

TRANSLATION

*The Twenty-Four Filial Exemplars*¹

Translated, annotated, and with an introduction by R. Keller KIMBROUGH

Introduction

The following set of stories is an English translation of *Nijūshikō* 二十四孝 (The twenty-four filial exemplars), which is a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Japanese translation of the early fourteenth-century *Quan xiang ershi xiao shi xuan* 全相二十四孝詩選 (Selected verses on all aspects of the twenty-four filial exemplars), compiled by the scholar Guo Jujing 郭居敬 from a variety of earlier Chinese sources. Records indicate that the work was first imported to Japan in 1381, and although the identity of the translator is unknown, Tokuda Kazuo argues that the translation was likely produced in or around the Tenshō 天正 period (1573–1592), when there was a noticeable spike in interest in the work in Japan.² The oldest extant text of the translation dates from the Keichō 慶長 period (1596–1615), when it was published in an illustrated “Saga-bon” 嵯峨本 moveable-type-printed edition with calligraphy by Hon’ami Kōetsu 本阿弥光悦. The work was widely reproduced in text and illustration from the seventeenth through the early twentieth centuries.

Like its Chinese source, *Nijūshikō* contains twenty-four stories about twenty-seven principal protagonists. (Episodes 21 and 22 are about sets of two and three brothers respectively.) The work begins auspiciously with accounts of the Chinese emperors Shun and Wen (r. 2233–2184 BC and 180–157 BC). All of the stories are moralistic in tone, and with the possible exception of episode 22, they are all concerned with the Confucian virtue of filial piety and its frequently miraculous effects. Each of the episodes is prefaced by a Chinese verse in four five-character lines. The verses are untranslated within the larger Japanese translation, but in some editions of *Nijūshikō*, including the one translated here, they are glossed with Japanese readings and creative interpretations of the Chinese. Each of the verses is followed by an explanatory tale in Japanese (which, in some cases, is inconsistent with the poem that it supports), and depending on the published edition of the work, each of these is either prefaced or followed by a block-printed illustration that is also sometimes inconsistent with its episode.

The version of *Nijūshikō* that is translated here was published in Osaka at sometime between ca. 1716 and 1729 as a single book within a box-set anthology of short medieval

1 The following translation is from the early eighteenth-century edition of *Nijūshikō* typeset and annotated in Ōshima 1974, pp. 298–327. The illustrations are from a printing of the same edition of the work in the collection of the National Diet Library (Tokyo).

2 Tokuda 1988, pp. 343–44.

fiction titled *Shūgen otogi bunko* 祝言御伽文庫 (The felicitous wedding companion library), or simply *Otogi bunko* (The companion library). Because of its inclusion in that anthology, *Nijūshikō* tends to be regarded today as an *otogizōshi* (a companion book), which is a catch-all term for a multitude of relatively short and usually anonymous works of medieval prose fiction. The publisher, Shibukawa Seiemon 渋川清右衛門, specialized in educational works for women, and there are at least two eighteenth-century advertisements in which he either insinuated or proclaimed that his anthology was “beneficial for women.” At around the same time that he published *Otogi bunko*, Shibukawa incorporated complete illustrated editions of *Nijūshikō* in at least two of his didactic and eclectic tomes for women (published in 1715 and 1716), suggesting that he really did believe that *Nijūshikō* was good for women.³

The unknown Japanese translator took substantial liberties with his or her translation of Guo Jujing’s collection of tales, resulting in what is essentially a Japanese, rather than Chinese, work of literature. For this reason, in my own English translation of the medieval Japanese, I privilege Japanese rather than Chinese readings of Chinese names. However, for the sake of convenience, I also provide pinyin romanization of the protagonists’ names in parentheses at the head of each story. All figures are from *Nijūshikō* (*Otogi bunko* edition, ca. 1716–1729), courtesy of the National Diet Library.

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3 For a further discussion of this issue, see the article that accompanies the present translation.



Figure 1. With the help of elephants and birds, Great Shun tends his fields.

[1] **Great Shun 大舜 (Da Shun)**

Elephants in a row, tilling in the spring;
a flock of birds weeds the fields.
Succeeding Gyō, he rises to the jeweled throne;⁴
his filial piety moves the emperor's heart.

Great Shun was an exceedingly filial person. His father, whose name was Kosō 瞽叟—“Blind Old Man”—was remarkably stubborn, and his mother had a twisted heart. His younger brothers were extremely arrogant, and they were worthless, too. Nevertheless, Great Shun was fervent in his filial piety. One time when he was farming at a place called Mount Reki, Heaven was moved by his filial devotion.⁵ Great elephants came and tilled his fields, and birds flew to him and pulled the weeds, aiding him in his cultivation. At that time the ruler of the realm was named Emperor Gyō 堯王. He had two daughters, the elder of whom was called Gakō 娥皇, and the younger, Joei 女英. Having received word of Shun's filial piety, Emperor Gyō immediately gave him his daughters to be his empresses, and in the end he left him the realm. This happened entirely as a result of Great Shun's profound sense of filial piety.

⁴ Emperor Gyō 堯王 (Emperor Yao) was a legendary ruler of early China.

⁵ Mount Reki 歷山 (Li-shan) is a mountain in present-day Shandong 山東 Province.

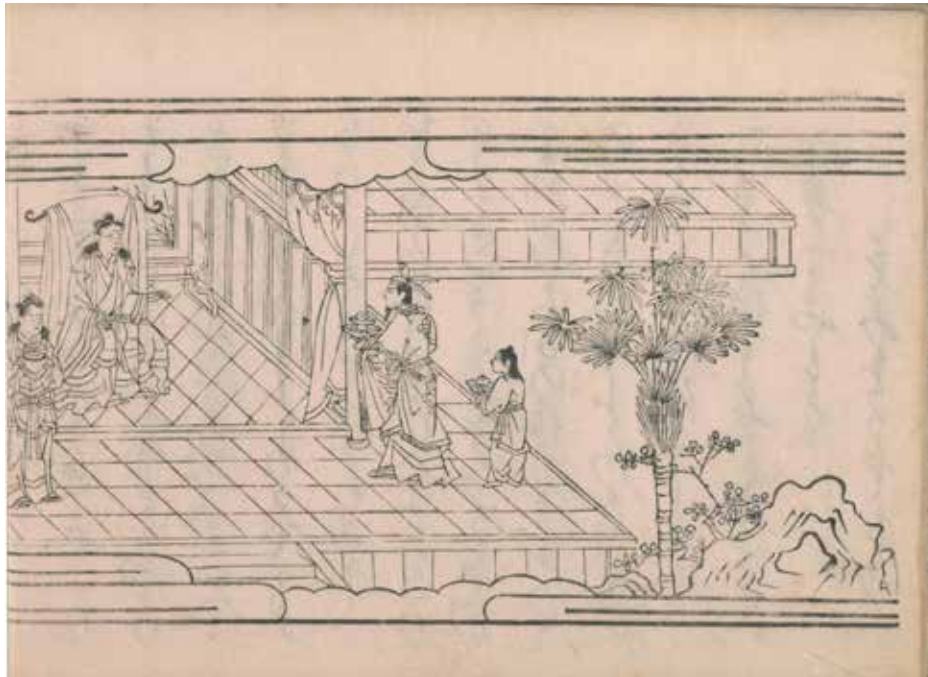


Figure 2. Emperor Bun serves his mother.

[2] **Emperor Bun of Kan 漢文帝 (Emperor Wen of Han)**

Ruling the land with benevolence and filial piety,
he towers high, surpassing a hundred other kings.
Serving his wise mother at the Imperial Court of Kan,
he always tastes her medicinal decoctions.

Emperor Bun of Kan was a son of the patriarch of Kan.⁶ As a child, he went by the name of Gō. He was filial toward his mother, Empress Dowager Haku 薄太后. Whenever she was served any kind of food, he would always taste it first himself. Emperor Bun had many brothers, but none of them were as benevolent and righteous in their conduct, or as filially pious as he. This is why the retainers Chin Bei 陳平, Shū Botsu 周勃, and others made him king. From that time forward, he was called Emperor Bun of Kan. Now, although we may know that everyone should follow the Way of Filial Piety, from the sovereign on high to his myriad subjects below, in fact it can be difficult to put into practice and to keep lodged within our hearts. Nevertheless, as the august ruler of the forty-thousand-and-more provinces, Emperor Bun behaved in just this way, thanks to his venerable disposition.⁷ People say that as a result, the realm thrived and the people dwelled in tranquility.

6 Kan 漢 is the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), and the patriarch of Kan was Liu Bang 劉邦, later known as Emperor Gaozu of Han. He was both the founder and the first emperor of the Han Dynasty.

7 “Forty-thousand-and-more provinces” is an epithet for China.

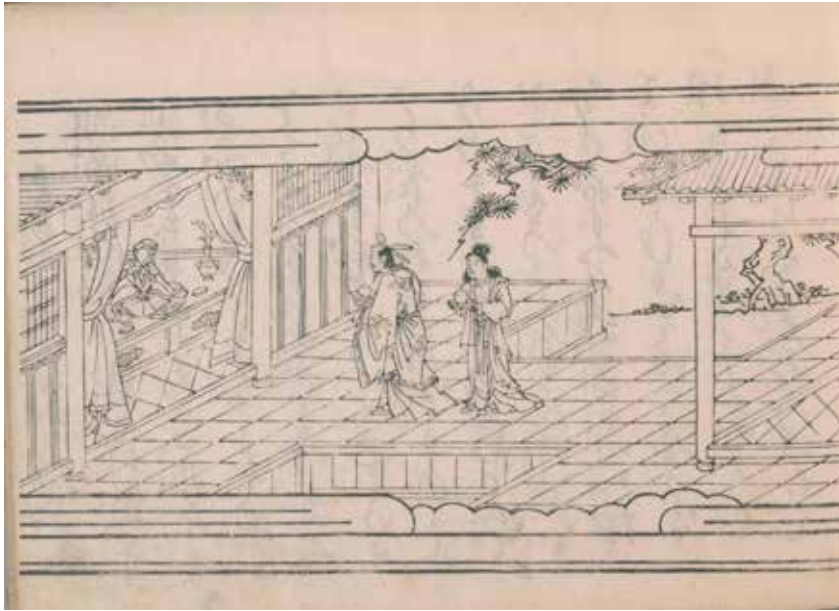


Figure 3. Tei Ran venerates a statue of his mother.

[3] Tei Ran 丁蘭 (Ding Lan)

Carving wood, he makes it his father and mother;⁸
 every day their expressions shift anew.
 Children and nieces all tell the tale,
 and word of his filial piety quickly spreads.

Tei Ran was from a place called Yaō in Kadai.⁹ He lost his mother at the age of fifteen, and because he long mourned the separation, he had a wooden statue carved in her likeness, which he served as if it were a living person. One night Tei Ran's wife burned the statue's face with a flame, whereupon [the wife] broke out in blisters seeping pus and blood.¹⁰ After two days, the hair on the wife's head fell out as if it had been cut with a sword. In her surprise, she apologized for what she had done. Tei Ran was amazed, and he moved the statue out onto the street. He had his wife pay penance for three years. Then, on a certain night, with the sound of a storm, the statue moved back inside the house of its own accord. From that time on, Tei Ran and his wife would consult the statue about even the most trivial matters, or so people say. There are few who have performed such filial service to cause such strange things to occur!

8 The poem speaks of two carved statues, but the story, which differs radically from the one in the source text by Guo Jujing, speaks of only one.

9 Yaō 野王 (Yewang) and Kadai 河内 (Henei) are places in present-day Henan 河南 Province.

10 I follow Ōshima in supposing that it is Tei Ran's wife who breaks out in blisters. However, insofar as the subject of the clause is unstated, and blistering is a natural result of a burn, it is possible that it is the statue that is injured.

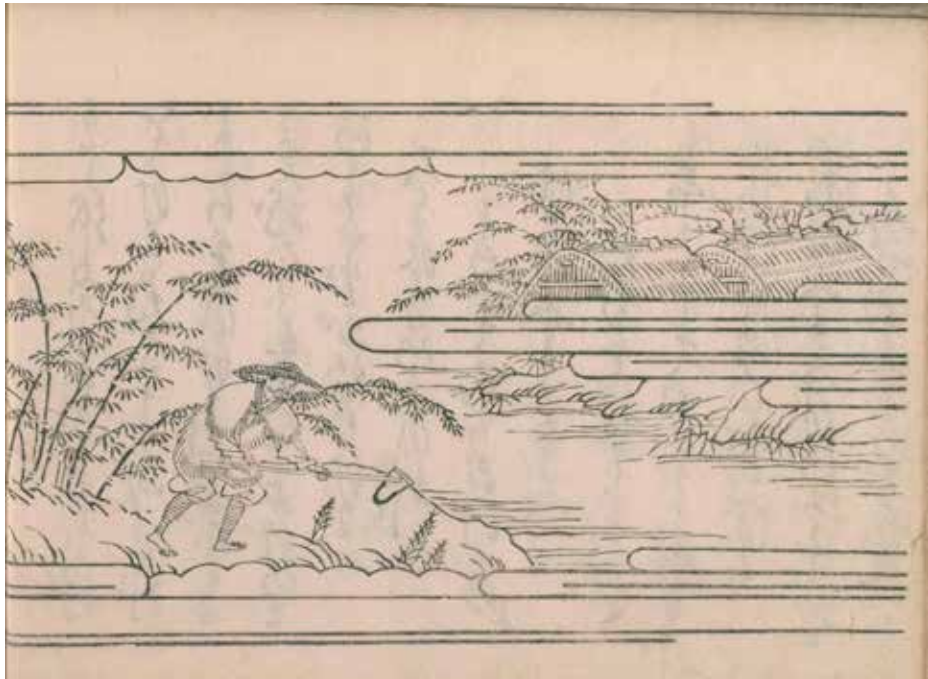


Figure 4. Mō Sō harvests bamboo shoots in winter.

[4] Mō Sō 孟宗 (Meng Zong), also known as Kyō Bu 恭武 (Gong Wu) or Shi Kyō 子恭 (Zi Gong)

His tears fall in drops, and the north wind is cold;
standing lonely, a few stalks of bamboo.
In a moment, the spring shoots emerge;
Heaven repays him with tranquility and peace.

Having lost his father when he was young, Mō Sō supported his single mother. She was old and constantly ill, and because the taste of food changed for her every time she ate, she would long for inappropriate things. Despite it being winter, she wished for bamboo shoots. Thus, Mō Sō immediately went to the bamboo grove to find some. However, because it was the season of deep snow, how could he have easily obtained them? Wretched with grief, he prayed, “I implore you, Heaven, please show your mercy.” As he pushed against some bamboo, the earth suddenly split apart and a profusion of bamboo shoots sprang up from the ground. Mō Sō was overjoyed. He immediately took them home and cooked them in a broth. When he gave them to his mother, she ate them, and at that moment her illness was cured and her life prolonged. The bamboo shoots were a gift from Heaven, which was profoundly moved by the depth of Mō Sō’s filial piety.

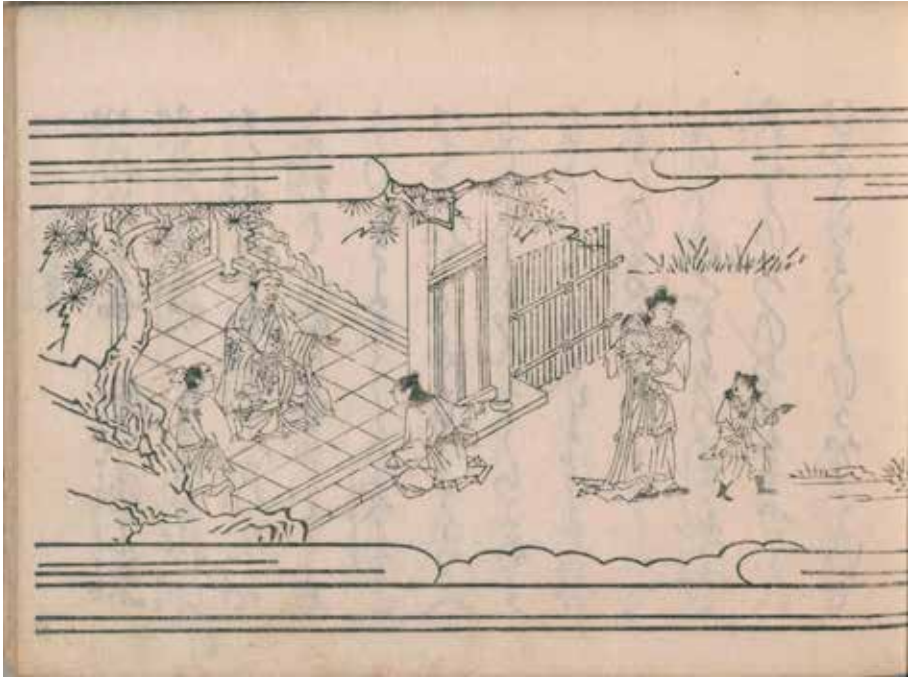


Figure 5. Bin Shigen pleads with his father to spare his stepmother.

[5] **Bin Shigen 閔子騫 (Min Ziqian)**

The Bin family has a wise son, so
why should he have resented his stepmother?
Because he keeps her by his father's side,
all three children escape the wind and frost.

Bin Shigen lost his mother when he was young. His father took a second wife, and she bore him two children. The new wife loved her own children deeply, but she despised her stepson. Even in the cold of winter, she would take the ears of reeds and use them to pad his clothes. Because she dressed him in such things, he was chilled to the bone, and when his father saw how he could barely endure, he sought to drive her away. Bin Shigen spoke, saying, "If you drive away your wife, all three children will be cold. As it is now, if I alone can endure the cold, then my two younger brothers will be warm." Because he dissuaded his father, his stepmother was deeply moved, and from then on she doted on him without reserve, like his very own mother. People of old seem to have been right when they said that the good and bad of a person lie within their own heart.

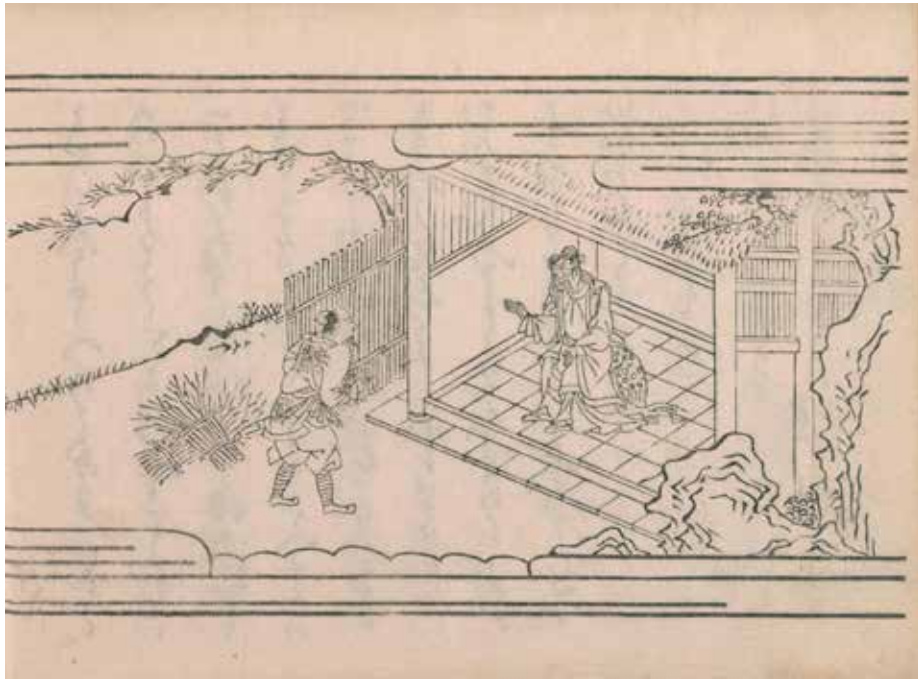


Figure 6. Sō Shin comes home at his mother's call.

[6] Sō Shin 曾參 (Zeng Shen)

As the mother gently bites her finger,
the child's heart is pained beyond endurance.
Shouldering his firewood, he takes so long to return;
the bonds of blood are profoundly deep.

One time, Sō Shin went into the mountains to gather firewood. His mother was minding the house when a close friend arrived. The mother wanted to provide for their guest, but Sō Shin was away, and since their family was poor, she had nothing to serve him. "Come home, Sō Shin!" she said to herself, and she bit her finger. Sō Shin was gathering firewood in the mountains, but suddenly he felt his heart race. He rushed home, whereupon his mother explained everything from beginning to end. She bit her finger, just like that, and because of Sō Shin's profound filial piety, he responded from far away, demonstrating the deep affection that exists between parents and their children. Generally speaking, Sō Shin's filial piety differed from that of others, because his was a connection from heart to heart. There must be an extraordinary truth in this.

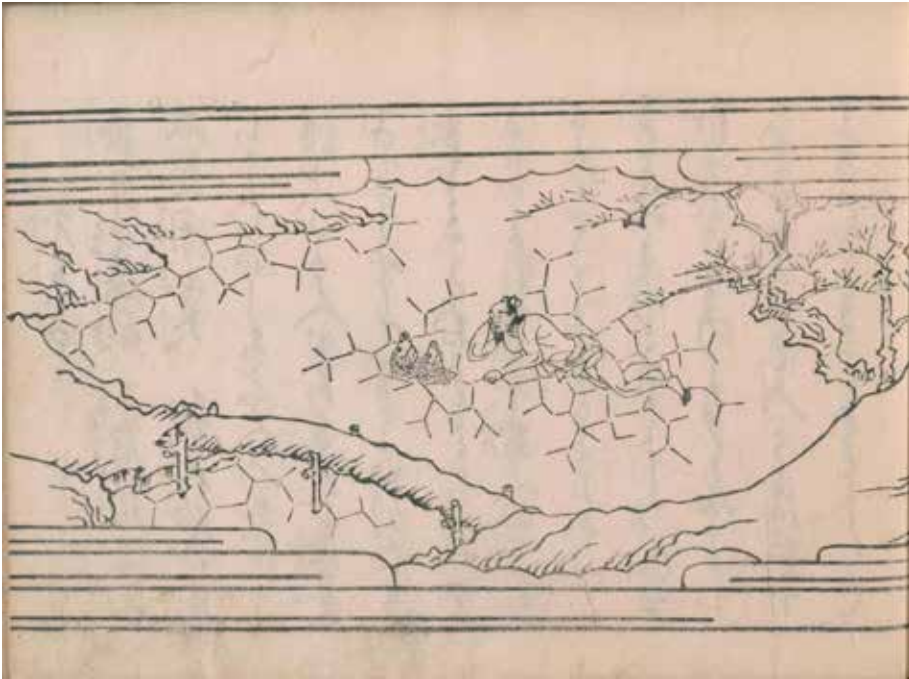


Figure 7. Ō Shō melts a hole in the ice, and two fish appear.

[7] Ō Shō 王祥 (Wang Xiang)

There are stepmothers in the world,
but there is no one in the land like Ō Shō.
Even now, on the surface of the river,
there is a shelf of ice that shows where he lay.

Ō Shō lost his mother when he was young, and his father took another wife. Her name was Shu Shi 朱氏. As is the way with stepmothers, Shu Shi told lies to create discord, estranging the father from his son. However, Ō Shō was not resentful, and he served her filially. Being the kind of person that he was, when his stepmother wanted fresh fish in the bitter cold of winter, he went to the river at a place called Jōfu in order to find some.¹¹ Nevertheless, because it was winter, the river was frozen and there were no fish to be seen. Ō Shō therefore took off his robes, becoming naked. He lay down on the ice and bewailed the lack of fish, whereupon a portion of the ice melted and two fish leaped out of the water. Ō Shō immediately took them home, and he gave them to his stepmother. This happened entirely as a result of Ō Shō's filial piety. It seems that every year in that place, there is a shape in the ice of a person lying down.

¹¹ Jōfu 肇府 (Zhaodong-fu 肇東府, according to Guo Jujing's source text) is in present-day Guangdong 廣東 Province.

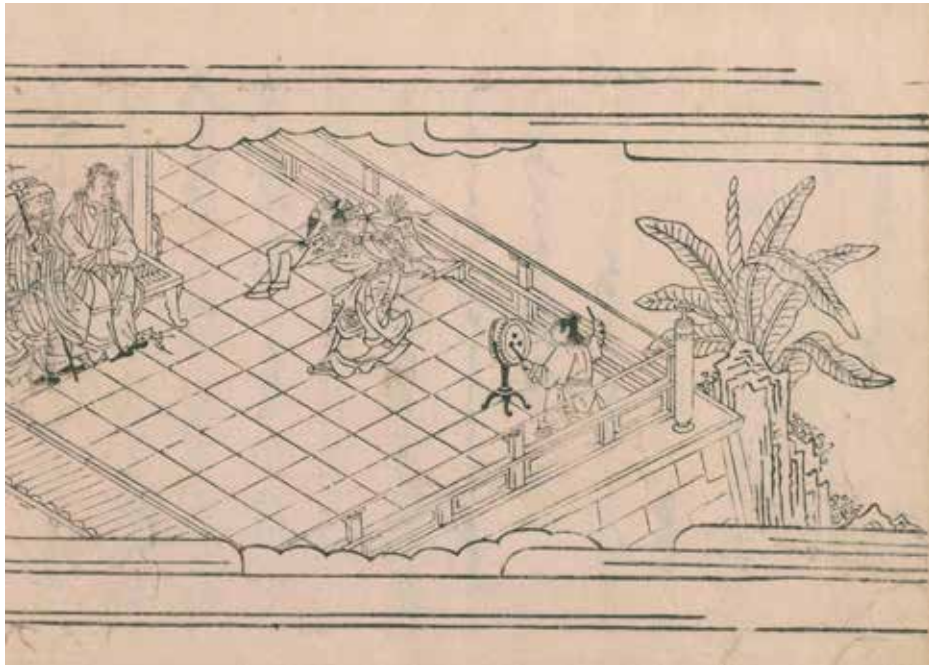


Figure 8. For his parents, Old Raishi pretends to be a child.

[8] Old Raishi 老萊子 (Lao Laizi)¹²

Frolicking, dancing, playing the fool;
a spring breeze rustles his colorful robes.
His parents open their mouths and laugh;
their room is filled with joy.

Old Raishi was a man who served his parents. Thus, when he was seventy years old, he would wear pretty robes so that he resembled a child. Dancing and frolicking, he would attend to his parents' needs, and he would purposely trip and fall and then cry like a baby. Why? Because having reached the age of seventy, his looks were marred by age, and he feared that upon seeing him, his parents would lament that he had grown so very old. In addition, people say that he did this so that his parents would not notice their own advancing years.

¹² The name Old Raishi is written with characters that can mean, "old [man] becomes a child."

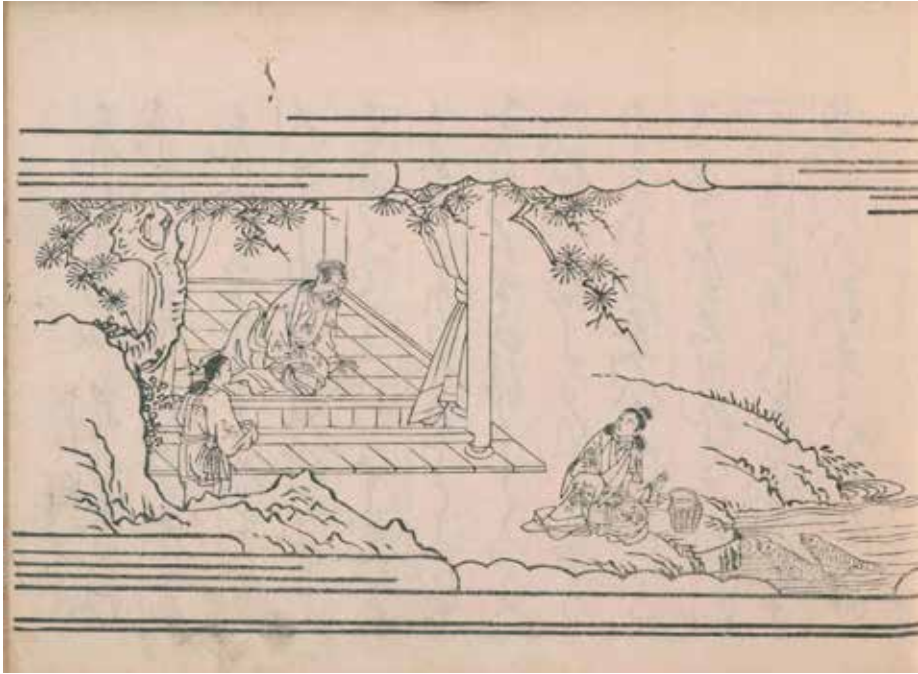


Figure 9. Kyō Shi's wife draws water for her mother-in-law.

[9] **Kyō Shi 姜詩 (Jiang Shi)**

A sweet spring erupts beside the house,
and one morning there are two carp.
The son knows well how to serve his mother;
his wife, too, is filial toward her mother-in-law.

Kyō Shi was filial toward his mother. She always wanted to drink water from the river, and to eat fresh minced fish. Thus, Kyō Shi would send his wife to fetch water from a river that was six or seven leagues away, and he would have her carefully prepare minced fish and give it to his mother. Together, they were constantly diligent in their service. One time, beside Kyō Shi's house, water suddenly sprang from the ground and flowed like a river. Every morning there were carp in the water, so they would catch them and give them to Kyō Shi's mother. These amazing things were gifts from Heaven, and they occurred because Heaven was moved by the filial piety of Kyō Shi and his wife.

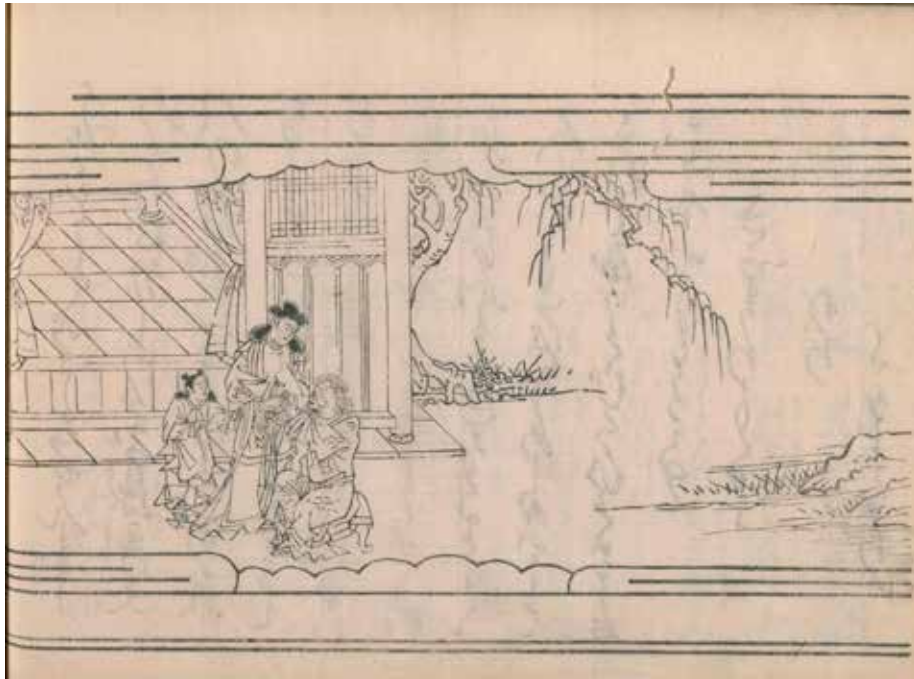


Figure 10. Tō no Bujin breastfeeds her mother-in-law.

[10] Tō no Bujin 唐夫人 (Tang Furen, “Madam Tang”)

Filial and reverent, the Sai family bride:
she breastfeeds her mother-in-law, and grooms her for the day.
It is a debt that cannot be repaid;
one asks that her descendants will do the same.

Tō no Bujin’s mother-in-law, Chōson Bujin 長孫夫人, was very old. Because she could not chew food, Tō no Bujin would feed her from her breast. In addition, every morning she combed her mother-in-law’s hair. She served her well in other ways, too, caring for her for many years. One time, Chōson Bujin fell ill and thought that she would die. She gathered together all the household and said, “To die now without repaying my years of debt to Tō no Bujin fills me with regret. If my descendants emulate her filial rectitude, then the family is sure to prosper.” Everyone praised Tō no Bujin’s devotion, remarking that there had been few in the past or present who had been so filial to their mothers-in-law. People say that for this reason the family immediately received its reward, flourishing in a most extraordinary manner.

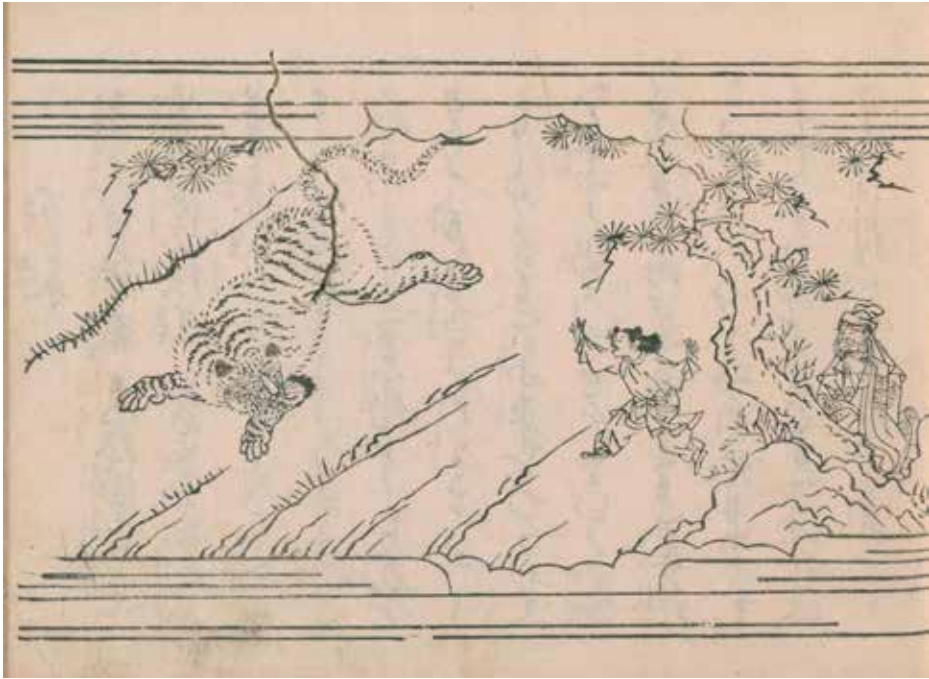


Figure 11. Yō Kyō defends her father from a tiger.

[11] Yō Kyō 楊香 (Yang Xiang)

Meeting a white-browed tiger deep in the mountains,
she strikes with all her strength at its rancid breath.
Father and child together, without harm,
escape the clutch of its ravenous maw.

Yō Kyō had only a father. Once when Yō Kyō went into the mountains with him, they suddenly encountered a savage tiger. Fearing for her father's life, Yō Kyō tried to chase it away. However, because she could not, she called on the mercy of Heaven. "I beg of you," she earnestly prayed, "give my life to the tiger, and save my father!" Heaven must have been moved, because the tiger, which until then had been most ferocious in its appearance and had been on the verge of devouring her father, quickly furled its tail and ran away. Parent and child, together, had escaped the tiger's maw, and without further ado they returned to their home. It is entirely because of the depth of Yō Kyō's filial devotion that she could produce such a miracle.¹³

¹³ Despite the translation, which uses female pronouns to refer to Yō Kyō, the Japanese text does not indicate Yō Kyō's gender. However, according to the story in some other Japanese sources, she was a teenage girl.

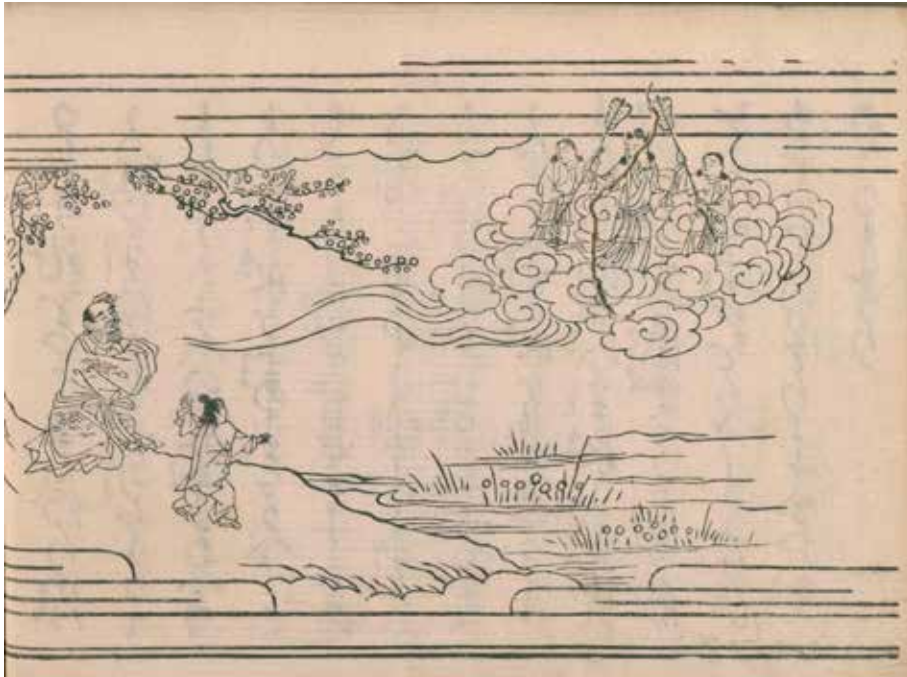
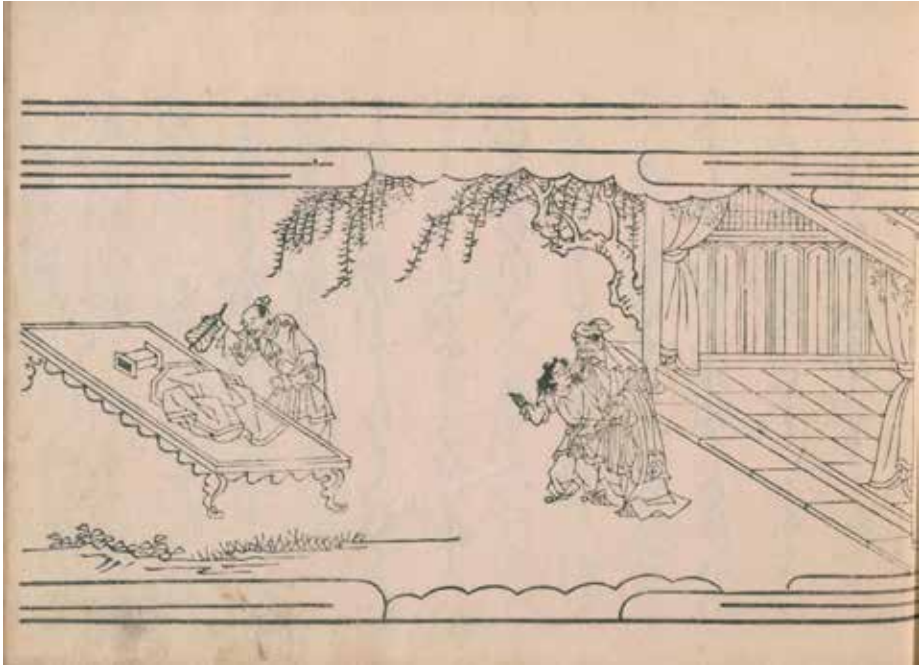


Figure 12. Tō Ei watches his celestial wife fly away.

[12] Tō Ei 董永 (Dong Yong)

He borrows coins to bury his father,
and a heavenly maiden meets him on the road.
She weaves silk to repay the lender.
Moved by his filial piety, everyone knows his name.

Tō Ei was separated from his mother when he was young. His family was poor, and he passed his days working for others, farming to earn wages. Because his father was crippled and could not stand, Tō Ei built a small cart, set his father on it, and parked it on the ridges between rice paddies so that he could tend to him there. The time came when his father died. Tō Ei wanted to arrange a funeral service, but because he had always been poor, he could not. Thus, he sold himself for a payment of ten *kan*, and he held the funeral rites. Later, when he set out for the master's house, he encountered a beautiful woman on the road. Saying that she would be his wife, she went with him, and in a single month she wove three hundred bolts of tight silk. When she presented it to the master, he was so moved that he set Tō Ei free. After that, the woman said to Tō Ei, "I am a celestial weaver-woman. The Emperor of Heaven was moved by your filial piety, and he sent me here to repay your debt." With that, she rose up into the sky.



[13] Ō Kyō 黄香 (Huang Xiang) Figure 13. Ō Kyō fans his father's robe.

Warming the blankets in the winter months
and fanning the pillows in summer to make them cool;
as a youth, he knows the duties of a child.
Since the ancient past, there has been only one Ō Kyō!

Ō Kyō was from a place called Anryō.¹⁴ He lost his mother when he was nine years old, after which he did all that he could to serve his father. Thus, in the extreme heat of summer, he would fan his father's pillow and seat cushion to keep them cool, and in the bitter cold of winter, saddened by the chill of the blankets, he would warm them with his body before giving them to his father. Because Ō Kyō was so filial, the district governor—a person known as Ryū Kan 劉謹—set up a placard in praise of his filial piety. People say that from that time forward, everyone knew that Ō Kyō was an outstandingly filial child.

¹⁴ Anryō 安陵 (Anling) is the name of a district in present-day Hubei 湖北 Province.

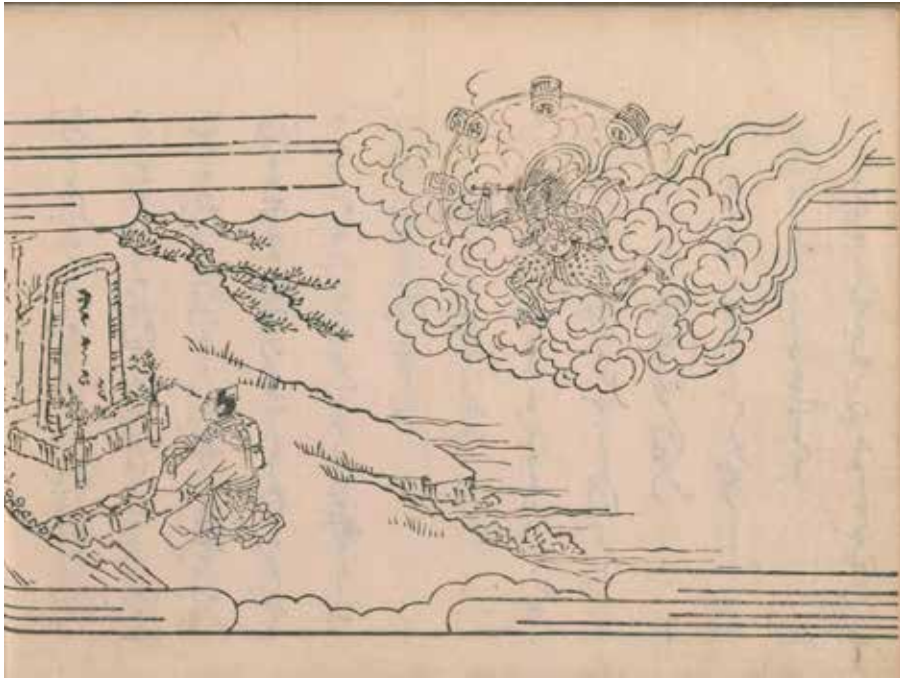


Figure 14. Ō Hō visits his mother's grave as a thunder god rages.

[14] Ō Hō 王褒 (Wang Pou)

His loving mother, afraid of thunder—
her pure spirit dwells in the pedestal of night.
At a single clap of the thunder god,
he visits her tomb and circles it a thousand times.

Ō Hō was from a place called Ei'in.¹⁵ His father, Ō Gi 王義, had been executed by the emperor as a result of some unexpected affair, and because Ō Hō held a grudge about it, he refused for the rest of his life to sit facing in the direction of the emperor. He would stay at his father's grave, kneeling and praying, and as he clung to an oak tree, he would weep and grieve. His tears fell on the tree, and people say that it withered. His mother had always been afraid of thunder, and so after she died, he would rush to her grave whenever there was thunder and lightning. "Ō Hō is here," he would say as he circled her tomb, giving strength to his dead mother. Considering that Ō Hō was so filial after his parents had died, one can imagine how filial he must have been while they were alive. His were rare and wonderful deeds!

15 Ei'in 營陰 (Ying'yin) is unknown.

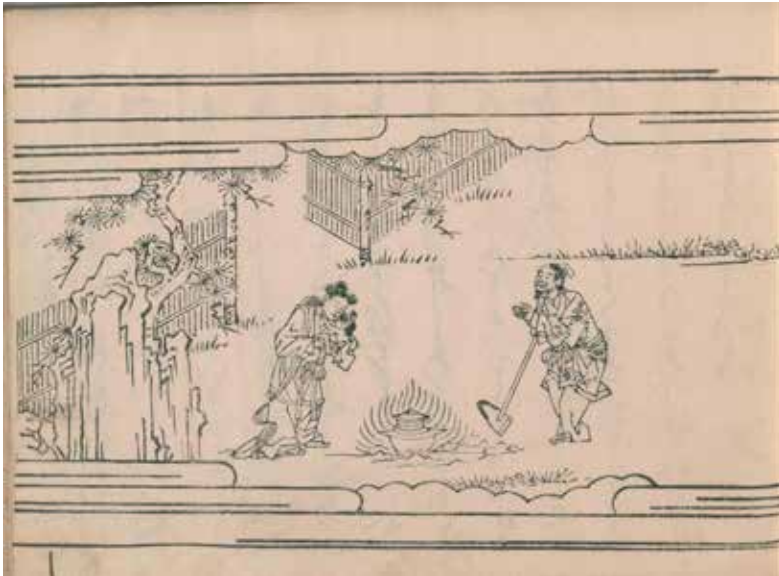


Figure 15. Kaku Kyo and his wife unearth a golden vessel.

[15] **Kaku Kyo 郭巨 (Guo Ju)**

Wishing to provide in their poverty,
they would bury a child to prolong their mother's life.
Heaven granted them a golden vessel,
the lovely light of which illumined their impoverished home.

Kaku Kyo was from a place called Kadai. His family was poor, and he supported his mother. His wife bore a single child, who was now three years old. Kaku Kyo's old mother doted on her grandchild, and she would share her food with him. One time Kaku Kyo said to his wife, "Because we are poor, we hardly have enough food even for our mother, or so I've thought. Nevertheless, she takes some and gives it to her grandchild, so that there really isn't enough. This is all because we have a little one. In short, since we are husband and wife, we'll surely have another child someday, but we'll never have another mother. So, I would like to bury our baby and take good care of our mother." The wife was indeed sad, but she did not disobey her husband, and they took their three-year-old child out for burial. Holding back his tears, Kaku Kyo began to dig, whereupon he discovered a golden vessel. There were astonishing characters inscribed on the object. They read: "This a gift from Heaven for the filial Kaku Kyo. It is not to be seized by any official or taken by anyone else." This meant that because Heaven had granted the vessel to Kaku Kyo, it was not to be taken by any other person.¹⁶ Kaku Kyo and his wife accepted the vessel with joy, and they went home together without burying their child. People say that after that, Kaku Kyo served his mother more filially than ever.

¹⁶ The message is written in Chinese, so it is followed by an explanation in Japanese.

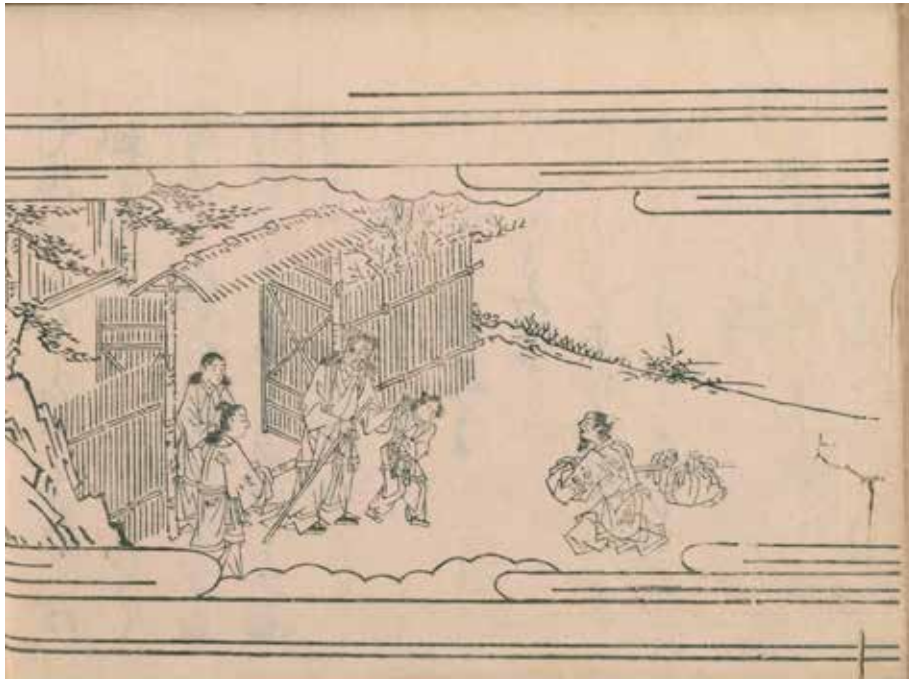


Figure 16. Shu Jushō finds his mother after fifty years.

[16] Shu Jushō 朱寿昌 (Zhu Shouchang)

Taken from his mother at the age of seven,
he was her opposite star for fifty years.
Then one morning they were reunited, and
their joy moved the Emperor of Heaven.

When Shu Jushō was seven years old, his father sent his mother away. Thus, he did not know her well, and so although he pined for her, fifty years passed without their meeting. One time, despite being a government official, Jushō abandoned his position and his salary, as well as his wife and his children, and he went to a place called Shin to search.¹⁷ “Please let me find my mother,” he prayed. He took blood from his own body and used it to copy a sutra. He prayed to Heaven and searched, and because of the depth of his feeling, he eventually found her.

¹⁷ Shin 秦 (Zou) is in present-day Shaanxi 陝西 Province.

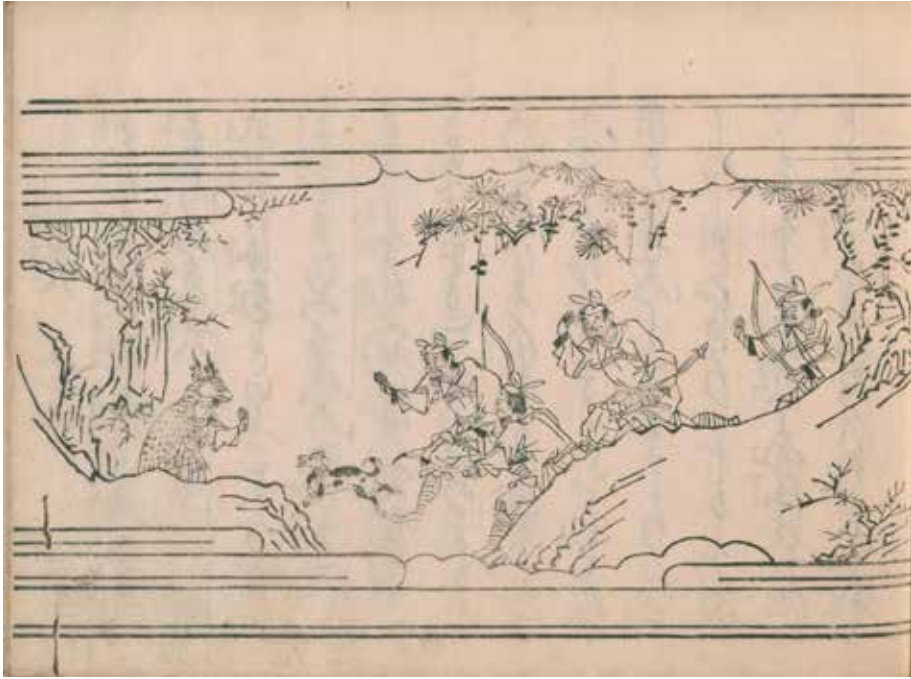


Figure 17. Dressed as a deer, Zen Shi speaks with a party of hunters.

[17] **Zen Shi 刻子 (Tan Zi)**

Because his old parents yearn for deer's milk,
he swathes himself in a brown furry robe.
Had he not spoken up loudly, he would have
gone home wearing an arrow from the mountains.

Zen Shi was so filial that he sought to throw away his life for his parents' sake. The reason is this: Zen Shi's mother and father were old, and because they both suffered from maladies of the eyes, they longed to have the milk of a deer as medicine. Because Zen Shi had always been a filial child, he wished to achieve his parents' desire. He therefore donned a deerskin and slipped inside a large herd of deer. Seeing this, some hunters took Zen Shi to be a real deer, and they prepared to shoot him with their bows. At that moment Zen Shi shouted, "I am not a real deer! My name is Zen Shi, and I have disguised myself as a deer so that I might fulfill my parents' desire." The hunters were surprised, and when they asked him how this could be, Zen Shi explained everything. Thus, it was thanks to the profundity of his filial devotion that Zen Shi was able to return home without being shot. Indeed, as a person, how could anyone acquire the milk of a deer just because someone wants it? Nevertheless, it is moving to imagine the thoughtfulness of Zen Shi's filial piety.

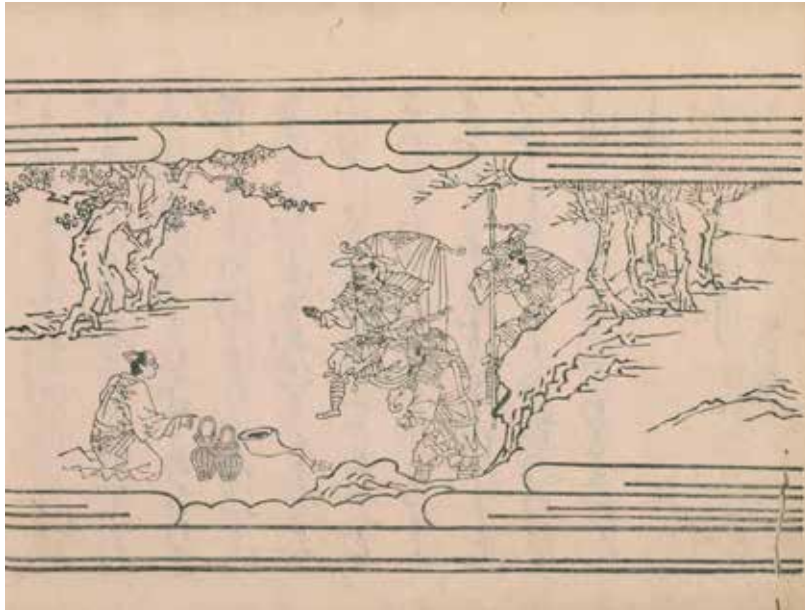


Figure 18. Sai Jun speaks with a band of murderous thieves.

[18] Sai Jun 蔡順 (Cai Shun)

He offers the black mulberries to his mother;
bemoaning his hunger, his robes are soaked with tears.
The red-browed bandits recognize his filial obedience;¹⁸
they repay him with meat and rice, and then let him go.

Sai Jun was from a place called Jonan.¹⁹ Toward the end of the age of the man called Ō Mō 王莽, the realm had fallen into terrible disarray, and there were drought and famine, too.²⁰ Because there was not enough to eat, Sai Jun gathered mulberries for his mother, separating the ripe berries from the unripe ones. At that time, because disorder had swept the land, a band of murderous thieves approached Sai Jun and asked, “Why do you divide your berries according to their two colors?” “I have a mother,” Sai Jun explained, “and I’ll give these ripe ones to her. The unripe ones are for me.” The bandits were evil, hard-hearted men, but they were moved by Sai Jun’s filial piety, and they gave him a bushel of rice and the leg of an ox before going on their way.²¹ Sai Jun gave the rice and the meat to his mother, and although he constantly partook of them, too, people say that over the course of his lifetime, he never ran out. This was a result of his filial piety.

18 The bandits have daubed rouge on their eyebrows to distinguish themselves from other men.

19 Jonan 汝南 (Runan) is in present-day Henan and Anhui 安徽 Provinces.

20 Ō Mō (Wang Mang, 45 BC–23 AD) is known as the founder and only emperor of the Xin 新 dynasty (9–23 AD).

21 The bandits actually gave him two *to* 斗 of rice, which is equivalent to approximately eighteen liters, or one U.S. bushel.

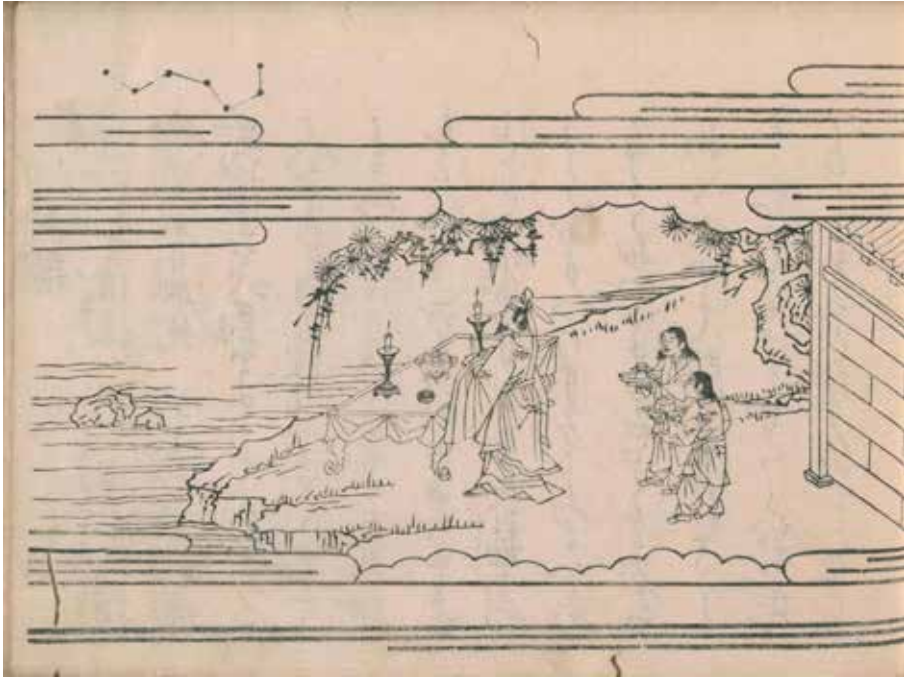


Figure 19. Yu Kinrō prays to the Big Dipper to save his father.

[19] Yu Kinrō 庾黔婁 (Yu Qianlou)

He arrives at his province, and before ten days have passed,
his long-lived father falls gravely ill.
Praying that he might die instead,
he sets his hopes on the north and speaks his sad heart.

Yu Kinrō lived in the Nansei period.²² He was appointed a government official of Senryō Province, and he quickly made his way there.²³ But before even ten days had passed, he felt a sudden palpitation in his chest. Thinking that his father might have taken ill, he abandoned his position and returned home. Just as he had feared, his father was grievously unwell. When Kinrō asked the doctor for his prognosis, the doctor replied, “You should lick the patient’s stool to see if it tastes bitter or sweet.” “That’s easy enough,” Kinrō said, and when he licked it, he found that it tasted bad. Thus, he grieved that his father would likely die. People say that he prayed to the stars of the Big Dipper that he might exchange his own life for his father’s.

22 The Nansei 南齊 (Southern Qi) dynasty spanned from 479 to 502 AD.

23 Senryō 孱陵 (Chanling) is a place in present-day Hubei Province.

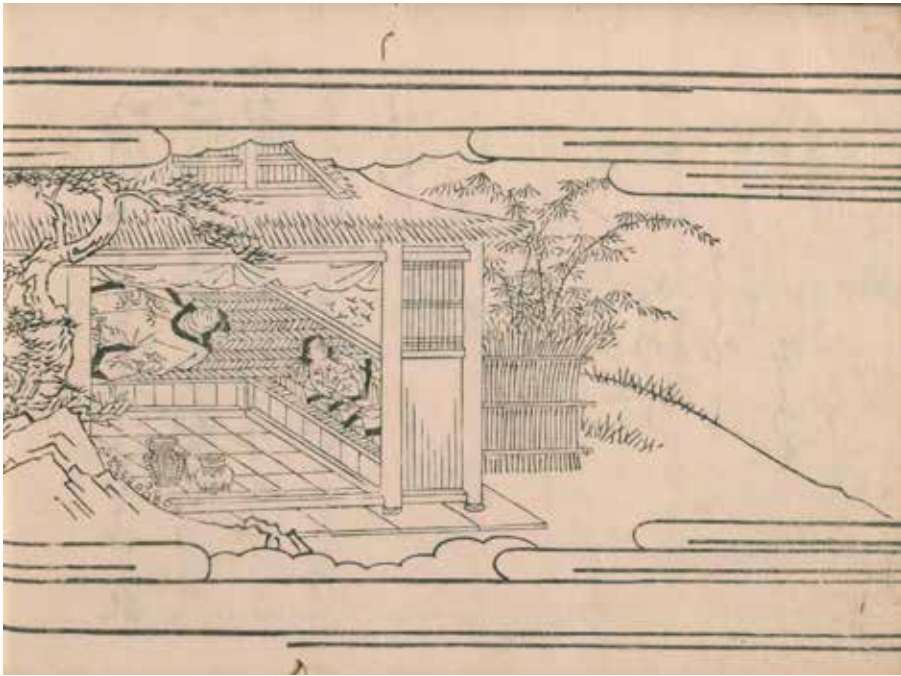


Figure 20. Go Mō draws the mosquitoes away from his parents.

[20] Go Mō 吳猛 (Wu Meng)

Without a net in the summer night,
he never drives the many mosquitoes away.
Letting them feast as they please on his fat and blood,
he keeps them from his parents' room.

At the age of eight, Go Mō was a filial child. Because his family was poor, they had none of the things that they wanted. Thus, although the summer arrived, they had no mosquito net. Go Mō thought to himself that if he took off his robe, put it on his parents, and then lay naked so that the mosquitoes would bite him, then they would bite only him and he could spare his parents. For this reason he always lay naked through the night, allowing the mosquitoes to bite him. He served his parents by keeping the mosquitoes away. For a child to be so filial is truly amazing!

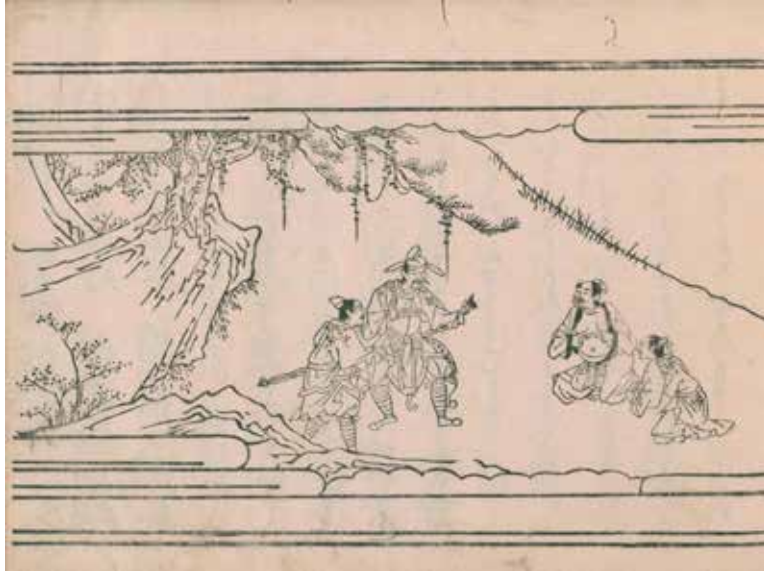


Figure 21. Chō Kō and Chō Rei plead with a pair of would-be cannibals.

[21] Chō Kō 張孝 (Zhang Xiao) and Chō Rei 張礼 (Zhang Li)²⁴

They happen upon a child of the green forest,²⁵
 and to be boiled instead, one speaks of fat versus thin.
 Everyone has a brother, but whether
 now or then, few have been like the brothers Chō.

Chō Kō and Chō Rei were brothers. They were supporting their mother, who was over eighty years old, when a famine swept the land. When Chō Rei was out gathering fruit and nuts, a single man approached. Panting with exhaustion, he said that he intended to kill Chō Rei and eat him. Chō Rei replied, “I have an elderly mother, and since I have not fed her yet today, please allow me a little time. I will come right back after I take her something to eat. If I break this promise, then please come to my house and kill my entire family.” With that, he returned home. He served his mother a meal, and then, just as he had promised, he came back to where the man was. Having heard what was afoot, the elder brother Chō Kō followed from behind. Addressing the bandit, he said, “I am fatter than Chō Rei, so I would be better to eat. Please kill me and spare my brother.” Chō Rei said, “But I made an arrangement with him first.” Thus, the two brothers argued over who would die. The wicked man was moved by the brothers’ righteousness and filial piety, and he let them both live. Observing that there had rarely been such brothers in the past or the present, he gave them two bushels of rice and one horseload of salt. Chō Kō and Chō Rei took it home, and people say that they pursued the Way of Filial Piety even more than before.

²⁴ The names Chō Kō and Chō Rei are written with characters that can mean, “stretched with filial piety” and “stretched with propriety.”

²⁵ “Child of the green forest” is a euphemism for a bandit.

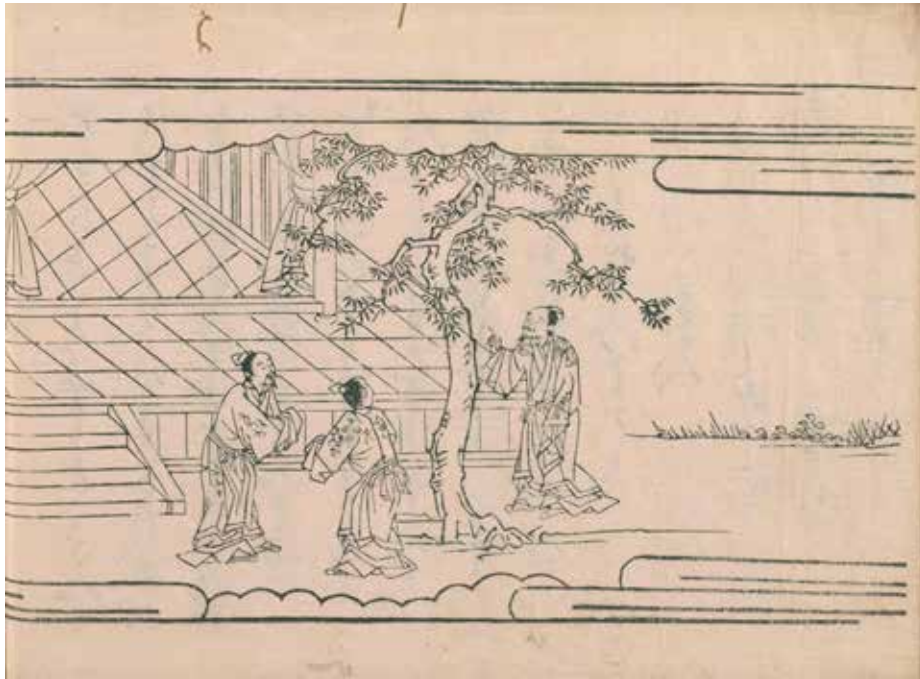


Figure 22. Den Shin, Den Kō, and Den Kei discuss dividing up a tree.

[22] Den Shin 田真 (Jia Zhen), Den Kō 田広 (Jia Guang), and Den Kei 田慶 (Jia Qing)

Branches like purple coral at the bottom of the sea;
among scores of fragrant blossoms, none can compare.
In the spring breeze, a tree full of flowers;
the brothers dwell together again.

These three were brothers. After they lost their parents, they took their parents' wealth and split it three ways. However, in the garden there was a Chinese redbud tree with flourishing branches and leaves and flowering, scattering blossoms. Saying that they should divide it into three parts, too, they stayed up all night discussing the situation. Dawn soon arrived, whereupon the brothers went to the garden to cut down the tree. The tree, which had been thriving until the day before, had suddenly withered. Den Shin stared and said, "Grasses and trees have feelings, too. This one must have withered because it heard us say that we were going to cut it down and divide it up. Truly, as human beings, how could we not see that this is so?" Thus, the brothers left the tree as it was, and people say that it flourished anew, just as it had before.

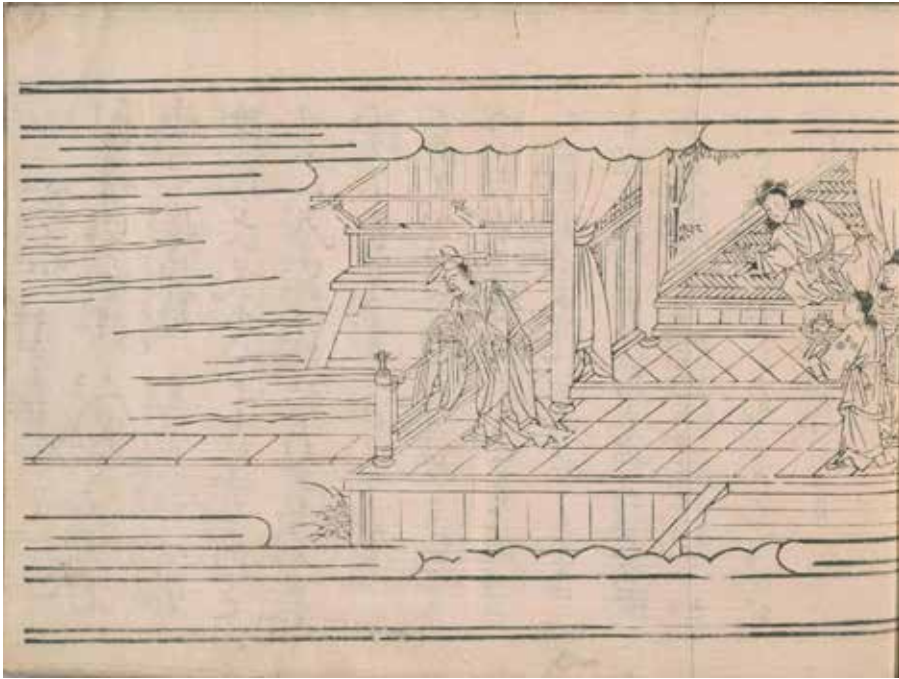


Figure 23. Sankoku empties his mother's chamber pot.

[23] Sankoku 山谷 (Shangu)²⁶

He is known throughout the land,
and ever filial, he serves his parents.
He scoops from the spring to rinse the chamber pot,
and not because he lacks servant-women.

Sankoku was a poet in the age of Sō 宋.²⁷ Even now he is regarded as a founding father of poetry. He had many servants, as well as a wife, but he took personal charge of his mother's chamber pot, washing it with his own hands when it was soiled before returning it to his mother. Morning and evening, he served her well, and he was never remiss. Thus, as we can know a myriad of things from a single example, we can imagine the full extent of his filial deeds. For this reason, his filial piety came to be known throughout the land. Unlike the other people here, this Sankoku is famous.

26 Shangu (Jp. Sankoku) is a pseudonym for the artist, poet, and calligrapher Huang Tingjian 黄庭坚.

27 The age of Sō is the Song 宋 dynasty, 960–1279.

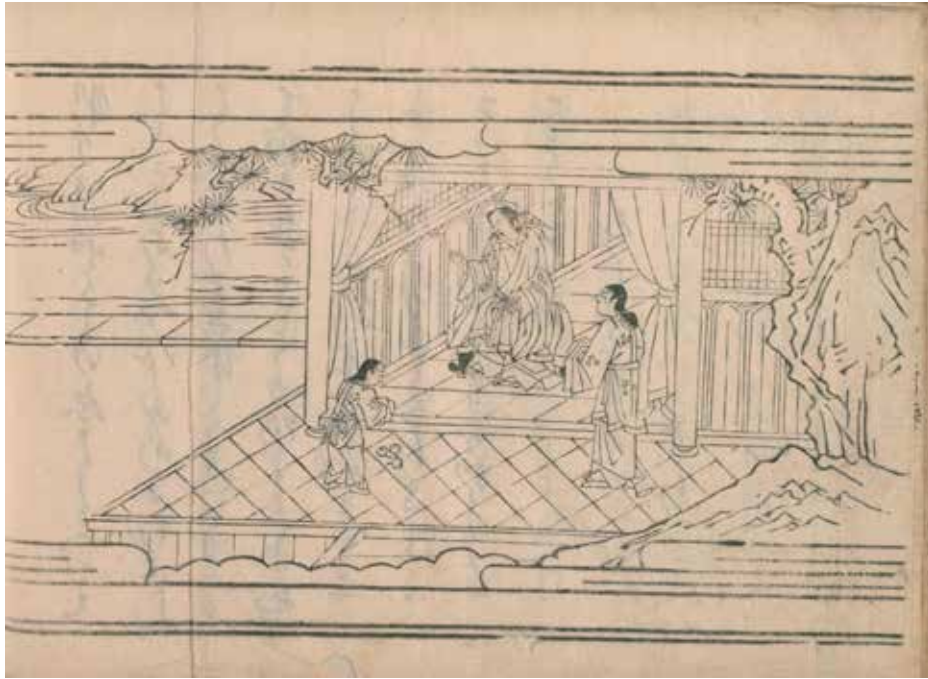


Figure 24. When Riku Seki bows, oranges fall from his sleeve.

[24] Riku Seki 陸績 (Lu Ji), also known as Kō Ki 公紀 (Gong Ji)

Filial piety and obedience are endowed by nature;
a child, six years among people,
puts oranges in his sleeve to
repay his mother for sweets.

When Riku Seki was six years old, he visited a person by the name of En Jutsu 袁術, who put out some mandarin oranges as a refreshment for his guest. Riku Seki took three, placed them in his sleeve, and announced that he was leaving. He bowed to En Jutsu, whereupon the oranges tumbled from his robe. Seeing this, En Jutsu said, "Master Riku Seki, this is unfitting for a child." Riku Seki replied, "They looked so wonderful that I wanted to go home and give them to my mother." People say that when he heard this, En Jutsu praised him, declaring, "With his childish heart, to be so very thoughtful! Whether in ancient or modern times, it's a rarity." It was because of this, they say, that all under Heaven came to know of his filial piety.