

*Kintarō kurabirakie*



Illustrated by *Tsukioka Yoshitoshi*

Published by *Akiyama Buemon* in 1891

Set of three large-size (38×26cm) color woodblock prints (*nishiki-e*)

Owned by the National Diet Library

This picture shows *Kintarō*, a Japanese popular folk hero renowned for his prodigious strength, cleaving a *kagami mochi*, a traditional Japanese New Year rice cake, with a powerful stroke of his trademark big hatchet. *Yama-uba*, a mountain hag, watches her son.

Between the two is written *kurabiraki*, when merchant families celebrated the first opening of their *kura*, storehouses, in the New Year. You can see a wooden armour box, *gusoku bitsu*, behind *Kintarō*. Samurai families also celebrated the day as *gusoku biraki*, cutting and eating the *mochi* that had been offered to their weapons and armour.

*Kintarō* is said to be the childhood name of *Sakata no Kintoki*, a famous valiant samurai of the end of the *Heian* period. Hence, pictures of *Kintarō* were regarded as good luck charms for the New Year, carrying the wish of the parents for their boys' health and success in life. In this picture, well-dressed *Kintarō* handily cleaves *kagami mochi* and his mother *Yama-uba*, often depicted as old and ugly, is

portrayed as a beautiful young lady looking at *Kintarō* calmly and tenderly. The colorful portrait of the mother and son is a suitable design for the New Year.

*Tsukioka Yoshitoshi* (1839-1892) was an *ukiyo-e* artist from the end of the *Edo* to the *Meiji* period. He produced pictures under a wide variety of themes including beautiful women (*Bijinga*), everyday life, folk stories and history. This picture is a remarkable piece of work in his later life.