

Japan Society for the Promotion of Science
International Training Program
(27th April 2012 – 14th February 2013)

**Japanese prints and collection
management systems in American
museums:**

Creating metadata for Utagawa School
actor prints from the late-Edo period.

Vanessa Tothill, Digital Humanities (ARC), PhD. Candidate, Year 2

Thank you for your kind support!
Sarah Thompson (MFA), John Carpenter (MET),
Shawn Eichman (HMA), Stephen Salel (HMA),
John Szostak (University of Hawai'i at Manoa), JSPS,
DHJAC, Ritsumeikan University

Utagawa School prints published during the Post-Tenpô Reforms period

Research goals:

Develop a greater understanding of censors' and publisher's seals in relation to *yakusha-e* of the late Edo-period.

Improve my ability to accurately 'read' a print (identify seals, seal combinations, artist's signatures, etc. on prints by artists of the Utagawa School from 1840 to 1860.)

Uncover more information relating to the '*shita uri*' seal (「シタ売」印), and retail seals.

Gain experience in handling original objects (prints, scrolls and textiles).

Gain experience in using TMS (The Museum System, database management facility).

TMS search fields:

Objects Query/Query Assistant

Country: Japan

Department: Asian/*Specific
collection

Date: 1849; 1849 and 1853
(number field only)

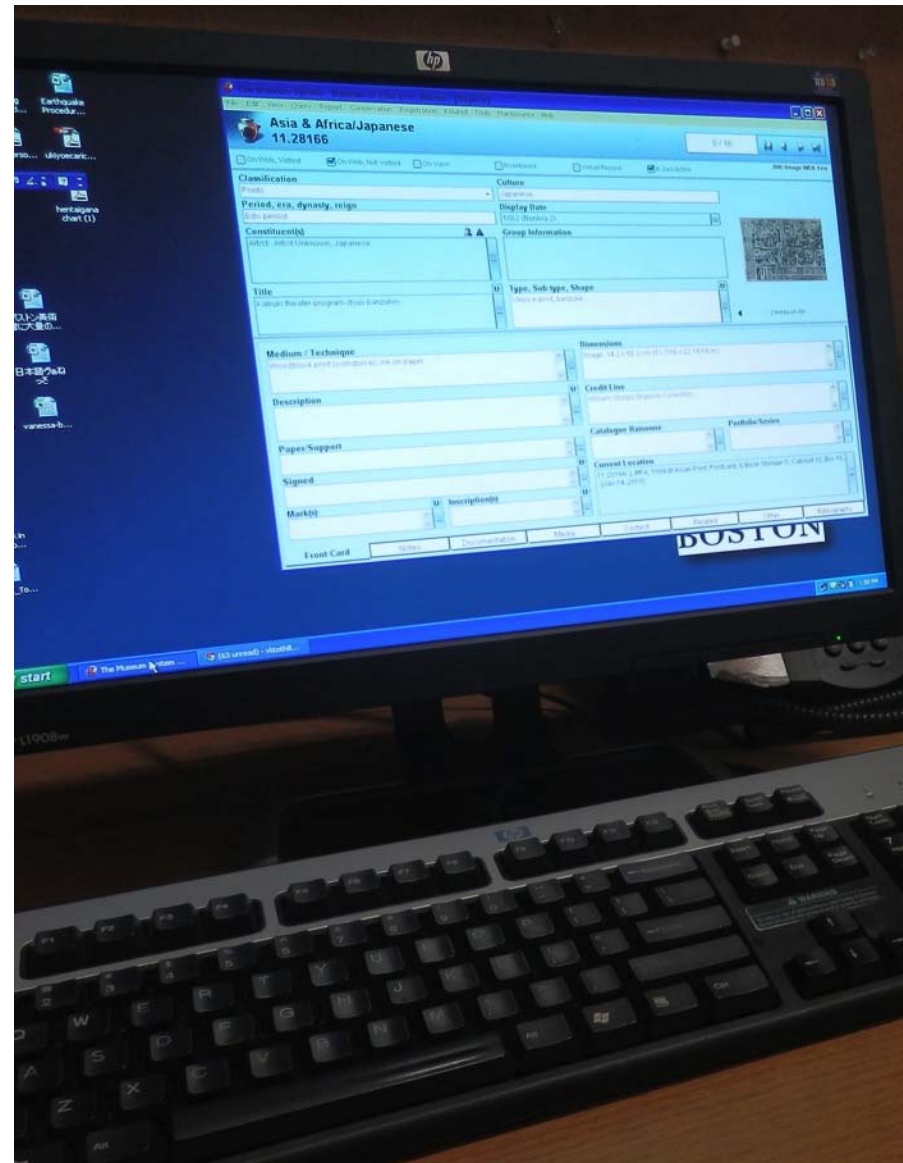
Display Name

(Constituents - Object related
constituents): Utagawa Kuniyoshi

Keyword: Ka'ei; Kaei

Mark(s): Watanabe; Muramatsu

Medium: print; woodblock



Keyword searches:

- Tombstone records (lack detailed metadata).
- Linguistic-bias/language as barrier: English (roman alphabet) rather than Japanese. Complicates cross cultural comparisons.
- Keyword searches require all details to be made explicit through text (English or roman alphabet).
- Non-linguistic connections must be expressed through text. Flagging up conceptual connections becomes the responsibility of a higher (curatorial) authority.

Problems finding:

Prints lacking a signature that have not been attributed to a particular artist.

Prints lacking a signature that have been wrongly attributed to a particular artist.

Prints that cannot be precisely dated to a particular year or *nengô* 年号.

Prints that only have been given an English translation as their only title. TMS search fields do not support Japanese/kanji.

User-behaviour:

Based on my own personal experience, I found that:

- I was less inclined to perform searches across various media and artistic schools. I did not use cross-cultural/cross-departmental searches.
- I narrowed my search in order to reduce volume.
- I found completing the 'Query Assistant' fields laborious and habit forming.
- I ignored 'invisible' files or problematic items that did not show up in searches. My research biased images with data.
- My user-behaviour reinforced the primacy of the material object and neglected the historical context/socio-economic conditions/ideological environment that influenced the object's production (information that was not easily accessible via the database).

Museum of Fine Art, Boston

27th April 2012 - 31st September 2012



Self-evaluation (MFA):

Recorded censors' seals: 1849-1853 (「シタ賣」印) period.

Low resolution photographs made it necessary to view prints.

3,128 records amended

Interpreted *banzuke*: 1840-1855

351 records created with detailed commentary

Produced a written report:

‘Post-Tenpô period *nishiki-e*: Examples of censor seal anomalies from the Japanese woodblock print collection at the Museum of Fine Art, Boston.’

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

1st October 2012 - 14th January 2013



Self-evaluation (MET):

Reviewed the “Utagawa Kunisada” image files. Checked the metadata and modified files accordingly.

189 records amended

Researched Utagawa School prints for the next rotation

Developed written work: ‘The ‘shita-uri’ seal: Re-issued prints’

Benefitted from the multiculturalism of the MET’s strong international internship/fellows program, and the high level of curatorial expertise made accessible to interns via the museum’s educational programmes.

Honolulu Museum of Art, Hawai'i

15th January 2013 – 14th February 2013



Self-evaluation (HMA):

Reviewed the Utagawa Kuniyoshi image files and added to the existing metadata.

27 records amended

Reviewed the Utagawa Hiroshige figurative prints and added to the existing metadata.

12+ records amended

Prepared research paper for ITP workshop:

“Utagawa Hiroshige: Kabuki-related prints from the Honolulu Museum of Art”

Collated information for a second paper: ‘Refashioning Ôtsu-e’

Benefitted from an introduction to book/paper conservation, scroll handling, textile handling, and received expert advice regarding photographing textiles.