend that is exemplified, I believe, by the works of Hiraga Gennai especially the \textit{Fûryû Shidôken den}. Interest in the characteristics of the land spurred an interest in culture and social norms. This in turn, created the context for an assessment of the social status quo.\textsuperscript{37}

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\textsuperscript{37} Berry 2006, pp. 50-54.
\end{flushleft}
The celebrity Gennai enjoyed after the start of the *bussankai* had a tangible repercussion on his life. It drew him to the attention of a powerful patron: senior counselor (*rōjyū*, 老中) Tanuma Okitsugu (田沼意次, 1716-1788.)\(^{38}\) It is not surprising to see an association between the two men, as Tanuma and Gennai shared a number of characteristics. Both were born low-rank samurai and actively worked toward raising their status; both were interested in western technology and the world outside Japan. Under Tanuma’s leadership, Japan’s seclusionist policy regarding book imports was considerably relaxed, allowing for a much greater influx of foreign ideas as well as much closer and frequent interactions between Japanese officials and Dutch representatives. Aside from personal interest,\(^{39}\) Tanuma saw in the West a means to better the Japanese economy and, consequently, actively encouraged western studies. From their first meeting on, Tanuma showed great interest in Gennai’s endeavours. Not only did he repeatedly invite the scholar to report on the advancement of his studies, he also personally financed Gennai on many occasions and gave his protégé what he truly desired: opportunities to put his knowledge to use for the sake of his country.

Owing to the influence of both Ransui and Tanuma, the *bakufu* repeatedly sent Gennai on special missions: in 1761 to Izu in order to supervise the production of soda ash; and around 1770 regularly to the region of Chichibu, where he discovered a number of natural resources: asbestos (which he unsuccessfully tried to weave and

\(^{38}\) Hall 1955, pp. 95-96.

\(^{39}\) Tanuma was extremely interested in western objects. Maes 1970, p. 64.
commercialize), gold, silver, copper and iron. After further prospecting, Gennai started exploiting the iron deposit, a choice that was most likely guided by Tanuma’s attempt to reform Japan’s monetary system with the introduction of new currency: small silver and iron coins.\(^{40}\) But despite initial success, problems refining the ore as well as the sudden change in bakufu financial policy brought his mining endeavors in the region to an end in 1775.

Meanwhile, in 1773, the daimyô of Akita, Satake Yoshiatsu (also known as Satake Shozan, 1748-1785, 佐竹曙山), invited Gennai to help separate the silver metal from the copper extracted in the Ani mine (leading to a subsequent rise in the domain’s profits) and to make a general survey of the resources available in Akita.\(^{41}\) As a bureaucrat, one of Satake Shozan’s most significant accomplishments was the amelioration of the finances of his han, but he was also an accomplished painter. Founding figure of the “Akita School,” he first trained in the Kanô style and became interested in Western painting techniques (yôga) after meeting Gennai.

Western painting techniques were first introduced in Japan by the Jesuits but faded into oblivion after the Christian’s expulsion and the enforcement of the ban on Christianity. Gennai had studied Western painting, probably during one of his stays in Nagasaki, and was, at the time, also considered the first Japanese to try to revive and

\(^{40}\) Hall 1955, p. 68.

\(^{41}\) The Akita domain is located in the northern part of Japan’s main island, Honchû, that is, several hundred kilometers away from Edo.
apply these techniques.\textsuperscript{42} It was his interest in European pigments as a \textit{honzógakusha} that first sparked Gennai’s interest in Western painting. He also immediately realized the benefits to not only \textit{honzógaku}, but other fields as well, of being able to realistically depict the subjects of their study, and became an ardent advocate of \textit{yóga}.\textsuperscript{43} While he was in Akita, Gennai introduced several painters, including Shozan and his retainer Odano Naotake (小田野直武, 1749-1780), to the concepts of shading and perspective. Odano, favorably impressed with the education he received in Akita, became Gennai’s disciple and followed him back to Edo to further his studies of Western art.

It is in light of this highly abbreviated, sketchy account of Gennai’s biography that we must now turn to the last facet of his life, his literary career, and look at his most famous literary piece, the \textit{Fûryû Shidôken den}.

\textbf{2.2: The treatment of Mt. Fuji in the \textit{Fûryû Shidôken den}}

The \textit{Fûryû Shidôken den}\textsuperscript{44} (風流志道軒伝) was published in 1763 in five volumes.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Maes 1970, p. 133.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Jones 1968, pp. 66-69.
\end{itemize}
volumes and stands out as Japan’s first fantastic voyage. The story, with its many puns, erotic dimension and unusual settings is highly entertaining. The book was an immediate success, it was reprinted often during the Edo period and remained popular well into the Meiji period. The tale is loosely based on the life of Fukai Shidôken (1680-1765) who first served as a Shingon priest in Kyoto but abandoned the priesthood to travel the country, eventually drifting to Edo where he became hugely famous as a preacher/entertainer giving public lectures on the grounds of the Asakusa temple.

The narration follows the life of a young monk, Asanoshin, who embarks on an erotic quest for meaning due to a fortuitous encounter with a pedagogically-minded Taoist hermit. After touring the city of Edo, particularly the red light districts, Asanoshin visits many places in Japan (particularly brothels) and finally leaves the country, using a magical fan imbued with the powers of the hermit, to further broaden his horizons. His travels take him to many lands, fantastic and real, among which, the realm of little people, of giants, of long legs, the kingdom of women, China and Korea. After a life spent inquiring into the mysteries of human relationships and exploring foreign lands to articulate the place of Japan in the world, Asanoshin has, according to Regine Johnson, learned lessons about the value of his country. His experiences abroad have led Asanoshin to articulate an independent place for Japan in the world as well as to reject

the China-centric chauvinistic assumption that all who do not follow the lead of the culturally superior middle kingdom are mere barbarians. He is brought back home by his protector, the Taoist hermit, and must now pass on his knowledge to the masses. The story ends with a scene depicting Asanoshin hitting his walking stick on the ground of the Asakusa temple to gather an audience to start telling his life story.

It is easy to see in the _Fûryû Shidôken den_ the literary expression of the many trends that characterize Gennai’s intellectual life, chiefly his interest in travel and the world outside Japan. But was the _Fûryû Shidôken den_ conceived purely as a fiction meant to divert the public? In her doctoral dissertation, Regine Johnson examines the literary and pictorial information about the outside world circulating in Japan up to the time in which the _Fûryû Shidôken den_ was published. She concludes that in Gennai’s time most people did not believe in the existence of the fantastic worlds so vividly depicted through Asanoshin’s odyssey. Given Gennai’s clear inclination towards pedagogical initiative visible not only in his actual undertakings, but also in the articulation of the basic plot of the story and the obvious link between the fictional character Fûrai Senjin and Gennai himself (he signed the book with his nom de plume Fûrai Sanjin), it seems clear that the _Fûryû Shidôken den_ was meant to be read as edutainment. The author purposely chose to include fantastic lands that no one believed in to avoid interference with a more serious

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46 Johnson 1989, p. 111.


48 Johnson 1989, p. 117.
message—regarding the definition of Japanese identity—and to build momentum for his
discussion of the position of Japan vis-à-vis China. I believe that the fantastic (and the
erotic) were used by Gennai to enliven a didactic message that otherwise might have been
too stiff for the general public and provides him with mock “others” against which to
contrast his own country in order to spread particular ideas of what exactly made Japan
unique, made Japan as “nation.”

In fact, Gennai’s attempt to articulate Japanese national identity reflected a
public dialogue in which a great number of intellectuals from the Tokugawa period took
part. Starting with the Neo-Confucians Hayashi Razan (林羅山, 1583-1657) and Arai
Hakuseki (新井白石, 1657-1725), following with the kokugakusha Kamo no Mabuchi,
Motoori Norinaga (本居宣長, 1730-1801) and Hirata Atsutane (平田篤胤, 1776-1843),
these scholars successively reinterpreted the founding texts of the Japanese tradition to
construct arguments dealing with the Japanese unique bicephalic power structure
(religious power held by the emperor and politico-military power held by the shogun).
Each of these philosophies held paramount a particular system: the Neo-Confucian

49 The Fûryû Shidôken den originally contains eleven illustrations (seven in the first
volume and four in the second) but none of them represent Mt. Fuji. These illustrations
can be seen online in the 1791 edition held in the Waseda library. A copy of this edition
is accessible at

<http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/hei13/hei13_01791/index.html> (Last
accessed in June 2011).
disowned Buddhism for Confucianism and the *kokugakusha* refuted both doctrines in search of a “pure” Japanese way.\(^{50}\)

By the time Gennai wrote the *Fûryû Shidôken den* his teacher Kamo no Mabuchi and later Norinaga had retrieved—respectively through their philological research on the *Man’yôshû* and the *Kojiki*—what they thought to be a philosophy exempt from foreign influence. This scientific process of national reconstruction certainly appealed to Gennai’s belief in the practical application of science for the sake of the nation. Recurrently in the *Fûryû Shidôken den*, Gennai makes himself the spokesperson of the *kokugakusha* for whom the destruction of Chinese centrality and superiority was the foundation to establish an independent place for Japan.\(^{51}\)

The things that a man should devote himself to need not go beyond


\(^{51}\) In the following excerpts Gennai echoes the views of Kamo no Mabuchi on the inadequate nature of Confucian teachings to Japan, the importance of poetry and the role of the Emperor. See Flueckiger’s translation of the *Kokuikô* in Peter Flueckiger. “Reflections on the Meaning of Our Country, Kamo no Mabuchi’s Kokuikô.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 63 (2008), pp. 239-263.
scholarship and poetry and painting. But even these, when the instruction is bad, produce backwoods Confucianists who are so out of touch with the times that they will don formal attire to scrub out a well or try to bake a potato with flint and steel. They are so fettered with the trash of Chinese books that they have no freedom at all. […] Though they strain to appear intelligent their efforts are as ineffective as giving a summer airing to a box of armor. Thus, contrary to general belief, they are worse than the most mediocre men. We have names for them: we call them ‘rotten scholars’ and ‘farting Confucianists.’ […] China is China, Japan is Japan, antiquity was a long time ago, and the present is now.52

And again in the conclusion:

The customs of China are different from those of Japan. Their emperor is little more than an itinerant laborer; if he doesn’t suit them, they change him. […] China is so debauched a country that the Sage had no choice but to make his appearance and give guidance. Japan is a country where humanity and justice are preserved; even if no sage comes forth there would still be peace. The Chinese are completely infatuated with their own culture. Yet they let the Manchus take their country from them […] and they have become a bunch of spineless dunces strutting about and calling themselves ‘men of the great Ch’ing Dynasty.’ […] In Japan, the fact that even a small child would be constrained to speak out—at the risk of being disrespectful—should the emperor be treated

52 Jones 1968, pp. 187-188.
Gennai’s pro-Japan discourse becomes particularly caustic with his narration of Asanoshin’s visit to China. After a sojourn in Korea and the Land of the Night to recover from his previous adventures, Asanoshin opts to visit China. In front of the imperial palace of Emperor K’ien-long in Beijing he suddenly decides to resort to his master’s magical fan to make himself invisible and visit the palace. But, upon reaching the closed quarters, he is immediately seduced by the sight of the emperor’s 3000 imperial consorts. Captured by so much beauty, Asanoshin hides himself in the building and every night enjoys the company of these ladies. Finally tricked into revealing himself, he is made captive by the guards and dragged in front of the emperor. The sovereign, intrigued by Asanoshin’s eloquence and experiences abroad, forgets to punish him and invites the hero to remain in the palace to entertain the Court with his travel stories.

The court is particularly interested by Asanoshin’s description of the splendor of Mt. Fuji:

In my home, Japan, we have a famous mountain named Fuji. In size it far exceeds the Five Sacred Mountains [of China.] Its eight-leaved peaks tower high in the sky, and throughout the four seasons the snow on it never melts. From whatever province one looks, the sight is, as an old poem says, ‘like a

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53 Jones 1968, pp. 239-240.
white folding fan hanging upside down.’ […] The wind rushes out of Lava Cave and cool the whole world, and the snow that falls at Mount Fuji’s foot is made into a delicious drink we call ‘white sake.’ Such as the Five Sacred Mountains cannot hold a candle to Fuji.54

The Chinese emperor, upset to see his country’s best mountains lose to Mt. Fuji, invests Asanoshin with the mission to replicate Mt. Fuji in papier-mâché using one of the five peaks as a base. After collecting paper and glue from all over China, Asanoshin takes command of a fleet of 30,000 vessels headed for Japan in order to take an impression of the mountain. Meanwhile, the deity of Mt. Fuji, hearing of the plot, thinks that it would be a disaster for her country to let the Chinese make a replica: “for a copy of this famous mountain under my protection to be made in an alien land would be a disgrace to Japan.”55 She summons all the Japanese deities to the summit of Mt. Fuji to elaborate a plan in order to stop the endeavor. After deliberation, they decide to deal with the Chinese fleet the same way they did with the Mongolian army when it was about to invade Japan, and the gods of rain, wind and hail are sent to sink the boats before they have a chance to dock.

Thus, through Gennai’s clever linguistic manipulation, Fuji comes to embody Japan as a whole and the five peaks are propelled to the status of China’s representative.56

54 Jones 1968, pp. 221-222.
56 Marcia Yonemoto. Mapping Early Modern Japan. Space, Place, and Culture in the
But, if we can easily trace Gennai’s articulation of Japanese superiority over China to Mabuchi’s writings (and even more to those of Norinaga), the author’s bold treatment of Mt. Fuji as the greatest symbol of Japan seems problematic. To my knowledge, nowhere in his work did the *kokugakusha* suggest a link between Fuji and Japan as a “nation.” We are thus forced to look elsewhere to find the source of Gennai’s inspiration.

Needless to say, the manner in which Asanoshin glorified Fuji in front of the emperor of China reflected the pride Edo residents took in living in a city from which Fuji was clearly visible.\(^57\) It was the biggest dream of a true Edoite to go once in his lifetime on a pilgrimage to the grand shrine in Ise and to climb Fuji. And for those with less time, disposable income, or just seeking an experience closer to their dwellings, by the time of the *Fûryû Shidôken den*’s publication, Edo was already filled with replicas of the mountain (*Fujizaka* 富士坂). These replicas were built by members of the tirelessly striving Fuji religion (*Fujikô* 富士講) and allowed believers to practice devotions without the hassle of actually traveling to the real mountain.\(^58\)

In the second chapter of the *Fûryû Shidôken den*, Gennai makes an interesting

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\(^{58}\) For a list of the *Fujizaka* built during the Edo period see, for example, *Fujisan kentei hôtei tekisuto*, 2006, p. 97, or Henry D. Smith. “Fujizuka: The Mini-Mount Fujis of Tokyo.” Conference paper published by *The Asiatic Society of Japan* 3 (1986).
allusion to the Fujikô. While still in Japan, Asanoshin, wishing to know the state of things in Edo, has recourse to the magic fan to display in front of him what life in the city is like. Thus, a series of visions emanate from the fan, taking Asanoshin month by month through Edo’s calendar. For the 5th month, Gennai presents us with the image of a “crowd that rushes up to the celebration of Mt. Fuji, lift[ing] so much dust from the ground that one wonders whether or not these are clouds created by the straw dragon.”⁵⁹ The celebration referred to here with “Gennai-esque” wit is that of the Fuji shrine located in Komagome (騒町富士神社, located in the Bunkyô ward of Tokyo), famous for its replica of Mt. Fuji. The Komagone shrine was already known by Gennai’s time as an important sanctuary of the Fujikô.

That Gennai knew the Fujikô seems very natural. He was very well connected in Edo and was a keen observer of the mores of his contemporaries. Moreover, his protector Tanuma was already a bakufu official (Chief of the Bureau of Palace Upkeep) in 1742 when the bakufu issued the first ban directed against this new religion.⁶⁰ Did

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⁵⁹ The original reads

五月[に][…]不二祭りの群集の足にごみ踏立れば、麦藁の龍も雲を起こすかと疑はずれ[…]. Chapter two is absent from Stanleigh’s translation but can be found in Maes’s adaptation of the text in French: Maes 1979, p. 23. Maes informs us that the pun here plays on the fact that after participating in this event, people would take back home a long net made of woven straw called mugiwara-ryû, “straw dragon.”

⁶⁰ Hall 1955, p. 35.
Tanuma and Gennai ever discuss the case of Fujikô? If so, there are no records proving it but the bakufu reissued a ban on Fujikô in 1775, the year after Tanuma’s downfall from the central government. Surely, the movement’s growth in the 1760-70s had caught the eye of the shogunate during the years Tanuma was at the height of his power. In any case, Gennai’s depiction of Mt. Fuji as the greatest mountain of the world (不二の万国の山) closely reproduces one of the fundamental ideas of the key figures of the Fujikô movement, Jikigyô Miroku (食行身縁, 1671-1733), whose disciples are credited with starting the Fujikô boom in Edo. In Miroku’s writings, Mt. Fuji is treated as the origin of China, India and Japan (不二は三国の根元地),61 that is to say, the most important mountain in Asia.

Knowing his aversion to subservience, it would not really be surprising to see in Gennai’s writings an aspiration towards a more egalitarian social system. The scholar was indeed fiercely attached to his freedom. Suffering from his low status within the feudal system, he constantly refused stable positions in the service of a particular lord, and attempted to serve his country from the social outskirts.62 Would the Fujikô doctrine

62 Gennai’s aversion to official employment (apart from temporary positions) is most striking during his visit to Akita. The powerful daimyô of Akita, Satake Yoshiatsu, seduced by Gennai’s multiple talents, offered him a domain of 2000 koku. Yet Gennai turned down the offer and returned to Edo. See Maes 1970, p. 132.
have been attractive to him? Maybe so, since Miroku advocated equality between all classes of society (samurai, peasants, artisans, and merchants) and had predicted the destruction of Japan’s feudal system and the advent of democracy.\(^6^3\)

We have already mentioned the polymath’s chief concern with the practical application of knowledge and talent for the benefit of the nation. I believe we should see in the *Fûryû Shidôken den* yet another manifestation of this trend, a literary example rather than an entrepreneurial one. Following the lead of Kamo no Mabuchi, Gennai, as much as his hero Asanoshin, engages in a discourse that seeks to define what Japan is, a goal we are constantly reminded of through Asanoshin’s repeated assertions “わがは日本のものなり”, I am a person of Japan\(^6^4\). Regardless of a possible personal interest in the Fujikô beyond that of pure curiosity, Gennai’s genius (pedagogically and intellectually speaking) probably sensed the opportunity to use a popular fad in Edo for the benefit of the “nation,” and overlaid a strong image of Mt. Fuji onto his ideal vision of his country, a Japanese community undivided by the barriers between han.\(^6^5\)

In any case, even if for Gennai the association Fuji = Japan was no more than whimsical or perhaps coincidental, it left a profound impression on his followers. Rekisai


\(^6^4\) This usage of the term “Japanese” is in sharp contrast with other contemporary travel accounts in which the authors never make it so explicit. See Yonemoto 2003, p. 119.

\(^6^5\) Inagaki 1989, p. 56.
Rôjin in his biography of Gennai, Hiraga jikki (平賀実記) published in 1788, relates that Gennai, on his way to Edo for the first time, stopped by Mt. Fuji. The climbing season was already over, but Gennai insisted on climbing the mountain anyway, explaining that Fuji was indeed the greatest mountain of the three kingdoms.

Using an unusual device—a Dutch torch that projected light 100 feet around and produced an intense heat—Gennai safely reached the summit. There, he looked in all four directions and raising his hand said: “one must firmly make up his mind, for even if one is thinking about the benefit of the nation, if he has no energy, realizing this dream will be difficult” (志を立国益を考えても勢ひなくぼ成就し難し).

Beyond the fact that Rekisai’s account of Gennai’s trip to Mt. Fuji is surely romanticized, the author still presents us an interesting image very much in line with the Fûryû Shidôken den, in which, via Gennai, the interest of the “nation” is superimposed on Mt. Fuji.

It is likewise no coincidence that Gennai’s spiritual successor, Shiba Kôkan, displayed a lasting interest in the natural monument as well. In the following section, we will see how he visually translated Gennai’s idea and how he used these images to

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66 It is unclear who this Rekisai Rôjin was. Kano suggests he was a close acquaintance of Gennai. Kano 1994, p. 44.


68 ibid. The translation is mine.
promote cultural cohesion in Japan.
Chapter 3: Visual Images of Mt. Fuji

Written works about the land, national or beyond the seas, fictional or factual, flourished in the Edo period. Gennai was not an exception but rather the norm. National gazetteers such as the Kokka man’yōki 1697 (The thousand leaves record of the provincial flowers, published in 21 volumes covering over 2000 pages) analyzed and enumerated the characteristics of Japan’s various provinces in numerous precise categories covering features as disparate as topography, chief crops and manufacture with figures given for annual productivity, principal sanctuaries and temples, lists of famous places, names and histories of local daimyo families along with a list of the domain’s principal office holders. Other works focused on a given area to cover it to even greater depth. The Edo kanoko (Dappled fabric of Edo), first published in 1687 and regularly updated thereafter, regroups about 300 physical features of Edo in 26 categories, recording in detail—up to the location of famous tea ceremony objects in the city. 69

Interest in the land and its assets as something to be discovered and assessed was sparked by the importation of western ways of seeing. More exactly, this new system of perception was invented in the Netherlands, from which the Japanese imported most of their information about the western world, and was the genesis of a new genre of images, that is, landscape paintings. As Karatani has put it, landscape is not only “what is

outside,” it is a perception created by a change in ways of seeing. During the 17th century, the various political, economic and religious shifts that accompanied the formation of the Dutch state gave new meanings to the land. Whereas other European nations, such as England, turned to their sovereigns to become the symbols of national identity, the Dutch, who had no figurehead to embody the identity of the state, turned instead to their land. Landscape painting through the new association it engendered created in the viewer both a sense of personal identity and a sense of belonging to a wider body of shared identities. Land became thus the locus of the formation of national identity.

European ways of seeing reached Japan in various forms. The western scientific revolution promoted rationalization and empiricism that became the mental lens through which Japanese culture would be appraised. Scientific instruments made perceptible many traditionally invisible factors, such as temperature, atmospheric pressure and time, leading to an explosion of interest in the visible object. The Japanese


72 Jensen Adams 1994, p. 66.

73 Timon Screech. The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan: the Lens Within the Heart. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 29-
craze for the European way of seeing is particularly evident in the list of imports made by the Dutch East India Company. Looking at the remaining lists, one is immediately astonished by the number of glass-made items: drinking cups, bottles, eyeglasses, pocket watch glass covers, opera glasses, microscopes and telescopes are all recurring Japanese imports. The act of “seeing” and the various tools necessary to visually probe the nature of things became inextricably associated with the west.74 By the end of the 18th century, glass items were no longer a luxury but despite being fairly widespread they nevertheless still aroused considerable excitation. In his bestseller Tôtōkaidō hizakurige, Jippensha Ikku (十返舍一九, 1765-1831) relates the popular amazement brought by the telescope:

Come and look, cried a man with a telescope. You can see all the streets of Osaka, down to the very ants crawling on the roads. [...] You can see both young and old and how many pockmarks they’ve got. [...] You can see ’em as wonderful as if you’d got ’em in you hands. [...] Ten thousand miles at a glance.75

Western art with its revolutionary ways of rendering objects in space provided tools to represent the visible world with a precision never reached before. This


75 Thomas Satchell, trans. Hizakurige or Shank’s Mare. Vermont: Tuttle Company, 1960, p. 323.
groundbreaking mode of vision was turned to document and question virtually every facet of human life. In its inherently political way, the western gaze scrutinized, dissected, rationalized and then objectified what entered its field of vision. This in turn made possible a wide discussion of the concept of “Japanesness.”

Nevertheless, articulating a unified definition of “Japaneseness,” or finding its boundaries, was no easy task in a country encompassing so great a diversity of local cultures and dialects. In fact, as we have seen with the example of the Fûryû Shidôken den, many travel diaries revolved around accounts of strangeness and difference.77 Likewise, Jippensha’s famous traveler-heroes from Edo, Kita and Yaji, never stopped trying to make fun of the peculiarity of the many locals met along the Tôkaidô highway. Yet, Jippensha’s genius shows that the assumption of a cultured center and a rustic periphery does not always hold as their pedantry quite often backfires and the locals also play pranks on them.78 Rather than the locals they meet en route, Kita and Yaji become the “rutics” for not caring about local cultures besides their own.

But, as Mitchell notes, “landscape doesn’t merely signify or symbolize power relations, it is an instrument of cultural power.”79 Through the process of democratization


78 Satchell 1960, pp. 116-118.

79 W. J. T. Mitchell ed. Landscape and Power. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
of the western scientific gaze upheld by a rising number of scholars of Dutch studies, the
land was detached from its classical association with literature and emerged as a new
entity ready for exploration and debate. So the discovery of landscape made possible
the association of new meanings with the land. Gradually, gazetteers, travel accounts,
landscape pictures and maps, via their reliance on the observable qualities of the land and
its subjects, started to conceive and then enforce an idea of Japan as a unified national
space. The observed world, the landscape, became politically charged.

If the boundaries of Japanese culture remained subject to negotiation until the
deal of the Tokugawa period, its center was somehow easier to find. As the greatest, most
recognizable feature of the Japanese political landscape, Fuji quickly came to be the
lowest common denominator of “Japaneseness” among a plurality of intellectual
movements. This holds true even among members of directly conflicting ideologies. We
have already seen how much Gennai despised Confucian thinkers and their devotion to
China but it is to be noted that Ogyû Sorai (荻生徂徠, 1666-1728), perhaps the most
Sinophilic figure of Tokugawa intellectual history, was a convinced Fuji nationalist as


80 This might also be partially explained by the fact that many scholars of rangaku were
physicians and, as such, enjoyed a greater degree of intellectual freedom than many in
Tokugawa society. Terrence Jackson. “Socialized intellect: The Cultural Network of

81 Karatani 1993, pp. 27 & 52.
well. In his travelogue, *Fûryû shishaki* (*Report of the Elegant Emissaries*) written in 1706, Sorai put forth a geography in which he considers Fuji as the pillar of sanctity in the universe and the center of the world. To parallel this in the art world, Nakabayashi Chikutô (中林竹洞, 1776-1853), a Nagoya-born, Kyoto-based art theorist and painter of the Nanga tradition (further discussed below), strongly opposed western painting style. Chikutô wrote not only painting treatises but also a discussion on nationalism and, as the backbone of his theories, painted a picture of Fuji, *Marvelous view of the county of the gods* (1837, 神州奇観図, *Shinshû kikanzu*, fig. 5) in which the mountain is treated as the symbol of Japan. He appended the following poem to the picture:

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kamiyo yori       Since the age of the Gods
takaku tafutoki   A venerable mountain in Suruga!
Suruganaru        Surely its form is our sacred country.84
yama ya mikuni no
sugata naruran
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84 ibid. The poem translation is mine.
Interestingly, notwithstanding his radical refusal of western painting techniques, Chikutô’s *Shinshû kikanzu* displays the same attention to detail one can find in Ike Taiga’s (池大雅, 1723-1776) “true view” (*shinkeizu*) paintings, conveying to the viewer the sense of an existing scene. We might even venture so far as to question the influence of western perspective on this picture as the lake on the right hand side of the picture appears to be painted in such a way as to recede in space towards Fuji. Like Taiga, Chikutô was aware of the limitations of ancient painting techniques and the general state of sclerosis in the Japanese art world.\(^85\)

This general understanding of Fuji as the best symbol of Japan transcended both class and geographic boundaries. Kanmei Nanmei (1744-1800), head of the Fukuoka domain school, added Fuji to the Seven Wonders of the World.\(^86\) In his broad worldview, there is little doubt that he saw Mt. Fuji as the best representative of Japan both at home and abroad.

Yet, as revolutionary as the western way of seeing was, its achievements in Europe would not be enough to explain the burning interest it spurred and the speed at which it propagated among all strata of society in Japan. The western gaze entered Japan at a very sensitive moment in art history. By the 18\(^{th}\) century, the two main Japanese schools of painting, Kano and Tosa, that had served respectively the shogunate and the

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\(^86\) ibid. p. 167.
court, seemed to have drained away their repertoire of imagery. At the same time, this impoverishment of the Tokugawa bank of symbols was exacerbated by Japan’s encounter with foreign countries whose power rested not only on very different political postulates but also made active use of visual means in state propaganda. In the words of Kuwayama Gyokushū (桑山玉州, 1746-1799), the most verbal partisan of the Nanga School and a late pupil of Taiga, Kano painters and their emphasis on copying existing works had caused “the mystery and beauty of [Japan’s] famous mountains and valley to be lost to us.” Similarly Shiba Kôkan notes:

There are different schools of artists in Japan—Tosa, Kano and, of late, the Chinese. None of them knows how to draw Fuji. [...] The Chinese style painters [(Nanga painters)] are incapable of drawing the famous mountains and celebrated scenes of Japan. They paint nameless mountains and call them landscapes (sansui). [...] These painters draw mountains and water in whatever

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87 Both schools were well known in Japan. Yet, generation of formulaicism—both Kano and Tosa masters trained their pupils by making them copy works by previous masters—as well as a generalized ban on innovation caused many Japanese to lose interest in the paintings produced by artists of these schools. Screech 2000, pp. 167-168.


way strikes them as interesting, giving free play to their brush. This is exactly the same thing as drawing a dream. [...] Neither the viewer nor the man who painted the picture has the least idea of what it depicts.  

In the view of many contemporaries, Japanese painting had lost authenticity (makoto) which in the words of Norinaga created a lack of observation of natural forms and a general incapacity of painters to conceive of a picture not as a patchwork of fragmented spaces but a cohesive unit. According to Norinaga, this general state of dominance of “in-house rule” over truth was exemplified by Kano master Katsuyama Takushû’s justification for altering reality. In his painting The Floating Bridge at Sano, he represented the famous pontoon bridge as a fixed bridge. Soga Shôhaku, another painter working in Kyoto, was outraged at the liberty Takushû took in his representation of the scene and demanded that he fix his painting to reflect reality. Takushû refused on the grounds that the painting was based on a sketch by Kano Tan’yû (狩野探幽, 1602-1674), one of the most celebrated Kano painters, and official artist to the Shogunate.

Despite the efforts of Shen Nanping’s Nagasaki school of painters to introduce a greater degree of “realism” into Japanese art, critics regarding the compositional harmony of these pictures turned many artists who had started studying Nanping’s style,


91 Screech 2000, p. 169.

92 Screech 2000, p. 143.
including Gyokushû, Shozan and Kôkan, towards other possibilities of pictorial representation. Cohesion and realism became the focus of the debate on painting. The west offered a promising solution, that of pictorial depiction that was both uniform and accurate. Yet, at the same time, these modern discoveries on the part of the west came out of a very different cultural and historical background and so had to be translated into a local cultural language before the Japanese could successfully absorb their own landscape. We shall now turn to the Japanese adoption of the western gaze and look at the influence of this pictorial revolution on representations of Mt. Fuji.

3.1: Towards landscape paintings: Ike Taiga

The first artist who tried to address both these issues of visual cohesion and “realism” was Ike Taiga. Born in Kyoto, Taiga started his artistic carrier as a craftsman town-painter (machi-eshi) producing fans and lanterns for the new, rising commoner market. His more regular customers seem to have consisted of a group of local intellectuals with a common interest in Chinese culture; it is therefore no surprise that the artist sought from a very early age to acquire fluency in Chinese-style painting, especially that of the Chinese literati (Nanga, also called bunjinga). According to the Chinese literati painters, the value of a painting of a particular scene should be judged according

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to the degree to which the painter, after direct observation, has captured the real essence of this particular place.\footnote{Takeuchi 1989, p. 3.} These paintings came to be called “true view” pictures (真景図, \textit{shinkeizu}) and the term first appeared in Japan, in a multivolume set of woodblock prints by Kawamura Minesetsu, \textit{Hundred views of Mt. Fuji (Hyaku Fuji)}.\footnote{Takeuchi 1989, p. 10.}

After his reputation had been established in and around the imperial capital, Taiga’s interest in travel, owed to the \textit{bunjin} tradition, pushed him to leave his hometown in 1748 to voyage northwards, stopping along the way at numerous famous places including Mt. Fuji, Nikkô, and then sojourning in Edo.\footnote{Travel was a popular pastime in the Edo period, especially for literati painters who tried to emulate the Chinese ideal of the liberated man, that is someone who could refresh his soul by direct communication with nature. Takeuchi 1983, p. 155. It was also necessary for these artists to study nature in all its forms through direct observation in order to get inspiration for new paintings. Dianne T. Ooka. “Ike no Taiga: Paintings in the Collection.” \textit{Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin} 66 (1971), p. 33.}

Perhaps due to his interest in botany, during his visit to Edo, Taiga was introduced by Hattori Nankaku to Noro Genjô (野呂元丈, 1693-1761), a scholar of Dutch studies and \textit{honzógakusha} serving the \textit{bakufu}. Noro had translated for the government one of the first books on Dutch botany (阿蘭陀本草和解, \textit{Horanda honzô}...
wage, A Dutch herbal in Japanese). The artist gave Noro a painting demonstration and in return Noro showed Taiga western pictures. While in Edo, Taiga might have also visited the hugely famous Temple of the Five Hundred Arhats (五百羅漢時, Gohyaku Rakanji). Founded as a branch of the Zen temple Manpukiji, with which Taiga had special ties, the temple was a center of Chinese learning in Edo and one of the city’s main touristic attractions. The temple also offered one of the most celebrated views of Mt. Fuji in the city, immortalized by such a prominent artist as Katsushika Hokusai (fig 6). In addition, the temple was also famous for its permanent display of western images.

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98 Takeuchi 1992, p. 117.


100 See for example, Hokusai’s *100 views of Mt. Fuji (Rakanji no Fuji)* as well as his *36 views of Mt Fuji* series (*Gohyaku rakanji sazaedō*).
Shogun Yoshimune had ordered five oil paintings from the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1722 but quickly gave at least two for exhibition in the temple. By 1735, a member of the VOC visiting Rakanji, identified the two western paintings on permanent display at the temple as the ones ordered by the shogun.\textsuperscript{101} Needless to say, these pictures attracted a lot of attention among Japanese painters, who went en masse to make copies; even the more conservative representatives of the \textit{bunjinga} tradition found words of praise for these European oils. Nakayama Kōyō (中山高陽, 1717-1780), an Edo-based \textit{bunjin} painter usually opposed to western depiction techniques, noted in his \textit{Gadan keiroku} (画談鶴助, 1775) after visiting Rakanji that “the Dutch beat everyone in copying the forms of life.”\textsuperscript{102} Interestingly, Taiga received a commission to paint the 500 arhats on sliding doors from Manpukuji in 1756 (fig 7).\textsuperscript{103}

In any case, the sum of Taiga’s interest in empirical studies, particularly botany, and his first experience climbing Mt. Fuji, led the painter towards an interest in landscape and reinforced his beliefs in the practice of sketching from life. Indeed, as Taiga’s adoption of the nom de plume “Pilgrim of the Three Peaks” (\textit{Sangaku dōga}) after his first encounter with Japan’s greatest peaks suggests, his spiritual fascination with mountains, especially with Fuji, would prove to be a major source of inspiration in his

\textsuperscript{101} Screech 1993, p. 425.

\textsuperscript{102} Screech 1993, p. 428.

\textsuperscript{103} Ōtsuki 2000, p. 226.
Taiga went back to Fuji at least two other times during his life, in 1760 and the following year as well. Following a practice increasingly common among traveling artists and intellectuals, Taiga kept and illustrated a diary during the 1760 excursion. His 1760’s *Excursion to the Three Peaks* named after the goal of the participants to climb Japan’s three holy peaks—Hakusan, Takeyama and Fuji—was prompted by a discussion about Fuji. Taiga and his friends were so moved by their exchange that they left on the spot to study in great depth the vegetation on the mountains and record subtle changes in landscape over the seasons.

From his extensive travel sketches, Taiga derived many “true view” pictures, of which roughly half are pictures of Mt. Fuji, such as the series *Fuji in the twelve months* (1762-63, fig 8), a set he organized according to the traditional *yamato-e* theme of the twelve months (*tsubinami-e*). These paintings characterize the combination of empirical studies with the literary sensibility so important to the *bunjinga* tradition. Taiga’s interest in the field of *honzôgaku* is evident in the great precision with which he distinguishes the variety of physical environments at the base of the mountain. Some of the scenes depict easily identifiable existing places; others, because of the meticulous attention given to

104 Takeuchi 1992, p. 16. This particular inclination was shared by Hokusai as well.

105 Shiba Kôkan and Tani Buncho also wrote and illustrated travel diaries. Hayashi Razan, Arai Hakuseki and Ogyû Sorai wrote travel diaries as well.

rendering these scenes, give the impression of existing views but the scene does not physically exist.\textsuperscript{107} We should also note that, following a new practice he established with his painting of Mt. Asama (\textit{True view of Mt. Asama}, 朝熊嶽真景図, fig 9), Taiga also painted the sky in blue, a sharp departure from Japanese conventions that was most likely inspired by western pictures. Yet, while giving a certain sense of “realism,” these paintings are still greatly influenced by medieval poetic and religious traditions. The elongated form of the mountain and the representation of the top of Fuji as having three peaks are references to \textit{yamato-e} painting conventions; the seasonal motifs associated with the mountain mostly derive from classical poetry associations between particular months and settings. In fact, many of Taiga’s settings appear in medieval poetic codices.\textsuperscript{108}

Gyokushû once wrote that “with the appearance of Taiga, the true forms of our country’s celebrated mountains […] have at last begun to appear in paintings.”\textsuperscript{109} Yet for literati painters, pure, true visual realism belonged to the world of “vulgar [and] evil demons.”\textsuperscript{110} Thus, despite Taiga’s genuine attempt to find a new way of looking at his land, especially Mt. Fuji, he could not free himself from the idea of the landscape as merely a vehicle and not an end in itself. Taiga’s \textit{shinkeizu} are fine visual statements

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{107} Takeuchi 1992, p. 62.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Takeuchi 1992, pp. 103 & 106.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Takeuchi 1989, p. 24.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Takeuchi 1989, p. 13.
\end{itemize}
about his own experience but they remain subjective views that both demanded a literarily knowledgeable artist for production and a learned viewer for appreciation.

This stance was problematic on two different levels for the partisans of western-style painting. First, because of the room left in the bunjin tradition for free interpretation during the translation process of a panorama into a picture, the resulting image did not mirror reality (see the Kôkan quote above). At the same time, vernacularization of knowledge seems to have been a central concern for pro-western painting figures in general. Kôkan advocated writing in the common language instead of the more widely used sinified version of Japanese (kanbun). He also wrote in an easy to understand style, giving much practical advice to students aspiring to learn western painting techniques. So it should not come as a surprise that, for the likes of Kôkan, the degree of learning presupposed for a correct appreciation of bunjinga betrayed one of the most fundamental functions of picture making, that is the ability to communicate via non-verbal means to as wide an audience as possible regardless of language differences or educational background.

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111 French 1974, p. 145. Satake Shozan wrote two paining treatises, one in kanbun and one in the vernacular. The topics and information covered in both treatises are quasi identical so it likely that Shozan’s intent in writing a “translation” of his treatise in the common language was to disseminate information among the lower social classes for whom reading it in kanbun would either have been difficult or outright impossible.

112 Naruse Fujio 成瀬不二雄. Shiba Kôkan shôgai to gagyô 司馬江漢 生涯と画業. 2
Kôkan, as if to prove his point, painted a remake of Taiga’s shinkeizu of the famous Minō waterfalls (1744, fig 10). Taiga’s rendering of the scene, while loosely based on the actual topography of the site, is clearly influenced by Chinese woodblock prints, from which Taiga extracted the angle of the picture and the position of the hut. Kôkan’s painting, executed roughly half a century later (fig 11), depicts two shrines instead of a hut and overall his description appears much more plausible. Around the same time, Kôkan also painted another view of the same waterfalls (fig 12) which exemplifies his early interest in western painting techniques as seen in the perspective applied to the stream.

If Ike Taiga’s shinkeizu can hardly be called landscape paintings, as the term is now understood by art historians, his works can nevertheless be seen as bridging two radically different trends in Japanese topographical painting practice, that of the representation of idealized forms of landscape (sansuiga) prevalent in the middle ages and a new emerging trend greatly indebted to western stylistic techniques, that is, fûkeiga.

### 3.2: The advent of the western gaze: Shiba Kôkan and Mt. Fuji as a national symbol

Like Gennai, Shiba Kôkan, too, was a talented polymath whose long list of accomplishments includes introducing and spreading the concept of the heliocentric...
planetary system in Japan, the creation of the first copperplate engraving and the democratization of western painting. As we will see, he also wrote and published extensively, hoping his ideas would reach the greatest possible number of people.

Although western scientific advances fascinated him, Kōkan was by vocation a painter. He started his artistic training by studying Chinese painting under Sô Shisèki (宋紫石, 1715-1786), an Edo-based Nanban artist and friend of Hiraga Gennai interested in western painting who produced a number of illustrations for the latter’s successful bussankai catalogues.\(^\text{115}\) It is highly possible that it is through the introduction of Sô Shisèki that Kōkan met Gennai for the first time, most likely after Gennai’s return from his long trip to Nagasaki and the Kamigata region (1769-1772).\(^\text{116}\)

Gennai’s charisma, vast knowledge of the west and strong views on painting triggered in Kōkan a desire to study western art and technology. The generalized need by all rangaku scholars for painters able to duplicate and create western-style illustration for scientific purpose also certainly contributed to Gennai’s interest in recruiting young and promising painters who could research western painting techniques.\(^\text{117}\) Yet, if Gennai is to be credited for Kōkan’s interest in the west it is impossible to credit him for teaching Kōkan how to paint in the western manner beyond very basic instruction. Gennai was not a painter. The only painting existing today that can be attributed to him (Seiyô fujinzu, fig


\(^{116}\) Naruse 1995, honbunron, p. 83.

\(^{117}\) Naruse 2004, p. 95.
13) falls far short of being a masterpiece; it shows rather than practical skills, an interest in western depiction techniques. We are therefore forced to look elsewhere to find Kôkan’s source of practical knowledge.

As we have already seen, Odano Naotake had followed Gennai back to Edo to officially become one of his students and research western painting as well as copperplate engraving. Odano Naotake already had some practical experience with western painting by the time Kôkan joined Gennai’s circle and records show that he took over the practical side of Kôkan’s painting education.\textsuperscript{118} Naotake, who had been first trained in the Kano school, studied Nanga painting with Sô as well. Early Akita Ranga paintings display this multiple cultural heritage. The picture \textit{Takazu} (鷹図, fig 14) exemplifies these transitional images: the subject is typical of the Kano school, the general composition is inspired by Chinese paintings but the rendering of the background landscape is clearly European. This cultural mix is visible also in Kôkan’s early works as the artist starts to experiment with chiaroscuro and linear perspective in his woodblock prints.\textsuperscript{119} Even more to the point, in his \textit{Kôkan hahazô} (江漢母像, 1781, fig 15), the artist used western shading techniques to give volume to his mother’s kimono, but the rendering of the tree in the background stays faithful to the techniques learned from Sô Shiseki.\textsuperscript{120}

Gradually, however, Naotake started to abandon Chinese painting techniques

\footnote{\textsuperscript{118} Naruse 1995, \textit{honbunron}, p. 93.} 
\footnote{\textsuperscript{119} French 1974, p. 80.} 
\footnote{\textsuperscript{120} Naruse 1995, \textit{sakuhinron}, p. 74.}
and his later paintings are free from these early influences. In his picture of Mt. Fuji (Fujigakuzu, fig 16), the perspective is no longer forced using an enlarged foreground element and appears thus much more natural. The picture’s rendering is done in small strokes much like a copperplate print. These later paintings had a lasting influence on Kôkan who painted a number of copies of Naotake’s works over his lifetime. His painting of Enoshima (Enoshima fuji bôenzu 江之島富士遠望図, fig 17), executed towards the end of his life sometime in the early 1800s, is very clearly based on Naotake’s depiction of the same scene in his Enoshimazu (江之島図, fig 18). Indeed, the sense of open space characteristic of Kôkan’s western-style paintings can certainly be explained by his exposure to Dutch compositions as well as a rejection of the flatness of Kano and Chinese paintings. But it is also, I think, a visible heritage from Naotake’s later landscape paintings.

Kôkan’s involvement with members of the Akita Ranga School was not limited to Naotake. He also knew Shozan personally and collaborated with him to create paintings such as a set of two scrolls depicting a western man and women (Seiyô danjo zu, fig 19) in which Kôkan executed the figures and Shozan the background. Shozan’s painting theories also provided most of the ideas Kôkan discussed in his own treatise on

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121 Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 293.

122 French 1974, p. 42.

western painting, *Seiyô gadan* (西洋画談, 1799).\(^{124}\)

Unfortunately, Gennai’s untimely death in 1779 brought Kôkan’s involvement with the Akita Ranga School to an early end. Naotake was forced to return to Akita and died shortly thereafter. Shozan, perhaps wishing to avoid tarnishing his name through Gennai’s crime (he killed a business associate), distanced himself from both Naotake and Kôkan. The school survived for a short while in Akita through Naotake’s son and a few retainers of the domain but it never regained the drive it had while Gennai was alive.\(^{125}\)

By the early 19\(^{th}\) century, the school had died out, leaving Kôkan the task of spreading western painting in Japan and piercing the mysteries of European lithography.

But even more than the impact on Kôkan’s painting career through his introduction to Naotake, his encounter with Gennai had profound repercussions on Kôkan’s beliefs. First, as can be gathered from Kôkan’s writing, the two knew each other well. In *Shunparo hikki* (春波楼筆記, 1811) in a section labeled “about Hiraga Gennai,” the painter gives precise accounts of Gennai’s career. Kôkan discusses his mentor’s accomplishments and success as a botanist and writer of *kyôgen*, his involvement in mining, the creation of the *erekiteru* (a static electricity generator) and the reason why he became a *rônin*. He also illustrates Gennai’s love for western books with an anecdote and

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\(^{124}\) Naruse 2004, p. 87. A comprehensive comparison of the two works can be found in Naruse 1995, *honbunron*, pp. 187-200.

gives Gennai’s address when they met. In his treaty on Western painting (Seiyô gadan) Kôkan relates:

When I was young, I heard from Hiraga Gennai that formerly, the Dutch had brought to Japan several hundreds of copperplate prints from their country, showed them to the Japanese and tried to sell them. The people’s way of thinking at the time was so shallow they did not think these were marvelous rarities and returned these prints quickly to the Dutch.

This not only shows how well Kôkan knew Gennai, his life and writings, but also could indicate that Gennai might have encouraged Kôkan to research a method of copperplate printing.

As we have seen, Gennai did not directly teach painting to Kôkan but through their close interaction, he successfully passed on his rebel spirit and political activism. Indeed, Kôkan can rightfully be given the title of Gennai’s spiritual successor. Like Gennai, he criticized the unequal social system of the Tokugawa days. It is worth noting here that the intellectual atmosphere in which Kôkan grew, that of the Edo rangaku

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127 Haga 1971, p. 477. The translation is mine.

128 Naruse 1995, honbunron, p. 82.

129 Naruse 1995, honbunron, p. 87.
salons, must also have served as a demonstration of the practical feasibility of equal class interaction. These salons regrouped members from all origins from the most humble to the highest (Kôkan was a commoner, and the salons were also attended by daimyô, for example, Matsuura Seizan of Hirado), who interacted as social equals.¹³⁰

In Shunparo hikki he writes: “In this country, no matter how gifted you are, if you are born into a house of merchant, artisan or farmer, your status is low and you cannot use your talents for the sake of the country. Even if you are talented, because of your status not only are you prevented from putting your talents in the service of our country, but you are also looked upon as a foolish commoner.”¹³¹ And later in a different section:

At the top [of our society] there is the emperor, then the shogun and underneath, samurai, farmer, artisans, merchants and the outcasts. Down to the most humble, they are all human beings. […] They were all born from the land and water of Earth and all have feelings. […] If one looks down upon a person of lower status, only pain is born from it, no happiness at all. […] [This pain] is born from the desire for honors and greed but if one discards this greed, then one’s heart should be at ease.¹³²


¹³¹ Haga 1971, p. 455. The translation is mine.

Like Gennai, Kôkan advocated the opening of Japan to foreign trade, particularly with Russia in order to maintain the price of rice: “for now the price of rice is low so the warriors are not thriving, is it not foolish to think of not trading with Russia?”133 He also firmly condemned the way Russian ambassadors were treated by the Japanese government: “the Russians must surely think now that all the Japanese are beasts!”134

Following in the footsteps of his mentor, Kôkan also asserted his will to serve his motherland and discusses the benefit of the country (kokueki) in several places, especially in relation to the use of pictures as a national tool: “like written characters, pictures should not be used for fun, it would be a loss for the country.”135 Looking at how much Gennai’s thought influenced Shiba Kôkan, it should not come as a surprise that the two men also shared very similar views on Mt. Fuji and the function the celebrated mountain should hold in Japan.

3.2.1: Kôkan and Mt. Fuji

Like Gennai, Kôkan held Mt. Fuji in high esteem. For Gennai, Fuji was the greatest mountain in the world, as it was for Kôkan, “Mt. Fuji is a mountain unique to Japan” and “the famous mountain in Japan.”136 His awe of the mountain was such that he


134 ibid. The translation is mine.

135 Haga 1971, pp. 429-430. The translation is mine.

devoted an entire section of his *Shunparo hikki* to it:

What is peculiar to my country is Mt. Fuji. It is always winter on top of this mountain and regardless of season, the snow on its peak does not disappear. During the summer only its peak is covered in snow but at the slightest cold, the snow starts to fall on the mountain and the view is priceless. I do not recommend looking at Fuji from within the Suruga province but from a distance of 20 or 30 ri, the mountain appears enormous. I do not recommend looking at the scenery from a low land either. The shape of this mountain is unique all over the world. The place called Motoichiba is where white sake is sold and at the same place they also sell pictures of Fuji carved into wooden planks. These are hanging in a little bit of an awkward way but the Dutch on their way to Edo bought several of these images.

This mountain was already erupting before the age of the Gods and over several thousand years, the volcano blew sand in all four directions finally growing to the shape it has nowadays. Till the time when I was a young boy, there was smoke rising from its peak but now it has stopped. The mountaintop existed before the creation of the world when the universe was still shaped like a wave and it was the only mountain in the universe. It is best to look at the mountain from afar. One should not climb Fuji. More than things that do not exist anymore like the spear Amanosakahoko, one should be moved and praise Mt. Fuji. This is why I, too, have painted this mountain already a number of
times. Since I paint images of Mt Fuji using western painting techniques, if one looks at my pictures, one can be reminded of the way in which the sun shining on the snow makes it glow like silver as well as the way in which the snow stays or disappears from the many irregularities of the mountain and the way in which Mt. Fuji exhales clouds.137

There are several important elements in this passage that outline Kôkan’s views on Mt. Fuji. For him, there was a right way to look at the mountain (from a particular distance etc…) and a particular way of representing it, as Fuji must be translated pictorially as faithfully as possible to its natural form. For him, the only way to convey the greatness of the mountain was through western-style painting: “if foreigners were to see Fuji, it would have to be in pictures. But, if this picture did not resemble the mountain the purpose of the picture would not be reached. The way to represent an object truthfully is western painting.”138

As mentioned earlier, the mid- to late-Edo period was characterized by a strong desire to look for the reality of Japan.139 Kôkan too was looking for a way to define “Japaneseness.” His reference to Amanosakahoko, the mythical spear used by the gods Izanagi and Izanami to create the Japanese archipelago, is echoed by his general views on

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138 Haga 1971, pp. 429-430. The translation is mine.

139 That is, the exact features of the land, its various resources, what products were manufactured and where, the particular characteristics of regional culture, etc…
“Speaking of kokugaku, there are people who investigate the old ways of Japan. [...] They write using ancient words that have a certain grace but for people who cannot read these old words it is gibberish.”\textsuperscript{140} The ultimate goal of kokugaku was to recover an original, pure Japanese sensibility free from foreign influence in order to address Japan’s problem of cultural cohesion. But for Kôkan, looking to a distant past for solutions to a current problem was a waste of time. Instead of devoting energy to recreate a past that was long gone, he proposed to turn his contemporaries’ attention towards Fuji. Ultimately, as Kôkan and later Aizawa Seishisai (会沢正斎, 1782-1863) rightfully perceived, the very disparity between rhetoric and reality present in the nativist discourse (among others) would have to be addressed and it is precisely this awareness that pushed Japan gradually towards the adoption of the western nation-state model.\textsuperscript{141}

Finding a means to define Japan was a pressing problem to which a great many, inside and outside the governing sphere, devoted their lifetime. Matsudaira Sadanobu (松平定信, 1758-1829), who succeeded Tanuma to the highest position of the shogunate, used his authoritarian position to probe the limits of his country’s territorial and cultural boundaries in order to fabricate a cultural bond that would bind Japan’s politically fragmented space together.\textsuperscript{142} On the cultural level, Sadanobu ordered copies of all the

\textsuperscript{140} Haga 1971, p. 434. The translation is mine.


\textsuperscript{142} Screech 2000, p. 17.
important artworks in his land. He also was himself an avid collector of fragments of Japanese cultural heritage, down to keeping broken tiles of old temples. With this policy Sadanobu intended to create a sort of repository of a commonly shared cultural heritage. As a result, from 1789 to 1804 he issued in 85 volumes his *Collected Antiquities in Ten Categories* (*Shûko jisshu*, 集古十種). The last category alone, regrouping copies of ancient pictures, put 2600 reproductions in circulation within the Japanese public sphere. With this massive publication enterprise, Sadanobu’s aim was to put at the disposition of every Japanese a summary of Japan’s material culture, a sort of encyclopedia of “Japaneseess” that people could buy and keep at home.\(^{143}\) Sadanobu too, like Kôkan, whose works he knew, was keenly aware of the power of pictures. He also ordered many surveys of the land, always appointing a painter to the expedition team.

Interestingly, the tangible result of Sadanobu’s surveys was not the building of forts to protect the land from foreign invasion or keeping those inside from slipping outside the realm’s borders. The concrete result of these surveys was the creation of images of a particular kind, that is, landscape paintings. For example, the 1793 coastal survey was immortalized in Moriyama Takamori’s paintings in which Mt Fuji repeatedly appears in an attempt to imbue the landscape with its cultural authority.\(^{144}\) Sadanobu also commissioned landscape paintings from the Nanga painter Tani Bunchô (谷文晁, 1763-1840), who built a reputation as a realist painter able to render true-to-life topographic

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\(^{143}\) Screech 2000, pp. 42 & 254.

\(^{144}\) Screech 2000, p. 35.
scenes (see fig 20).

Martin Warnke discussing war landscape writes that “to the commander, the landscape is just a map given concrete form, just as a map is a landscape converted for operational use.”\textsuperscript{145} It is precisely because Sadanobu (who was in charge of Japan’s military defence) and Kôkan were interested in the reality of their country and wanted to find a tangible way to bind Japan’s politically and culturally fragmented territory that they turned their attention to the power of landscape paintings. These images were as much for Sadanobu as for Kôkan political tools to foster cultural integration.

3.2.2: The iconography of power

In his monograph on Dutch studies, Grant Goodman proposes that “rangaku […] was never a ‘grassroots’ movement and did not reflect any demands from below.”\textsuperscript{146} Yet, Kôkan was perfectly aware that his country was divided: “in my country, Japan, the nature of people in the east and in the west is different.”\textsuperscript{147} These divisions created tension among the citizenry and prevented Japan from reaching the level of achievements (political, cultural and also economic) enjoyed by her western counterparts. Kôkan, as much as Sadanobu, strove to provide a solution to this divide for the sake of his country,


\textsuperscript{147} Haga 1971, p. 461. The translation is mine.
for the sake of all Japanese.

Through his research, visual and otherwise, Kôkan deduced that the kind of political unity displayed by European nations was based on spiritual consensus. Much as contemporary Europeans used the East to call attention to problems at home, in Oranda tsûhaku (和蘭通舶, 1805) Kôkan describes France as a marvelous country which, through its use of modern science, had achieved an ideal state of government that cultivated spiritual unity among its citizenry:

French people are kindhearted and polite, and many display great interest in astronomy, surveying and physics. They are also courageous, and always maintain an army prepared for any emergency, but are careful to avoid war by treating others with extreme courtesy. Therefore, France deserves to be the great cultured nation she is. Both the high- and low-born work together to maintain perfect harmony in the country. In the north, on the banks of the Seine River, is the great city of Paris, where the grand and beautiful palace of the king is located. The city is 37 miles in circumference, has 17 gates, and more than 60,000 houses. There are over 100 monasteries, called “cloisters,” as well as churches both large and small. There are also asylums providing for widows and widowers, old persons without children and orphans. Each asylum has a workshop to train people to use whatever powers they have: the blind are taught to use their hands and feet, the crippled to train their eyes and ears. In this way each person learns to make to most of his ability, and none is left to become a
worthless person. There are institutions for children where infants are taken in, so that poverty does not force parents to desert their offspring on the street or throw them in a ditch. There are many hospitals for those who are too poor to afford medicine or who suddenly become ill while traveling. Hospitals are divided into sections for treating various illnesses, such as plague or other contagious diseases. All kinds of medicine are carefully dispensed by responsible persons, and excellent doctors in every hospital see to their patients daily. Hospitals further offer such facilities as clothing, beds, curtains, etc, and there are also nurses (generally old women.) Those who have recovered from illness are given money, clothing, and food to help them begin life anew. There are 30 of these hospitals in France.

When a man finds money or anything else of value on the street, he immediately puts up a notice of what he has found on the church gate. These valuables are of course returned to the person identified as having lost them. In the event that they are unclaimed, they are offered in charity to the poor or contributed to asylums. All charitable institutions are established by the government, a practice followed in other European countries as well. From my examination of the asylum depicted in copperplate pictures brought to Japan, I have discovered that the walls are made of stone with glass set in the windows. The buildings are seven or eight stories high, and of indescribable size and
magnificence.\textsuperscript{148}

Of course such description would have made the leaders of French Enlightenment (especially Voltaire) smile but this comparison of France with Japan allowed Kôkan to emphasize what was problematic at home—the lack of harmony among the citizenry—as well as to illustrate how this integration had been achieved in the west.\textsuperscript{149} European solidarity was fostered by the spiritual unity of the church under the leadership of a government whose symbol, the king, was made clearly visible. To reach the European level of integration, what Japan needed were symbols.

During Kôkan’s lifetime, the idea that Japan had to emulate the west and gain the same kind of cohesion as its European counterparts gradually gained momentum.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148} Translated by French in French 1974, pp. 129-130.

\textsuperscript{149} Nagasaki interpreter Yoshio Kosaku used the same technique to criticize Japanese customs. Reporting on the life of Hollanders, he praises their compassion and benevolence, as well as their moral conduct. Similarly to Kôkan’s account of life in France, Yoshio also noted the Dutch reverence for their king and their freedom in choosing a field of study (this leeway was in sharp contrast with Japanese hereditary practices). Goodman 2000, pp. 71-72.

\textsuperscript{150} Mito scholars Fujita Yûkoku (藤田幽谷, 1774-1826) and later Fukuzawa Yukichi (福沢諭吉, 1834-1901) reached a conclusion very similar to Kôkan’s. Yûkoku proposed that the ruler of Japan must win popular unity and integration. Fukuzawa concluded that since modern western nations derived their strength from a spiritual source, Japan, too,
Through western images and encounters with western political apparatus, actors in the early-modern Japanese public sphere started to conceive concepts of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is Aizawa Seishisai (1782-1863) who first articulated the link between culture, spirituality and politics in a comprehensive discussion, his *New Theses* (*Shinron*, 新論), published in 1825 just a few years after Kôkan’s death. Although these men were in disagreement over the place the west should occupy in Japan, they shared a striking number of similarities in their approach to the problem of Japanese political integration. In *New Theses*, Aizawa advances the idea that the Japanese spiritual void needs to be filled in order to unite the people: “Barbarian leaders seduce their people into spiritual unity. […] Can we rely on restrictive traditional policies, policies designed to weaken the realm and make commoners ignorant?” He also recognized that the basis of European nation-states were western cultural advancements that enabled the ruler to mobilize his subjects spiritually towards a common national goal. He called this popular unity and allegiance “kokutai” (national polity). In order to create a Japanese *kokutai*, Aizawa realized the division between classes had to be at least partially abolished. Japan had to acquire the spirit of western civilization. Maeno Ryôtaku, physician to the lord of Tango and otherwise well-known Edo *rangakusha* who worked with Sugita Gempaku on the publication of the celebrated anatomy treaties *kaitaishinsho* (解体新書, 1774), went as far as discussing the idea of electing a leader. Wakabayashi 1986, pp. 54 & 106.


had no need for a specialized military class dissociated from the land. To compensate for a drastic diminution in the number of samurai, Aizawa proposed the creation of a popular army.\(^{153}\) Through a move to ease Japanese social stratification and establish a merit-based society, Aizawa called for the creation of a wider base of active citizens who would be made into the recipients of his *kokutai*.

But Aizawa, as a member of the samurai who valued Confucian morality, was devoted to the preservation of the existing *bakuhan* system. He sought to strengthen the existing political status quo based on the idea that the ruler acts and governs in the name of heaven. In doing so, the ruler was responsible for educating his subjects. In order to unify Japanese policy and its subjects, Aizawa needed an historical validation for his theory and naturally turned to the Japanese nativist mytho-history focusing on the emperor and his relation to the realm of divinity. With this move, he linked Confucian principles of benevolence/compassion and the ruler’s duty to educate the masses to the purpose of the imperial line in Japan. This new amalgamation in turn allowed Aizawa to transform Confucian morality into religious duty to the emperor. The emperor serves and obeys his divine forefathers, and his subjects in return serve and respect the emperor: “if the whole country reveres the heavenly duties [of filial piety and loyalty], then all will know how to respect the emperor.”\(^{154}\) Since the *bakufu* was serving the emperor, this


move would not only secure mass allegiance to the emperor and his shogunal appointee but also unite all four classes.

Aizawa also proposed the creation of national shrines where Japanese subjects could offer their respects to the emperor and through him to the gods of the land in order to propagate this new unity between past and present, ruler and ruled.

In short, Aizawa asserted that the only way for Japan to become a modern nation was to create a national body using the emperor as a spiritual father to all Japanese. The practical implication of Aizawa’s theory was to put the emperor on public display (like a European monarch) so that the bakufu could exploit the imperial house’s mystical qualities and through the power of rituals instill a sense of reverence for the emperor in every citizen. In other words, Aizawa proposed a complete reversal of the Japanese policy of representation of power. For hundreds of years, both the shogun and the emperor had practiced a politic of absence. It was precisely because they were never seen that their aura of power existed. Yet, because of their invisibility, they could not embody the identity of the state. Making the emperor visible was Aizawa’s response to the Japanese need for a national symbol.

If for Aizawa the figure of the emperor imposed itself as the national symbol of Japan, for Kôkan, the answer was to be found elsewhere. Not only because he inherited Gennai’s interest in Mt. Fuji but also because, as a painter, he was deeply influenced by Dutch imagery, not least landscape painting, Kôkan found a solution to the lack of national symbols in the tangibility and immutability of the land. Western painting was the
only way to disseminate his findings precisely because it allowed for a realistic pictorial translation of a philosophical quest for the reality of “Japaneseness.” It also enabled Kôkan to make a visual postulate about cohesion: wouldn’t cohesion in the picture plane encourage cohesion in the realm?

Innovative painting methods were not the only things to be discovered in western images. There was more at work in these images. Kôkan soon realized why European art contributed so much to the high level of cultural achievement in the west. Since he knew the Dutch taught morality through the use of symbols, this contribution he felt had to be related to the importance of icons in European artwork. In the lord of Kii’s library, Kôkan also tumbled upon one of the rare works of European fiction available in Japan at the time, Aesop’s Fables. Apparently, he was so fascinated by the narration’s use of symbols for teaching purpose that he translated a few of these stories into Chinese and even wrote some of his own. Honda Toshiaki (本多利昌, 1744-1820), another rangaku scholar contemporary with Kôkan, was also struck by the importance of symbols in western culture. Looking at a Russian map he writes, “there are human figures on this map. The woman is the empress Ekaterina. There is also the letter E with plants sprouting from it like an aureole. This must mean that the light of virtue is cast on the four continents from the letter E. The four nude figures each represent a continent, and this

155 French 1974, p. 77.

means that all the continents will in the future belong to Russia.”157

Therefore, there is little doubt that Kôkan was aware of the didactic of pictures and must have seen how much Europe made use of visuals for political propaganda. He must also have realized that one of the early functions of landscape paintings was to provide evidence of ownership.158 Kôkan’s landscape paintings were inspired by these European accomplishments and their message was clear: the Japanese people commonly owned Mt. Fuji, making it into the national symbol of Japan.

3.2.3: Kôkan’s Fuji propaganda

As one might expect from the true heir of Gennai’s intellectual heritage, Kôkan too had a rather high opinion of his value to Japan. He considered himself as a sort of prophet of western painting and an enlightened man working towards the modernization of his country.159 Consequently, he naturally thought of teaching his contemporaries what he had discovered studying western science and media. In fact, his attention to popular education comes as a recurrent theme through most of his writings.

Kôkan (and Honda Toshiaki) advocated a simplification of written expression, privileging kana over kanji and the vernacular over Chinese so that a wider portion of the population could gain access to knowledge. Honda even went a step further and

157 Translated by Keene in Keene 1952, p. 87.

158 Warnke 1994, p. 53.

159 French 1974, pp. 84-85.
prescribed the adoption of the western script in Japan. Both criticized the barrier to dissemination and assimilation of knowledge that came as a byproduct of the widespread use of Chinese to write scholarly books. Kôkan was therefore very attentive to writing for the general public. He wrote in an easy-to-understand style; he also printed copies of his books until the woodblocks wore out and then made more.

Via his exposure to western imagery and its didactic use, Kôkan became aware of the educational power of pictures. In *Shunparo hikki*, Kôkan writes: “people without distinction of rank enjoy pictures and color pictures are especially easy to understand for unrefined persons (zokujin).” And in *Seiyô gadan* he explains: ”pictures are used like writing in works like botanical books. This is because, if one does not illustrate these books, how could anyone understand the real shape of these plants?” Unsurprisingly, Honda too recommended images as the best medium for popular education.

At the same time, Kôkan did not think highly of the Japanese masses, which comforted him in his self-appointed duty to enlighten the populace: “it is my understanding that lower class citizens are primarily naïve and unsophisticated—peasants

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162 Haga 1971, p. 248. The translation is mine.
163 Haga 1971, p. 476. The translation is mine.
164 Keene 1952, p. 88.
and the like are all stupid (oroka.)”165 “Peoples’ hearts are easily moved. If they read a book of poems, they want to make poems too. If they see a book, they want to write too. If they hear a travel account, they too want to see the neighboring regions.”166

While on travels, Kôkan frequently shared his knowledge in the hope of educating his compatriots; in Saiyû Nikki he relates the following episode: “September 10 […] I took my map of the world and explained it. […] I said that the world is spherical, that there are many other globes like ours in space, that the space between globes is what we call the sky, and no living person can fly through this space unless he becomes a deity.”167

As I have mentioned already earlier, the Edo-period boom in commercial printing as well as the growing participation of Japanese citizens in discussing issues related to state-making created an audience for Kôkan’s message.168 “Seeing” was no longer the privilege of a literary educated elite and thus Kôkan endeavored to advertise his message, to educate this new and rising audience. Following the example of European landscape painters—particularly Dutch painters—he sought to represent a key landmark in a way that imparts a political message to the public.169

165 Haga 1971, p. 458. The translation is mine.
166 Haga 1971, p. 433. The translation is mine.
167 Translated by French in French 1974, p. 121.
168 Berry 2006, p. 18.
169 For European examples see Warnke 1994, p. 117.
Landscape paintings are powerful images. Twenty years after looking at one of Naotake’s paintings of the Fuji, Tegara Okamochi upon seeing the mountain with his own eyes for the first time, still recalled the painting he saw many years ago and praised its realism. Maybe because he was aware of the attention western paintings were getting at the Temple of the Five Hundred Arhats, Kôkan resolved to use holy grounds to propel his cause. Among the many pictures of Mt. Fuji he painted over his lifetime, Kôkan donated a number of them for permanent display in shrines and temples all over Japan. “Ever since about 25 years ago, I have realistically painted in oil, following the western manner, Japanese landscapes, starting with such excellent and famous mountains as Mt. Fuji, and hung these paintings in various region’s temples. Many refined personages have also bought my paintings and society now shows interest in my work.” No doubt, he was partially motivated by a mundane desire for self-promotion but I believe he also saw these donations as a good way to transmit his vision of Japan, one in which Fuji served as a national symbol, to as wide an audience as possible. Among the paintings Kôkan donated we can find a painting of Shichirigahama beach (Sôshû kamakura shichirigahamazu 相州鎌倉七里浜図, 1796, fig 21), one of his favorite sights during the Kansei years. Kôkan gave this painting to the Atagoyama shrine in Edo where it stayed on display until 1811 when it was transferred to the Edo bookstore Seizandô.

170 Johnson 2005, p. 147.

171 Haga 1971, p. 442. The translation is mine.

172 Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 166.
The picture must have drawn considerable attention. Ōta Nampo, attached the following note to the image: “this painting was previously hung in the Atagoyama Shrine south of Edo castle, but was removed because it is in the western style [of painting]; it is now owned by Seizandō. Using western techniques, Kōkan had painted this picture of Enoshima. Within the limits of a single picture he had admirably managed to confine and to catch the feeling of the long, misty, panoramic expense of beach at Shichirigahama.”

Another pertinent example of Kōkan’s donation would be his *Kisarazu Uranozu* (木更津浦之図, 1800, fig 22) which he contributed to the Itsukushima Shrine (Hiroshima) in 1800 where it is still kept today.

Both paintings share one intriguing feature: in addition to Kōkan’s signature in Japanese and his seals, the painter also signed the pictures in Roman alphabet “S. a. Kookan” and added the phrase “Eerste Zonders in Japan” (first marvel of Japan) to his *Kisarazu uranozu*. This translation into Dutch spells out Kōkan’s motivation in making pictures of Fuji, and appears quite frequently on them (see in example, *Sunshû satsuda fujisanzu* 駿州薩陀富士山図, fig 23 or *Teppôzu fujienbôzu* 鉄砲洲富士遠望図, fig 24 or again *Sunshû satsuda fujienbôzu* 駿州薩陀富士遠望図, fig 25.) Could this indicate that he wanted also to advertise Fuji as a national symbol to a foreign audience? Kôkan knew that the cheap prints of Fuji sold at the Tôkaidō stations were very popular among

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173 Translated by French in French 1974, p. 103.

the Dutch, which probably helped in reinforcing his idea that the mountain was unique.\footnote{Keene 1952, p. 86.} He also seemed to take to heart how the mountain should be represented to a foreign audience. As we have seen previously, Kôkan was especially particular about the way Fuji should be represented to foreigners, that is in a pictorial technique that copies nature as truthfully as possible.\footnote{Haga 1971, pp. 429-430.}

The inclusion of foreign elements into pictures of famous Japanese landmarks was quite popular during the later part of the Edo period.\footnote{In \textit{Origins of Modern Japanese Literature}, Karatani discusses the idea that the discovery of realism through landscapes amounted to a defamiliarization of the familiar. It is this new realism that forces people to see things that, by force of habit, they did not see before. The superposition of foreign elements on Japanese landscape was therefore a way to assess the new concept of “Japaneseness”. Karatani 1993, p. 29.} These images were probably made as a response to a popular interest in foreign things.\footnote{Asakura Haruhiko 朝倉治彦 ed. \textit{Shiba Kôkan no kenkyû} 司馬江漢の研究. Tokyo: Yasaka Shobô, 1994, p. 118.} But first and foremost, they served as a tool for political propaganda, showing a certain kind of relationship between Japan and the world beyond the seas. I believe these foreign elements served to either reinforce the central, unifying, function of the \textit{bakufu}, as seen in one of Kôkan’s early paintings showing two members of a Dutch envoy in front of Edo Castle (\textit{Edojô}...
gairanjinzu 江戸城外蘭人図, fig 26), or to contest it by proposing a new center, most notably Mt. Fuji. The latter kind of images, in which envoys were contrasted with Fuji rather than the Edo Castle seem to have been far more prominent, hinting at the role the mountain took as representative of the nation. As one might expect, these pictures left a powerful impression on the Japanese masses.179 Like western painting techniques, foreign embassies to Edo through the representations they engendered and the discourse they created, helped model a modern Japanese self.180 So much so that foreign envoys became a sort of motif in later Edo art, especially in the work of Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北斎, 1760-1849), from whom two pictures exemplify this trend: his depictions of members of the Korean envoy in awe in front of Fuji (Fugaku hyakkei 富嶽百景, Raichō no fuji 未朝の不二, fig 27 and, on the same theme, Tōkaidō gojûsantsugi no naigen 東海道五十三次の内原, fig 28). Ronald Toby notes that for the Korean embassies alone, over 100 paintings and illustrated books depicting their activities in Japan have survived to this day.181 Interestingly, western perspective was very often used in these pictures, and the “locus classicus” of Korean embassy images in Edo invariably offered a one point perspective view in which the vanishing point coincided with Mt. Fuji, drawing the viewer’s attention towards the mountain (see for example, Okamura Masanobu’s


Chôsenjin raichô no zu, fig 29). Discussing a compositionally similar image by Hokusai, the woodblock print of Nihonbashi included in his series 36 views of Mt Fuji, Screech remarks that Edo Castle and Mt. Fuji are floating above the ground and seem detached from the plan drawn in perspective on which the populace is grounded: “these elements remain precisely not included in the perspective scheme: Castle and peak, creatures of an altogether grander dispensation, are shown as inaccessible. […] The populace is crushed below, the Nation and its monuments spread out above.”182 The same reading can be applied to the pictures of the Korean embassies discussed above, except that in these pictures the only national monument to be found is Fuji. Needless to say, the didactic intent of such images is clear. Mt. Fuji, representing the Japanese nation, is contrasted with the Koreans, representing what was not Japanese.

Kôkan’s devotion to making a national symbol out of Mt. Fuji did not stop at the public display of his paintings. He traveled widely, including sojourns in Osaka, Nara, Hyôgo and Kyoto. While on the move, he was always happy to show his pictures and explain his own views on painting as well as lecture on world geography and astronomy.183 His activities during his seven-month stay in the imperial capital starting in the fourth month of 1812 will further illustrate Kôkan’s proactive stance.

Soon after reaching Kyoto he writes, “not many people in Kyoto have looked at


Fuji, therefore I will humbly leave many pictures of Fuji here (京にて富士山を見た者鮮し、故に小言富士を多く描き遣し申候。)”¹⁸⁴ This viewpoint might seem a little strange, since not only Ike Taiga but also Maruyama Ôkyo (円山応挙, 1733-1795) worked in Kyoto and their output included a wide number of pictures of the famous mountain. Kôkan must have meant rather than a lack of interest, a lack of what he deemed a proper representation of Fuji, which as we have seen amounted for him to a particular way of articulating the mountain as a national symbol through western-style painting.

For the demanding audience in Kyoto, Kôkan further refined his painting technique, adding subtle gradation in his images.¹⁸⁵ A significant number of the paintings he realized in Kyoto are still extant today, and among these pictures we can find Kanayadai fugaku enbôzu 金谷台富嶽遠望図, fig 30; Sunshû iwafuchi fujizu 駿洲岩淵富士図, fig 31 and Sunshû kashiwara fujizu 駿州柏原富士図, fig 32. Kôkan noted with understandable pleasure that his painting had gained notoriety among Kyoto’s nobility. Prince Kan’in had praised one of his views of Edo.¹⁸⁶ More importantly, one of his paintings of Mt. Fuji was presented to the emperor for review.¹⁸⁷

Kôkan’s influence must have been broad in the imperial capital. One of his

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¹⁸⁴ Naruse 1995, honbunron, p. 243. The translation is mine.

¹⁸⁵ Asakura 1994, p. 129.


pictures even found its way onto a map of Japan engraved by Matsumoto Gengendō (松本玄々堂, 1786-1867), a copperplate artist whose school would be particularly active in the Kyoto art scene from the late Edo period to the early Meiji period. It seems very natural that Gengendō and Kôkan met in Kyoto. Both shared similar interests in copperplate printing and geography. Masters able to teach the new European technique of copperplate printing were also very hard to find during the Edo period. Surely Gengendō must have noticed the presence in town of an artist of Kôkan’s reputation. His Dôsen nihon yochi zaizu printed in 1835 (fig 33) includes in the top left corner a landscape that bears striking similarities to Kôkan’s Sunshû kashiwara fujizu (Fig 32, 1812). In any event, the juxtaposition of a landscape picture of Mt. Fuji with a map of Japan is interesting on more than one level. It demonstrates a certain kind of awareness of the land, the same displayed by Dutch landscape paintings, and also through symbolic language visually links a country to a particular topographical feature. Mt. Fuji is Japan; Japan is Mt. Fuji.

Finding Mt. Fuji on mid- late-Edo period maps is not surprising; inclusion of the mountain was more the norm than the exception. A quick look at any book focusing on Edo-period maps would confirm this as well as give the reader an idea of how widespread the presence of Fuji was. The natural monument blessed by its presence maps of the Tôkaidô (it was one of the terminal points of the road, fig 34), maps of Edo

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(fig 35), general travel maps (fig 36), pamphlets reporting the damages made by the great Tōkai earthquake (fig 37), pilgrimage maps to Fuji (fig 38), maps of hot springs (fig 39), and needless to say maps of Suruga province (fig 40). According to Kären Wigen, one can see a growing amount of attention given to representation of mountains on maps over the Edo-period. Over the course of the Tokugawa era, Mt. Fuji assumed more and more prominence in the picture plane, up to eclipsing big city centers in importance. She concludes that even before the Meiji restoration, “mountains in general, and Mt. Fuji in particular, were already emerging as icons of the nation.”

As Melinda Takeuchi notes, maps give a visible form to people’s conception of their world; they can also serve to provide an alternative view of the very political substance of a particular area and, because maps give the appearance of objectivity, they deconstruct the old and reconstruct new political and spatial conceptions. If the resemblance between Gengendô’s picture included in the Dōsen nihon yochi zaizu (Fig 33) and Kôkan’s view of Kashiwara (Fig 32) is not coincidental, then we can conclude that, at least in this particular occurrence, Kôkan had reached his objective of securing Mt. Fuji’s place as the national symbol of Japan.

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190 Takeuchi 1992, p. 98.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

According to H.D. Harootunian, over the course of the Edo period, the various debates held by Mito and kokugaku scholars as well as the doctrine of new religions, especially the Fujikô, emphasized the idea of “world renewal.” These developments contested what had long been the political center of Japanese culture and proposed alternate solutions.\(^{191}\) Both Gennai and Kôkan were born during this time period and participated in the political debates seeking to define what it meant to be Japanese. Because of their involvement with western studies, both started to import a particular European discourse of state propaganda. This tendency is particularly pronounced in Kôkan’s works.

As we have seen through Gennai and Kôkan, Japan’s encounter with the west, and the field of research this encounter created in Japan, rangaku, were major factors in shaping Japanese identity. Dutch studies were at the forefront of a process of dispersion of knowledge.\(^{192}\) Philosophically, it provided early modern Japanese citizens an ‘other’ to whom they could compare themselves. The west also provided the visual tools through which it had solidified itself, which began to be used in Japan for much the same purpose. Western images also drew the attention of the Japanese to the use of symbol for


communication in general, and more particularly to the role of symbols in political propaganda.

Through his exposure to western media and his encounter with Gennai, Kôkan became acutely aware of the shortcomings of Tokugawa policy. As a man of multiple talents, he strove to provide a solution to the fragmentation of the Japanese political landscape, proposing a visual solution to a socio-cultural issue.

Images of Mt. Fuji were hugely popular over the later years of Tokugawa hegemony. All the major artists of the later Edo period produced representations of the mountain. Hokusai’s series *36 views of Mt. Fuji* proved so popular that he expanded the number of pictures in it, later adding an extra ten woodblock prints. In 1848, a triptych showing the shogun hunting at the base of the mountain sold 8000 copies.\(^{193}\) Aside from their unusual characters and interests, one of the main reasons why both Gennai and Kôkan enjoyed so huge a popularity was, I believe, their use of Fuji as a symbol of a unified Japan. Gennai became a legend while he was still alive and his *Fûryû Shidôken den* was reprinted up to the Meiji area. Likewise, Kôkan’s paintings were copied even during his lifetime and his *Saiyô Nikki (Journey to the West)* was reissued as well.\(^{194}\)


Both Gennai and Kôkan’s works were known to the bakufu. Sadanobu even criticized Kôkan for not passing on his knowledge of copperplate printing to any student. But if the master never took an apprentice, his paintings were no less influential. Hokusai modeled many of his prints after Kôkan’s pictures, including the world-famous cultural icon, The Great wave at Kanagawa (fig 41). Hokusai also inherited his use of the western horizon line as well as his color scheme for depicting the sky, clouds and water from Kôkan.

This paper raises one final important question. Since the government knew Gennai and Kôkan’s publications, they must have realized how critical these were of the political status quo of the times. Intellectuals and artists had been severely punished or even sentenced to death for holding discourses or printing things much less caustic than that of Gennai. Many rangakusha, like Watanabe Kazan (渡辺華山, 1793-1841), or the people involved in giving Von Siebolt a map of Japan in 1828, experienced the dangers

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Ôtsuki Nyoden writes about the Dutch scholar Watanabe Kazan was imprisoned and sentenced to exile on charges of treason because of the content of his essay *Shinkiron* (慎機論) written in 1838. He originally intended to draw the attention of high officials to the possibly disastrous consequences the application of the *bakufu* policy of chasing away foreign ships using firearms could have for Japan. Kazan’s original motive to write this work was the rumored arrival of a ship named *Morrison*, which from lack of better information, he mistook for Robert Morrison, an English missionary specialist of China. Kazan’s misinformation led him to conclude that if such a prominent scholar was sent to Japan, it surely must be on behalf on his government. He concluded that attacking an official envoy, in spite of the lack adequate means of costal defenses, would jeopardize Japan’s safety and harshly criticized his government for failing to recognize the precariousness of such enterprise. He also criticized the government’s defense policy and likened the state of *bakufu* with the decline of the Ming dynasty in China: “This resembles the refined style of living, with the leisurely drinking of wine, com- posing poetry, and dancing enjoyed by the leaders of the late Ming dynasty […] the samurai spirit is sinking more deeply into moral weakness, as though to finally bring about our country's ruin. In these days I would like to take important ministers of state to task, but they have always been the sons of wealthy aristocrats. I would also admonish those retainers in positions to influence lords active in affairs of state, but they are upstarts who have risen to power through bribery.” The work also contained words of praise for western learning and the advancement of knowledge in
Sugita Seikei (杉田成卿, 1817-1859), that he had learned about the western concept of “freedom” in his reading in Dutch and English but “when he heard that Takahashi, Watanabe, Takano, Takashima and others had been seized for spreading foreign ideas he feared that he too was inviting trouble. He held himself in check and was very careful not to let it slip from his mouth. The only way he could find solace for the heaviness of his spirit was through drink, but when he was drank he was unable to keep from shouting ‘freedom!’”. 199 It was dangerous for non-bakufu officials to meddle in politics under Tokugawa rule, especially for commoners. Yet Kôkan went as far as contesting bakufu foreign policy. The absence of an official sanction is puzzling. In lieu of an answer, I would like to briefly look at the only case I know of direct involvement of the bakufu with Mt. Fuji’s supporters.

As we have seen previously, despite repeated instruction from the bakufu, the west.

Kazan was arrested and tried in 1839. Torii Yôzô, head of the metsuke office demanded that the death sentence be pronounced but Kazan was saved in extremis by the petitions written by his friends to influence the decision through an intervention of rôjû Mizuno Tadakuni. Two years after his exile, Watanabe Kazan committed suicide to avoid embarrassing his lord. Bonnie Akibo. “Watanabe Kazan and the Tokugawa Bakufu”. Monumenta Nipponica 44 (1989).

Fujikô activities continued to increase over time. This long history of tension between political authorities and believers of the cult reached a peak in 1847 when the palanquin of the shogun general inspector (ômetsuke, 大目付) was stopped in front of Edo castle and he was handed a letter of complaint signed by Shôshichi, son of Kiemon from Saitama. The letter lamented the poor state of contemporary society in which people were pursuing pleasure without restraint and asserted the need for bakufu officials and the emperor to quickly understand that the world was changing. The letter also contained an explanation of the importance of Miroku’s teachings, as well as criticism directed towards both the shogun and the emperor for not realizing the state of crisis of the world, and failing to prepare for the advent of the “Age of Miroku.” Shôshichi indeed sought to have the top leaders of Japan comply with the Fujikô’s doctrine in order to meet the conditions needed to complete this much-awaited cosmic turnaround. The letter was passed on to Masao Naritsune, Finance Magistrate (1845-48), who rejected the complaint, summoned the protagonists, and started a long procedure of examination that lasted from the eighth month of the same year to the ninth month of 1849.

Because of its scope and its religious ramifications, the examination was later 200 The following is based on the account given by Fumiko Miyazaki in Miyazaki Fumiko 宮崎ふみこ. “Minshû no shûkyô undô” 民衆の宗教運動. Koza nihon kinseishi 講座日本近世史 7 (1986). Miyazaki based her research on primary documents contained in the series Hatogayashi no komonjo (鳩ヶ谷市の古文書) particularly, vol 2, 3 and 4, published by the hatogayashiky_ikuiinkai (鳩ヶ谷市教育委員会).
handed over to the Temple Magistrate Honda Tadamoto. The review of the case by the Finance Magistrate can be divided into two points. First, he reasserted that commoners should not occupy themselves with matters outside their family business, nor do they have the qualifications to do so. Second, he warned that commoners should not take part in religious activities that are not recognized by the bakufu or create new religious groups. From the point of view of the Finance Magistrate’s official, the petition was an absolute aberration, particularly the mention that the founder of the movement, Miroku, received a “revelation from heaven.” For him, the argument of a “revelation from heaven” meant that commoners could easily ignore bakufu authority in the name of an even greater power. The Fujikô cult therefore posed a political threat to the authority of the bakufu.

The investigation led by the Temple Magistrate was particularly zealous. Not only did he summon the main protagonists of the case but also important members of various local chapters of the Fujikô and oshi (itinerant priests) from Sengen shrines. However, contrary to the rather strong critical stance taken by officials from the Finance Magistrate's office, the Temple Magistrate’s officials were more flexible. They seemed to have been more interested in the doctrine and practices of the cult, and apparently focused their inquiry on practical details such as the presence or absence of secret teachings. They also demanded that a copy of all the documents related to the cult’s teachings be provided to the investigators. According to Miyazaki, it is probable that the Temple Magistrate was not only concerned with the determination of an appropriate
punishment, they were probably looking for a pretext to obliterate the Fujikô and, in order to do so, they needed to fully understand the operation of the cult.

In 1849, the case was finally settled and the Fujikô was once again banned. The bakufu reasserted its position that religious teachings outside the ones backed by the government should not be transmitted and that the creation of new religions was strictly prohibited. The members of Fujikô were severely criticized for these reasons but at the same time, bakufu officials could not find any concrete reason to completely terminate the cult. Members of the cult involved with the case were forced to turn in all the documents related to the cult in their possession and to sign an oath renouncing their faith. However, judging from the number of records and documents found in the homes of descendants of cult members it is highly probable that these injunctions were not followed. Members of this religious group were particularly active after the arrival of Perry in the midst of a social and political crisis further fuelled by recurring natural disasters.201 The cult even continued existing after the Meiji restoration, albeit with some serious doctrinal modifications to comply with the new trend of emperor worship.

The outcome of the bakufu’s official involvement with Fujikô is intriguing. It seems that the bakufu was not entirely sure how to deal with the case. Complex legal litigation requiring intervention from more than one Magistrate was more likely to create tensions or conflicts of authority within

the bakufu bureaucracy, resulting in somewhat lighter sentences for the convicted, but the outcome in this case simply seems too clement and did not significantly alter the course of development of this new religion. Did bakufu bureaucrats estimate that, given the history and large number of adherents of the Fujikô, any strong action would have been bound to failure? Was the government too pressed to deal with greater issues at the time of the case to properly deal with Fujikô dissidents? In any event, this case shows one of the remarkably rare occurrences in which bakufu officials had to politically involve themselves with the mountain and its myriad supporters. The result is clear: by the mid 1800s the political authority of the bakufu could no longer compete with the power of Mt. Fuji. Could it have been that

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202 Due to the complexity of the Tokugawa legal system, cases involving more than one juridical authority, especially when religious rights were at stake, proved especially challenging. This tendency is exemplified by a divorce case in 1845 involving the Temple Magistrate, Town Magistrate and the authorities of Mantoku temple, in which both the Temple and Town magistrate claimed jurisdiction over the plaintiff. A long negotiation ensues in which both magistrate advance their respective arguments as to why they should be given authority to handle the case. See John Henry Wigmore, ed. *Law and Justice in Tokugawa Japan*. 20 vols. Tokyo: The University of Tokyo Press, 1967-1986. Vol. 8-A, pp. 13-34.
because Gennai and Kôkan were also involved with the mountain, it partially shielded them from governmental retaliation? In any event, the case bakufu vs. Fuji closed with an overwhelming victory for the mountain, a victory at the height of its popularity in the Edo period.
Figures


Fig 1: “At the Foot of Mt. Fuji,” NIPPON, no. 6 (1936): 22–23. From Weisenfeld 2000, p. 762.
Fig 3: 500-yen bonds, 1878. From Trede 2008, p. 92.

Fig 5: Nakabayashi Chikutô, Shinshû Kikanzu. From Kano 1994, pp. 58-59.
IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. It was a picture of one of the screens on which Taiga painted the 500 Arhats. Accessible online at
<http://www.kyuhaku.jp/exhibition/exhibition_s23.html>
(Last accessed May 2011).

Fig 8: Ike Taiga, *Fuji in the 12 Months*. From Takeuchi 1992, pp. 54-61.


Fig 11: Shiba Kôkan, Minō Waterfall. From Seiyû Ryotan, 1794. University of British Columbia, Rare Books and Special Collections, Japanese Maps, G155.J2 S5 1794.

Fig 12: Shiba Kôkan, Minō Waterfall. Private Collection. From Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 45.

Fig 16: Odano Naotake, *Fujigakuzu*. From Johnson 2005, p. 86.


Fig 20: Tani Bunchô, Kôyo Tanshôzu. From Screech 2000, p. 65.

Fig 21: Shiba Kôkan, Sôshû Kamakura Shichirigahamazu. From Naruse 1995, sakuhinron, p. 166.


IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. It was a picture of Mt. Fuji by Katsushika Hokusai. Accessible online at

Fig 27: Katsushika Hokusai, Fugaku Hyakkei, Raichôno Fuji. Accessible online at <http://www.degener.com/1606-64a.HTM> (Last accessed May 2011).
Fig 28: Katsushika Hokusai, Tôkaidô Gojûsantsugino uchi hara. From Suzuki 2007, p. 95.

Fig 29: Okamura Masanobu, Chôsenjin Raichônozu. From Toby 1986, p. 427.


Fig 38: *Fuji Môde Hitori Annai*. From Yokota 1999, p. 20.
Fig 39: Naraya Kurohaku (publisher), *Map of the Seven Hot Springs of Hakone*. From
Fig 40: Map of Suruga Province. From Yamashita 1998, p. 75.
Fig 41: Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave at Kanagawa*. From Calza 2003, p. 418.

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