

Happiness and Longevity: Deities of Good Fortune in Japanese Prints,

December 5, 2003-February 29, 2004

In Edo-period Japan (1603-1868), a long and happy life was believed to be the gift of a group of benevolent deities known as the Seven Gods of Good Fortune (Shichifukujin). This holy assembly of assorted divinities united four of Buddhist origin: Bishamonten, Daikokuten, Benzaiten, and Hotei; two derived from the Daoist tradition: Fukurokuju and Jurojin; and one borrowed from Shinto belief: Ebisu. To procure benefits from these gods of luck, people made annual visits to the temples devoted to their worship. Portraying the gods served the same purpose, thus they became an important theme in the *ukiyo-e* woodblock printing tradition, the major art form of the Edo period. Initially, representations of these deities were treated as sacred images. Over time, such prints evolved into often-humorous genre pictures. Many such images were produced for sale at the New Year.

The beings depicted in the works on view are not distinguished by a godlike appearance. Neither stately nor austere, often characterized by eccentric features and behavior, they smile amiably and look approachable, as befits popular deities who bring happiness and prosperity. This exhibition embraces a period of over 180 years—from early experiments with color woodblock prints up to the very end of their history as popular art. Designed by Harunobu, Toyoharu, Shigemasa, Hokusai, Gakutei, and others, these prints occur in a variety of formats, including narrow, upright “pillar prints” (*hashira-e*), large-size print panels (*ōban*), privately commissioned and published deluxe prints (*surimono*), sketchbooks (*manga*), and albums. The deities appear in their traditional guise and also in comic/parodied forms (*mitate*) as children or courtesans.

In addition, Japanese popular religion adopted the Chinese cult of established Daoist deities known as *sennin*, often referred to as “Immortals.” Usually claimed to be historical figures, *sennin* are said to have obtained the secret of eternal life, thus setting a promising example as ideal beings. Among the Japanese gods of good fortune, Fukurokuju and Jurōjin are associated with longevity through their Daoist origin.

The variety of visual interpretations for these seven personages is not surprising: the timeless human quest for happiness and longevity sparked artists’ imaginations. We continue to yearn for the generous gifts of the Gods of Good Fortune and only hope that technical progress will make them even more efficient. The 20th-century print by Raifu shows a treasure boat propelled by steam.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Kitao Shigemasa, Japanese, 1739-1820

Parody of child as Bishamon (Mitate bishamonten), The Seven Gods of Good Fortune, 1780s

Polychrome wood block print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1366

With an hourglass instead of the usual miniature pagoda in his right hand and a military fan (*gumbai*) in his left, this boy represents Bishamonten (Sanskrit: *Vaiśravaṇa*), the fierce Guardian of the North in the Buddhist pantheon. Traditionally Bishamonten is depicted as a ferocious warrior. His association with material wealth has its source in an old Indian myth that the riches of the soil are concentrated in the northern quarter of the earth.



Utagawa Toyoharu, Japanese, 1735-1814

The Seven Gods of Good Fortune in Their Treasure Ship (Shichifukujin takarabune), 1770s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1095

All seven of the Gods of Good Fortune in a treasure boat (*takarabune*) are compressed into the narrow format of a pillar print (*hashira-e*). From the top down and moving from right to left the gods are Bishamonten, Jurōjin and Benzaiten, Hotei and Fukurokuju, Daikokuten, and Ebisu. The treasure boat is depicted as a roofed pleasure boat (*yanabune*) with a huge character for longevity inscribed on a canopy adorned with a flaming jewel on its crest. This representation alludes to boat-partying, a favorite public diversion in Edo (modern-day Tokyo).



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Suzuki Harunobu, Japanese, 1724-1770

Parody of Immortal Kinko (Kinko sennin), ca. 1768

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1050

Some of Harunobu's finest designs were created in the narrow vertical format known as the pillar print (*hashira-e*). A courtesan mounted on a giant carp and absorbed in reading a letter parodies a Daoist Immortal known in Japan as Kinkō (Chinese: Qīngāo). The legend tells of a 200-year-old Chinese painter and musician of the Zhou period (1122-247 bc) who emerged from the underwater world riding a giant carp. He carried a scroll with a sutra text and a law banning fishing. The frivolous interpretation of classical themes in a contemporary context is typical of mitate prints.



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Keisai Eisen, Japanese, 1790-1848

Soshuya Yohei

Mount Fuji, falcon and eggplants (Ichi fuji ni taka san nasubi), 1830s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.508

Shown against the backdrop of a distant Mt. Fuji are a falcon on a rock and an eggplant growing nearby. Not only is this a beautiful work of *kachō-ga* (the “bird-and-flower” genre), but its traditional, auspicious composition promises a lucky first dream for the New Year. Completed in shades of blue, this sheet by Eisen belongs to a category of prints known as “indigo impressions” (*aizuri*). This technique first appeared as the printmakers’ response to the restrictive governmental edicts of the 1840s aimed, among other things, at rich polychromy, but it also had its own aesthetic appeal.



Japanese

Ezakiya Kichibei, Japanese

Kozan, Japanese, fl. ca. 1800-1820

First dream of the New Year (Hatsuyume), 1811.5

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1364

The print illustrates a lucky “first dream of the year” (*hatsuyume*), according to the inscription in the print’s upper right-hand corner. Daikokuten and Ebisu, two of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune, appear in this print as falconers. An eggplant is growing next to them. The scene is set against Mt. Fuji, with the sun rising behind its right slope. Two treasure boats are to be seen on the lake. On the sail of the one to the right is the character for “treasure,” while the one on the left reads “happiness.”



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Kitao Shigemasa, Japanese, 1739-1820

Parody of child as Fukurokuju (Mitate fukurokuju), The Seven Gods of Good Fortune, 1780s

Polychrome wood block print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1369

This boy watches the contest of two miniature sumo wrestlers on his fan. Hotei's usual attributes are ingeniously combined here. His leaflike fan, the same as those used by referees in sumo bouts, would have suggested the portrayal of children, the god's customary companions, as heavyweight champions. Their huge bodies also contain an allusion to Hotei's renowned corpulence.



Kitao Shigemasa, Japanese, 1739-1820

Parody of child as Ebisu (Mitate ebisu) (Shichifukujin), The Seven Gods of Good Fortune, 1780s

Polychrome wood block print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1371

With his usual high folded hat (*kazaorieboshi*) tied to his fishing rod and a giant fish under his arm, this boy appears as Ebisu, the patron of fishermen and trade. He is the only deity of Shinto origin among the Seven Gods of Good Fortune.



Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868

Gama, Courtesans as Immortals, 1820s

Polychrome woodblock print with embossing and metallic embellishment

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.38

A leaf-patterned mantle over the courtesan's kimono and a folded-paper toad in her hands define her as a parallel to Gama Sennin, "a sage with a toad" (Chinese: Liu Hai). Many Far Eastern legends of the toad's longevity culminate in this image. The sage is believed to have received the gift of immortality from the toad. A *netsuke* (belt toggle)



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depicting him in his traditional guise is on view in the case (acc. no. 18.672).

Kitao Shigemasa, Japanese, 1739-1820

Parody of child as Benten (Mitate benten), The Seven Gods of Good Fortune, 1780s

Polychrome wood block print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1368

A beautifully attired girl with an elaborate hairdo plays a long, horizontal, seven-string Japanese harp (*shichigenkin*). This is how the artist parodies Benzaiten, the deity of music and happiness and the only woman among the Seven Gods of Good Fortune.



Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868

Ryogyo, Courtesans as Immortals, 1820s

Polychrome woodblock print with embossing and metallic embellishment

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.30

A thousand-year-old turtle with a seaweed tail (*minogame*) is masterfully incorporated into the design of the outer kimono of a courtesan. This creates the conceit that she sits upon the turtle's back, thus resembling the Immortal Rokō (Chinese: Lu Ao) of the 2nd century BC. He is said to have lived in this manner for hundreds of years.



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Kitao Shigemasa, Japanese, 1739-1820

Parody of child as Jurojin (Mitate jurojin), The Seven Gods of Good Fortune, 1780s

Polychrome wood block print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1365

Holding a turtle (one of the most common symbols of longevity) above his head, this boy stands for Jurōjin, a god of long life. This deity of Daoist origin largely duplicates Fukurokuju's functions and attributes. Jurōjin's head, however, is believed to be less elongated and is usually covered. Accordingly, he is shown here in a square gauze hat (*nage-zukin*) reminiscent of the angular headgear of a Chinese official. The characters inscribed on his apron mean "happiness" and "longevity," which define the sphere of his blessings.



Kitao Shigemasa, Japanese, 1739-1820

Parody of child as Daikoku (Mitate daikoku), The Seven Gods of Good Fortune, 1780s

Polychrome wood block print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1367

The soft rounded hat upon the boy's head, the mallet in his hand, and the playmate rats are all established attributes of Daikokuten, the leading deity in the group of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune. Of Buddhist origin, Daikokuten (Sanskrit: Mahākāla, "the great black one"), a ferocious guardian of the faith, was also worshiped in India as a household patron and a god of wealth.



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Okumura Masanobu, Japanese, 1686-1764

Ebisu, mid 1740s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1057

In his traditional garb, Ebisu, patron deity of fishermen, stands on a precipitous cliff pulling his net out of the waves. His heavy catch is dominated by a giant sea bream or *tai*, regarded by the Japanese as a symbol of good luck. Unlike most illustrations of Ebisu, which show him with a fishing rod and a tai fish, this portrayal of the god in the process of casting his net has an appearance of truth further emphasized by the presence of a crouching onlooker intently watching Ebisu's efforts.



Kitao Masayoshi, Japanese, 1764-1824

Watanabe Gentai, Japanese

Kitao Masanobu, Japanese, 1761-1816

Hokusai school

The Seven Gods of Good Fortune (Shichifukujin), 1800s

Polychrome wood block print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1333

This anonymous print likely comes from Chiharu Takashima's 1828 republication of a page from a famous album of pictures and poems first published in 1795 by Tsutaya Jūzaburō. Gathered in a circle around two symbols of longevity—a dancing crane and a turtle—the Seven Gods of Good Fortune appear in their traditional guises. The far right-hand figure in full armor and a helmet is Bishamonten. Moving clockwise, next to him is the bald Hotei; Ebisu points to the crane; and Daikokuten leans on a bale of rice that supports his magical mallet. Jurōjin reposes on a stag, his usual mount. Fukurokuju is distinguished by his short body and extended skull. Benzaiten plays her biwa lute. Since the gods were depicted in a traditional and lively manner, the print—originally of special significance for a group of artists and poets—may be regarded as a generic image of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune.



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Nakamura Hōchū, Japanese, fl. 1790-1813

Kinkado of Edo, Japanese

Tampankan, Japanese

Ogata Kōrin, Japanese, 1658-1716

Ebisu, Otafuku, Daikoku (Otafuku to Ebisu Daikoku), Korin gafu (An album of pictures by Korin), late 1800s- early 1900s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1320



Sketchy and eccentric images of Daikokuten with his mallet and bales of rice at his side and Ebisu hand-in-hand with Benzaiten—depicted as a Shinto priestess with bells (*suzu*) at her waist—suggest the bold style of Ogata Kōrin (1658-1716), patriarch of the Rinpa School of painting. A book of woodcut prints based on Kōrin's works and published at the beginning of the 19th century by Nakamura Hōchū excited a revival of interest in the highly decorative Rinpa style. This print is probably a later version from the Meiji period (1868-1912).

Raifu, Japanese, ca. 1929; 20th century

Kyufu, Japanese, 20th century

Treasure ship (Takarabune), 1929

Polychrome wood block print

Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1997.90.13



This vessel is a modernized version of a treasure ship. Powered by steam and equipped with two sails, it carries stacked bales of rice. Although the wind blowing the smoke back could not possibly balloon the sails as depicted, the two means of propulsion insure quick delivery of the bountiful load. Fukurokuju, a god of longevity with an extended skull, navigates the boat from the fore. The left-hand sail bears a cyclic calendar sign for the year of snake, which corresponds to 1929, the date of the print's production, and the right-hand sail is inscribed with the character for treasure. The poem on the left is identified as the first writing of the New Year (*kakizome*) and reads: "Spring upon spring—the view of vast expanses of the ocean!"

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Kitao Shigemasa, Japanese, 1739-1820

Parody of child as Hotei (Mitate hotei), The Seven Gods of Good Fortune, 1780s

Polychrome wood block print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1370

The boy playing with a kite adorned by a picture of a crane represents Fukurokuju, who as the god of longevity was often shown accompanied by such a bird, also emblematic of long life. Cranes in Daoist mythology abide among the Immortals, often serving as their transportation. Additionally, the kite alludes to New Year's festivities. It was customary to fly kites on the first days of the year, the time closely associated with the Seven Gods of Good Fortune.



Japanese

Netsuke (belt toggle), 1800s

Ivory

Gift of Misses Anna and Louisa Case 20.112

This is a typical image of Daikokuten seated on a rice bale while holding his wish-granting mallet. Some jewels have already been produced by it and are scattered about. The kind and smiling face of this god of wealth and good luck bears no semblance to the ferocious guardian of the Buddhist faith, Mahākāla, from whom Daikokuten derives.



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Japanese

Inrō (small portable case) and Netsuke (belt toggle), 1800s

Inrō: “sprinkled picture” lacquer technique (*maki-e*); netsuke: overlays of red and black lacquer (*negoro*)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.422

On the *inrō*, Hotei is shown enjoying the simple pleasure of scratching his back, for which purpose he uses the lengthy handle of his leaflike fan, his standard attribute. The netsuke plays off Hotei’s other attribute—his canvas bag—to which Hotei owes his name (literally translated as “Canvas Bag”). Usually filled with valuables or children, here the bag contains the god himself. Only Hotei’s contentedly smiling face, his fleshy chin propped by his hands, is visible above the sack’s opening. The *negoro* lacquer technique, in which the red coating of lacquer is rubbed out in some places to show the underlying black layer, lends the objects a worn appearance, particularly appropriate here with the perpetual carrying of the god’s sack.



Japanese

Netsuke (belt toggle), 1800s

Carved wood

Museum Appropriation Fund 18.595

As often happens, the smiling Hotei is shown with a child who has just emerged from the bag on the god’s back and sits on his shoulders.



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Japanese

Netsuke (belt toggle), 1800s

Ivory

Bequest of John M. Crawford, Jr. 1989.110.25

This remarkably compact netsuke shows Hotei in a conventional way. Shorn and smiling, with swelling earlobes like any other Buddhist personage, he is exposing his barrel-like belly, a symbol of well-being. His bag of treasures is behind his back, and in his right hand he holds a leaf-shaped fan.



Japanese

Inrō (small portable case), 1700s

Carved red lacquer

Gift of Misses Anna and Louisa Case 20.085

Inrō are small portable cases worn at the girdle to hold various items such as medicines, seals, candies, etc. They are suspended by silken cords, which are prevented from slipping through the belt or girdle by attachment to *netsuke* (belt toggles). *Inrō* ornamentation reflects a high degree of artistic development, usually executed in one of the various lacquer techniques. This *inrō* shows Hotei on one side and two Daoist Immortals on the reverse.



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Japanese

Netsuke (belt toggle), 1800s

Wood

Museum Appropriation Fund 18.672

Gama Sennin, or the “sage with a toad,” is said to have received the secret of immortality from a gigantic toad who accompanied him ever after. In Japanese art he usually appears as an old, bearded man with bulging eyes who wears a coat made of leaves and leans on a staff with a gourd flask attached to it.



Japanese

Netsuke (belt toggle), 1800s

Ivory

Gift of Mrs. Theodore W. Foster in memory of Thomas and Paulina Wright Davis 29.020

With a short body, long head, and enormously elongated skull, Fukurokuju has a most unusual appearance. Here his attributes are atypical. Instead of the open fan characteristic of a Daoist Immortal, he is holding a folded fan. His usual staff with a scroll tied to it has been transformed into a branch bearing the peaches of immortality of Chinese mythology. A *tai* fish, yet another good luck symbol, substitutes for the scroll.

Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868

Tobosaku, Courtesans as Immortals, 1820s

Polychrome woodblock print with embossing and metallic embellishment

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.29

Shown from behind, her attire demonstrated to its full advantage, a courtesan turns her head toward the viewer. She wears a shawl, the ends of which are tied in a knot resembling the leaves of a peach concealed by her position. The name of a Daoist Immortal, Tōbōsaku (Chinese: Dong Fangshuo), is inscribed before the poem. This courtier of the Chinese emperor Wu Di (140-87 bc) stole and ate a peach of



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immortality grown by the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu) and intended for Wu Di.

Japanese

Netsuke (belt toggle), 1800s

Ivory

Museum Appropriation Fund 18.654A

This flattened round netsuke is of the “bean-paste bun,” or manjū type. The netsuke is carved in relief with the image of the “fishermen’s god,” Ebisu, who sits on a rock and angles, his fishing basket behind him.



Japanese

Netsuke (belt toggle), 1800s

Ivory

Gift of Misses Anna and Louisa Case 20.122

The *netsuke* shows Daikokuten’s regular attributes of a bag, a bale of rice, and a wish-fulfilling mallet.



Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849

Tōshirō Katano, Japanese

Random sketches by Hokusai: Vol. 13, Kaei 2, 1849

Woodblock print

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.394.13

Originally a Buddhist guardian of faith (Sanskrit: Mahākāla), the Three-Faced Daikokuten (Sammen Daikokuten) with six arms is the manifestation in which this deity was introduced into Japan from China. Here he is shown with the props of a God of Good Fortune. With Bishamonten at his right and Benzaiten at his left, this type of Daikokuten image played a crucial role in the grouping of the seven lucky gods. The right-hand page shows an unrelated image of a

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protective Buddhist deity, Fudō Myō-ō, in his form as the Dragon King (Kurikara Fudō).

Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849

Tōshirō Katano, Japanese

Random sketches by Hokusai: Vol. 3, 1812-1849

woodblock printed book with paper wrappers, sewn

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.394.3

Not only were living creatures believed to possess felicitous power to grant happiness and longevity; certain objects were also credited with this ability. The most comprehensive group of magic objects, known as the myriad treasures (*takaramono*), was carried around in the bags of the Gods of Good Fortune. Here these felicitous magic objects are shown in pairs, which doubles their blessings.

Yanagawa Shigenobu, Japanese, 1787-1832

Dong Fangso Stealing the Peaches of Immortality, Five Examples of Long Life, 1823/1

Polychrome woodblock print with embossing

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.11

The Daoist Immortal Tōbōsaku (Chinese: Dong Fangshuo) is shown here as he steals the peaches of immortality that were presented to his lord, the Chinese emperor Wu Di (140-87 bc). By eating them, Tōbōsaku obtained the secret of eternal life.



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Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868
Tekkai, Courtesans as Immortals, 1820s
Polychrome woodblock print with embossing and metallic
embellishment
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.37

Tekkai (Chinese: Li Tieguai), one of the Eight Immortals (*sennin*), was known for his mastery of magic. He frequently dispatched his spirit on journeys to celestial quarters, leaving his body behind. Once, a disciple buried Tekkai's body, assuming his teacher was not going to return. Tekkai, however, reappeared and lodged in the body of a limping beggar. He is thus depicted with an iron crutch, parodied here by the courtesan's pipe.

A scroll escaping from a gourd symbolizes Tekkai's power to free his spirit from his body, which is burlesqued by the courtesan's portrait floating in the smoke she exhales.



Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868
Okyo, Courtesans as Immortals, 1820s
polychrome woodblock print with embossing and metallic
embellishment
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.28

A courtesan stands and grasps a pole of a kimono rack in a position that suggests she is trying to balance on the backs of a pair of ducks in flight. In fact, the ducks are depicted on the lower panel of the rack. The artist created this illusion by merging identical cloud patterns on the courtesan's kimono and the panel. The figure stands for Ōkyō (Chinese: Wang Qiao), a Chinese official who is said to have used two ducks as transportation when visiting the emperor's palace.



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Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868
Kinko, Courtesans as Immortals, 1820s
Polychrome woodblock print with embossing and metallic
embellishment
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.27

A courtesan with a letter in her hand seems to be riding a giant fish, which in reality appears as a design on her kimono, seen from underneath her watery patterned outer robe. She represents the Daoist Immortal Kinkō (Chinese: Qingao) returning to the shore on a carp after his month-long sojourn in the underwater world. The same subject is treated in the pillar print by Harunobu (acc. no. 13.1050).



Japanese
Netsuke (belt toggle), 1800s
Ivory
Museum Appropriation Fund 18.654B

This flattened round netsuke is of the “bean-paste bun,” or *manjū* type. The *netsuke* is carved in relief with the image of the “fishermen’s god,” Ebisu, who sits on a rock and angles, his fishing basket behind him.

