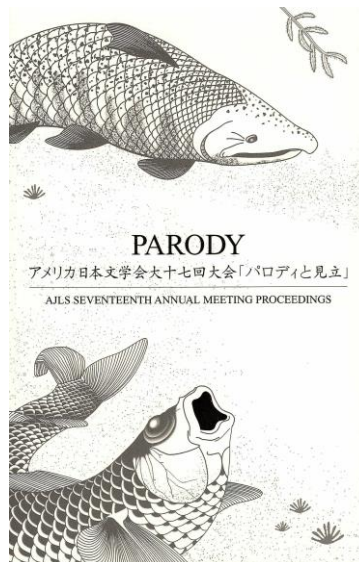


“Parody in the *Dōke jōruri-zukushi* Series by
Kuniyoshi”

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**PARODY IN THE
DŌKE JŌRURI-ZUKUSHI
SERIES BY KUNIYOSHI**

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INTRODUCTION

Ichiyūsai Kuniyoshi 一勇齋国芳, probably the most important of all *nishiki'e* 錦絵 caricaturists of the late Edo period, was born in the eleventh month of Kansei 9 (1st January 1798) in Edo's Nihonbashi. At the age of 13, he became a member of Utagawa Toyokuni 歌川豊国 I's (1769–1825) *ukiyo*e school. From Bunsei 10 (1827), when he published his *Tsūzoku Suikoden gōketsu 108nin no hitori* 通俗水滸伝豪傑百八人之一個 (One Hundred and Eight Heroes of the Popular *Suikoden*, One by One), he was famous as a designer of warrior-hero pictures, so much so that his contemporaries gave him the epithet *musha'e no Kuniyoshi* 武者絵の国芳, warrior-picture Kuniyoshi.

When in the sixth month of Tenpō 13 (1842) the production of pictures depicting actors (*yakusha'e* 役者絵) or courtesans and geishas (*bijinga* 美人画) was prohibited in the course of the so-called Tenpō reforms, this constituted a severe blow to the *nishiki'e* world as a whole, since actors and courtesans had been among the most popular *nishiki'e* motives. Kuniyoshi, however, managed to make a virtue out of necessity, designing a great number of caricatures, some of them satirizing the reforms themselves and immediately stirring a craze among the public. In the fall of 1855 and still at the height of success, Kuniyoshi, however, suffered a cerebral apoplexy that caused his drawing skills to wane dramatically. He nonetheless continued to work, creating a wealth of further caricatures up until his death in Bunkyū 1 (1861).

**BURLESQUE AND POLITICAL SATIRE IN THE
DŌKE JŌRURI-ZUKUSHI SERIES**

In this paper, I would like to analyze a number of sheets from Kuniyoshi's series *Dōke jōruri-zukushi* 道外浄瑠璃盡 (Sundry Burlesque Versions of Popular Puppet Plays). This series consists of 10 *ōban*-sized sheets printed with two scenes in the horizontal *chūban* format (中判二丁掛け) each and published by Hayashiya Shōgorō in the course of the

eleventh and twelfth month of Ansei 2 (1855–1856).¹ Together, the series depicts 20 scenes from kabuki dramas based on *jōruri* puppet plays that were popular among Edo townspeople of the day. All designs offer amusing re-interpretations of these well-known theater scenes, in most cases in what, at first sight, appears to be a simply burlesque manner, inducing laughter on the part of the viewer by the incongruity between the heroic quality of the original and the vulgar, topical or lowly content to which it is being twisted. In some cases, however, as I shall demonstrate below, they clearly involved political parody as well. The “critical difference” (Linda Hutcheon) with which the designs imitated their heroic models, was not directed, however, at the originals themselves. Rather, another “hidden” message can be detected behind the representations, a message satirizing contemporary politics in an age when such political satire was, of course, strictly banned by the authorities.

The first sheet that I would like to introduce here is the one devoted to the *Mikasayama goten no ba* 三笠山御殿の場 (Mount Mikasa Palace Scene), act 4 of the famous Chikamatsu Hanji play *Imoseyama onna teikin* 妹背山女庭訓 (Couple Mountain, or Homely Morals for Women) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Imoseyama onna teikin: Mikasayama goten no ba*, from the series *Dōke jōruri-zukushi* by Ichiyūsai Kuniyoshi, published Ansei 2.12. Private collection, Vienna, Austria.

First staged in Meiwa 8 (1771) at the Takemoto-za in Osaka, it immediately became tremendously popular, so that it was brought to the kabuki stage within the year, at the equally Osaka-based Ogawa-za. The

¹ The series can be viewed online at the searchable database UVDB, n° 21004–1 to 21004–10. See also Brandl 2009, pp. 173–192.

overall plot draws on the seventh-century fight for political supremacy between Soga no Iruka and Tenchi Tennō's loyal retainer Fujiwara no Kamatari. The act opens with Soga no Iruka, who is planning to usurp the throne, holding a feast in celebration of the completion of his gorgeous mansion at Mount Mikasa, which he has built in the likeness of the Imperial Palace, and the arrival of Kanawa Gorō, disguised as the fisherman Fukashichi, who comes as a messenger of Kamatari with a gift of saké and a letter of congratulation. Iruka, suspecting that the saké may be poisoned, does not take it, so Fukashichi drinks it all and lies on the raised floor when all others have gone. He then becomes the object of an attempted assassination. In a famous moment, he deftly avoids spears that are thrust up at him through the floor, shortly before ladies-in-waiting appear to serve poisoned saké to him in another of Iruka's attempt at killing him. It is this famous scene that is also represented on Kuniyoshi's print, with the notable difference that there is nothing heroic about the depiction of Fukashichi. Rather, he lies asleep with inebriation in the manner of a vulgar drunkard, not even able to avoid being played silly tricks upon by Iruka's ladies-in-waiting.

There is reason to suspect that there was historically true "news" behind this irreverent twist of the famous kabuki scene. In the fifth month of Ansei 2 (1855), troops from the Matsumae domain had burnt down a Russian encampment in the Northern Ezo territory (today Sakhalin).² The fact that Soga no Iruka's father had answered to the name of Emishi 蝦夷, additionally written exactly the same as Ezo 蝦夷, provides an easy associational link to the term Ezo. The *takamakura* or high pillow the fisherman Fukashichi's head is resting upon, as well as the opened fan that he is holding, called *suehiro* in Japanese, together pictorially suggest the name of Matsumae **Takahiro** 松前崇弘, the then lord of the Matsumae domain. On the fisherman's tobacco pouch, the characters *hi no yōjin* 火の用心, or "Beware of fire hazard!" allude to the burnt-down encampment. One of the ladies-in-waiting is holding a centerpiece with a miniature pine tree décor, but upside down, which, translated into words, reads *sagarimatsu*. This hints at the Matsumae domain the name of which of course contains the word *matsu*, as well as at the fact that the lord of Matsumae had received from the government a domain in the Dewa region only recently, transforming him into a daimyo with a revenue of 30,000 *koku* of rice and allowing him to descend (*sagaru*) from his domain in Hokkaidō to Japan's main island.

² Kodama 1972, p. 292.

Obviously, Kuniyoshi was making fun of this vulgarly-behaved parvenu daimyo by depicting him in the role of the fisherman Fukashichi of the theater play, badly fitting into the formal long-legged trousers of a nobleman that he wears, and, utterly unfamiliar with the refined behavior suitable to a high-class man of arms, letting himself go like a despicable drunkard. Probably, in the eyes of Kuniyoshi, the role of a fisherman suited Takahiro all the better, considering that the Matsumae family was known to have amassed their wealth through the exploitation of fishermen. If we compare the face of the fisherman Fukashichi on Kuniyoshi's picture to that shown on the photograph of Matsumae Takahiro preserved in the Matsumae Museum of Local History (Matsumae Kyōdo Shiriyōkan), we find that they are as alike as Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Takahiro had become lord of the Matsumae domain in Kaei 2 (1849), when the former lord, his brother, died. In Bunkyū 3 (1863), he advanced to the post of government magistrate of temples and shrines (*jisha bugyō*), and later on, he was even appointed commander-in-chief of the government army and navy, as well as member of the Bakufu senate.³ In other words, he was one of the main governmental figures during the last days of the Tokugawa shogunate.

As far as Kuniyoshi is concerned, his critique of the Matsumae family probably went back to the year Kōka 4 (1847), the date at which he most probably, as I shall argue below, designed the print entitled *Zensei kogane no hana* 全盛黄金花 (“Splendors of Flowers of Gold”) (Figure 2),⁴ although it was published only as late as in the twelfth month of Ansei 5 (1859) by Yamaguchiya Tōbei.



Figure 2. *Zensei kogane no hana* by Ichiyūsai Kuniyoshi, published Ansei 5.12. Courtesy of Isao Toshihiko.

³ *Nihonshi daijiten*, vol. 6, p. 334.

⁴ UVDB, n° 30019.

It depicts a crowd from all strays of life, struggling with one another to snatch the gold coins a man, standing in the right part of the picture, is scattering on the ground before them. At first sight, this scene seems to be a literal illustration of a legendarily famous story, that of Kinokuniya Bunzaemon (–1734). Kibun, as he was also called, had amassed a fortune in his business of shipping mandarins from Kishū to Edo, and the story had it that, one day, he gathered all of Yoshiwara's *oiran* around him in the licensed pleasure quarter's banquet hall and there threw his money around in the literal sense of the word.

There is good reason to think, however, that Kuniyoshi had a similar episode but closer to his own lifetime in mind when he drew this picture. In the third month of Tenmei 8 (1788), Matsumae Yorisada 松前頼完 had become the talk of the town when he ransomed Segawa 瀬川, the then most favored and highest ranking *oiran*, for the fabulous sum of 500 gold *ryō*. Yorisada was the younger brother of Matsumae Michihiro 松前道広, the then lord of the Matsumae domain. Active also as a *kyōka* poet by the alias of Sasaba Suzunari 笹葉鈴成, this Matsumae Yorisada, writing under the pen name of Matsumae Bunkyō 松前文京, was a major luminary of the *gesaku* literature of his days.⁵ With this information in mind, let us now come back to Kuniyoshi's picture. There, in the foreground, at the feet of the man throwing the coins, we see a servant pointing at his master with a fan inscribed with the Chinese characters 松 *matsu*, for Matsumae, three parallel lines for 川 *kawa*, for Segawa 瀬川, and 竹 *take*, for Sasaba 笹葉. In addition, he is wearing a black *haori* that displays the *hanabishi-mon*, the rhombus-shaped flower of the Matsumae family crest.

In the Matsumae domain, the lords had installed a fishery tenancy system that covered the whole of Hokkaidō and in which the local population, including the native Ainu, were kept like slaves. By means of this inhuman system, the Matsumae lords had amassed immense amounts of money. In *Kōka* 4 (1847), Matsuura Takeshirō 松浦武四郎, an assiduous explorer of Ainu people and life, published a work entitled *Himeokubeshi* 秘めおくべし (Top Secret!), in which he described the reign of terror the Matsumae had established within their domain as well as the miserable life the Ainu were forced to lead there. The Edo intelligentsia was deeply shocked by this report, and reacted with heart-felt commiseration for the Ainu as well as severe condemnation of the Matsumae régime.⁶

⁵ Inoue 1983, pp. 10–11.

⁶ Yoshida 1967, p. 42.

To my mind, it is highly probable that Kuniyoshi designed his *Zensei kogane no hana* in the wake of the publication of *Himeokubeshi*, depicting an incident in which a member of the Matsumae family, although some 60 years earlier, had displayed a similar impudence and relentlessness to the one the book had just uncovered, splashing the money about that his family had earned by the unjust exploitation of slave labor, and for completely trivial pursuits at a time when, in Tenmei 8 (1788) or the peak of the so-called Tenmei famine, millions of his fellow countrymen were starving. Despite the much later publication of the print in the twelfth month of Ansei 5 (1859) as indicated by its censor's seal, the fact that Kuniyoshi had suffered his stroke back in Ansei 2 (1855) makes it highly implausible that he designed it at as late as 1859 when he was no longer able to produce such refined drawings. Conversely, dating it back to Kōka 4 (1847) would bring its origin to a time when Kuniyoshi drew quite a number of similar designs, such as for example the triptych *Nemuke-zamashi*⁷ (Figure 3), which, like *Zensei kogane no hana*, also involved a multitude engaged in lively action and that equally stand out for their sophisticated composition of motion sequences and their wealth of colorful details.⁸



Figure 3. *Nemuke-zamashi* by Ichiyūsai Kuniyoshi, published between Kōka 3.12 and Kaei 1. Courtesy of Isao Toshihiko.

⁷ UVDB, n° 30022.

⁸ A number of other examples of woodblock prints by Kuniyoshi the designs of which went back to the Kōka era, but that were published only as late as during the Ansei period, are discussed in Burandoru 2006, p. 10. Obviously, publishers felt that with Kuniyoshi's waning drawing abilities and his enduring popularity among consumers, prints by him would still sell even if the designs were old.

A POSTERIORI SATIRICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Let us now come back to the *Dōke jōruri-zukushi* series and consider the sheet representing act 7 of *Kanadehon chūshingura* 仮名手本忠臣蔵 and act 3 of *Yoshitsune senbon-zakura* 義経千本桜 respectively (Figure 4).



Figure 4. *Kanadehon chūshingura* 7danme and *Yoshitsune senbonzakura* 3 no kiri, from the series *Dōke jōruri-zukushi* by Ichiyūsai Kuniyoshi, published Ansei 2.11. Private collection, Vienna, Austria.

The *Kanadehon chūshingura* scene is the one set in a tea house in the Gion-machi pleasure quarter. Upon realizing that both the courtesan Okaru at the second floor above him and the villain Ono Kudayū from his hiding place under the veranda got glimpses of the secret letter that he had been reading, the faithful retainer Ōboshi Yuranosuke asks Okaru to scale down the ladder and come to him because they have to talk. On stage, we would see Yuranosuke heaving Okaru down the ladder. In the burlesque version of the *Dōke jōruri-zukushi* series, however, both Okaru and the ladder fall onto Yuranosuke, while Kudayū creeps out from under the veranda with a stupid grin on his face.

Interestingly, there is at least one extant specimen of the print that has two texts pasted to its reverse side that provide an explanation or, rather, an interpretation of the pictures (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Reverse side of figure 4, with written explanations pasted to it.
Private collection, Vienna, Austria.

Both refer to the sudden and mysterious death of the thirteenth shogun Tokugawa Iesada, and to the rumors that surrounded it. Indeed, word was spread among the citizens of Edo that Iesada had been poisoned by members of the faction of Tokugawa Nariaki, the lord of Mito, who wanted his son Hitotsubashi Yoshinobu to become the fourteenth shogun. The conspiracy, however, was uncovered by the great-chancellor Ii Naosuke, and Tokugawa Nariaki as well as the other members of the Hitotsubashi faction were severely punished.⁹ Many *nishiki*'e caricatures were published on the occasion,¹⁰ but what is striking in this context is the fact that the death of the thirteenth shogun of course occurred on the sixth day of the seventh month of Ansei 5 (1858), or the eighth day of the eighth month of the same year according to its official proclamation, whereas the print of the *Dōke jōruri-zukushi* series was published, as we have seen, already back in Ansei 2 (1855). That is to say, the interpretation of the picture given on its reverse side refers to events that occurred three years after the publication of the print and which, therefore, the picture could not possibly have taken up as its subject, if

⁹ Konishi 1972, pp. 119–132.

¹⁰ See UVDB, n° 20006, 20010, 30026, 30029.

the date seal on the print is correct, which we have no reason to doubt.
For the *Kanadehon chūshingura* scene this text reads:

忠臣蔵七段目
由良の助ハ水戸御隠居公
おかるハ一ツ橋の若
九大夫ハ太田備後の守資始(すけとも)
其訳
小石川候一ツ橋に天下をとらせんとうら梯子よりちか道にしよふと思い
し処其一ツ橋やりそこなひて落たハ下に居る由良の水戸公おおいにうめ
きいざまになりし事又縁の下に居る九大夫ハ今まで隠居していた太田
候くらい所からはいだしてこのそふどふを見て高わらいしている所なり
由良御紋所あおひのかたち也
九大夫紋所太田の矢のやり違ひに見立る
能く能くはんじ見るべし

Chūshingura shichi danme
Yuranosuke wa Mito go-inkyō-kō
O-Karu wa Hitotsubashi no waka
Kudayū wa Ōta Bingo no kami Suketomo
Sono wake
Koishikawa-kō Hitotsubashi ni tenka o torasen to urabashigo yori
chikamichi ni shiyō to omoishi tokoro sono Hitotsubashi yarisokonaite
ochita tokoro wa shita ni iru Yura no Mito-kō ōi ni umeki iizama ni
narishi koto mata en no shita ni oru Kudayū wa ima made inkyō shite
ita Ōta-kō kurai tokoro kara haidashite kono sōdō o mite takawarai
shite iru tokoro nari
Yura no go-monsho aoi no katachi nari
Kudayū monsho Ōta no ya no yaritagai ni mitateru
Yoku yoku hanji mirubeshi

Chūshingura, act 7
Yuranosuke is the retired lord of Mito
O-Karu is the young lord Hitotsubashi
Kudayū is Ōta Suketomo, the governor of Bingo province
Explanation:

This is the scene when the lord of Koishikawa,¹¹ wanting to have
Hitotsubashi take over the world, was thinking of having him climb to

¹¹ That is, Tokugawa Nariaki, the former lord of Mito, whose residence in Edo was located in the Koishikawa district.

power by the shortcut of a hidden ladder. Hitotsubashi, however, stumbled and fell right upon Yuranosuke who was left moaning with pain. Further, we also see lord Ōta,¹² who had been waiting under the veranda, come forth from his dark hiding place and burst out in roaring laughter.

The family crest on the garment of Yura[nosuke] is hollyhock-flower-shaped.¹³

The family crest on the garment of Kudayū is reminiscent of crossed arrows.¹⁴

This is a picture to be examined and interpreted very, very carefully!

The second scene on the sheet is dedicated to act 3 of *Yoshitsune senbon-zakura*. Set in a *sushi* shop, it centers on Igami no Gonta, the son of the shop's owner, and his sacrifice. Once a vile scoundrel, Gonta has discovered that his father served the Taira in the past, and he is determined, therefore, to save Taira no Koremori and his family for the slaying of whom Kajiwara Genta, a retainer of the evil Minamoto no Yoritomo, is offering a huge head-money. He professes having killed Koremori, his wife and child, and now has to produce their severed heads before Genta as proof of his deed. The heads, however, in fact are those of his follower Kokingo and of his own wife and young son. Unaware of the fact and wrathful at what he believes his son has done to Koremori, Yazaemon, Gonta's father, stabs his son to death. In the print's comic version of the scene, everybody looks in dismay at the head produced by Gonta, which is, in fact, nothing but a pumpkin with a face painted on it.

The explanatory text pasted to the back of this scene runs as follows:

千本桜すしやの段
梶原ハ石河土佐守か
弥左衛門ハ本郷丹後守か

¹² This refers to Ōta Suketomo 太田資始 (1799–1867), a former member of the shogunate's senate, who had been forced to resign from his office because of his opposition to the Tenpō reforms in Tenpō 12 (1841), at which time he also had abdicated from his position as the lord of the Ōmi Kakegawa domain and passed it on to his eldest son. In 1858, however, Ii Naosuke, a representative of the so-called Nanki-ha 南紀派, the faction opposed to Tokugawa Nariaki and his Hitotsubashi faction's politics of a rapprochement between the *bakufu* government and the tennō house, was appointed chancellor and he called Suketomo back to his former governmental position.

¹³ The three-leafed hollyhock flower, *aoi*, was the crest of the Tokugawa family.

¹⁴ *Ya no yaritagai*, the crest of the Ōta family.

おもとハーツ橋公か
 権太ハ奥若衆志賀金八 返り忠臣 切腹してはてるといふ
 其訳
 水府候 紀のけニ未ダ御幼君御入らずに其首打ッて出せ
 よと石河より志賀ニ言付しを権太の志賀金八いさい承
 知して打ッて参りしを差出す首じっけんせし所以の外
 なるしなにて皆きもをつぶせし也これらも権太の金八
 返り忠してとふなすかぼちゃにしたとてばかせしといふ事か
 よくよくはんじ見るべし

Senbon-zakura sushiya no dan
Kajiwara wa Ishikawa Tosa no kami ka
Yazaemon wa Hongō Tango no kami ka
O-Moto wa Hitotsubashi-kō ka
Gonta wa oku-wakashū Shiga Kinpachi kaerichūshin seppuku shite
hateru to iu
Sono wake
Suifu-kō Ki no ke ni imada go-yōkun on-irazu ni sono kubi utte daseyo
to Ishikawa yori Shiga ni kotozukeshi o Gonta no Shiga Kinpachi isai
shōchi shite utte mairishi o sashidasu kubi-jikken seshi tokoro motte no
hoka naru shina nite mina kimo o tsubuseshi nari korera mo Gonta no
Kinpachi kaeri-chū shite tōnasu kabocha ni shita tote bakaseshi to iu
koto ka
Yoku yoku hanji mirubeshi

The act in the *sushi* shop from *Senbon-zakura*
 Kajiwara might be Ishikawa, the governor of Tosa province
 Yazaemon might be Hongō, the governor of Tango province
 O-Moto might be lord Hitotsubashi
 Gonta is Shiga Kinpachi¹⁵ who, having changed sides, ended his life by
 committing suicide.

Explanation:

The Lord of the Palace at the Bottom of the Sea¹⁶ had Ishikawa¹⁷ tell
 Shiga that he should cut off the head of the house of Ki before he

¹⁵ Shiga Kinpachi was the young body servant of the shogun Iesada who was said to have poisoned him at the command of Tokugawa Nariaki.

¹⁶ Suifu-kō, that is, the lord of Mito, Tokugawa Nariaki, who had brought together the two schools of underwater fighting that existed in his domain under the name of *suifu-ryū*.

¹⁷ That is, Ishikawa Masahira 石川政平, the governor of Tosa and a close factionist of Nariaki.

would enter [the shogun's palace] as prince.¹⁸ Gonta, alias Shiga Kinpachi, agreed and went to kill [Yoshitomi], but when he actually came to display the severed head, there were incredible things in the barrel where the head was supposed to be and everybody was dumbfounded. This might mean that Gonta alias Kinpachi, having changed sides, ridiculed the lord, saying that he had replaced the head with all kinds of pumpkins and squashes.

This is a picture to be examined and interpreted very, very carefully!

Here, the explanation of the picture's "true meaning" confronts us with yet another speculation concerning Tokugawa Nariaki's role in the political struggle about succession to the position of the shogun, that is, that he not only had Iesada, the thirteenth shogun, poisoned, but that he also plotted the assassination of Tokugawa Yoshitomi, the succession candidate opposed to the one he himself favored.

Be that as it may, it should be emphasized once more in this connection that the picture itself or its designer could not possibly have intended this meaning originally, since the print was published some three years prior to the events to which the interpretation tries to relate it. This, of course, is a paradox not at all easy to explain, nor do we know—or have means by which to establish with any certainty—who was responsible for pasting these a posteriori interpretations to the reverse side of the print. It could have been a collector interested in history who made these interpretations only for himself, but it could also have been that these interpretations were made already back in 1858 or shortly thereafter in order to circulate rumors—whether with or without the prints' publisher's cooperation, we equally do not know. In order to solve this riddle, information from print specialists or collectors who discovered similar specimens of these two prints would be highly welcome.

There are, however, examples of *nishiki'e* caricatures that shortly after their publication intentionally received false a posteriori interpretations which related the prints to events that occurred subsequent to their publication. *Dōke kyōga* 道化狂画 (Figure 6), designed by Yoshikazu 芳員 and published by Kakumotoya Kinjirō, constitutes such an example.¹⁹

¹⁸ That is, kill Tokugawa Yoshitomi 徳川慶福, the lord of Kii, who was the candidate for succession to Iesada as the fourteenth shogun favored by the Nankiha, the faction opposed to Nariaki.

¹⁹ For a detailed interpretation of this print, see UVDB, n° 10074.



Figure. 6: *Dōke kyōga* by Ichijusai Yoshikazu, published Ansei 5.4.
Private collection, Vienna, Austria.

With the censor's seal reading *uma4* 午四, its date of publication was the fourth month of Ansei 5 (1858). According to Minami Kazuo, an essay dated Ansei 5.8 and entitled *Nyoza rōsen-kyo kibun* 如座漏船居紀聞 (Notes of One Sitting in a Sinking Boat) which was discovered in the Edo mansion of the lord of the Matsushiro 松代 domain, included an interpretation of *Dōke kyōga* from 8th month of Ansei 5 that explained the meaning of the print as actually depicting the events surrounding the thirteenth shogun Iesada's death as well as the purported role of Tokugawa Nariaki in it as part of his overall attempt at usurping the shogunate. Minami argues that all the elements of this interpretation, referring to events that took place several months after the publication of the print, must, therefore, be erroneous. He adds that there is yet another extant source that gives an explanation of the meaning of the one and same *Dōke kyōga* diametrically opposed to that of the Matsushiro essay. This is *Sanjō-ke monjo* 三条家文書 (Collected Writings of the Sanjō Family), containing writings by the hand of Sanjō Sanetsumu 三条実万 (1802–1859) as well as of his son Sanetomi (1837–1891). Sanetsumu was *naidaijin* 内大臣 at the tennō's court in Kyoto and a very close confidant of Kōmei Tennō. Planning to restore the Tenno house to political power, he is known to have corresponded with Tokugawa Nariaki during the years immediately prior to the thirteenth shogun

Iesada's death, and to have advocated a thorough change in the politics the bakufu followed under its then chancellor Ii Naosuke, with the result of the bakufu forcing him to step down from his office in 1858 when Tokugawa Nariaki's plot against the shogun was uncovered. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Sanetsumu's own interpretation of the *Dōke kyōga*, he writes that the print in fact had been ordered by Ii Naosuke with the intention of circulating rumors that would discredit Nariaki. For Minami, the interesting point lies not in which of these two interpretations was more or less accurate, but rather in the fact that, for one and the same print, there circulated at least two radically different versions as to its intended meaning depending on the point of view, one in Edo among supporters of the Bakufu and one in Kyoto among supporters of the tennō.²⁰

Taken together, these few examples reflect the situation of political *nishiki'e* caricatures in the Bakumatsu period. Because of the severe censorship, it was impossible to depict events realistically. Rather, they had to be hidden under parodies or travesties difficult to decipher, which is precisely why they often ended up being misinterpreted or over-interpreted.

Of course, we are unable to confirm today with certitude who was responsible for the sometimes obviously mistaken or even intentionally false interpretations that arose concerning one and the same print. Were top politicians such as Ii Naosuke really responsible for the publication of such sheets and/or for spreading word about their possible meaning, as suggested by the *Sanjō-ke monjo*? This would mean that even the ruling elite tried to use the *nishiki'e* caricature genre as a means with which to make propaganda among the commoner population. And it would also mean that they were keen to have the commoner population on their side, even making use of a genre of publications that members of the political elites had tried to curtail as much as possible a few years ago. Or did the publishers themselves spread word about the meaning of a specific print, even when it alluded to events evidently subsequent to its prior publication and even when this meant to assign a meaning to a pre-existing print that could not possibly have taken up the subject, simply because it was published prior to the event the interpretation purported it to depict? Would they have done so in order to enhance the sales of already existing, but still unsold prints dedicated to earlier events, or were they themselves taking sides in politics? Or had it simply become a game amongst the commoner population of the days, usually the main

²⁰ Minami 1998, pp. 249–257.

consumers of *nishiki'e*, to find a hidden meaning behind each and every print that purported to be *dōke*, or “critically different to the norm” as one might also translate the term, and one which had to do with high politics? Or did it suffice to declare, by the title, that prints were *kyōga*, “crazy pictures” in order to trigger speculations about their meanings concerning politics, and this within each stratum of society, that is, among those who were supposed to do politics, the samurai nobility, pro-shogunate or not, as well as among the Kyoto nobility, and also amongst, not to forget, the commoner population itself, perhaps increasingly curious to understand what high politics, by definition beyond what should be their concern, were all about? (translated by S. Formanek)

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