

## 26 The Prints of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets in the Art Institute of Chicago

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For years, collections of Japanese art and books on the East coast of America have drawn considerable attention. The Burke Collection, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Spencer Collection in the New York Public Library, and the Sackler and Freer Gallery in the National Museums of Asian Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. all contain exceptional works of Japanese art and print books. However, the tale of Japanese art and book collecting in America is incomplete if we do not consider the collections of other regions.

Through generous funding from the JSPS Grants-in-Aid Research Start-up Grant, I was able to visit the Art Institute of Chicago, the San Francisco Asian Art Museum, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; all famous within America for their collections of Japanese art, but perhaps less well known in Japan.

This paper will introduce two print books of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets 三十六歌仙 in the Art Institute of Chicago collection, a black and white Saga-bon print from the early 17th century and a color Shunshō print from the late 18th century.

The Thirty-Six Immortal Poets are a grouping of thirty-six famous poets designated by the late Heian period (794–1185) politician and poet, Fujiwara no Kintō (966–1041). The Thirty-Six Immortal Poets include Kakinomoto no Hitomaro from the *Man'yōshū*, Ariwara no Narihira, famous for *The Tales of Ise*, Ono no Komachi, the famous poetess, and Ki no Tsurayuki, the compiler of the first Imperial collection of Japanese waka poems *Kokin wakashū*. The thirty-six poets are divided into two teams of eighteen poets, the left and the right. Poets from Hitomaro to Taira no Kanemori were on the left team and poets from Tsurayuki to Nakatsukasa were on the right team.

This kind of grouping was so popular that several variants were created, including the Thirty-Six Female Immortal Poets, a group of all female poets, as well as a “Later” Thirty-Six Immortal Poets that brought together poets of the centuries after Kintō had passed away. Pictorial depictions of these groups of poets became popular in the Edo period (1600–1868) taking many forms, including paintings pasted to albums or standing screens and print books. In the two books this paper will introduce, each of the thirty-six poets is illustrated

with a single poem of theirs next to or above them.

## 1. Saga-bon: The First Illustrated Print Books

The first text I will discuss is a Saga-bon version of the Kintō Thirty-Six Immortal Poets. More than simply beautiful print books, the Saga-bon are the earliest printed non-Buddhist illustrations of Japanese literature.<sup>1</sup> Although many extant copies of these Saga-bon print books are held in American institutions, English language research on the Saga-bon print tradition is still limited. In discussing the Saga-bon print books in the Spencer Collection of the New York Public Library, Uhnsook Park describes the Saga-bon thus;

Sagabon is the best known and most influential genre of movable type books in the early Edo period. The name Saga 嵯峨, is applied to a collection of at least thirteen titles of Japanese classical literature in various editions, printed by Hon'ami Kōetsu 本阿弥光悦 and Suminokura Sōan [sic] 角倉素庵 at Saga, near Kyoto, a village where Sōan lived and worked.

These works were produced in the years 1608 to about 1624. They were noted for lavish attention given to the quality of their paper, binding, calligraphy, and overall appearance. Consequently, the Sagabon are works of great beauty.<sup>2</sup>

The Saga-bon print collection created by Kōetsu includes editions of the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* (One-hundred Poets, One Poem Each), the *Kokin Wakashū*, *The Tale of Genji*, and *The Tales of Ise*, as well as the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, among other works. Kōetsu designed the first printings himself, but they were so popular that dozens of copies and forgeries were created. As Uhnsook notes, the name of these printed books, Saga-bon, comes from the fact that the workshop of Suminokura Soan was located in a suburb of Kyoto named Saga.

The Saga-bon genre was first defined in Japanese scholarship in Wada Tsunashirō's book, titled *Sagabon-kō* (Research on the Saga-bon), published in 1916. Wada identified two copies, a "large copy" and a "medium copy" of the Saga-bon Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, but did not give the current locations of these extant books.

Wada specifies the size of these copies as below.

Large copy:

Page = L33.94×W24.54

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1 David Chibbet, *The History of Japanese Printing and Book Illustration* (Tokyo: Kodansha. 1977), 114.

2 Uhnsook Park, "Illustrated Books of the Late Edo Japan: The Mitchell Collection in the New York Public Library's Spencer Collection," *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 1989 (87): 12–24.

Image boundary line= L29.09 ×W21.82.

Medium copy:

Page = L28.48×W21.51

Image boundary line = L26.06×W18.48.<sup>3</sup>

In both *Saga-bon zu kō* (Research on the Saga-bon Images) and *Kokatsujiban no kenkyū* (Research on Old Moveable Type Books), Kawase Kazuma classifies the copies of the Saga-bon Thirty-Six Immortal Poets into two types and three sub classes.<sup>4</sup>

#### Type 1

- A) Books that have multi-color gubiki<sup>5</sup>: Tenri University Library Scroll (previously held by Yasuda Bunko)
- B) Books that have single-color gubiki: Ochanomizu Seikidō Bunko (which has been colored with pigment and gold paint)
- C) Books that have plain paper with no gubiki: Tōyō Bunko

#### Type 2

- A) Reproductions: (a) Yasuda Bunko (status unknown)  
(b) Tōyō Bunko

The books in Type 1 are all from the same wooden print blocks, so the size of their pages is roughly the same. The books in type 2A are newly created imitations of the original print blocks of the type 1A, B, C books, so they are larger or smaller than the books in type 1. At the time of Kawase's research, the only texts he was aware of were those in Japanese institutions. Many extant copies of the books in overseas collections had not yet been identified. His list has been added to and edited by later scholars based on new findings.

In *Kasen'e of the Edo Period (1600–186)*, Suzuki Jun compiled an exhaustive list of the extant Saga-bon versions of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, which has significantly modified Kawase's original classification. The "large copy" described by Wada appears to be that of Suzuki's "first printing", and the "medium copy" might be those Suzuki designated as "repro-

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3 Wada Tsunashirō, *Saga-bon kō: Edo monogatari, Nishikie no kaiin kōshō, hoka* (Tokyo: Kuresu shuppan, 1995).

4 Kawase Kazuma, *Saga-bon zu kō*, 1932; Kawase Kazuma, *Kokatsujiban no kenkyū*, revised edition (Tokyo: Nihon koshosekishō kyōkai, 1967).

5 Gubiki is a paste as a base color beneath the printed ink.

ductions type 2”.<sup>6</sup> Sizes were not included in Suzuki’s article.

First Printing:

- 1) Sackler & Freer Gallery (H32.9 × W24.9)
- 2) Tōyō Bunko (copy 1) (H32.6 × W24.4)

Second Printing:

- 3) New York Public Library (H33.3 × W24.7)
- 4) Ochanomizu Seikidō Bunko (H33.03 × W25.0, border dimensions: H29.69 × W22.57)
- 5) Tenri University Library (H33.5 × W50.2, border dimensions: H29.5 × W22.5) (previously held by Yasuda Bunko)
- 6) Harvard University Museum (H34.5 × W24.1)
- 7) Sackler & Freer Gallery, Pulverer Collection (H31.5 × W23.9)

Reproductions Type 1:

- 8) Boston Museum of Fine Arts (H30.7 × W23.8)
- 9) Tokyo Metropolitan Library
- 10) Tōyō Bunko (copy 2)
- 11) Tokyo University of the Arts Library (missing some pages)

Reproductions Type 2:

- 12) National Diet Library (border dimensions: H29.1 × W22.8)
- 13) Waseda University Library
- 14) Tōyō Bunko (copy 3)

## 2. Art Institute of Chicago’s Saga-bon

To Suzuki Jun’s list, I would add the Art Institute of Chicago’s Saga-bon book. The Chicago Saga-bon has a dark blue cover with a hand painted label “三十六歌仙書画” (Sanjūrokkasen shoga, Paintings and Writings of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets). The prints themselves are on fragile, thin paper that has been pasted to thick white paper. The Chicago text is H35.5 × W25, border dimensions: H29 × W22.6, and is very close to the dimensions of the New York Public Library and the Harvard University Museum books. The Chicago Saga-bon has no preface and begins on the first page with the poet Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, continues

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6 Suzuki Jun, “Kōetsu Sanjūrokkasen kō,” in *Kasen’e of the Edo Period (1600–186): The Transformation and Originality of the Courty Beauty in Ehon (illustrated books)*, ed. Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan, 104–123. (Tachikawa: Ningen Bunka Kenkyū Kikō Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan, 2009), p. 113.

through the first eighteen poets for the left team followed by all eighteen poets from the right and concludes with the poetess Nakatsukasa. The original Kintō order of the poets alternated poets from the left and right teams, and some reproductions (like the National Diet Library book) of the Saga-bon were rearranged to follow the Kintō order.

The cover of the Chicago book is not likely the original and the binding has been replaced. The title slip “Sanjūrokkasen Shoga” is almost certainly an addition from 1851 when a post script slip was attached to the inside of the back cover. The slip, originally in Japanese, reads;

Text by Honami Kōetsu, Posthumously known as Kōan. Images by Kanō Motonobu, known as Kohōgen. Offered in Spring, Kaei 4 (1851), year of the metal boar. 70-year-old Fujita Nagatoshi.

As Kōetsu lived 1558–1637 and Motonobu lived 1476–1559 it is unlikely that Motonobu was the artist for this particular book; moreover it contradicts the accepted belief that Tosa Mitsushige (1496–?) was the artist for the Saga-bon Thirty-Six Immortal Poets.

According to the internal records of the Art Institute of Chicago, below, the book in question is a slightly damaged copy of the text in the Freer Gallery.

Professor Koreshirō [sic] Wada in his book *Sagabon-Kō*, mentions two publications of this work on Sanjūrok-kasen. One corresponds to this book in our collection, and the other, according to his description is a book of smaller size with the plates reduced and altered in parts. We learn from Professor Wada that the illustrations have been considered to be by Tosa Mitsushige, the son of Mitsunobu. The Freer Gallery has in its library a perfect copy of this book, probably in its original condition; it measures 33×25 cm. The size of the blocks is the same as in our copy. Slightly tinted papers of yellowish and brownish shades are used interleaved with white papers. The sheets are not numbered, and there is no other inscription, excepting the names of the poets and their poems. The writings are judged to be copies made after Kwōetsu's own calligraphy. Compared to illustrations of the *Ise Monogatari*, the illustrations of this book show much more elaborate work in engraving.<sup>7</sup>

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7 From the notes pasted to the interior of the case for the Saga-bon Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, author unknown.



Image 1



Image 2

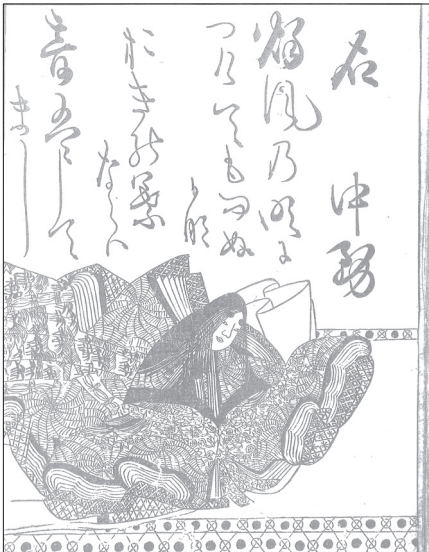


Image 3

Image 1: Saga-bon Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, courtesy of Freer Gallery.

Image 2: Above right, Saga-bon Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, courtesy of Art Institute of Chicago, photograph by Cristina Hirano.

Image 3: Saga-bon Reproduction (Above Left), courtesy of Iwase Bunko.

If the Art Institute of Chicago notes are correct, then this item should be correctly classified as either a first printing or a second printing. As the paper is currently in very bad condition, it is hard to tell if there was originally colored gubiki or white gubiki on the pages. Given the slight color variation, it may be possible that at one time there was colored gubiki on the pages, or at the very least white gubiki that has been rubbed away on certain pages.

*Kasen'e of Edo Period*, edited by Suzuki Jun, reproduces the entirety of the Saga-bon printed book of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets held in the Arthur M. Sackler and Freer Gallery of Art in the National Museums of Asian Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. This enabled me to compare each picture in the Chicago Saga-bon (image 2) to the Freer book (image 1). Upon close inspection of the calligraphy and images, it is clear that the Chicago Saga-bon came from the same printing block as the Freer gallery book. I also compared the Freer and Chicago books with a reproduction (from an imitation block) housed in the Iwase Bunko Library of Nishio City, in Aichi prefecture (image 3).

Though many of the men portrayed in the Saga-bon Thirty-Six Immortal Poets wear simple garments, several of the men sport intricate patterns and the women's kimono all feature minute floral designs. In the poetess Nakatsukasa's image, it is clear from the details of her kimono pattern that the Freer and Chicago images came from the same block. Upon close inspection the Iwase Bunko book proves to be a less detailed reproduction and not a reprint using the same block.

For example, in the design for Nakatsukasa's kimono in the Freer and Chicago books, there is a linking hexagonal design with a thick exterior line, a thin interior line, and four dots in the center. In the Iwase reproduction, the hexagons have two lines of roughly identical thickness, the hexagonal shape is distorted in areas and instead of dots, there are lines or, in some cases, scrawls within. Not only the size of the blocks, but also the matching details down to the tiniest of lines implies that the Chicago book is from the same original block as the Freer book, confirming the suggestion made by the Art Institute of Chicago notes.

In terms of present condition, the very fragile pages of the Chicago book have been remounted on sturdier pages. The Chicago book does have water mark discoloration, a few places where the block did not print fully, some ink stains, and a few places where the paper has been worn away, but it seems to be in better condition than several of the other books in Suzuki's list. Using the online images for the Harvard book, the Harvard book seems to have been printed after the Chicago book as the images are fairly fuzzy due to the block having worn away or the block not being pressed against the paper correctly.<sup>8</sup>

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8 See the Hitomaro image: <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/187362?position=12>

The Art Institute of Chicago Saga-bon is an extremely rare copy of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets Saga-bon printed book and is likely one of the first copies of the second printing. Further study must be undertaken to compare this copy with the first editions as well as the second editions in both Japanese and American collections.

The fact that five of the 14 copies listed by Suzuki are held in American collections proves that collectors from all over the United States were eager to own one of the Saga-bon books, and moreover one of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets. The Art Institute of Chicago Saga-bon Thirty Six Immortal Poets must be added to the list of extant copies, and its existence is indicative of the quality of the books in the Art Institute of Chicago's collection.

### 3. The Art Institute of Chicago Shunshō Print: A Brilliant Reproduction

Second, I would like to introduce a late Edo period edition of Shunshō's Thirty-Six Immortal Poets. Katsukawa Shunshō (1726–1792) was a leading ukiyo-e painter in the mid Edo period, and collections from across the United States are filled with his prints. The Art Institute of Chicago alone holds nearly 600 of his prints. To my knowledge there are eleven copies of Shunshō's Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, of which five are in American and British collections.<sup>9</sup>

Extant copies (in alphabetical order):

- 1) Boston Museum of Fine Arts copy 1 (from the Spaulding collection, donated in 1921)
- 2) Boston Museum of Fine Arts copy 2
- 3) British Museum copy 1
- 4) British Museum copy 2 (from Arthur Morrison, acquired 1906)
- 5) Freer Gallery Pulverer Collection
- 6) Saigū Historical Museum
- 7) Sankō Library
- 8) Shimane University Library
- 9) Tenri University Library
- 10) Tokyo Metropolitan Library Kaga Library
- 11) Tōyō Bunko

In the Art Institute of Chicago book, an incorrect colophon was pasted to the back of the book, naming it as the Nishiki Sanjūrokkasen. However, the Nishiki Sanjūrokkasen was actu-

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9 All texts were found using the institutions' collection websites.



ally a depiction of the variant Female Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, not the original Kintō selection of male and female poets. On the last page of the Chicago book, an advertisement for the Shunshō print edition is seen next to the bibliographic information for the Nishiki Sanjūrokkasen. The advertisement, originally in Japanese, reads; “Color print illustrated text. Text by Sayama-Sensei, Thirty-Six Immortal Poets. One volume. Images by Katsukawa Shunshō. Printed in the previous year.”

The colophon for the Nishiki Sanjūrokkasen claims that the manuscript or print books were completed in Kansei 10, the year of the earth horse (1798) and published in Kansei 13, the year of the metal rooster (1801). Which would suggest that the Shunshō print was published in 1800. According to the colophon of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts book, the Shunshō print book was originally produced in 1789. Given that the Boston version of the text was likely printed in 1789 and Shunshō died in 1792, it is possible that the Chicago text was a posthumous commemorative reprint edition featuring Shunshō’s artwork.

The Boston Museum of Fine Art book (Accession number 2006.1804) may be taken as a representative of the original printing. The inside of the front cover of the Boston book is eggshell paper with gold and (imitation) silver flake followed by a nine-page introduction in flowing kana script (*sōsho*). On the 9th page (left side) Fujiwara Kintō is depicted at his writing desk formulating the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, this is followed by one more page of introduction by the artist Shunshō. Finally on the 10th page (left side) the first poet, Hitomaro, is depicted in black and sepia. His poem is depicted on the reverse of his page with a light sepia toned watermark beneath the printed poem. The rest of the book follows this pattern with the poet on the left and her (or his) poem on the reverse side of that page.

In contrast to the Saga-bon, which imitated classical costume and postures, the Shunshō depictions of the poets are in a more contemporary style. The fine and delicate lines indicate great improvement in printing techniques since the Saga-bon texts were produced. Some of the men are in traditional court costume or hunting attire, but several are portrayed standing, which is unseen in the Saga-bon version. Likewise the women are portrayed in an ukiyo-e fashion. For instance, Ono no Komachi is standing like women in the bijin prints that Shunshō was so famous for.

The Chicago Shunshō book takes the original printing typified in the Boston book and revolutionizes both its format and color scheme. The Chicago book is a folded print (like an accordion) rather than bound pages like the Boston book. The cover of the Chicago text is a multi-color depiction of a flowing stream lined with pines and plum trees. The inside of the front cover is a multi-color watermark and the introductory pages have been removed or were never included. The first page is the depiction of Fujiwara Kintō, however the reverse of his



Image 4: Katsukawa Shunshō's Thirty-Six Immortal Poets (Saigū no Nyōgo), courtesy of Art Institute of Chicago, photograph by Cristina Hirano.



Image 5: Katsukawa Shunshō's Thirty-Six Immortal Poets (Saigū no Nyōgo), courtesy of Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

page is not the introduction by the artist Shunshō, but the poem by the first poet Hitomaro, so that the poet Hitomaro remains on the left, but Hitomaro's poem is visible on the right side. In the Chicago book, when you open to a page you see both the poet's image as well as his or her poem on the facing page, rather than the reverse as in the Boston book. As mentioned previously, the original Kintō order of the poets alternated poets from the left and right teams. The Boston copy of the Shunshō print follows the original Kintō alternating left and right pattern, but the Chicago Shunshō book, like the Chicago Saga-bon, has all the eighteen poets of the left team first followed by the eighteen poets from the right team

Where the Boston text has mainly plain paper underneath the poems, each poem in the Chicago book is printed with varying multi-color watermarks. The watermark continues onto the upper edge of the left side of the page above the image of the poet. Even the colors in which the poets are printed have been injected with more vibrancy. In the Boston book, Ariwara no Narihira is slightly demure in a beige hunting cloak and patterned pants, in the Chicago book his hunting jacket has become a brocade of green and brown while his pants have been printed in maroon and gold.

The second edition in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Accession number 2006.1803) is similar to the Chicago book in that some pages have watermarks. For example, on Saigū Nyōgo's page, the Boston book (image 5) has a watermark of four layers of pink clouds under the poem, which echoes the gradation of pink to white and pink again on the curtains. The curtains in the Chicago book (image 4) have been printed in purple at the top fading to white then to rose echoed by the watermark on the facing page, purple at top and salmon and rose at the bottom. Saigū Nyōgo's clothes are nearly identical in both books, she wears an over garment of light pink patterned with darker pink flowers, the layered garment underneath features roundels of flowers done in yellow and orange. The only difference is the undersides of the sleeves in the Chicago book are purple where the Boston book are white.

The Chicago Shunshō book may be a later reprint, perhaps even later than the colophon would suggest, but the blocks clearly match and the rich colors bring new energy to the designs.

The two printed books, the Saga-bon and the Shunshō book exemplify strikingly different traditions of Japanese Edo period print culture, but they are linked as reproductions of the Thirty-Six Immortal Poets. Moreover, the very order of the poets in the Chicago books is an uncanny coincidence. Both books follow the variant tradition of having the left team followed by the right, unlike the original Kintō order that alternates. In other editions of the Saga-bon as well as the Shunshō print in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and others, the Kintō order is followed.

The Saga-bon itself is an exceptionally valuable find as it is one of less than ten copies of the original printing using the original blocks. Though the corresponding texts in the Spencer Collection in the New York Public Library, and the Sackler and Freer Gallery are more well known, the Chicago text is no less significant.

There are hundreds of other Edo period printed books in the Art Institute of Chicago collection. In fact, the exact number of books has not yet been calculated. From my limited study of just a few of the books in this enormous collection, it is clear that the collection contains many more unexpected and exciting treasures which deserve to be included in the wider awareness of Edo period print culture.