17TH CENTURY UKIYO-E AND JAPANESE TATTOOING

THE ANCESTRAL HISTORY OF TATTOOING IN JAPAN

FOREIGNERS

KABUKI

THE FIRST HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY

AINU

EDO, FROM THE MID 18TH CENTURY TO THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

THE 1ST HUNDRED YEARS OF JAPANESE TATTOOING

THE HISTORY AND ART OF JAPANESE PRINTS AND TATTOOING

JAN VAN DOESBURG

THE VAN DER VELDEN COLLECTION
THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF TATTOOING IN JAPAN
The earliest signs of the practice of tattooing in Japan are usually sought among the tribes of the Neolithic era now known as the Jōmon period (c. 10,000 B.C. - 300 B.C.). Because of the absence of documentary sources from the period itself and the often highly plausible character of references appearing in sources of a later date, our knowledge of the Jōmon period is completely derived from archaeological research. This mainly concerns the production of earthenware, in that period unglazed, made of soft clay and fired at a low temperature.

Although the culture of the Jōmon period was one of hunting and food gathering, implying the inconvenience of heavy baggage for groups that are constantly on the move, a lot of earthenware was produced. Detailed archaeological research has indicated that the Jōmon people operated from small and temporary settlements, where seeds, nuts, fruit and catch were processed and stored in pots. When moving to a new area, the nomadic groups or tribes could obviously only take along a few pots, so they had to produce new ones whenever a new place of residence was chosen.

A large amount of Jōmon pots has been excavated throughout Japan, especially in recent decades. A substantial number of the earthenware products show decorations that have been applied by impressing the surface of the damp clay with cords. This method of decorating is indicated by the term jōmon, literally 'cord pattern', which now has become the name of the entire historic period in question. Radiocarbon analyses have pointed out that these earthenware products represent the oldest of its type known in the world so far. Shards of a cooking pot with cord markings excavated in 1999 in Akita, north Japan, have now been carbon dated to 14,500 B.C., which places the beginning of the Jōmon period even further back.

On account of the lack of factual knowledge, the Jōmon culture has become subject of many speculations and discussions. Even the existence of the Jōmon ruler Jinmu-tennō, who is currently adopted as the first emperor of Japan, merely seems to have originated from legends and speculations formed and written down in later times. There is not a shred of evidence that a centralized government was ruling over a homogeneous Japanese archipelago in those days, yet Jinmu-tennō's enthronement, which is thought to have taken place in the year 660 B.C., is nowadays officially considered as the foundation of the Japanese Empire. It is believed that Jinmu-tennō was of divine descent, being the grandson of the sun goddess Amaterasu. Tradition has it that the troops of Jinmu-tennō invaded the central region of Honshū, the great island of Japan, from the southwest. This occurred between 670 B.C. and 660 B.C., an assumption based on notes written down many centuries later. After having defeated several aboriginal tribes, including the chief tribe of Nagasunehiko, the invader settled in Kashiwabara. This was a small place at the foot of mount Unebi in the Yamato district of Honshū. Some time later it became the seat of the Imperial court, despite the fact that the government did not rule over the whole country. During the following centuries, the government in Kashiwabara managed to expand its powers over large areas of the country, so eventually the Yamato region became the centre of Japan. It held this position until the end of the eighth century.

The aboriginals were driven to the eastern and northern parts of the Island of Honshū, in particular the region of Hidakami (i.e. Hitakami), now forming the provinces of Hitachi, Iwaki and Rikuzen. From there they repeatedly revolted against the invader and his successors, and became known as Ebisu, a term that stands for 'Barbarians'.

In Japan's earliest chronicles we find a number of passages, hitherto unverified and in some cases with dubious dates, revealing that from the very beginning of
Best known for campaigns against the aboriginals is perhaps Sakane no Tamuramaro (758-811). He defeated the Ebisu in 801 and built the castle of Izawa in Mutsu, in order to offer resistance to their continuous incursions.

Through the centuries the number of Ebisu gradually decreased until the aboriginals formed an ethnic minority that was finally brought under complete subjection in the eighteenth century. It is assumed that the Ainu populations now residing in Sakhalin, the Kurils and Hokkaidō, are remnants of the Ebisu. The supposed relationship between the Ainu and Ebisu is partly founded on the resemblance of a number of geometrical motifs and patterns appearing in the culture of both people. These design motifs include some of those still used in contemporary Ainu tattoos and seem to originate from the early ages of the Japanese Empire. At any rate, many excavated pots and clay figurines are extant with decorations of the type of design in question, mainly from the Latest Jōmon period (1000 B.C.-300 B.C.),[1]

The clay figurines, called dogū, have been the subject of much discussion, but it is now generally assumed that the vast majority represent deities associated with fertility. Their motifs and patterns have been applied by scratching the surface of the damp clay with a sharp utensil. The faces of quite a few of the figurines are decorated with concentric lines around the eyes and the mouth. On the bodies geometrical motifs and patterns can usually be found, consisting of for instance paired oblique lines, triangles, parallel lines, hatchings and spirals, very similar to the design motifs found on many pots of the same period. Though the often grotesque-looking totemic dogū are products of the imagination, they are of course composed of visual elements simply originating from real everyday life. In other words, the body marks applied to the clay objects portraying human figures may simply represent embroidery or other kinds of decorations of the clothes worn those days, while the facial marks on the figurines most likely represent skin decorations, perhaps including tattoos. There is no conclusive evidence for the presence of tattoo reproductions on the faces of the dogū figurines, but the idea is originated in Takayama Jun’s thorough study Jōmonjin no irezumi (‘Tattoos of the Jōmon people’).[2] It concerns a comparison of the facial markings of the dogū figurines with markings appearing in the cultures of Taiwan, Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands. In spite of the lack of factual information on any pigment or
A man with kanji characters tattooed on his upper arms.

Detail of a bookplate from Shikidō mizu no den, published 1770s.

The actor Onoe Matsusuke I as the palanquin bearer Gōhei. On his right arm is the character matsu, tattooed in dotted lines.

A hosoban print published 11/1780.

The actors Onoe Matsusuke I and Segawa Kikunōjō III. A hosoban print published between 1781 and 1792.

The actor Onoe Matsusuke I as the palanquin bearer Gōhei. On his right arm is the character matsu, tattooed in dotted lines.

A hosoban print published 1/1780.
An ôban published c. 1787, depicting sumô wrestler Fudenoumi Kinemon, with Sakata tattoo, posing with sumô wrestler Kashiwado Kandayu.

Courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library & Christie’s Images, London.
A second change concerns the development of different types of tattoos. The works of art printed between the late 1760s and 1800, including both single-sheet brocade prints and black-and-white bookplates, not only depict tattooed vows, but also large characters in outlines and pure figurative tattoos, while for the same period there seem to be no records of prints or bookplates in which tattooed family crests are present. This does not necessarily mean that crest tattoos had completely disappeared. Perhaps this type simply had gone out of vogue. In the same period, the first examples of persons with two or more tattoos are recorded, as well as some prints showing tattoos placed on other parts of the body than just the arms. To avoid a tedious and lengthy enumeration of details, only a selection of the most relevant prints and book illustrations is discussed here. The other examples are mentioned in the footnotes or completely left out because of their marginal importance.

One of the earliest full-colour prints in which a tattoo appears is a medium-sized print (large chūban, 21 x 28.3 cm) by Suzuki Harunobu, with a shunga bathhouse scene. As we have already seen, the artist is considered as the pioneer of the brocade print. He was the leading artist of the 1760s and created a style all his own, poetic and sweet, thereby focussing on idealized beauty. The print in question was published in the late 1760s, at the height of the artist’s career. It is not signed in order to avoid problems with the authorities. Generally erotic works were left unsigned, but in some of his shunga Harunobu took the risk. In those cases the signature appears
The practice of combining different types of tattoos and not restricting these to the upper arms any longer most likely originated in the 1790s, as is mentioned in the previous chapter. Such combinations also included figurative tattoos. This development led to the figurative full-body tattoo style which was to become one of the most striking fads of nineteenth-century Japan.

The development is also seen in shunga prints by Kitagawa Utamaro (1754-1806), one of the most prominent artists at the turn of the century. For instance, in the artist's Ehon karanishiki (Picture-book of Chinese brocade), published in 1802, a boatman appears with three different tattoos on his arms. The tattoos are placed at random and seem to be incoherent. One is representing a woman's head much like the one in Torii Kiyonaga's book illustration mentioned before.

A second interesting print to be brought up in this context is a shunga originating from Utamaro's Ehon hana fubuki (Picture-book of flowers in violent bloom), which was also published in 1802. In the print a villainous figure appears whose back is tattooed with the image of a skeleton playing a three-stringed banjo-like instrument often played by female entertainers (fig. 019, p. 099).

The novel deals with the legendary exploits of a kind of Robin Hood gang of freebooters, revolting at injustice and struggling against corrupt government officials at the chaotic end of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1125). The novel is believed to have originated from a mixture of fact and fiction. The brigands are said to have had a hideout near the marshes of Liangshan in the western Shantung region. In an early stage itinerant narrators spread the stories of the rebels' adventures. Undoubtedly they have treated the subject matter in a creative way over the course of time, whereupon the different stories were probably brought together in the 1360s. The compilation is one of China's first long novels.

Utamaro's two shunga, each after its own fashion, perfectly reflect the innovative move tattooists and their clients made in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The next phase announced itself in 1805, when a special phenomenon emphatically began to play an important role in the process. That year a few illustrations by Hokusai marked the beginning of the crucial steps towards the distinctive style of the Japanese tattoo of the late Edo period, in spite of the fact that the original source that indirectly gave rise to Hokusai's illustrations had been known in Japan for many years. The original source is the Chinese novel Shuihu zhuan. In Japan it is called Suikoden, 'Tales of the water margin'. The first version of this voluminous work was probably written or compiled by authors using the pseudonyms of Shi Na'an and Luo Guanzhong, at the end of the Yuan period (1279-1368). The original compilation and a number of versions written during the two centuries that followed are now unfortunately lost. The earliest extant complete version dates from 1589.
intentions and were always thinking in terms of stepping into breach for the poor. Four of the rebels were decorated with tattoos. The rebels’ adventures, their skills in martial arts and wrestling, and above all their honour, loyalty and strong ties of brotherhood were the main ingredients that led to the enormous success of the novel.

It seems that the Chinese novel reached Japan at the beginning of the eighteenth century. At any rate, Japanese editions began to appear in the first half of that century. One of the first was a version with a simplified text, written by Okajima Kanzan (d. 1727), to unlock the Chinese novel to the Japanese readership. Similar versions followed and soon the novel was a favourite among literati. In 1773 the first full adaptation for Japan was written, tailored to the general public. It was called Honchō Suikoden, ‘Our own tales of the water margin’ In no time this version of the exciting adventures of the hundred and eight brigands was widely disseminated among the citizens of the towns and villages of Japan. After its publication several variants appeared, including Onna Suikoden, a version in which women are the principal characters of the story.

In 1777 a Suikoden-related picture-book was published. It included a brief summary of the original story and was illustrated by Toriyama Sekien (1712-1788), who produced a number of drawings of the leading characters.

By the first decade of the nineteenth century both the Chinese and Japanese Suikoden had become extremely popular and in 1805 the rage was further enhanced with the appearance of the first of ninety-one volumes of Shinpen Suiko gaden, ‘Newly compiled illustrated Suikoden’. It involves a woodblock-printed yomihon (a popular genre of illustrated fiction, literally ‘books for reading’), published in black-and-white. The first ten volumes are written by the famous author Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848), who was followed by Takai Ranzan (1762-1838), and the first sixty were illustrated by one of the most prominent artists of the time, Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). In total the publication spanned thirty-three years. Katsushika Taiō II (active 1821-1853) took care of the illustrations beginning with volume sixty-one. Of course the four tattooed heroes of the original Chinese version also appear in these illustrated volumes. Hokusai depicted them in a Chinese style, in vivid lines, with their characteristic tattoos on the upper part of their bodies. From the publication of the very first volume onward, the four were the favourites of the reading public.

In 1807 again a set of volumes was published, but then sequel volumes did not appear until 1828. The reason for the lengthy interval remains unclear. It is common knowledge that Hokusai and Bakin have quarrelled over the Suikoden volumes, most likely concerning financial matters, but at least until 1/1815 the two worked together on several projects, while in the meantime their Suikoden publications had come to a standstill.

When it comes to the continuation of the development of tattooing from the early 1800s up to the late 1820s, a small number of works of art give us something to go on. The recorded examples are important and of much interest, as they indicate that figurative full-body tattoos already existed in the 1810s and early to mid 1820s. It implies that such tattoos predated the ones depicted on the famous Suikoden prints designed by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861) between 1827 and circa 1836 (see hereafter). The facts are as follows.

The earliest of the gathered examples is an ōban print by Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769-1825), depicting the actor Onoe Eisaburō as Mamushi no Kichi (i.e. Jirokichi). The character appears in act one of the play Sandai banashi totoya no chawan and occasionally in plays of the Soga genre, such as Tamakushi ge kawaraban. The performance of the scene shown in Toyokuni’s print is not recorded in current kabuki annals, but we know from an old literary work that the print was published in 1809. We also know that it predates the eleventh month of that year, the date on which the actor changed his name to Onoe Matusuke II.
UTAGAWA KUNIYOSHI
Tanmeijirō Genshōgo in an underwater fight with a high-ranking general. One of the most lauded prints from the ōban series Tsūzoku Suikoden gōketsu hyakuhachinin no hitori, published 1827-1830 by Kagaya Kichiebei.
Pilgrims at their visit of the Rōben waterfall at Ōyama.

An ōban triptych published by Azumaya Daisuke, c. 1819.
Detail of the centre panel of figure 022.

Tattooed pilgrims performing acts of ritual purification at the Rōben waterfall.

Detail of the right-hand panel of figure 022.

Tattooed pilgrims performing acts of ritual purification at the Rōben waterfall.
The Ancient DecADe of the 19th Century
Until the late 1950s the authors of books on Japanese prints have paid little or no attention to ukiyo-e produced in the cities of Kyoto and Osaka (i.e. the Kamigata region) between the late 1780s and the 1870s. Even in Japan only a handful of the early publications was devoted to the ukiyo-e oeuvre of the artists active in these two cities. Genji Kuroda’s important and voluminous work Kamigata-e ichiran, published in 1929, is one of the few exceptions. Unfortunately it is only available in Japanese and therefore not easily accessible to many interested western readers. Information from other early books is scarce, usually concise and often far from accurate.

Scholars and art critics have certainly neglected this particular group of ukiyo-e for a long time. Initially, the vast majority of the collectors of Japanese prints showed no interest either. The reasons for all this are clearly pointed out by Roger Keyes and Mizushima Keiko in their standard work The Theatrical World of Osaka Prints, published in 1973. Briefly it amounts to this: ‘Osaka prints are scarcer than Edo prints, they were hardly available to the first collectors, scholars and dealers, who bought their first prints in the nation’s capital Edo, and Osaka prints almost invariably have as their subject matter the favourite actors of the kabuki theatre’.

Meanwhile things have changed. In the past forty years quite a few publications have appeared dealing exclusively with the print production in Osaka and Kyoto during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century. Numerous publications by Prof. Matsudaira Susumu, the undisputed authority in the field of Osaka and Kyoto prints, became available, but also several books, articles and catalogues by others can be added to the publications mentioned above. All of these have in common a great devotion, enthusiasm, and a fundamental aim at a high degree of accuracy. Thus we now dispose of much solid information on the subject, although it took until 2002 (see hereafter) before it was linked specifically to the history of tattooing in the Kamigata region.

In the majority of the books on Japanese tattooing the print oeuvre of the Kamigata artists is completely neglected. This is surprising, since the prints in question are almost invariably related to actual kabuki performances that are precisely datable. Consequently any depicted tattoo can be placed in its historical context and thereupon it might shed some new light on the development of tattooing. With that knowledge the present author began to list and examine Osaka tattoo prints. The results of this initial study were published in 2002. The research was confined to the prints produced in Osaka, since tattoo prints originating from Kyoto appear to be extremely rare. Hence in the following we will deal exclusively with Osaka prints. The results of the small study here may serve as a guideline.

As noted before, print design in Osaka was strongly interwoven with the kabuki theatre, and simply because of the absence of Suikoden-related plays the prints were not greatly affected by the Suikoden craze, as they were in Edo. In addition it can be inferred from the examined prints that some stages of the tattoo development in Edo may have preceded the corresponding stages in Osaka. Furthermore, prints depicting actors represented as tattooed labourers, fishmongers, otokodate, and firemen, but not referring to an actual performance or even to a kabuki play at all, were very popular in Edo in the 1850s and 1860s, but are almost completely absent from Osaka printmaking. In other words, the characteristic features of the tattoo prints from Edo and Osaka show similarities as well as differences, in each case highly dependent on the phase of development. Nevertheless it is clear that they mutually influenced one another and that both contributed to the development of a distinct Japanese tattooing style.

Between the late 1780s and the 1870s, an estimated one hundred and fifty artists contributed to the print production in Osaka.
The artist Ryūkōsai Jokei (active 1777-1809?) single-sheet prints and book illustrations by eighteenth century. During these years has its origin in the last quarter of the Japan in that period in a wider context. Putting the increasing popularity of tattooing in Osaka. Combined with information originating from tattoos seen. Considering the total number of roles performed during the period concerned, we may assume that the small percentage of tattoo prints is in line with the small number of plays in which tattoos are shown. In addition we should note that such plays achieved great success and hence caught the attention of competing artists and publishers. Usually this resulted in the publication of at least a few different prints related to one performance. As the artists preferably chose the highlights of a play for their prints, we may assume that a tattooed character appearing in a play as a rule would also be represented in prints. Starting from the prints it was thus possible to compile a fairly complete overview of the appearances of tattoos in plays staged in Osaka. Combined with information originating from kabuki annals this has given us some insight into the historical development of tattooing in Osaka. As a consequence we can put the increasing popularity of tattooing in Japan in that period in a wider context.

The popularity of actor prints in Osaka has its origin in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. During these years single-sheet prints and book illustrations by the artist Ryūkōsai Jokei (active 1777-1809?) increasingly drew the attention of the local kabuki fans. The artist’s work was unique in style and characterized by rather solid figures aptly rendered by means of bold and powerful lines. Most of his single-sheet prints show a subdued colouration. Generally he used only four or five colour-blocks for each print. Despite Ryūkōsai’s small output, only a few books and about forty single-sheet prints are known today, his oeuvre has definitely influenced a generation of following Osaka artists. Not only did the works themselves serve as a guideline, Ryūkōsai’s specific ideas about drawing faces and poses of actors, which he specified in a sketchbook, were also passed on to his pupils and followers.

Ryūkōsai started his career in the mid-1770s as a pupil of the painter Shitomi Kangetsu (1747-1797). After he left the studio of Kangetsu, in the early 1780s, Ryūkōsai soon became known as a painter and illustrator. A manuscript entitled Osaka dachin uma (dated 1783) includes some notes on the artist. The compiler mentions a vogue for folding fans with actor portraits painted by Ryūkōsai who lives at Kameibashi in Kita-horie. He adds that the artist is known for his unique way of capturing the likeness of an actor and for drawing the pose of the actor in compliance with special wishes of the patron. Unfortunately very few of the artist’s paintings have survived.

Ryūkōsai’s earliest datable work is an illustration in Kyōka narabi no oka, a poetry anthology with illustrations by different artists. The book was published in 1777. The first datable graphic work of which all paintings have survived.

Ryūkōsai’s earliest datable work is an illustration in Kyōka narabi no oka, a poetry anthology with illustrations by different artists. The book was published in 1777. The first datable graphic work of which all illustrations are by Ryūkōsai is an album published in 1784. It is entitled Yakusha mono-iwai, ‘A celebration of actors’, containing forty-nine full-length portraits of actors produced in black-and-white. All figures are accompanied by a haiku verse and by the actor’s stage-clan name and pen name. In the early 1790s Ryūkōsai began to design single-sheet actor prints, apparently stimulated by the popularity of actor prints by artists of the Katsukawa school in Edo.

As far as we know Ryūkōsai’s single-sheet prints are the earliest nishiki-e produced in Osaka. The earliest print dates from 1/1791 and most of the others were published up to 3/1794. All of his prints are in the small and narrow hosoban format (c. 33 x 14.5 cm), except for one ôban. Since in Edo from the early 1770s up to the early 1790s the hosoban format was by far the most popular format for actor prints, it seems no coincidence that Ryūkōsai has chosen this paper format for his introduction of single-sheet actor prints to the kabuki fans in Osaka. The prints were...
Actors portrayed as *Suikoden* heroes.

A surimono-style oban tetraptych published c. 11/1835 by Kinkadō Konishi. A mitate scene showing from left to right Arashi Rikan II as Rōrihakuchō Chōjun, Nakamura Tomijūrō II as Ko Sanjō Ichijōsei, Nakamura Utaemon III as Nyūunryū Kō Sonshō, and Nakamura Shikan II as Kyūmonryū Shishin.
Now tattooists who lived in Yokohama, a district of Tokyo where many foreigners sojourned, were allowed to resume their work, on the condition that they tattooed foreign clients only. Their tattooing style and technique were at a high level and soon many foreigners found their way to Japan’s leading tattooists. These did not only include seamen, businessmen and tourists who came to Japan, but also quite a few members of the Western aristocracy. Even Prince George I of Greece, King George V, Nicolas II, later tsar of Russia, and Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence and Avondale, had themselves tattooed in Japan.

Stimulated by the legalized tattooing of foreigners and the ban on tattooing Japanese people, the illegal tattooing of Japanese fellow-countrymen expanded and was practiced on a fairly large scale as early as the 1880s. The ordinance of 1872 may thus have produced little effect, but in any case tattooing continued to be officially prohibited to the Japanese. This situation would last until 1948. In that year an official of the Occupation Government of General MacArthur revoked the Meiji prohibition against tattooing, since he considered tattooing as important as other indigenous arts of Japan. He came to this point of view after having seen tattoo master Horiyoshi II (Tamotsu Kuronoma, 1914-1991) demonstrating his skill and artistic talent. The revocation of the old official tattoo ban led to an upsurge of tattooing, initially with traditional tattoos playing the leading part. Traditional tattoos were favourite among yakuza, who in this time of rationing of numerous products managed to earn enough money with shady business to afford full-body tattoos.
All the prints included in this section have been selected from the Van der Velden Collection of Japanese woodblock prints, a collection primarily focusing on ukiyo-e depicting tattoos. The selection has been composed from the perspective of giving the reader insight into the fascinating and fashionable world of tattooing in nineteenth-century Japan. The reader should note that the prints are not arranged in chronological order but after the ideas of the designers of this publication, in order to create a balanced and aesthetic visual unity.

Print sizes:  
- ōban, appr. 26 x 38 cm  
- chūban, appr. 19 x 26 cm  
- koban, appr. 9 x 12 cm  

In other cases dimensions are given in centimetres, with height preceding width.
The represented man is one of the most famous heroes of the Suikoden novel. He is usually shown in a feat of strength, but here he is sitting quietly on a bench. The hero's tattoo is composed of nine dragons covering large areas of the body and is among the examples frequently admired and followed by tattoo fans.
In one of the tattoos shown in the prints of this set of ten a dragon is depicted, in all of the others floral motifs appear. The dragon tattoo is not represented as if it were a real tattoo, but as a painted or printed decoration on a short-sleeved shirt worn by the actor Bandō Hikosaburō V.
KUNICHIKA (1835-1900)

Series:  Edo no hana isami zoroi
Signed:   Kunichika hitsu
Artist’s seal:  Toshidama
Publisher:   Shimizuya (trademark Kiyo, in the publisher’s name read as Shi)
Date/censor’s seal:   ½1865 (an intercalary month), aratame 71865, aratame (no. 10)
Numbers: 7, 8, 9, 10
Size:   oban

(Clockwise) Nakamura Fukusuke II, Sawamura Tosshō II, Bandō Mitsugorō VI, Ichikawa Kodanji IV.
Ichikawa Danjūrō IX as Kyūmonryū Shishin (l.) and Ichikawa Sadanji I as Kaoshō Rochishin (r.), in the play Suikoden no danmaru, Shintomi Theatre, 5/1886.

Signed: Toyohara Kunichika hitsu
Artist's seal: Toshidama
Publisher: Komiyama Shōhei
Date: 5/1886
Block carver: Noguchi Enkatsu (seal chōkō Enkatsu)
Size: ōban triptych

This triptych and the two following are related to a very successful performance of a kabuki play incorporating a stylised choreographed version of a fight between two famous Suikoden heroes. The performance attracted many visitors, not only because of the fascinating movements and poses laid down in its choreography, but also because of the elaborate tattoos shown on the stage, one with cherry blossoms and the other with dragons, adding a very striking visual element to the scene.
In this scene of the present play Jirozō is hit on his right lower leg by a stone thrown by Heiji. The first, who is grasping his right leg with both hands, is sporting a magnificent tattoo with a pattern of whirlwinds and cherry blossoms and the head of a woman holding a letter between her lips.

Title: Akogi monogatari (The story of Akogi)
Signed: Hirosada
Date: 1850
Size: chūban diptych
Ichimura Uzaemon XIII as robi (firefighter) Sakichi, in the play Nachimai matsuri yomiyu no nigiyomi, Ichimura Theatre, "1860.

Title:   Go-sairei (festival; referring to the autumn festival at the Hachiman Shrine)
Signed:   Toyokuni ga
Publisher:   Ebiya Rinnosuke
Date/censor's seal:  8/1860, aratame
Size:  ōban

Only a few months after the publication of this print Kunisada included a print depicting the same actor and role in a series of half-length portraits (see hereafter). On the whole the decorations on the actor’s clothes are similar in the two prints, but the motifs in the tattoos differ, making clear that ukiyo-e artists not always exactly copied what was shown in kabuki.
Ichimura Uzaemon XIII as Omatsuri Sashichi (i.e. Sakichi).
Series: Shin butai isami no yakusai
(New theatre with actors as chivalrous man)
Signed: Toyokuni ga
Publisher: Kiya Sōjirō (seal Bakurō-shi Kiya han)
Date/censor's seal: 10/1860, aratame
Block carver: Yokogawa Takejirō (seal Yokogawa hori Take)
Size: ōban

In the tattoo on the actor’s right arm are the back, tail feathers and a wing of a phoebic, referring to the feather robe (hagoromo) of feminine Buddhist angels.
In the upper part of the print the strong wood grain of the block for dark grey can be seen. The text in the circular cartouche deals with the role of Sashichi. It is written by Hananoya Kōju.
YOSHIHARU (1828-1888)

The hero Rōshi Ensei standing on a rock by the sea.

Series: Suikoden goketsu kagami (Mirror of heroes of the Suikoden)
Signed: Ichibaisai Yoshiharu ga
Publisher: Yamaguchiya Tōbei (seal Yamaguchi, with trademark)
Date seal: 12/1856
Censor's seal: aratame
Size: ōban

This powerful print and the next two are from a series of six or more, much in the style of the Suikoden prints by Yoshiharu's teacher Kuniyoshi. Apparently the artist was a tattoo devotee, seeing that flamboyant tattoos in this series are shown in five of the six prints recorded.
YOSHIHARU (1828-1888)

The Suikoden hero Rōhakuchō Chōjun fighting a dragon.

Series: Suikoden gōketsu kagami,
(Mirror of heroes of the Suikoden)

Signed: Ichibaisai Yoshiharu ga

Publisher: Yamaguchiya Tōbei

Date seal: 12/1856

Censor's seal: aratame

Size: ōban
Although this triptych is dating from the period following the hey-day of Osaka printmaking, it is showing a strong design and striking tattoos. The actors are portrayed as firefighters holding a standard (matoi). The characters have fanciful names, which indicates the three prints are not related to a kabuki performance but simply and solely designed as fashionable portraits of popular actors.
Nakamura Fukusuke II as Danshichi Kurobei.

Series: Mitate yami no zukushi
Subtitle: Natsu no yami (Summer darkness)
Signed: Toyokuni ga
Publisher: Hayashiya Shōgorō (trademark Shō)
Date: 4/1855
Censor’s seal: aratame
Block carver: Yokogawa Takejirō (seal hori Take)
Size: ōban

In Danshichi’s tattoo a dragon is confronting a tiger. The composition is completed with stylised clouds, wind, flames, rocks and clusters of leaves of a sasa bamboo. These motifs form a traditional combination in which the confrontation of the two animals here may express that the mythological animal’s power is stronger than that of the tiger, since the dragon takes a prominent place in the tattoo in this powerful print by Kunisada.
GLOSSARY OF JAPANESE TERMS
AINU Japanese people of an old race
AKEBONO-MIKIRI fading of colour over a wide area
ARAGOTO a bombastic style of acting
AZAMI thistle
BAKUTO itinerant gamblers
BAREN disc-shaped printing pad
BENI-E eighteenth-century hand-coloured print
BENZURI-E mid-eighteenth-century two-colour print
BIJIN beautiful woman
BIWA a lute-like instrument
BOKASHI graded colour
BOTAN tree peony
BOTAN-MIKIRI a tattoo-border modelled after tree-peony petals
BUGAKU 'dance-music', court dance and music
BUNRAKU puppet theatre
BUTSUGIRI tattoo with a hard edge
CHIKU bamboo
CHÔNIN 'townsmen', merchants and craftsmen
CHÛBAN a paper format, appr. 19 x 26 cm
DAIKON a large white radish
DAIMYÔ feudal lord
DAIMYÔ-BIKESHI fire brigades serving feudal lords
DENGAKU 'field-music', folk dances, rustic celebrations
DÔGU clay figurines
EDO modern Tokyo
EGURI chest tattoo showing a low neckline
EHON illustrated book
ETA 'highly dirty ones', social outcasts
GA picture, drawn by
GAEN servant fireman
GEIKO female professional entertainer
GEISHA female professional entertainer
GIGAKU 'skill-music', masked drama-dance performance
GÔ pseudonyme, nom de plume
GOFUN opaque white pigment made from shells
HAIGÔ name used by actors for signing poetry
HAIKU seventeen-syllable poem
HAN published by
HANA-FUDA a popular card game with floral designs
HANAMICHI 'flower-path', the catwalk of kabuki
HANEBORI hand-tattooing with feathering motions
HANGA woodblock print
HANEBORI a burial mound clay figure
HANMOTO publisher, published by
HANSHITA-E a finished design ready for carving
HANTEN a half-length coat, often padded
HAORI a formal jacket varying in length
HAPPI a lightweight hip-length coat
HIKI RENJÛ fan club
HIKAÉ tattooing of the shoulders and upper breast
HININ 'non-humans', social outcasts
drawn by a fabulous phoenix-like animal
HORI carved by, engraved by, tattooed by
HORIMONO a tattoo, tattooing
HORIMONO-SHI tattoo master
HORISHI carver, tattooist, tattoo master
HÖSHO a type of thick soft and strong kōzo paper
HOSOBAN a paper format, appr. 33 x 14.5 cm
HOSOKAWA a type of kōzo paper used for woodblock prints
IKEBANA traditional Japanese flower arrangement
IREBOKU 'putting in a mole with ink', tattooed love dots
IREZUMI 'application of ink', often denoting penal tattoos
JIGOKU hell
JÖ-BIKESHI professional fire brigades
JÖMON cord pattern
JÖRURI chanted narration
KABUKI Japan’s popular theatre
KAEN flames
KAGURA ‘god-music’, Shintō shrine dances
KAI-AWASE a traditional shell-game
KAI-ŌI a traditional shell-game
KAJIBANTEN a fireman’s coat
KAKEMONO hanging scroll
KAKEMONO-E vertical ōban diptych
KAME tortoise
KAME NO KÔ 'turtle back', tattooing of the back and buttocks
KAMI spirit
KAMIGATA Kyoto-Osaka region
KAMURO a young girl apprenticed to a courtesan
KANA-ZÔSHI a popular genre of fiction
KANJI Chinese characters used in Japanese
KAOMISE opening of the new theatre season
KAPPA a mythical creature, a water monster
KARASHISHI a mythical animal, a lion-dog
KARASU-TENGU a mountain goblin
KAWAKIRI ‘skin cutters’, moxa pellets
KAWARA-MONO ‘riverbed people’, discriminated citizens
KEISEI courtesan
KEN a type of double-edged straight sword
KENDÔ 'the way of the sword', a martial art
KENTÔ register mark
KIKU chrysanthemum
KIMONO Japan’s traditional T-shaped garment
KISHÔBORI a tattooed vow or pledge
KITSUNE fox
KOBIKO a term used for various small paper-formats
KOI carp
KÔMORI bat
KÔZO paper made from mulberry fibres
KUMADORI a stylised make-up used in kabuki
KUMO cloud
Bibliography

Bowers, F.,
*Japanese Theatre.*
Tuttle Co., Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, 1974.

Carella, A.L.,
*Il fuoco sulla pelle; l’arte del tatuaggio tradizionale giapponese,*

Clark, T. and Ueda, O.,
*The Actor’s Image; Print Makers of the Katsukawa School.*
The Art Institute of Chikago, Chikago, 1994.

Crighton, R.A.,
*The Floating World; Japanese popular prints 1700-1900.*

Dally, M.C.,
*Utagawa Kuniyoshi.*

Doesburg, W.J. van.,
*Ōsaka Kagami,* Huys den Esch publ.,

Doesburg, W.J. van.,

Doesburg, W.J. van.,
*What About Kunisada?*

Edmunds, W.H.,
*Pointers and Clues to Subjects of Chinese and Japanese Art.*

Fagioli, M.,
*Shunga, images du printemps.*

Fagioli, M.,
*Shunga; Stampe Erotiche Giapponesi.*

Fellman, S. and Thomas, D.M.,
*The Japanese Tattoo.*

Fiorillo, J., Hashimoto, R. and Menon, S.,

Forment, F. and Brilot, M., ed.,
*Tatu-Tattoo!*

Forrer, M.,
*Hokusai.*

Forrer, M., et al.,
*Hokusai and his school.*
Date AnD censorship SeAls, 1791-1875
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Censor</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.</td>
<td>kiiwame (approved)</td>
<td>1791-1842 (the square variants only on special issues such as fan prints)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.</td>
<td>Take (Takeguchi Shōemon)</td>
<td>1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.</td>
<td>Taka (Takano Shinemon)</td>
<td>1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.</td>
<td>Fu (Fukatsu Ihei)</td>
<td>1843-1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.</td>
<td>Tanaka (Tanaka Heijirō)</td>
<td>1843-1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.</td>
<td>Watarai (Watanabe Jiemon)</td>
<td>1843-1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.</td>
<td>Mura (Murata Heiemon)</td>
<td>1843-1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.</td>
<td>Hama (Hama Yahei)</td>
<td>1843-1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.</td>
<td>Yoshimura (Yoshimura Gentarō)</td>
<td>1843-1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Muramatsu (Muramatsu Genroku)</td>
<td>1843-1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Kinugasa (Kinugasa Fusajirō)</td>
<td>1845-1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Murata (Murata Heiemon)</td>
<td>1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Hama and Kinugasa</td>
<td>1847-1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Muramatsu and Yoshimura</td>
<td>1847-1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Mera (Mera Taichirō) and Murata</td>
<td>1847-1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Kinugasa and Yoshimura</td>
<td>1849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Kinugasa and Watanabe (Watanabe Shōemon)</td>
<td>1849-1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Hama and Magome (Magome Kagyou)</td>
<td>1849-1853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Fuku (Fukushima Giemon) and Muramatsu</td>
<td>1849-1853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Kinugasa and Murata</td>
<td>1851-1853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Mera and Watanabe</td>
<td>1851-1853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>aratame (examined)</td>
<td>1849-1851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>aratame (examined)</td>
<td>1853-1857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date/aratame seals on fan prints, 1815-1840</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Seals" /> 1815</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Seals" /> 1815</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Seals" /> 1815, 1827, 1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Seals" /> 1816</td>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Seals" /> 1816</td>
<td><img src="image8" alt="Seals" /> 1817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image11" alt="Seals" /> 1818</td>
<td><img src="image12" alt="Seals" /> 1818</td>
<td><img src="image13" alt="Seals" /> 1819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image16" alt="Seals" /> 1820</td>
<td><img src="image17" alt="Seals" /> 1820</td>
<td><img src="image18" alt="Seals" /> 1820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image21" alt="Seals" /> 1823</td>
<td><img src="image22" alt="Seals" /> 1824</td>
<td><img src="image23" alt="Seals" /> 1825, 1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image26" alt="Seals" /> 1828</td>
<td><img src="image27" alt="Seals" /> 1829</td>
<td><img src="image28" alt="Seals" /> 1829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image31" alt="Seals" /> 1831</td>
<td><img src="image32" alt="Seals" /> 1832</td>
<td><img src="image33" alt="Seals" /> 1833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image36" alt="Seals" /> 1839</td>
<td><img src="image37" alt="Seals" /> 1839</td>
<td><img src="image38" alt="Seals" /> 1840</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Date/kiwame seals on fan prints, 1835-1864

1835 1836 1858
1859 1859 1860 1861
1862 1862 1863 1864 1864