

Chapter 1

The Life and Times of Tsuchiya Kōitsu

1.1 The Life and Times of Tsuchiya Kōitsu

It goes without saying that the name Tsuchiya Kōitsu is one that greatly intrigues and inspires the authors, but we cannot help regretting that there are too few people who know of this artist and who recognise the artistic value of his works, even among avid woodblock print collectors. An exhibition devoted exclusively to Tsuchiya Kōitsu was held at the Chigasaki City Museum of Art in January 1999, commemorating the 50th anniversary of his death, and this was the first opportunity for the public to enjoy the gathering and display of a large number of Kōitsu's woodblock prints at a single time. Prior to this his name rarely rated a mention, and until the publication of this reference text, the Chigasaki City Museum of Art exhibition catalogue “Adoration of Scenery – Tsuchiya Kōitsu” [39] had been the only available printed source that specifically covered Kōitsu's works and his biographic information. Another Kōitsu exhibition was arranged at Chigasaki City Museum of Art in July 2002, for the purpose of displaying all 12 masterpieces of the “Tokyo Views” series (see page 311), but apart from these two exhibitions devoted exclusively to Kōitsu, it has only been possible to view his prints periodically at auctions or on the Internet as one of the so-called second generation *shin-hanga* (literally, ‘new prints’) artists and usually without any introduction to his career or personal history. It is the authors' hope that the publication of this reference text will help elevate the Kōitsu name to its rightful place among the pre-eminent *shin-hanga* landscape artists like Kawase Hasui and Yoshida Hiroshi.

We are very grateful to Kōitsu's daughters Tsuchiya Masa and Tsuchiya Fusako, because they generously decided to donate their Kōitsu woodblock print collection containing many examples of pre-war strikes to the Chigasaki City Museum of Art, together with priceless relics such as Kōitsu's original drawings, sketchbooks, a diary, artist seals, colour pigment box, and other personal effects. Also, the Chigasaki City Museum of Art has steadfastly adhered to the principles of supporting its local artists and also collecting and exhibiting their works since its foundation. By all accounts its 1999 Kōitsu Exhibition was one of the most successful and pioneering events ever planned. If Kōitsu exhibitions such as these were not held, the authors may never have taken an interest in an artist named Tsuchiya Kōitsu, nor collected his prints. We feel we have been unconsciously guided on a fateful path in order to publish this catalogue.

To write this particular article on Kōitsu's life, we relied upon the biographical data [48] made available in the aforementioned catalogue by Nishiuchi Yūji, the curator of Chigasaki City Museum of Art, plus a wealth of detailed information gained from interviews and communication with Kōitsu's daughters Masa and Fusako, and with relatives of the various publishers, printers, and carvers of Kōitsu prints. In addition, we have made every effort to include relevant data from the fruits of our intensive seven-year research on ‘all things Kōitsu’ by including new information on many Kōitsu-related issues such as details of several lesser-known publishers of Kōitsu prints. In this article we are pleased to present a more thorough chronological table of Kōitsu's life than was previously available. It is now possible for the reader to visualize a detailed picture of Kōitsu's lifetime including his ‘blank period’ between the early 1900s and 1930s, immediately prior to his becoming active as one of the eminent *shin-hanga* artists.



Figure 1.1: A young Kōitsu in March of 1902.