

Reading the *Illustrations of the Japan Expedition*: Another Story by Three Researchers

This exhibition introduces how KANAGAWA was recorded and transmitted to the West through the eyes of Westerners who came to Japan during the Opening of Japan period. The three researchers have attempted to provide commentary from a variety of perspectives on each of the images in the *Illustrations of the Japan Expedition*, which includes lithographs in which KANAGAWA was depicted in earnest by Westerners.

SHIMAMURA Motohiro (SM), a specialist in the diplomatic history of the Bakumatsu-Meiji Restoration period, explains that all but one of the six lithographs were composed of three layers (1) local scenery, (2) activities of the American expedition, and (3) local people. He also notes that figures depicted in illustrations from the expedition's official account, the *Narrative*, were cut from the *Narrative's* illustrations and painted into the elephant lithographs. The collage of the two images is also noted in the book.

William Steele (WS), a long-time resident of Japan and an expert on modern Japanese history, looks not only at Heine's point of view, but also at how those who were watched by Heine watched him: the gaze of both the viewer and the watched, and attempts to read the mutual curiosity that is apparent.

Jason Petrusis (JP), an American historian with a strong interest in racial issues, focuses on Chinese and black people who were present but not depicted, and questions why Heine left them out.

Steele and Petrusis also attempt to understand the six lithographs as a series of stories and find Heine's intentions in them.

The views expressed here are all their own. In an attempt to interpret the story from a variety of perspectives, no attempt has been made to reconcile opinions. Please understand this as a kind of "narrative."

No. II-1

Consider the bridge that the envoy's procession is crossing in the center of the screen as the starting point. In reality, it is not possible to depict this composition from this viewpoint because the current turn of the road runs opposite to the left and right, and there is no high ground in the vicinity. Likewise, the depiction of the American envoy is consistent with the description in the *Narrative*, but the American officers and sailors who are positioned around the large tree on the hill in the foreground are from the outward journey, while Heine himself also marched in the procession and could not have been sketched at this location.

Even more interesting are the depictions of the locals. First, let us look at the gray-haired, gray-bearded old man with the closed umbrella, located in the center foreground of the painting, and then look at the man to his right holding the umbrella outstretched. Images approximating these two men can be found in the illustrations of the *Narrative*. The three men in the pavilion to the right of them also appear in another illustration, although they are not the same. In other words, this painting is a collage in which characteristic figures and landscapes are cut out from the illustrations in *Narrative* and reconstructed into a single picture.

(SM)

This lithograph commemorates Commodore Perry's visit to Okinawa at the beginning of the Japan expedition. The first thing that drew my attention was the self-portrait of Heine at the very center of the print. With sketch book in hand, he is entranced by the view in front of him. We ask ourselves, what he is thinking? He appears to revere the idyllic tranquility of the natural environment and the peaceful lives of its inhabitants. The men behind him, engaged in casual talk, smoking, and drinking tea, seem oblivious to the drama taking place in front of them. Heine, a political exile, who had, in 1848, demonstrated against autocratic rule, may well be worried about future of these "kind, gentle and well behaved" people. (*With Perry*, 59) Along the road and the stone bridge below, American sailors are shown in uniform, bayonets affixed, marching in formation. A band is playing, and artillery is on display. Commodore Perry, in a sedan chair borne by four Chinese coolies, is off to pay his respects to the Regent in his palace at Shuri. The depiction of Perry's imperial procession may in fact be a lament that the lives of the local people will soon be disrupted.

And how do people now, 271 years after Perry, interpret this lithograph? Over the course of the years since the Perry expedition, Okinawa has suffered from both Japanese and American imperial ambitions. In 1945, the horrific Battle of Okinawa resulted in the death of over 100,000 civilians. Okinawa remained under American military control until 1972, but despite repeated calls to "give us back our green, peaceful island," the bases remained, and members of Japan's Self Defense Forces have added to the island's militarization.

(WS)

When artists Wilhelm Heine and Eliphalet Brown, Jr., created these lithographs, they were trying to open “windows” onto faraway places for viewers who had never seen Asia. They hoped viewers would think about these lithographs as faithful reports of real-life events. In fact, US viewers had long imagined what Asia looked like, and many would have marveled at Heine’s depictions of Japanese and Ryukyuan people – because they could finally compare their fantasies of Asia with eyewitness pictures. But Heine and Brown also used these lithographs to tell a carefully constructed story about the encounter between American forces and Asian people, which aimed to show viewers who had more power and who had less. The artists constructed their story in part by choosing who to include in the image and where to place them.

If we look carefully at this lithograph, we see not only people from the Ryukyu Islands and White Americans but also Chinese crew members who worked for the US Navy during its Expedition to Japan. To see Chinese participants, look at the middle of the long procession running across the background. First we spot US Commodore Matthew C. Perry, Expedition leader; then we see that he is being carried in a sedan chair by four Chinese men in gray tops and white pants; and finally we see six more Chinese men following them. The six followers carried gifts from the US for Ryukyu Islands officials, and were escorted by the blue-jacketed US marines walking in front of them. But while Chinese workers such as Chong Fok Seay and Ah Tuck labored for the US Navy throughout the Expedition, Chinese people are visible in only two of the six lithographs. Why include them here? Why exclude them from other lithographs?

(JP)

No. II-2/7

The title of this lithograph is a reference to the famous “Crossing the Rubicon” scene in Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar” with the line “The die is cast.” Unlike the other five images, this image does not clearly form a three-layered structure: the landscape, the American envoy, and the local people. It depicts the area around Hatayama-zaki, where an American survey ship is trying to break through despite the fact that the Shogunate’s imperial vessels are blocking its way. Hashirimizu Daiba fort was established at Hatayama-zaki on the Miura Peninsula side, and the line connecting Kannon-zaki Daiba fort, which was closer to the open sea, and Futtsu on the Boso Peninsula side was the boundary set by the Edo shogunate at the time where foreign ships were to be sunk. Therefore, attempting to pass through this line was a point of no return for foreign vessels as well as for the U.S., and seemed to imply the “determination not to retreat” of the American envoys.

The U.S. envoy arrived in Uraga on July 8, 1853, and immediately began surveying the area. This image was drawn on July 11, the fourth day, and it is true that the survey was conducted under the escort of the steam warship *Mississippi*. However, a similar image does not exist in the illustrations in the *Narrative*. The image is not as tense as the present one, but rather a **record** of the surveying operations. It does not seem to have been intended to depict a **historical event** that would leave its mark on American history, as this image does.

(SM)

This print commemorates the decision to enter Edo Bay, knowing that the Tokugawa government had forbade entry of foreign ships into the bay beyond a certain point. Commodore Perry is absent from the scene. Instead, the lithograph depicts the brave officers and men of Japan expedition as they confronted a flotilla of unfriendly Japanese ships on July 11, 1853. The crew of 14 sailors and two officers appear unperturbed by the threatening postures of the Japanese crew of some 30 men in a boat that seems intent to block their advance. In the background are at least 15 Japanese ships each with around 30 samurai warriors onboard. Bloodshed appears possible. A larger Japanese cargo ship is nearby and the USS *Mississippi*, Perry’s flagship, looms far in the distance. Nonetheless, one American sailor at the front on the cutter defiantly holds up a white flag to signal the peaceful intent of their mission and Lieut. Silas Bent (1820-1887), in officer’s uniform at the back of the boat, calmly proceeds with his hydrographic survey of the area around Uraga.

A separate illustration of this event prepared for the official *Narrative* is less fraught with danger. It depicts a single boat that does not appear to be in any danger. The elephant lithograph, however, focuses to the crew of sixteen: “When Japanese boats tried to intercept us, half our crew would drop oars and pick up muskets from under seats. Without fail this demonstration cleared the way for us.” (*With Perry*, 67). Heine and Brown’s more dramatic depiction of the initial encounter between the United States and Japan may have been specifically designed to praise and glorify the role played by the expedition’s officers and its crew members.

(WS)

While the first scene in the Ryukyu Islands showed a peaceful procession in which US forces dominated an Asian space, this lithograph from “Yedo” Bay shows a confrontation. As viewers, we are placed in the middle of the action; we can think of Heine and Brown as movie directors who were deciding how to film a scene. Looking closely at the lithograph, we ask questions to identify the “main character” and ask how they move the “plot” forward. Who faces forward and whose back is turned? Who holds a gun and who holds a fan or pike? In 1855, US viewers may have perceived a tense and dangerous moment: a small US crew was surrounded by Japanese sailors, who might or might not attack. Here in Yokohama almost 170 years later, how do we perceive the scene?

In fact, US viewers had long imagined what Asia looked like, and many would have marveled at Heine’s depictions of people in Japan and the Ryukyu Islands – because they could finally compare their fantasies of Asia with eyewitness pictures. What, then, was the purpose of creating this tension in the first place? What story did the artists intend to tell about power relations between Japan and the US?

(JP)

No. II-3/ 8

The scene in this lithograph is as recorded by the American side. However, this image depicts Japanese people who are not described in the American record. In the foreground are two samurai and others. However, they seem to be chatting with each other, not looking at Perry's first landing, which was also a historic moment for the Japanese side. In fact, Hikone clan warriors were stationed at this location in Kurihama to guard the area, so it is not surprising that there were Japanese warriors there. However, they do not appear to be keeping a vigilant eye on their surroundings. Likewise, the people on the Japanese-style boat on the left do not seem to be paying close attention to their guard duties.

Compared to the illustrations in the *Narrative* there is a difference in the way the Japanese people are depicted in the illustrations. The two warriors in the center and the people on the Japanese-style boat, as well as the horse beside the two warriors in the illustration, are depicted in the line on the right side of the middle row. In the illustration, the horses are depicted in the line on the right side of the middle row.

The elephant lithograph is constructed in three layers, consisting of the Japanese landscape, the activities of the American mission, and the people of Japan. Although the title of the painting focuses on the historical moment of the American mission's first arrival in Japan, it seems that Heine intended to impress the viewer with the people of Japan.

(SM)

The third elephant print focuses on the presentation on July 7, 1853 of the letter from President Millard Filmore requesting friendly diplomatic relations and the inauguration of trade between Japan and America. Commodore Perry is shown in conversation with Japanese officials. Armed guards extend to the right and left of the commodore; a naval band is playing. In depicting the scene, Heine chose to give the foreground to the Japanese officers, crew, and their horses. The great Commodore, although at the very center of the print, is presented in miniature. Distance has nearly erased his identity; the two American flags are the only give-away. Why should this be? The American side was clearly the more powerful, depicted in highly regimented formation, but Heine's sympathies appear to be with the more casual Japanese men in the foreground who display little interest in Perry and his letter, talking among themselves and even turning their back to dramatic events unfolding on center stage.

A second point concerns the attention Heine gives to the natural environment. The elephant lithographs focused on major turning points connected with Perry's diplomatic mission, including the presentation of Filmore's letter. But Heine was equally impressed by the beauties of the Uraga landscape: "picturesque, lush with vegetation, and crowned by sublime and lovely pines." (*With Perry*, 64) The two warships that occupy the center left of the image are countered by the majesty of Mt. Fuji on the right.

(WS)

Compare this lithograph to a description of the same landing by Bayard Taylor, a journalist who accompanied US crew in Kurihama in July 1853. Taylor wrote:

A stalwart boatswain's mate was selected to bear the broad pennant of the Commodore, supported by two very tall and powerful negro seamen, completely armed. Behind these followed two sailor boys, bearing the letter of the President and the Commodore's letter of credence, in their sumptuous boxes, wrapped in scarlet cloth. Then came the Commodore himself, with his staff and escort of officers.

In the middle of the scene, Commodore Perry stands in front of two flags, holding his hat. (How small he is! Why are the Japanese figures in the foreground the biggest in the lithograph?) Behind Perry we see a "boatswain's mate" holding the blue Commodore's pennant and "two sailor boys" carrying red boxes. But where are the two Black sailors?

About 1 in 10 members of Perry's crew were Black. It was a cosmopolitan crew that included African, Chinese, European, and even Japanese sailors, and likely included Pacific Islander, South and Southeast Asian, and Indigenous American sailors, too. Yet in this lithograph, though written evidence tells us that Perry deliberately placed two Black sailors at the front of his entourage, Heine and Brown depicted everyone in the US crew as White. Likewise, Black US sailors are almost impossible to find across hundreds of images in the US Navy's published account of the Expedition, the *Narrative*, even though they are easy to find in Japanese scrolls, screens, sketches, and prints. We must conclude that the US artists chose to make Black sailors disappear – that Heine and Brown were telling a story about who "belonged" in the picture of Asia that US viewers would imagine, a story about who should be seen through this "window" on Asia.

(JP)

No. II-4/9

This lithograph depicts the American envoys, who returned to Japan in February 1854 for the purpose of concluding a trade treaty, heading toward the venue for the treaty negotiations, with Perry in the foreground.

It also depicts an American warship floating on the sea at the back of the screen, a procession of American envoys led by Perry in the middle, and Japanese people in the foreground. The three-layered structure of the painting focuses on the Japanese people. The illustration in the *Narrative* is different from this picture, as is the illustration from Kurihama. The major differences are that the Japanese people are not as numerous in the foreground as in this painting, and that Perry and his men are about to advance to the right.

Since the purpose of this painting is to record the activities of the American envoys, it is only natural that the majority of the picture should depict them, and it can be said that the illustration is more faithful to the facts. In this illustration, Shogunate officials are lined up on both sides of the screen to greet the American envoys on their way to the Treaty House, and on the right side of the screen, behind a line of American guards of honor, there is a group of samurai apparently deployed to guard the American envoys, who are “watching” the procession to get a glimpse of the envoys. The large crowd of spectators, who could not possibly have been warriors deployed to guard the procession of American envoys, is depicted behind the American guards of honor. At that time, such a large number of ordinary people would not have been allowed to approach so closely, so it is not surprising that Heine intentionally placed them as a way to add a touch of history to the American envoy’s first negotiations with Japan to conclude a treaty.

In other words, this painting was created as a highly fictionalized depiction of a scene “appropriate to the historical moment,” rather than as a “record” of the facts.

(SM)

Commodore Perry returned to Japan in the spring of 1854 to begin the negotiations that led to the signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa—the so-called opening of Japan. While Heine has placed Perry (hat in hand) in the center of the print, he is distant and unremarkable. The two dogs playing during the ceremonies vie for the attention of the viewer. The same two samurai in formal dress that appeared in third elephant print, this time turn their backs to the viewers, and appear more interested in the dogs than in Perry. As before, there is a contrast between the highly regimented American sailors and the more disorderly cadre of Japanese officers. Moreover, why did Heine include a father and son walking away from the momentous event taking place behind them? And why did he draw attention to the large crowd that had gathered to see Perry and his men? It is difficult to imagine that so many commoners would be allowed so watch from such close quarters. What message is Heine seeking to convey through such an unusual composition?

The same question must be asked regarding the foreboding array of warships that fill the space in the

upper part of the print. What was Heine thinking? Surely, he was aware that this display of military would (and should) raise suspicions of American goals in seeking to open Japan to the world. As a contemporary satirical verse declared:

Only four cups of select tea and a peaceful night's sleep is impossible.

The verse retranslated taking various word plays into account:

Only four steamships and the peace of the world is upset.

(WS)

In the previous lithograph ("First Landing"), Heine and Brown invited viewers to see events from a US perspective: we start with closeups of Japanese soldiers that are ethnological in their detail (satisfying US curiosity), then survey a larger scene in which the US stands up to Japan (satisfying US patriotism). This lithograph of the 8 March 1854 Yokohama landing instead invites viewers to take a Japanese perspective, seeing what Commodore Perry wanted Japanese participants to see. We viewers stand inside the lines of US sailors and marines, watching a careful choreography: triumphant US leaders occupy the center, as three Black sailors march a few steps behind. In the 1854 Yokohama landing, as in the 1853 Kurihama landing, Perry used Black sailors to send a message to Japanese participants: he believed that armed Black crew members communicated the threat of US violence. Perhaps he also wanted to remind Japanese participants about how Americans used "race" to make hierarchy – an immoral hierarchy in which White Americans held power over Black Americans through racist actions and structures. (Japanese viewers might have wondered: where will we fit into the US "race" hierarchy?)

How would Black sailors view this scene? For Black crew members like Benjamin Dennis and Abram Armstrong, the US Navy offered opportunity and freedom: while the Navy was quite racist, it also gave Black sailors a chance to serve their country, make a good living, and travel the world. When renowned scholar and Black American W.E.B. Du Bois visited the University of Tokyo in the 1930s, he was pleased to see a print of the Perry Expedition that included Black sailors. We can guess that some of the Expedition's Black sailors would have been proud of being memorialized, taking their rightful place at the center of Japan-US history.

(JP)

No. II-5/ 9

This scene depicts the landing of the American envoys who arrived at Shimoda Port the previous day on June 8, 1854. The lithograph set in the Ryukyu Islands depicts their return from Shuri Castle, whereas the lithographs set in Kurihama, Yokohama, and Shimoda in Japan all depict a landing. Was this done intentionally? The *Narrative* includes an image titled "Com. Perry Paying His Farewell Visit To The Imperial Commissioners At Simoda." Both images are almost identical in terms of background scenery, with Perry, the representative of the American envoys, wearing a naval cap as he is greeted by officials. However, there is a considerable difference in the way the Japanese people in the foreground are depicted. The girl with the fan, the woman with the baby on her back, and the three young women are, as before, reused collages.

Aside from Heine himself, this scene incorporates many images of the common people of Shimoda, perhaps because the artist was able to spend a long period of time in the area. Fishermen are tattooed, girls, young women, women with babies on their heads, and various other Japanese people are depicted, more so than in the previous images.

It is like an illustrated book of Japan.

(SM)

Before returning to the United States, Perry made a final stop in Japan at Shimoda, one of the newly opened ports. Heine has again included himself in the drama, fulfilling his role as recording artist of the expedition. He is shown sketching Perry as he is greeted by the commissioner in charge of Shimoda. A procession of sailors is followed by men pulling four artillery pieces. Preparations were being made for the military exercises depicted in the sixth print. As in earlier depictions, Perry's facial features are unclear.

In more detail the viewer is treated to an array of Shimoda commoners who have come to look at the Americans. The crowd includes a man with freshly caught fish in his basket, a mother with baby on her back, a trio of women in holiday costume, several children, and a few posted guards. To the left is another group of commoners on boats, perhaps fishermen. Heine has again placed Perry in the distant center; his main concern, however, is with the Japanese commoners who have come to see the great man and his black ships.

We ask ourselves: what is Heine really sketching? The little girl holding a fan offers a clue. She is not looking at Perry but at someone behind the crowd of people. Is she not looking at the artist, Heine, who, to sketch the commoners and their outfits, is in fact seated further back? My guess is that the little girl is looking at Heine as he, in turn, is looking at her. His curiosity about daily life in Japan (so evident in all the elephant prints) is matched only by the curiosity of people in Japan, including the little girl with a fan, wanting to know more about the strangers from the West.

(WS)

Across six lithographs, Heine and Brown told a story that moved from conflict to coexistence to friendship. In the previous lithograph, Japanese and US forces were still prepared to fight, even if a fight was unlikely. But in this lithograph, set in June 1854 Shimoda, the two sides celebrate the peace that emerged after the March 1854 Treaty of Kanagawa. We also see peace with our own eyes: in the foreground, a mother carries her baby, who smiles at a US sailor behind. (Where else do women appear in the lithographs?) Everyday Japanese people dominate the scene – though we also see artist Heine seated in the foreground, sketching in a yellow hat. Then we see Commodore Perry back by the trees, a few steps behind his blue pennant, touching the brim of his cocked hat while two Japanese officials bow.

Now that the scene is friendly, we also see Chinese crew members again. About ten figures behind Perry, a man in white holds an umbrella. That is Lo Sam from Guangdong, China, who was a translator for the US. Then, at the far-left edge of the lithograph, look for three tiny figures: the right figure is artist Eliphalet Brown, Jr., the middle is his Chinese assistant, and between them is Brown's daguerreotype camera. Like the Chinese men in the 6 June 1853 lithograph, the assistant probably joined the US squadron after it arrived in China, before heading to Japan. Chinese crew members cooked, carried, and served across the Expedition's ships during the squadron's time in East Asia, with some even attending Perry personally. By including these Chinese figures, Heine and Brown showed that Chinese workers were part of their vision of Asia – even here in Shimoda.

(JP)

II-6/10

This is another image that is not included in the *Narrative*. It depicts the military exercises conducted by the U.S. envoys at Ryosenji Temple, where the US and Japan signed an appendix to the treaty signed in Yokohama. This image, too, has a three-layered structure of background, American envoys, and Japanese people, as well as a variety of embellishments.

First of all, the actual grounds of the shrine are not large enough to accommodate such a large number of people. The site is so spacious that it could accommodate a large number of people. Therefore, the number of people who were actually there is exaggerated. In addition, there must not have been a bell tower at Ryosenji Temple in the past. The officials in the foreground and the girl with a fan who also appeared in “The Landing...At Simoda” are depicted, but the place where they are depicted is the current location of the temple gate, which is not as large as this. Furthermore, the staggered expressions on the faces of the Japanese people seem to have been created on purpose.

While the illustrations in the *Narrative* emphasize the importance of documentation, the large lithographs show three layered images of the landscape, the activities of the American envoys, and the customs of the local people, using collage and other forms of adaptation. It can be said that the prints were created as a scene “appropriate to the historical moment.”

(SM)

Heine was expected to record important events related to Perry’s diplomatic mission, including this final demonstration of American military might. Perry, a military man, also used pomp and ceremony to achieve his objectives. The final lithograph depicts a military band playing, with sailors in uniform standing at attention while artillery fire and military maneuvers occupy the central staging area. Tokugawa officials looked on, as did the ordinary people of Shimoda. According to Heine: “Three quarters of the people of Shimoda, including many lovely young women, attended to the band’s cheerful music. ... To conclude we staged miniature maneuvers. The speed and precision of our artillery fire, and of our infantry exercises, evoked from the Japanese the maximum of admiration and applause.” (*With Perry*, 160).

Perry’s strategy may have worked, but what did Heine really think? In his memoirs, he confessed that he escaped the military exercises. “I left the temple for the open air as soon as possible. ... To me, God’s outdoors offered far more pleasure and comfort.” (*With Perry*, 160) A look at the lithograph confirms Heine’s ambivalence. Commodore Perry is shown in the center but is only vaguely recognizable. Strangely, no one, American or Japanese, appears to be interested in the main event. Among the local residents, two men on the right appear to be clapping. Women and children show no sense of excitement. A mother and the girl with a fan (II-5/9) look away. Most people are engaged in conversation, but they may be more interested in the band music than the roar of the cannon. Heine, the artist, seems to have put more effort into depicting the natural setting of the temple, the towering pine trees and other greenery that then and now continue to envelope the temple grounds.

(WS)

When I first saw this lithograph, my eyes were drawn to the large figures in the front – Japanese soldiers and ordinary people in colorful clothing. Then my eyes jumped to the Temple steps at the back, where US Navy officers mingle with Japanese officials. This is the final scene in Heine and Brown’s story about the growing friendship between the US and Japan, evidenced by their close contact at the Temple entrance. But if our eyes skip over the middle of the lithograph, it is worth returning to look more closely. There, sailors prep artillery and marines handle rifles. Even if this is a routine demonstration of US weapons, it is still a scene of warfare suspended. Like the seemingly pleasant procession in the Ryukyu Islands (“Return”), this peace was achieved not just by negotiation but also by threat of force.

As we use these lithographs to understand this moment in Japan-US-Ryukyu relations, we remember that these “windows” on history are not transparent. Of course they are not windows but pictures, scenes in a story told by two artists who included some things and excluded others. So we ask again: what parts of the story are missing, and why? But while the lithographs have erasures, they are also rich in the details of everyday life, helping us to see how ordinary people experienced this shocking time of change. Here in the Museum, just a few blocks from the spot where the US and Japan met in March 1854, we ask: how did people from Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, China, and the US feel as they lived through this startling encounter? How did they view the new world they were creating together, and how do we see it today?

(JP)