Public access description
The netsuke is a toggle. Japanese men used netsuke to suspend various pouches and containers from their sashes by a silk cord. Netsuke had to be small and not too heavy, yet bulky enough to do the job, while also being strong and hard-wearing. Above all, they had to have the means for attaching a cord. Netsuke were made in a variety of forms, the most widely appreciated being the katabori (shape carving), a three-dimensional carving, such as this one in the form of the Chinese general Gentoku, riding across a river on a horse.

From the mid 18th century onwards, customers increasingly demanded netsuke with interesting and inventive designs. This was often achieved by copying or adapting designs from woodblock-printed books, which were widely available and cheap. The source of this netsuke is a double-page spread from the ‘Ehon shaho bukuro’ (Bag of sketching treasures). There are, however, slight differences between the netsuke and the original. The general’s right hand, holding the whip, lies against the horse’s rump on the netsuke, while it is held up behind him in the book. Similarly the horse’s tail is flattened on the netsuke, while it streams behind in the book. Such modifications are all perfectly acceptable when considering the need for compactness in a netsuke. Any sharp protrusions might catch and damage the wearer’s clothing.

Descriptive line
Netsuke of the Chinese General Gentoku riding across a river, carved ivory, signed Rakueisai, ca. 1850 - 1900

Physical description
This carved and stained netsuke is in the form of the Chinese general, Gentoku, riding across a river on a horse.

Dimensions
Length: 6.4 cm

Museum number
A.781-1910

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O92180/netsuke-rakueisai/