



The Great Wave, Hokusai, c.1829–32

"ALONE IN ITS UNION OF GRACE AND MAJESTY": MOUNT FUJI IN ART AND CULTURE

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MOUNT Fuji and its environs have inspired poets, painters, artists and travelers for generations. One criterion required for UNESCO inscription is that Mt. Fuji must reflect outstanding universal values as a source of artistic inspiration. Since the earliest portrayal of Mt. Fuji in Japan's oldest written poetry anthology *Man'yōshū* (Collection of a Thousand Leaves) and oldest story *Taketori Monogatari* (The

It is a grand scene beyond all description. It was covered in snow. In the shining of the sun, it looked like frozen silver. I even thought that its awe-inspiring, lofty form was yet more inspiring than that of the famous Dhaulagiri in the Himalayas, which I saw in January 1855.

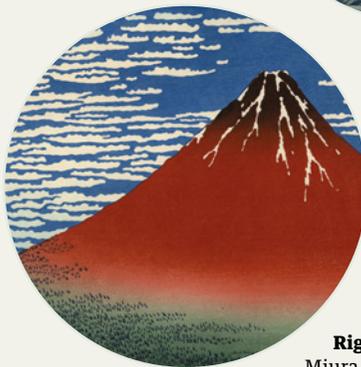
- Townsend Harris (1804-1878)-
First United States Consul to Japan



Below: Red Fuji, Southern Wind, Clear Morning, Hokusai, c.1830



Left: The Sea off Satta, Hiroshige, c.1858



Right: The Sea Off Miura, Hiroshige, c.1858



Tale of the Bamboo Cutter), the magnificent form of Mt. Fuji has inspired Japanese and foreigners alike across the ages and reflects upon the universal spirit of these artists and poets.

One of the first depictions of Mt. Fuji can be found in the *Man'yōshū*, an anthology of 4516 *waka* poems dating back to the 7th and 8th Centuries. “*Tago no ura yu/ uchidete mireba/ Mashironi so/ Fuji no takane ni/ Yuki wa furikeru*” (Passing through Tago Bay and coming to a clearing, I

see snow falling, pure white, on Fuji’s lofty peak). Other *waka* eulogize Mt. Fuji as a divine peak that has stood “since the parting of heaven and earth.” Around this time, the image of Mt. Fuji began to appear in paintings, including the oldest example of an illustration on a paper screen from *Shōtoku Taishi Eden* (The Illustrated Biography of Prince Shōtoku) dating from the Heian period (794-1185).

When the political center of Japan shifted from Kyoto to

Kamakura (Kanagawa Prefecture) in the latter half of the 12th Century, more people began to traverse the road linking the capital cities that ran to the south of Mt. Fuji. Hereafter, large numbers of people, including travelers and artists, began to record their impressions of Mt. Fuji and it consequently acquired an even greater symbolic meaning in the Japanese consciousness.

From the 14th Century onward, Mt. Fuji became a popular motif in painting, literature, crafts,

gardens and other artistic fields to the extent that it was becoming a standard image of Japan. Of the many popular representations of Mt. Fuji in popular culture, the three best known are those produced by Hiroshige (1797-1858) in the *ukiyo-e* prints, *Tōkaidō gojūsan-tsugi* (Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road) and the *Fuji sanjurokkei* (Thirty-six views of Mt. Fuji), as well as by Hokusai (ca. 1760-1849) in the 1834 publication of the *ukiyo-e*, *Fugaku hyakkei* (One-hundred Views of Mt. Fuji). The Tōkaidō Hiroshige Art Museum that

houses many original Hiroshige works can be found in Shizuoka Prefecture. As pointed out by its curator, Mr. Katsunori Takahashi, “While Hokusai’s woodblock prints place emphasis on form, Hiroshige’s woodblock prints are faithful to the subject matter. The difference between the two lies in Hiroshige’s depiction of scenery as it is. Hiroshige’s depictions of Mt. Fuji leave a strong impression as landscape images, and many people have had a near life experience of viewing Mt. Fuji from different places through the woodblock prints of Hiroshige.”

The vivid images displayed

in these *ukiyo-e* were later a source of inspiration for many western artists who were part of a new “*Japonisme*” movement in Europe, whereby Mt. Fuji became well-known abroad as a symbol of Japan. The iconic mountain influenced the works of Impressionists and *fin de siècle* artists, such as Monet, Van Gogh and Henri Riviere.

As Japan began to accept greater numbers of foreign visitors in the 19th Century, overseas explorers, traders and diplomats began to transcribe their impressions of their outings to this ‘holy’ volcano. Perhaps best expressed by Henry Heusken, interpreter and secretary to US Ambassador Townsend Harris, “Glory forever to the mountain of mountains of the Pacific Sea, which alone raises its venerable brow covered with eternal snow amidst the verdant countryside of Nippon! Jealous of its beauty, it will not suffer a rival which might lessen its splendor. Its crown of snow stands out alone above the highest mountains of Nippon.”

I stopped the palanquin to take a look at it, as the mountain stands soaring high and penetrates the blue sky like a white gem hairpin, while the lower part below the middle is shaded under the cover of clouds. It is as beautiful as the white lotus flowering in Gem Pond of Mt Huashan in China.

- Shin Yu-Han (1681-?) -

Visited Japan in 1719 as the Documentation Officer of the 9th Korea Communication Mission



...We got a beautiful view of Fuji, the “Peerless One,” springing from the ground as it seemed almost behind the inn, and lifting its beautiful head into the pale blue sky, above horizontal wreaths and stretches of cloud.

- Ernest Satow (1843-1929) -

British Diplomat



Nowadays, Mt. Fuji is closely associated with the “best in Japan” and “something auspicious.” Thus it is often used as a standard when comparing the magnificence of other mountains (such as referring to Mt. Rainier in the United States as the “Tacoma Fuji”) and the iconography of Mt. Fuji is still largely depicted in everything from high-class artwork to mass-produced goods and tourist trinkets. It is also a favorite choice of mural for Japan’s *sentō* (public bath houses) and many replicas of Mt. Fuji are incorporated into garden landscapes, much as the *Daimyō* (lords) had done in the 18th Century.

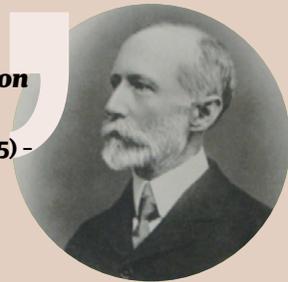
The scenic grandeur of Mt. Fuji’s nearly perfect, solitary volcanic cone inspires a sense of majesty, introspection and beauty that has been the subject of creative endeavors for centuries. As a volcano, it also evokes fear, respect and awe, which may be one of the reasons that it has become a widely understood symbol. When foreign

travelers visit Japan from abroad, Mt. Fuji can be found not only in representations in vases and fans, but in the many portrayals displayed in popular advertisements, art posters, and murals. The UNESCO designation is an attempt to not only draw attention to this fount of inspiration, but to also provide the means to protect the high level of integrity associated with its grandeur. 7

Natives and foreigners, artists and holiday-makers, alike fall down in adoration before the wondrous mountain which stands utterly alone in its union of grace and majesty.

- Basil Hall Chamberlin (1850-1935) -

Famous Japanologist



Fujiyama, ever all-knowing, divine, and entire, rises shrouded in the color of rose like a gigantic stamen in the center of a flower.

- Georges Bousquet (1845-1937) -

French lawyer



...The beauty of Fuji sticking out proudly into the far reaches of the sky is the most elegant spectacle in all Japan – no, it is, in fact, one of the world’s greatest spectacles. Because the foot of the mountain, free of snow, is largely of a blue that could be mistaken for the sky, people can only look at the cone-shaped mountain, bristled with the white of snow, as it reaches up to the heavens.

- Patrick Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) -

Japanologist and Writer

