

## Rare Rare Books from Tokugawa Japan

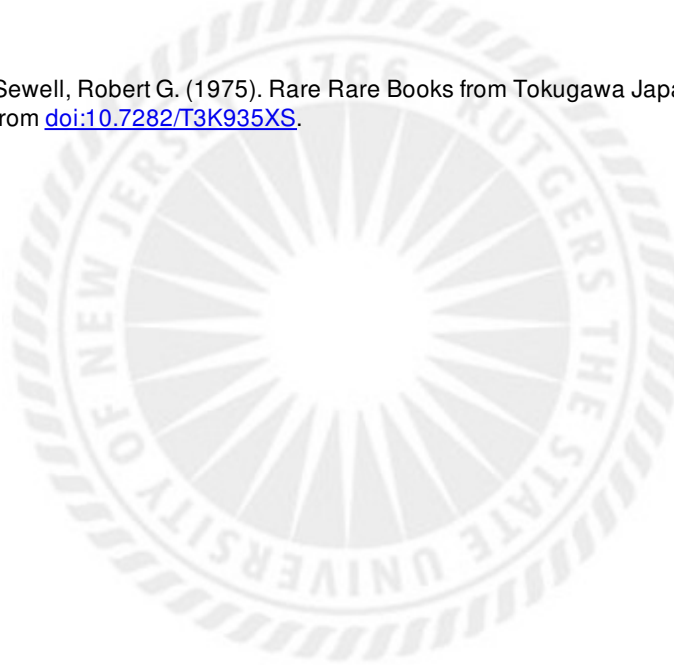
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# Rare Books from Tokugawa Japan



The University of Illinois Library's holdings in Japanese language materials is now nearly 35,000 items. Of special interest to readers of *Non Solus* is the Japanese rare book collection made up of scrolls, folding books, manuscripts, maps, and books printed with both movable type and wood blocks from the eighth century to the mid-nineteenth century. The collection is particularly rich in books produced during the Tokugawa period, 1600-1867. In the summer of 1974 a part of the collection was displayed for readers and visitors in the Rare Book Room. Most of the approximately one hundred books in the collection were purchased from the estate of Joseph K. Yamagiwa in 1969. Dr. Yamagiwa was a Japanese-American who, in the course of seeking out his roots, became a well known scholar of Japanese language and culture. His academic career covered some thirty years of teaching and research at the University of Michigan, and he collected books with great care and affection throughout his lifetime.

The Tokugawa period was an age of growth and new directions in Japanese culture. A strange form of centralized feudal government evolved under the Tokugawa family which brought peace, prosperity, and urbanization to Japan after centuries of chaotic civil war. During this 250 year period a governmental policy forbade foreigners from entering the country and Japanese from leaving. In this relative tranquility and isolation, Japanese culture developed a strong and unique character. Book production played a fundamental role in the unfolding of Tokugawa culture and provides an important index to it.

At the outset of the Tokugawa period in the early seventeenth century, literacy was almost exclusively limited to Buddhist monks and a handful of aristocrats. But by the end of the era in the mid-nineteenth century, practically all of the samurai class were literate as were a majority of the townsmen. Publishers responded to the growing reading market by publishing an estimated 860,000 books during this period. The Japanese rare book collection contains important examples of books produced throughout this 250 year period and reflects the change in audience and tastes of Tokugawa Japan.

In the first half century of the Tokugawa period books were produced for two types of audience: for the aristocrats and scholars, and for the poorly educated, common people, who were either read to by professional readers or were just learning to read. Of the books produced for the elite, some of the most impressive were printed on movable type. For the common man, a favorite kind of book were *otogizōshi*, or simple tales with many illustrations.

Printing with movable type flourished in Japan between 1592 and 1644. This technique was introduced into Japanese publishing in 1592 when Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) presented to Emperor Goyozēi a font of copper type captured in Korea during the Korean expedition of 1592-1595. Much impressed by this invention, the emperor subsidized several presses. Buddhist temples and private enterprises also supported printing presses during the first four decades of the seventeenth century. Among the books printed on private presses, those from the press at Saga, produced under the direction of the artist Hon'ami Kōetsu (1558-1637), are the most highly esteemed. These books are called *Kōetsu-bon* ("Kōetsu books") or *Saga-bon* ("Saga books"). The Rare Book Room has one of these entitled *Sanjurokkasen* ("Thirty-six Immortal Poets of Japan"), published about 1605. Books of the *Sanjurokkasen* contain a portrait and poem for each poet. They became extremely popular and were continually being reissued with new portraits and selections of poems. In the edition held by the Rare Book Room the type was designed by Kōetsu and portraits were drawn by Tosa Mitsushige. The type closely resembles hand brush calligraphy, for which much credit goes to the skill of the anonymous engraver. Some of the types are ligatures in which more than one Chinese character or a character and a *hiragana* symbol ( a Japanese phonetic script) are united to produce the effect of cursive writing. Other publications printed with movable type in the collection are less artistically ambitious and more utilitarian, using one character per type. These books are *Sangoku buppō denzu engi* ("The History of the Buddhist Law in Three Countries"), c. 1600, and an edition probably from the 1630's of a medieval war tale, *Heiji monogatari*. Printing with movable type completely disappears from Japanese commercial printing and is replaced by wood block printing by the middle of the seventeenth century. Wood blocks were more suitable for the mass production of texts with extensive illustrations, essential for the popularity of commercial books published later in the Tokugawa period.



Sanjurokkasen (c. 1605). This book of "The Thirty-six Immortal Poets" is a "Saga book" printed from movable type.

Perhaps more indicative of the flow of popular Tokugawa culture and commercial publishing is the changing format of the *otogizōshi*. These were medieval novellas composed for the sensibilities of the common man. Their content was romance, military heroics, exotic lands, Buddhism, life of commoners, and animal stories. Such stories remained popular into the Tokugawa period and assumed three characteristic formats — picture scrolls, Nara picture books, and *kana* story books. These types of books do not contain imprint information; therefore, it is difficult to determine accurately their dates. In terms of their origins, the picture scroll is the earliest, the Nara picture book is next, and the *kana* story book is the most recent, but all three forms persisted into the seventeenth century. Picture scrolls, most prevalent in the medieval period, were transported to market places and read by *etoki*, or professional scroll readers. The hand-painted illustrations and calligraphy are in the same style as that of the Nara picture books, a style which is said to have originated in the works of artists connected with the Buddhist temples at Nara. Nara picture books are codices, or bound manuscripts, with hand-painted illustrations and represent a transitional form from the picture scroll to the *kana* story book. With texts written in easy to comprehend *kana*, the Japanese phonetic script, and printed with illustrations on wood blocks, the *kana* story book could be mass produced to satisfy the growing demand for simple, entertaining material for the newly literate. The *kana* story book is the prototype for later Tokugawa book production. The Rare Book Room has examples of *otogizōshi* in all three formats: an early seventeenth century picture scroll, *Hōrai no makimono* (“The Scroll of Horai”), three Nara picture books, and several *kana* story books such as *Monogusa Tarō*.

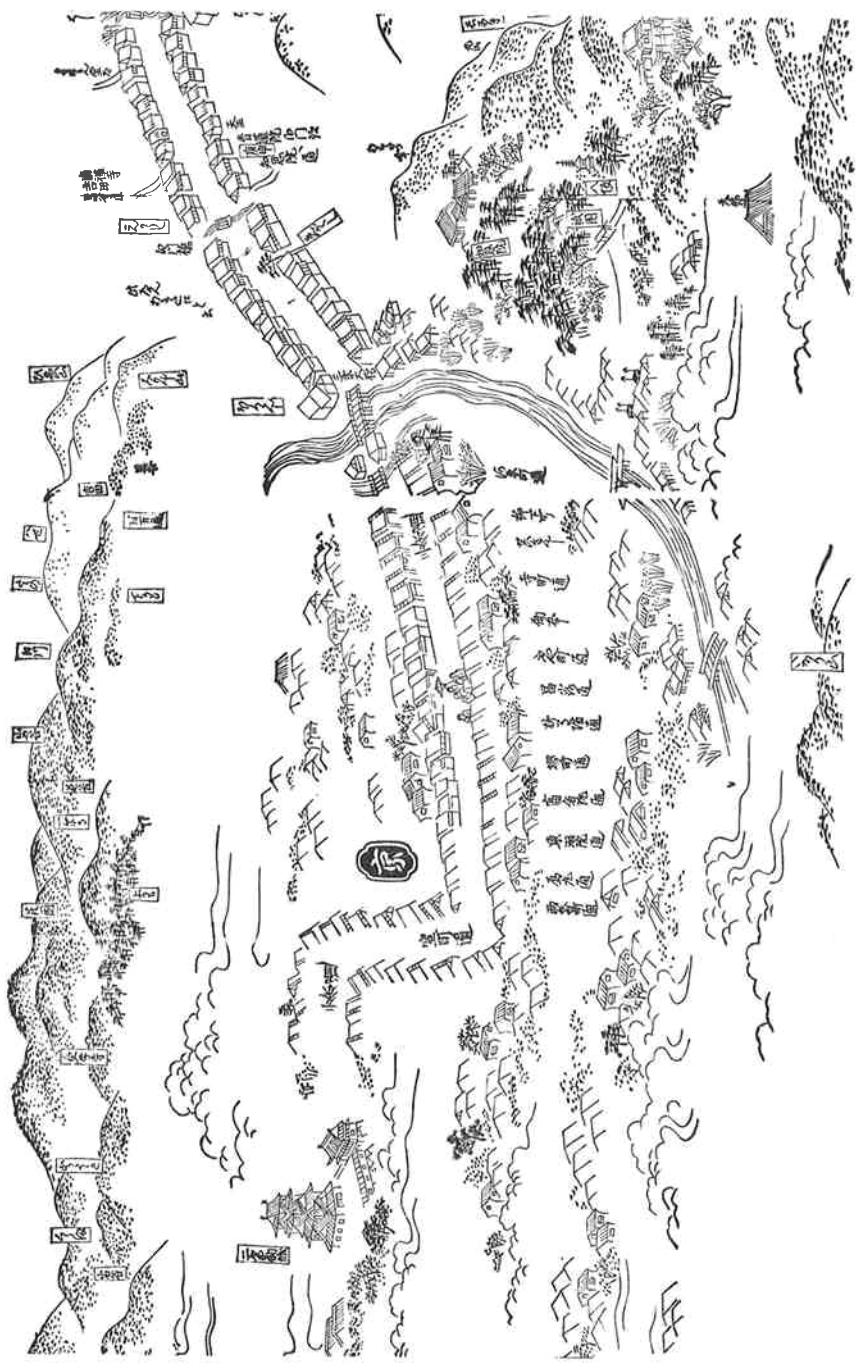
Peace, urbanization, and commercial growth during the first century of the Tokugawa period were the factors which gave rise to a large and prosperous class of merchants for the first time in Japanese history. The *chōnin* or townspeople were increasingly able to assert their influence on the development of culture. Large entertainment centers grew up in the great cities of the day: the Yoshiwara in Edo (Tokyo), the Shinmachi of Osaka, and the Shimabara in Kyoto. A wide variety of activities were available in the brothels, theaters, and public baths of these centers.

The Japanese puppet theater and kabuki came into their full flowering in these centers of entertainment. The Rare Book Room has a number of contemporary handbooks for kabuki and other theatrical forms as well

as a collection of playbills from nineteenth century kabuki theaters in the Kansai or Osaka-Kyoto region. But perhaps the most interesting book on popular, urban culture in the rare book collection is Katsuragawa Hosan's *Sunkin zattetsu*, a curious collectanea of the popular arts during the eighteenth century. Katsuragawa, the compiler, reproduced portions of works from his private collection which included maps of the entertainment quarters, guides to brothels, playbills, calendars of events, and even the gigantic hand print of a contemporary *sumo* wrestler.

At the same time that urban centers were developing, transportation between them also improved. Travel and sightseeing came into vogue so maps, guide books, and gazetteers were published to satisfy a growing demand for travel information. One of the main reasons for improved communication and transportation was the construction of the *Tōkaidō* or Eastern Sea Road which connected Edo (Tokyo), the government headquarters of the Tokugawa regime, and Kyoto, the ancient capital. When Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa regime, established fifty-three official post houses along the road in 1601, the *Tōkaidō* became a vital part of the life of the country. Inter-prefectural commerce and the required annual journey of all feudal lords with their entourages to and from the capital in Edo caused traffic to increase greatly. Restaurants, tea houses, and other forms of entertainment flourished around the official post houses. The cultural life along the *Tōkaidō* became a constant subject of artistic and literary works throughout the period. The Rare Book Room has a first edition of one of the volumes of *Tōkaidō bunken ezū*, a work which depicts the entire route from Edo to Kyoto in five volumes. Each volume is a folding book of 415 cm. The illustrator of this work was Hishikawa Moronobu (1618-1694), the founder of the *ukiyo*e school of wood block prints.

The rare book collection also includes a number of maps from the Tokugawa period such as two maps of Edo (Tokyo), one from 1682, and another from the 1850's. A comparison of the two provides excellent material on the growth of the city during that 200 years. There is as well a huge hand painted map published in 1842 by Akiyana Nagotoshi called *Fujimi jūsanshu yochi no zenzu*. Measuring 146 x 168 cm, this map took over a decade of research to complete and shows in minute detail the thirteen provinces from which Mount Fuji can be seen. There are also several contemporary gazetteers in the collection such as those for seven-



Ochikochi Dōin, *Tōkaidō bunken ezu* (1670). This folding book was illustrated by Hishikawa Moronobu, founder of the *ukiyo*e school of wood block prints. This section of the pictorial map of the *Tōkaidō* depicts the road leading into Kyoto.

teenth century Edo, eighteenth century Osaka, and nineteenth century Nagasaki. Among these, *Edo susume*, 1677, is the most valuable. It is the first edition of this work, which focuses on Edo at the end of the seventeenth century, during the high point of Tokugawa culture known as the Genroku period. The illustrator of this work is again Hishikawa Mōronobu.

The flowering of Tokugawa culture was supported by an increasingly literate and knowledgeable population. The demand for language skills and learning is reflected in the tremendous proliferation of dictionaries and encyclopedias. The Japanese writing system requires an extensive amount of dictionary work. Words can be represented by Chinese characters, which have both a semantic value and a variable phonetic value, or by two syllabaries. So there are two main types of dictionaries, character and syllabary dictionaries. If one knows the pronunciation of the word but needs the character used to represent it, one uses a syllabary dictionary. If one is reading a text and wants to know the pronunciation of a word one uses a character dictionary. The Rare Book Room has numerous examples of Tokugawa period dictionaries of both types including four editions of *Wagokuhen*, a dictionary of Chinese characters used in Japanese, and Arakida Morizumi's *Ruiju kanazukai*, a 1666 syllabary dictionary.

Another rich area of source material on Tokugawa culture in the collection are its literary works. During the beginning of the period, publishers reprinted many classics of Japanese literature. Perhaps the most popular of these was *Ise monogatari* ("Tales of Ise"), a collection of verse narratives concerning the life and loves of a "certain young man" frequently identified as the legendary poet and lover, Arihara no Narihira (825-880). The Rare Book Room has four seventeenth century editions of this work. The Tokugawa age had a particular affinity for the robust and romantic quality of this work. But as time passed and the culture of the period became more self-assured and distinct, readers were no longer content with such reprints. Authors were called upon to adapt the classics into contemporary settings. Santō Kyozan (1769-1858) was a skilled practitioner of this art. The Rare Book Room has his adaptation of *Taketori monogatari* ("The Tale of the Woodcutter"), a work originally composed in the early tenth century. Kyozan's version, which was published in a multi-volume series from 1838 to 1856, recreates the classic with appropriate Tokugawa period local color to ensure its popular suc-





Santō Kyozan, *Taketori monogatari* (1838-1856). This page is indicative of the importance of illustration in late Tokugawa fiction. The artist is Kunisada.

cess. It is illustrated by some of the foremost artists of the day, Toyokuni, Kuniteru, Kunisada, and Kuniyoshi.

Besides adaptations, *gesaku* writers, educated men who wrote light fiction for entertainment and profit during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, collaborated on contemporary love stories, a genre known as *ninjōbon*. One of the collection's examples of this type is a work by Shōtei Kinsui (1795-1862) and his apprentice, Sanzantei Arindo (1831-1901), entitled *Temari uta sannin musume*, published serially from 1862 to 1864. This book follows the typical plot in which the joys and sorrow of love are described in realistic, erotic detail. A young naive couple of the merchant class vow ever-lasting love. Then the man strays and becomes involved with another woman, usually a prostitute. *Ninjōbon* were condemned as detrimental to public morality during a period of reform in the 1830's when writers were imprisoned and their books destroyed.

Some writers attempted to counter this trend by raising both the moral tone and literary quality of their work. Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848), generally regarded as the best nineteenth century Japanese novelist, was one of these writers. The Rare Book Room has the 1811 edition of his masterpiece *Chinsetsu yumiharizuki* ("A Strange Tale of the Crescent Moon"). In this thirty volume work published serially from 1807 to 1811, Bakin collaborated with the pre-eminent artist of the age, Katsuhika Hokusai (1760-1849). His story is an adaptation of the sixteenth century Chinese novel, *Shui hu chuan* ("Water Margin") and Japanese historical tales. Because of *Chinsetsu yumiharizuki* and other works, Bakin is credited with being the creator of the historical romance in Japan. His moralistic outlook on Chinese civilization, Buddhist philosophy, and national history was mellowed by concern for the delicacies of style, by compassion for others, and by his belief in human dignity.

An annotated bibliography of the entire Japanese rare book collection, including the Tokugawa books described here, is being prepared and will be published by the University of Illinois Library. It bespeaks the cosmopolitan nature of the Library, perhaps best known for its seventeenth century holdings in English literature, that it should have so rich a collection of similar date from the Far East.

ROBERT G. SEWELL