

Mastering the Visualization of Heroic Narratives within Daimyō Families: *The Illustrated Scroll of Shutendōji* in the Edo period

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1. Introduction

This presentation will focus on the reception of the *Shutendōji emaki* in the 17th century. Originating in medieval Japan, the original “Shutendōji” story recounts how Minamoto Raikō and his retainers quelled the tale’s namesake monster. This story was pictorialized as scroll paintings (*emaki*) or as illustrated books. Many daimyō warriors in the Edo period owned such renditions, as did the Owari Tokugawa family, the lord of Nagoya castle, who possessed a number of books and scrolls of the “Shutendōji” narrative. This presentation will show how those painted versions were valued by the Owari Tokugawa in the Edo period (1603-1867).

2. About the *Shutendōji emaki*

The *Shutendōji emaki* in the collection of the Tokugawa Art Museum is comprised of three scrolls, believed to have been made in the early Edo period (17th century) [fig.1, 2] ([1](#)). They were transmitted in the Owari Tokugawa family. As for the oldest surviving example, that would be the *Ōeyama emaki* (an alternate title for the same legend), made in the 14th century and currently held in the Itsuō Art Museum. The scrolls in Suntory Museum of Art may be the most famous, as they are painted by the distinguished painter Kanō Motonobu in the 16th century. In Edo period, the story of Shutendōji came to proliferate through woodblock printing. Finally, I should note that the demon queller, Minamoto Yorimitsu [948-1021] (otherwise pronounced Raikō), was a real historical warrior who died in 1021.

The story is as follows. In Kyoto, the daughter of the court noble Ikeda Chūnagon goes missing. Through divination, it is discovered that she was abducted by the monster of Ōeyama. Chūnagon informs the emperor, who then orders Raikō to go subdue this demon. Before his quest, Raikō and his retainers (Watanabe Tsuna, Sakata Kintoki, Usui Sadamitsu, Fujiwara Yasumasa, and Urabe Suetake) go pray for victory at the shrines of Kumano, Sumiyoshi, and Iwashimizu Hachiman. So that their identities would not be divulged, they disguise themselves as mountain priests (*yamabushi*). In Tanba they meet up with three

elderly men, who reveal to them that the monster is called Shutendōji, and that to defeat him, they should hold a drinking party, as he loves to drink. To this end, they give Raikō and his group a flask of magical *sake* and a helmet. In fact, these old men are the gods of Kumano, Sumiyoshi and Iwashimizu Hachiman. As they climb further into the mountain, by the upper reaches of a river, they encounter a woman. The old men disappear at this point, as they inquire about the woman, about seventeen or eighteen years old. It turns out that she is the daughter of the Hanazono Chūnagon. There by the river, she is washing a blood-stained robe. She tells them that the Shutendōji drinks the blood of girls as *sake*, and eats their flesh as dishes. This bloody robe belonged to the daughter of the Horikawa Chūnagon, who had just been eaten that morning, she tells them.

After inquiring about the whereabouts of Shutendōji, Raikō and his team arrive at an iron gate. There Shutendōji's monsters keeping guard welcome them because the demons plan to eat them. They finally meet Shutendōji, who as his name implies, has a face that is child-like, but a pale red, gigantic, grotesque body. Raikō tells Shutendōji that they are yamabushi. For shelter that night, Raikō proposes, he would prepare some good *sake*. Shutendōji agrees, then holds a banquet. Raikō and his retainers pretend to eat so that they would not to be suspicious [fig.1].



Fig. 1

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Raikō then offers Shutendōji the magical sake, and the monster gets completely intoxicated by the delicious wine. Now is their chance. As the team rushes into the monster's bedroom, the three gods reappear, shackling Shutendōji's arms and legs in chains [fig.2].



Fig. 2

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The gods tell him to take his head. Turning into a demon himself, Raikō attacks Shutendōji, chopping off his head. The severed head flies up, then swoops down, taking aim at Raikō. Thanks to gods' helmet, he escapes harm. The team then rescues the captive girls and return to the capital, where they are received with honor and are given awards by the emperor.

Shutendōji's residence represents the supernatural realm, beyond the normal world of human beings. To express its supernatural quality, there are several telling features. While

not depicted in this scroll's painting, in the text, the Shutendōji's residence is revealed to have a garden in which the four seasons are concurrently present, symbolizing an immortal world in which there is no passage of time. Moreover, in Shutendōji's bedroom, the sliding screens have images of turbulent seas, as they are a symbol of another realm at the bottom of the sea.(2) Such evocative motifs were one technique by which the painter, in his visual medium that combined text and image, vividly communicated to his viewers the otherworldliness of Shutendōji's domain.(3)

3. The Owari Tokugawa Family and their Emaki

Many daimyō warriors in the Edo period owned emaki or illustrated books that pictorialized the "Shutendōji" narrative.(4) The Owari Tokugawa family, the owner of this version, was one of the most important branch families, from which the shogun could be chosen if the main line lacked heirs. It was established by Tokugawa Yoshinao, Tokugawa Ieyasu's ninth son. That samurai would be interested in a story about heroic warriors defeating a monster is not surprising. Still, the Owari Tokugawa fascination with "Shutendōji" was exceptional: the inventory of their collection shows five sets of "Shutendōji" scrolls or books in the span of the 18th and 19th centuries.(5) This number outstrips other narrative books, underscoring their special relationship with this work. I contend that "Shutendōji" had particular meanings for the Tokugawa family. Of course, not all of these scrolls were owned by one person, and they were acquired over the course of many generations. But they do demonstrate some conscious preoccupation with this story over others, as these gorgeous scroll paintings were especially prepared for festive occasions, such as births or weddings in the lord's family. In fact, in light of these occasions centered on the family, I argue that the selection of "Shutendōji" reflected the samurai's concern over lineage. It is well known that Tokugawa Ieyasu positioned himself as a descendant of the Seiwa Genji. Minamoto no Raikō, who subjugated Shutendōji, was also from this lineage. Therefore, for the Tokugawa, this story, despite its fictionality, was not simply some fairy tale about defeating a monster, but had significance as the glorification of a heroic ancestor. Furthermore, the Owari Tokugawa collection houses other works that feature the heroism of the Genji, such as *The Tale of the Heike*, or the "Rashōmon emaki," which features Watanabe Tsuna, a member of Raikō's group. These stories were not simply captivating for the eyes, but were treasured as records of the family's ancestors and their brave exploits.

4. Conclusion

In Japanese culture, the image of the demon (*oni*) has often been used to represent the Other, such as violent pirates, *yamabushi*, entertainers, or foreigners, who were all in some manner seen as resisting the social order.(6) The "Shutendōji" can also be read as the story of a forcible pacification of a being who had evaded the social order. In this respect, the tale evokes Girard's ideas about those who "can be slayed without the risk of retaliation." (7) For the samurai, who claimed the mandate to rule, stories that demonstrated the pacification of

other lands, including the realm of the fantastic, had status as origin myths that validated their lineages. As such, for the samurai of the Tokugawa clan, the quelling of the demon then acted as a vicarious experience, making the viewing of the scroll a ritualistic performance that linked the character of Raikō to themselves. The *Shutendōji emaki* was therefore a vital work to possess, as its viewing legitimized and asserted the sovereignty of this ruling family.

Translated by Takeshi Watanabe

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Notes

1. For more on this scroll painting, see: The Tokugawa Art Museum, *Momoyama-Edo Kaiga no Bi* (Nagoya: The Tokugawa Art Museum, 2008) 87, 156. ([back](#))
2. In the Imperial Palace, there are similar screens depicting turbulent seas. Even though the Heian-period version does not survive, in Sei Shōnagon's *The Pillow Book*, she describes these screens as depicting long-legged, long-armed, fearsome monsters in rough waters. ([back](#))
3. The scroll's texts do not describe the screens, but in the Nō play, *Ōeyama*, the libretto (in the Hōshō tradition) makes explicit mention of the screens as the "araumi no shōji." ([back](#))
4. For more on the 17th-century reception of the "Shutendōji" illustrated books, see Aya

Ryūsawa, “Daimyōke no Ehon Jukai to Emaki Eirihon Seisaku no Ryūsei ni Tsuite,” *Setsuwa Bungaku Kenkyū*, 49, 10 (2014) 4-13. ([back](#))

5. For more on the various works in the Owari Tokugawa collection, see Aya Ryūsawa, “Owari Tokugawake Denrai ‘Rashōmon Emaki’ ni Tsuite,” *Kinko Sōsho*, 36 (Tokugawa Reimeikai, 2010) 43-70. ([back](#))
6. For an overview on “Oni” in Japanese culture, see Akiko Baba, *Oni no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1988) and Kazuhiko Komatsu, ed. *Oni -Kaii no Minzokugaku* 4 (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo, 2000). Hideo Kuroda pointed out that the Other including foreigners was regarded as Oni. See Hideo Kuroda “Emaki no Naka no Oni: Kibi Daijin to Oni,” (Kazuhiko Komatsu, ed., *Oni -Kaii no Minzokugaku* 4 (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo, 2000) 335-362. ([back](#))
7. René Girard, *Bouryoku to Seinarumono* (Tokyo: Housei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1982), trans. Yukio Furuta. trans. of *La Violence et le Sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972) 22. ([back](#))