



Tokaido Texts and Tales: Tokaido gojusan tsui by Kuniyoshi, Hiroshige, and Kunisada (Cofrin Asian Art Series)

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“These innovative prints have been considered one of the most seminal series from the era. *Tokaido Texts and Tales* investigates the sources of the legends, folklore, and fictional stories told in these prints, and persuasively foregrounds the creativity of the printmakers.”—Natsu Oyobe, associate curator of Asian art, University of Michigan Museum of Art

“A wonderful addition to our growing knowledge and appreciation of *ukiyo-e* prints of the late Edo period.”—Sarah E. Thompson, assistant curator for Japanese prints, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Throughout the Edo period (1615–1868), the Tokaido was the most vital road in a network of highways across Japan. Connecting Edo (modern-day Tokyo) and Kyoto, the road and its fifty-three rest stations became a popular theme for artistic expression in a variety of mediums.

The *Tokaido gojusan tsui* (*Fifty-Three Pairings along the Tokaido Road*), created in 1845, is one of the most well-known and fascinating examples of woodblock prints inspired by the road. Japan’s three leading print designers of the nineteenth century—Kuniyoshi, Hiroshige, and Kunisada—paired each Tokaido rest station with an intriguing, cryptic design. Due to the harsh and punitive Tenpo-era reforms, which attempted to impose a strictly defined morality, prints of celebrity actors, courtesans, and entertainers were outlawed during this time. Crafted to outwit the artistic restrictions imposed by the reforms, the woodcuts in this series became popular visual puzzles that were frequently reproduced.

Because of this ingenious approach to the Tokaido theme, which ultimately resulted in the creation of new types of art, the *Tokaido gojusan tsui* has been praised as one of the most innovative and important works from the late Edo period. This series was also the first to be created by more than one artist. Its three designers followed their individual interests and strengths, yet shared a common composition—dominant figures against distant landscapes. They used a variety of motifs, including stories from kabuki theater, poetry, famous tales, legends, landmarks, and local specialties.

Presenting the complete set of *Tokaido gojusan tsui* prints in vivid color, along with text from the woodcuts transcribed and translated from the Japanese, this book is an invaluable resource for collectors, art historians, and students of this classic technique. Supplementary essays and detailed analyses of the prints help readers share the delight contemporary viewers experienced when these Tokaido woodcuts first appeared on the market.

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