

Large print display text



The Asahi Shimbun Display

日本の祭礼—  
華麗なるだんじり

**Japan's  
festival floats**

This guide provides all the display text  
in large print.

For any queries about access at the  
British Museum, please email  
[access@britishmuseum.org](mailto:access@britishmuseum.org)

## Introduction

### **Text on orange panel, left wall:**

Festivals have been central to Japanese life for centuries, combining solemn ritual with boisterous revelry. A range of festivals is celebrated in towns and cities across Japan, typically during the summer. Elaborately carved large wooden floats created by specialist artists feature in many of the events.

Collaboration with Japanese scholars has revealed information about a festival float model donated to the British Museum in 1908. The story of the model highlights changes in Japanese craft practice in the 1800s to meet foreign expectations. The object reflects the ritual and social function of floats in Japanese history and Japan's relationship with other countries.

Japanese festival culture

**Text next to orange panel, left wall:**

日本の祭礼文化

## **Japanese festival culture**

Each festival in Japan is associated with a particular shrine of the indigenous faith, Shintō. During these events, a portable shrine believed to contain the spiritual presence of the local deity is carried through the streets surrounded by people. There is a procession of spectacular floats, or boats on water, accompanied by dances, music and song. Festivals nurture a sense of regional pride and can draw crowds of tourists.

**Wall labels, left wall:**

尾張 津島天王祭り

**The Tennō Festival at Tsushima,  
Owari Province, 1853**

By Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858)

## Japanese festival culture

The Tennō Festival at Tsushima, in central Japan, has been held for 600 years and is unusual as it takes place mainly on water. This print depicts the first part of the event, a dramatic night-time sailing on the Tennō River of five boats laden with lanterns. Vessels carrying spectators surround the boats and teahouses are on the far bank.

Colour woodblock print  
1902,0212,0.397.60

尾張津島祭礼

**The Tsushima Festival in Owari Province, 1859**  
By Utagawa Hiroshige II (1826–1869)

During the morning of the second day of the Tennō Festival, boats are decorated with brocade curtains and bear mannequins dressed in costumes representing figures from history and legend. Woodblock prints like this were sold in bookshops in the cities. Though made by hand, the prints were mass-produced and affordable, costing about the same as a double helping of noodles.

Japanese festival culture

Colour woodblock print  
1915,0823,0.329.25

京都祇園祭礼

**The Gion Festival in Kyoto, 1859**

By Utagawa Hiroshige II (1826–1869)

The Gion Festival in Kyoto began in AD 869 as an attempt to drive away plague. People believed that angry spirits were spreading illness so performed rituals to make peace with them. Groups of men haul tall, wheeled floats (**yamahoko**) through the streets in an impressive display of strength.

Colour woodblock print  
1915,0823,0.329.3

神事残月

**The Moon in the Morning Sky of a Festival Day, 1886**

By Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–1892)

This print depicts an early morning scene with a silvery full moon lingering overhead and belongs to the series, **One Hundred Aspects of the Moon**.

## Japanese festival culture

The float is part of the Sannō Festival of Hie Shrine in Tokyo. A mannequin stands on the float and represents the deity of Kamo Shrine in Kyoto. The curtain on this print shows famous horse races.

Colour woodblock print  
1906,1220,0.1426

### **Central case, side of case:**

都名所図会

### **Illustrations of Famous Places in Kyoto, 1786**

Written by Akisato Ritō (active 1772–1830),  
illustrated by Takehara Shunchōsai  
(active 1772–1801)

Gazetteers were a popular form of publication in Japan during the 1700s, both with people embarking on journeys and armchair travellers. This book is from an eleven-volume set depicting places in Kyoto. These pages show the Gion Festival, where a decorated float is being pulled along.

Japanese festival culture

Woodblock-printed book  
2002,0815,0.1.2

倭人物画譜

**Picture-Album of the People of Yamato, 1800**

By Yamamoto Soken (1759–1818)

Major Japanese cities had substantial publishing industries during the 1800s, which produced hundreds of titles every year. Many picture books were designed by artists and included entertaining and attractive imagery. Soken's book places the viewer amidst the Gion Festival, where a large float is being hauled through the streets, on which two dancers seem to be taking a brief rest.

Woodblock-printed book  
1979,0305,0.184.2



## Japanese festival floats

### Central case label, front:

船形だんじりの模型

### Model of a Festival Float, 1900–08

Yamanaka and Company, a business specialising in Chinese and Japanese art, donated this float to the British Museum in 1908. This gift marked the Olympic Games, which took place in London that summer.

Recent collaborative research into this object has led to new insights. We now know this is a model of a state barge (**gozabune**), used by the shogun, head of the Japanese military government until 1867. The object's decoration may have been made by Murakami Tetsudō, a specialist in carving festival floats.

Wood, metal and fabric

1908,0725.3 Donated by Yamanaka & Co.

## Japanese festival floats

### 船形だんじりの装飾

#### **Float decoration**

The model is decorated with motifs from the natural world. On the walls of the rear cabin are leaping lion-dogs for strength and peonies for wealth. Above the central cabin are phoenixes for long life. Dragons are also featured, which are associated with strength and vitality. Inside the cabin, the walls are painted with blossoming cherry trees, signifying the renewal of springtime.

#### **Picture caption:**

Top: A dragon. Bottom: A phoenix

#### **Picture caption:**

Blossoming cherry trees and abstract clouds for decoration

### 日本の研究者との協力

#### **International collaboration**

International collaboration has helped reveal new information about this model.

## Japanese festival floats

Specialists in Japan have knowledge of the latest research. To understand objects such as this float, it is essential to consult Japanese sources, as these have the most detailed information. Consulting with scholars in Japan provides the curator with access to these materials. Research into this festival float model is ongoing.

### **Central case label, back:**

山中商会

### **Yamanaka and Company**

Major societal changes occurred in Japan during the late 1800s. Art collections were dispersed from feudal lords and Buddhist temples to art markets. Yamanaka and Company was the first trader of Chinese and Japanese art. In 1900, Yamanaka opened a factory in Japan to create furniture and ornaments that would appeal to Western tastes. Carvings of creatures found in Buddhist temples were applied to furniture. Murakami Tetsudō (1867–1919), was head of the factory and specialised in carving decoration on festival floats.

Japanese festival floats

海外美術市場

## **Overseas art markets**

Chinese and Japanese art appealed to European and American collectors as it employed different formats, techniques and visual modes of expression from those of Western art. Buddhist imagery was seen as 'exotic' and the symbolism was rarely understood by Western countries. Overseas art markets were an important source of revenue as Japan strove to establish itself as a modern state.

### **Picture caption:**

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

山中商会の家具

## **Yamanaka and Company furniture, about 1905**

These images are part of the Yamanaka and Company furniture catalogue that was created for an American market in 1905. The decoration on the chair and sofa is inspired by imagery in the Buddhist temple Hōryū-ji near Nara in Japan. Elaborate carvings of phoenixes adorn both pieces of furniture. Lotuses and foliage are also carved into the chair.

## Japanese festival floats

### Wall labels, right wall:

天神祭の引き船

**Model of ship used at the Tenjin festival, 1852**

By Matsukawa Hanzan (1818–1888)

The text on this print requests donations from parishioners to build the proposed float for the Tenjin festival of Tenmangū Shrine in Osaka. Much of the funding for floats came from parishioners, some of whom would have been wealthy businessmen.

Colour woodblock print

1902,0212,0.420

だんじり形玩具を引く童子と娘

**Young woman and child pulling a toy festival float, about 1750**

By Okumura Masanobu (1686–1764)

This image shows a young woman and child pulling a toy float during the Sannō Festival of Hie Shrine in Edo.

## Japanese festival floats

The warrior Ichirai Hōshi is represented on the toy, leaping over his ally during the Battle of Uji Bridge in 1180. This print is the earliest displayed here, and demonstrates the historic importance of festival floats and miniaturised versions.

Woodblock print with hand-colouring  
1938,0312,0.4  
Donated by E W Tuke

### **Film label:**

岸和田だんじり祭

### **A Float at Kishiwada Danjiri Festival**

This film highlights the dynamism of the Kishiwada Danjiri Festival, which involves groups of men hauling tall, wheeled floats through the streets at speed in an awesome display of strength. This film draws attention to the important role floats play during traditional festivals, which are attended by men, women and children.

Duration: 39 seconds.  
This film is silent.

Find out more

## Find out more

### Related galleries

To see more objects from Japan, visit the **Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries in Rooms 92–94.**

From ancient flame pots, through samurai armour, to contemporary manga, the objects on display in the Japanese Galleries date from prehistory to the present. The objects refer to the lives of emperors and ordinary townspeople.

### Events

Find out more about this display with curator Dr Rosina Buckland in a free online talk on Thursday 4 May, 17.30–18.30, live on Zoom and YouTube. For more information and to register visit [britishmuseum.org/exhibitions-events](https://britishmuseum.org/exhibitions-events)

Find out more

## Large print guide

Scan the QR code for a large print guide of the display and to watch a time-lapse video of a conservator cleaning the model of a festival float.



## Acknowledgements

The British Museum thanks Ms Kuchiki Yuriko, Dr Emura Tomoko of the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties and Mr Tanaka Shūji of Ōita University for their contributions to developing this display.

The image featured on the back wall of this display is of the Sparrow Dance of Aoba Matsuri Festival in Sendai, Japan. © 2016 Masao Taira via Getty Images.

The ambient sound in this display includes these clips:



Find out more

Ambience Aomori Nebuta Festival.

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Japanese Obon Festival traditional music.

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Japanese festival crowd ambience and chanting.

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