

Selections from NDL collections

Sanbaso

Artist: Utagawa Kuniyoshi; Publisher: Ebisu-ya; Published in 19th century; Large-sized, *nishiki-e* (wood-block color print, 24.5 x 36.6cm), one sheet; Owned by the National Diet Library
 *Available in the [National Diet Library Digital Collections](#)

This is a *nishiki-e* depicting the dance *Sanbaso* performed on the *kabuki* stage.

Sanbaso literally means "the third old man." In the *noh* play "*Okina*," *Sanbaso* is the third character—following *Senzai* and *Okina*—to appear on the scene and perform a dance to pray for a bountiful harvest.

The *noh* play "*Okina*" depicts a sacred rite that originated in ancient times. In *kabuki*, this play was simplified for performance on auspicious occasions such as New Year's Day or at the opening of a new theater. Although *Sanbaso* is the third part of "*Okina*," it eventually came to be performed independently and gained widespread popularity due to its humorous nature and essentially celebratory ambience.

In the picture, the actor on the left is playing the role of *Sanbaso*. One feature of *Sanbaso's* dance is its dynamic

movement. The *nishiki-e* portrays the actor holding his leg high in the air and wearing a gold and black striped *eboshi* (men's headgear), which is shaped like the edge of a sword, as well as a brightly colored costume with a distinctive design of a crane flying on the neck and back. The actor seated on the right is *Senzai*, who wears a decorative *eboshi* on his head and beautifully designed attire that features pine, bamboo and plum. Since ancient times, the motifs on these costumes were believed to bring good fortune.

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