

Heroes and Warriors: Japanese Prints of Historical Narratives and Legendary Tales,
September 28, 2007-January 13, 2008

Tall tales, heroic sagas, stories woven from history and legend — these are the sources from which Japanese printmakers drew to create the vivid images that fill this gallery. Such narratives have been part of the storytelling tradition for centuries and in the Edo period (1603–1868) became part of the puppet and kabuki theater repertory as well. Chinese stories were also popular in Japan, and illustrations from two of the most famous Chinese novels are included in this exhibition.

Many of these prints glorify loyalty, courage, and fidelity unto death, the virtues so often associated with the Japanese warrior class (samurai) beginning in the late 12th and 13th centuries. According to the code by which samurai lived, loyalty and fidelity often dictated revenge for injustices and perceived wrongs within the context of complex struggles for political power. The stories related through these prints touch upon camaraderie, failed ambitions of heroes and political leaders, and noble endings of brave men. The history of the great warrior Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–89) assumes epic dimensions in its retellings. He was perceived as a threat by his elder half-brother Yoritomo (1147–99), consequently persecuted, and eventually killed. Another true-life story concerns 47 masterless samurai (*ronin*) who took revenge on behalf of their dead lord in 1703 and became martyrs when they were ordered to commit ritual suicide (*seppuku*). These dramatic tales live on in numerous forms, including the visually lively and powerful versions on view here.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, Japanese, 1839-1892

Akiyama Buemon, Japanese

Yamamoto Shōun, Japanese, 1870-1965

Moon at Mount Inaba (Inabayama no tsuki), One-hundred phases of the moon, 1885

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1376

In 1564, during the siege of the Saitō clan stronghold at Gifu Castle on Inaba Mountain, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98) climbed an unguarded precipitous cliff at night with six reliable men and opened the gates of the castle to the troops of his leader, Oda Nobunaga (1534–82). Hideyoshi, who was destined to be one of the great warlords of the late 16th century, went on to revenge his leader's death and pursue Nobunaga's dream of reunifying Japan during a period of factional warfare.

What do you think the artist Yoshitoshi is telling us about Hideyoshi in this print?



RISD MUSEUM

Katsukawa Shuntei, Japanese, 1770-1820
Kichizō Tsutaya, Japanese
River Battle (Kassen), 1808
Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.2329



This panoramic battle scene is characteristic of Shuntei's warrior prints. By experimenting with such expansive views in the triptych format, Shuntei laid the foundation for the development of the subject in the 19th century.

How would you compare this rendition of a battle to other fighting scenes in this exhibition?

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861
Tsujiya Yasubei
Nitta Tadatsune and the Goddess of Mount Fuji (Kennin sannen Minamoto no Yoriie-kyo Fuji no mikari), ca. 1844
Polychrome woodblock print embellished with mica or metallic powders
Bequest of Issac C. Bates 13.2332



Nitta Tadatsune was sent by the emperor to eliminate the monsters hiding in Mount Fuji. Here he has bravely advanced into a cave in its slope, where he encounters the goddess of the mountain and her dragon. The goddess praises his courage for entering her domain.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861
Hachi, Japanese
Apparition of the Large Skeleton Summoned Before Otake Taro Mitsukuni and His Retainer by Takiyasha, Daughter of Taira no Masakado in His Haunted Soma Castle, ca. 1844
Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.2336



Taira no Masakado (d. 940), a provincial warlord who rebelled against the court, was defeated and killed. Here, in his ruined castle at Sōma haunted by the ghosts of his soldiers, his sorceress daughter Takiyasha conjures up a spectral skeleton to frighten the court's emissary, Mitsukuni. Mitsukuni, formerly a follower of Masakado, remains undaunted and ultimately defeats Takiyasha.

RISD MUSEUM

Katsukawa Shuntei, Japanese, 1770-1820

The Warriors Sato Tadanobu and Yokawa Kakuhan (Sato Tadanobu; Yokawa Kakuhan), ca. 1800

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1158

Satō Tadanobu (1161–86) served Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–89), the late-12th-century hero who was pursued and killed by his half-brother, Yoritomo (1147–99). Here Tadanobu jumps from the roof of the Yoshino temple to attack the monk Yokawa Kakuhan. For this battle, Tadanobu has disguised himself as Yoshitsune to allow his lord to escape.



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

The Warrior Matano Goro Kagehisa Dropping a Rock on the Youth Sanada Yoichi Yoshisada (Matano Goro Kagehisa Sanada Yoichi Yoshisada), 1810s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1299

During a hunting party, the strong man Matano Gorō Kagehisa, who served Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–99), tosses a huge rock over a cliff. At the base of the cliff is Sanada Yoichi Yoshisada, a sixteen-year-old also known for his strength. Sanda Yoichi catches the rock and hurls it back.

What do you think the relationship is between these two men?



Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861

Mikawaya Tetsugoro, Japanese

Toyotomi Hideyoshi escapes assassination on the ship of Yojibei (Toyotomi Hideyoshi to Yojibei), Famous places of Kyushu, Buzen Province, going to the capital..., 1847-1852

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1310

Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98), a great warlord of the late 16th century, takes refuge on the rock to the left. He is fleeing from the ship's captain, Yojibei, who has attempted to assassinate him.



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Yoshitsuru, Japanese

Joshuya Juzo, Japanese

Opening siege of Minamoto no Yoritomo: Hojo Tokimasa and others attack Yamaki Hangan at his mansion (Minamoto no Yoritomo no hataage Hojo Tokimasa sono hoka Yamaki Hangan no yashiki ni oshiyoseru), 1847-1852

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Jesse H. Metcalf 23.043



Hōjō Tokimasa became the protector of Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–99) and eventually his ally in 1181, when Yoritomo rebelled against the powerful Taira Kiyomori (1118–81), who dominated court politics. The violent battle depicted here is just one episode in Yoritomo's struggle to assume power over the imperial court at Kyoto.

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, Japanese, 1839-1892

Komiyama Shohei

Liu Xuande (Liu Pei; J., Gentoku) visits Zhuge Liang (Liang Chu-ko; J., Komei) in a snowstorm, from Illustrated Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms, 1883

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Paula and Leonard Granoff 85.197.15



This triptych illustrates Liu Bei's (161–223) visit to Zhuge Liang (181–234), an episode from the Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguozhi), a Chinese narrative about the historical events that followed the dissolution of the Chinese empire in 220. Legend has it that Liu, on horseback on the left, called upon the scholar Zhuge Liang three times before he found him at home. Zhuge Liang, impressed by Liu's character, agreed to become his adviser. At the center are the generals Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, who served Liu Bei.

Does Yoshitoshi tell this story effectively, and if so, how?

RISD MUSEUM

Ochiai Yoshiiku, Japanese, 1833-1904

Omiya Kyusuke, Japanese

Hakayawa Sashichi, Japanese

Yoshiiku Ochiai, Japanese, 1833-1904

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861

Utsusemi, Chapter 3 of the Tale of Genji: Watanabe no Tsuna (Utsusemi: Watanabe no Tsuna), Modern-style Imitations of Genji, 1864

Polychrome woodblock print embellished with mica or metallic powders

Gift of Paula and Leonard Granoff 85.197.2

The samurai Watanabe no Tsuna (993–1024) was famed for having cut off the arm of the demon Ibaraki after a long night's watch at the Rashomon Gate of Kyoto. The illustrated inset at the top of the print matches this subject with "The Shell of the Locust" (*Utsusemi*), chapter 3 of the 11th-century Tale of Genji, the earliest novel in Japanese literature. The connection between the historical subject and the theme from the novel is unclear, but usually there is a relationship between such insets and the main subject of the print.



Mizuno Toshikata, Japanese, 1866-1908

Katada Chojiro, Japanese

Hori Tatsu, Japanese

Two [Chinese] warriors fight below camp headquarters at Liangshan (Ryozanpaku no fumoto ni ryoketsu yu o arasou), 1890's

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Paula and Leonard Granoff 85.197.22

In this scene from the Chinese novel *Water Margin (Shuihuzhuan; J., Suikoden)*, Lin Zhong fights Yang Zhi at Liangshan. This battle determines that these two righteous outlaws will eventually join the renegade band that hides out at Liang Mountain, visible on the right in the far distance. Both warriors are identified by their nicknames as well as their given names: "Blue-Faced Beast" Yang Zhi is on the left and "Panther-Headed" Lin Zhong on the right.



RISD MUSEUM

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, Japanese, 1839-1892

Akiyama Buemon, Japanese

Kobayashi Heihachiro: Dawn Moon and Falling Snow (Seppu no gyogetsu Kobayashi Heihachiro), One Hundred Phases of the Moon, 1886

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Isaac C. Bates 97.017

On the night of January 30, 1703, a group of masterless samurai (known as the “Forty-Seven Rōnin”) attacked the mansion of Lord Kira of Kosuke, who had intrigued to force their master to commit suicide. Kobayashi Heihachirō, one of three samurai who defended the villainous Lord Kira to the death during the battle, is here disguised in his nurse’s kimono, which he borrowed when the night attack began.

This popular story, called the *Treasury of Loyalty (Chūshingura)*, extols the virtues of the masterless samurai. Do you think that Yoshitoshi thinks of Kobayashi Heihachirō as a hero or villain?

