

Carl Schraubstadter and Japanese Prints:
The Robert Louis Mueller Family Collection



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Andō Hiroshige, *Peacock and Peonies*, 1843-5
multi-color woodblock print
The Robert Louis Mueller Family Collection

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The Katsukawa School of Print Design

Chen Liu

During the eighteenth century, the *ukiyo*, or “floating world,” flourished in the major urban areas of Japan. To the *chōnin*, or townspeople, *ukiyo* stood for the pursuit of pleasure through performances in the Kabuki theaters and the elaborate entertainments in the brothel districts featuring music and poetry as well as the more sensual pleasures. During this same era, the newly created technique of producing multi-colored woodblock prints in China, the so-called *douban* printing technique, was introduced into Japan through imported printed books. This technique was soon applied to producing woodblock printed portraits of popular Kabuki actors, noted *geisha*, and famous high class courtesans. These woodblock prints came to be known as *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world).⁶³

Most woodblock artists belonged to one of several studios, or schools, which included a master artist and his apprentices. One of the most important schools in the 18th century was the Katsukawa school, which included the master Katsukawa Shunshō 勝川春章 (1726-1792) and his pupils (see list of artists in the table on page 18). Although each artist within a school had his own characteristics, the artists of each school worked in similar styles. Such is the case with the artists of the Katsukawa school, as evidenced by the *yakusha-e* (actor prints) in the Mueller collection. As a group, the Katsukawa artists led in the development of *yakusha-e* and *bijin-ga* (prints of beauties) in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Some facts are known about the life of the master, Katsukawa Shunshō. The entry on him in the *Ukiyo-e Ruikō*

63 The *ukiyo-e* style can also be seen in other media, such as painting.

written by Ōta Nampo 大田南畝 (1749-1823) is probably the earliest extant source.⁶⁴ Some scholars have asserted that Shunshō studied in a studio of the Torii School for awhile; however, according to Ōta, he was a pupil of Katsukawa Shunsui 春水 (active in the first half of the eighteenth century).

The original family name for Katsukawa Shunsui was Miyagawa 宮川, the name of the city in the Owari Province where he was born. Miyagawa (Katsukawa) Shunsui was the son and student of Miyagawa Chōshun 宮川長春 (1682-1752), who studied with artists of the Kanō School.⁶⁵ Around 1750, the Tokugawa shogunate arrested and banished a number of artists associated with the Kanō School, including Miyagawa Chōshun and Miyagawa Shunsui. The former died soon afterwards, and the latter had to change his last name to survive. First he changed it to Katsumiyagawa 勝宮川 and then shortened it sometime later to Katsukawa. Because of this traceable relationship and because Miyagawa Chōshun was a painter and never really designed any woodblock prints, Katsukawa Shunsui is regarded as the earliest artist of the Katsukawa lineage, and his pupil, Shunshō, is considered the actual founder of the school.

Shunshō adopted the family name of his master, Katsukawa Shunsui, and used Shunshō as one of his *gō* (studio names), the name he is most widely known by. He sometimes used other *gō* such as Ririn 李林 on his artwork, which can be found on one of the twenty-four prints of the set titled *Furui Nishiki-e Ise Monogatari* (Romantic Brocade Pictures of the Tale of Ise).⁶⁶

64 Tatsutanoya Shūkin and Ōta Nampo, *Shin zoōho Ukiyoe ruikō* 新增補浮世繪類考, Tokyo: Suwara, 1889.

65 The Kanō school was a group of painters founded in the 15th century.

66 For details, see Clark 1991.

Shunshō was considered to be the finest portraitist of his time and was extremely skilled in capturing the likenesses of actors. Scholars have noted that his style rapidly developed in the late 1760s and early 1770s from presenting actors two-dimensionally with little background to more fully modeled figures posed in more detailed settings.⁶⁷

In addition, Shunshō's prints of beauties, although few are extant today, came to be regarded as "the best in the second half of the [eighteenth] century" by some scholars.⁶⁸ One example is his work, *Seirō Bijin Awase Sugata Kagami* (A Mirror of Beautiful Women of the Green Houses Compared) done in collaboration with another master print designer, Kitao Shigemasa (1739-1820) 北尾重政.⁶⁹ This four-volume work (one volume for each season) is considered one of the most beautifully illustrated books in the history of art. The two volumes, autumn and winter, were designed by Shunshō.

Before he had a studio name, Shunshō used as his seal the name Hayashiya Shichiemon, which is based on the name of the owner of the house he lived in at that time.⁷⁰ Visible in many of his early works, the seal is in the shape of a jar (*tsubo*) with a character *hayashi* (林) written inside (for example of the seal, see catalogue number 2). For this reason, Shunshō was called *Tsubo* as a nickname.

Shunshō's first pupil, Shunkō (1743-1812), followed this fashion and used a seal in the shape of a similar jar

67 Donald Jenkins in Clark and Ueda 1994, 19-20.

68 Paine and Soper, 1955, 263.

69 See Kitao Shigemasa and Kubota Beisai, *Katsukawa Shunshō, Seirō bijin awase sugata kagami* 青樓美人合姿鏡, Tokyo: Fuzoku Emaki Zuga Kankokai, 1916. There is also an unpublished pair of pages in the Phoenix Art Museum collection.

70 Some scholars believe Katsukawa Shunshō and Hayashiya Shichiemon are actually the same person.

with a character *ki* (木) written inside.⁷¹ This character, *ki*, which translates as "a tree," is actually half of the character *hayashi*, which means "a forest." By such a transformation, Shunkō humbly indicates that he is Shunshō's pupil, and not as good as his master.

Katsukawa Shunkō was born in 1743 in Edo and began working in Shunshō's studio at an early age. At the peak of his career in the 1770's and 1780's, Shunkō's actor prints (see for example, catalogue numbers 8-12) were considered to be as good as those of the master Shunshō. At the same time, he developed the so-called *ōkubi-e* (big head pictures) and also created the *ōgao-e* (big face) pictures.⁷² Around 1788, Shunkō apparently lost the use of his right hand, but may have continued to be active in print design.⁷³

Other print designers of the Katsukawa school, including Shuntei, Shundō, Shun'ei, Shunjō, Shunchō, and Shunzan, all achieved some degree of fame for their prints of actors, beauties, and warriors during their lifetimes.⁷⁴ Two members of the school, Shunchō and Shunzan, were also influenced by the style of the master print designer Torii Kiyonaga 鳥居清長, who was renowned for his prints of Kabuki and of beautiful women.

The Katsukawa school was the most important group of print designers in the second half of the eighteenth century. Through its pupils, the Katsukawa school continued to influence *ukiyo-e* print design and production well into the nineteenth century. Arguably the

71 See, for example, Clark and Ueda 1994, 296-7, no. 107.

72 This style was fully developed by Kitagawa Utamaro (1754-1806) and Tōshūsai Sharaku (1770-1825).

73 Sources differ over whether Shunkō retired or continued to be active in painting and print design.

74 Catalogue number 5 in the Mueller collection, which is unsigned, may be the work of one of these artists.

greatest and most representative of the *ukiyo-e* artists, Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎 (1760-1849), was originally a pupil in Katsukawa Shunshō's studio. He joined the studio in 1778, where he used the *gō*, Katsukawa Shunrō 勝川春朗. He remained in the studio for 15 years, leaving finally in 1792 when Shunshō died.⁷⁵

Artists of the Katsukawa School:

Katsukawa Shunshō 勝川春章	(1726-1792)
Shunkō 春好	(1743-1812)
Shuntei 春亭	(1770-1820)
Shundō 春堂	(fl. 1780-92)
Shun'ei 春英	(fl. late eighteenth to early nineteenth c.)
Shunjō 春常	(?-1787)
Shunchō 春潮	(fl. c. 1780-95)
Shunzan 春山	(fl. c. 1782-98)

⁷⁵ Other biographies (such as that in Roberts 1976, 48) state that Hokusai quarreled with Shunshō and was dismissed in 1785.

Hiroshige: Life and Art

Andrea Feller

Within months of the death of Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858),⁷⁶ his fame and talent were extolled in an inscription on his memorial portrait by Utagawa Kunisada (also known as Toyokuni III, 1786-1865):

Ryūsai Hiroshige was the famous follower of Toyohiro, the follower of the founder of the Utagawa school, Toyoharu. Recently, Hiroshige, Toyokuni, and Kuniyoshi are unequaled, being the Three Masters of *Ukiyo-e*. Hiroshige was especially good at landscape. In 1856, he presented the scenery of Edo to his many admirers in the print series, *The Famous Views of Edo*. He also issued his Famous Places of Edo with *Kyōka* around this time, one print each month. Thus, he showed his skill with the brush to all the world. He died on the sixth day of the ninth month of this year at the age of sixty-two.⁷⁷

Kunisada signed the print, “shedding tears while thinking of him,” further expressing his sorrow over the artist’s recent death.⁷⁸ Both were associated with the Utagawa school, and both had collaborated on a number of triptychs and print series together, Kunisada producing the figures and Hiroshige producing the landscape backgrounds. Kunisada, known for his actor prints and portraits, was commissioned by the publisher Uoei to create the memorial portrait.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Also known as Andō Hiroshige, the artist usually signed his prints simply with the name Hiroshige. Aspects of Hiroshige’s life summarized here are based on Forrer 1997, 11-27, Jansen 2004, 9-12, Smith 1997, 33-45, and Lane 1978, 9.

⁷⁷ Kita 1996, 122.

⁷⁸ Woodson 1998, 157.

⁷⁹ For more on Kunisada’s memorial portrait, see Woodson 1998, 157; Kita 1996, 120 and 122, and Forrer 1997, 11.