

12 The Development of Disaster Prints and Publications in Japan, 1663–1923

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Abstract

Disasters such as earthquakes were an important topic of early modern Japanese print media because the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868) censored political news. Beginning with the boom of the print market in the seventeenth century, visual representations, narrative genres, and tropes emerged in order to report, illustrate, and interpret disasters. They also persisted after print culture was transformed through the arrival of Western technology in the late nineteenth century. This chapter analyses the development of single-page disaster prints and three prominent examples of disaster publications – earthquake reports in book length – from their beginnings to the Great Kantō Earthquake, by tracing selected visual and narrative techniques and tropes: the catfish as a satirical symbol derived from folkloric religion, the dramatic visualisation of threat from earthquake and fire, visual and narrative representations of the spatial extent and degree of damage, and the stories of individual experiences told in increasingly standardised narrative genres.

Keywords

media history – Japan – *namazu* catfish prints – Great Kantō Earthquake – Ansei Edo Earthquake – memory

In 1855 a strong earthquake of estimated magnitude 7 hit Edo (present-day Tokyo; in this chapter, Tokyo before 1868 is referred to as Edo), the political capital of early modern Japan. As the earthquake occurred near the surface, it caused considerable damage through quaking and fire and killed between 7,000 and 10,000 people. Amidst the chaos of the earthquake's

aftermath, hundreds of woodblock prints were circulated illegally, most of them depicting catfish (in Japanese *namazu-e*, literally 'catfish pictures'). At that time, the catfish was said to cause earthquake disasters in popular Japanese lore, and the pictures mostly showed anthropomorphised catfish symbolising the earthquake in a satirical manner: they were beaten up by victims, apologised for the damage they caused, or distributed wealth to the Edoites.¹

The 1855 earthquake that caused this flood of satirical prints happened during a time of political turmoil: Two years prior, Commodore Perry had arrived in Japan with his 'Black Ships', modern American gunboats, to force Japan, which had mostly self-isolated from overseas trade since the seventeenth century, into an unequal trading relationship with the United States. In 1854 the Tokugawa Shogunate, which ruled Edo-period Japan from 1603 to 1868, signed unequal treaties with the US and Britain. Treaties with other European empires followed in 1858. As a result, Japan opened five ports for trade, exposing the country to the risk of colonisation or subjugation observed in East and Southeast Asia. This stirred political tension and discontent with Tokugawa rule.²

The general sentiment of instability caused by political crisis and the natural disaster erupted in the catfish woodblock prints. There were prints that connected the earthquake to the political crisis but did not necessarily depict it as a tragedy. In one example, the catfish looks like a whale, blowing out *koban*, Japanese oval gold coins, to the delight of the surrounding spectators. But in front of the whale, two small boats are depicted. Their occupants are seen attacking the much more powerful opponent in vain. As the large black catfish evokes contemporary depictions of Perry's Black Ships, it is safe to assume that this picture processes hopes and anxieties in Edo towards the Western powers through the earthquake disaster: both could mean ample business opportunities but also severe dangers.³

It is no coincidence that natural disasters were used to process and discuss the political situation: Japan was ruled in the early modern period by the

1 Gregory Smits, 'Shaking Up Japan. Edo Society and the 1855 Catfish Picture Prints', *Journal of Social History* 39: 4 (2006), 1045–78; Susanne Formanek, 'Japanische Reaktionen auf (Natur-) Katastrophen. Am Beispiel des großen Edo-Erdbebens von 1855 und seiner medialen Aufarbeitung', in Christa Hammerl and Ilja Steffelbauer (eds), *Naturkatastrophen. Dramatische Naturereignisse aus kulturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive* (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2014), 48–63.

2 For an introduction to the mid-nineteenth-century crisis in Japan, see Elise K. Tipton, *Modern Japan. A Social and Political History* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 24–41.

3 Gregory Smits, *Seismic Japan. The Long History and Continuing Legacy of the Ansei Edo Earthquake* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 147–53.

Tokugawa Shogunate, a military government that had risen to power after 150 years of civil war and censored all news coverage that could threaten their legitimacy. Natural disasters were among the few newsworthy topics that were not suppressed by the Shogunate. Thus, printers eagerly took up reporting on natural disasters and, as seen, sometimes even used them to hint at political events.⁴ This is reflected in hundreds of surviving woodblock prints (*kawaraban*, literally 'tile-block prints') featuring natural disasters: in one of the most prominent *kawaraban* collections, they amount to approximately half of the prints.⁵ As a consequence, a rich variety of disaster reporting and visual representation developed in Japan after print culture took off in the seventeenth century. They formed a range of tropes and narratives that proved remarkably persistent even when print culture was fundamentally transformed by the arrival of Western printing technology and photography.

This chapter presents and analyses the developments and transformations of the two main print mediums used for conveying catastrophe from the Edo period until the early twentieth century. First, there are single-page prints from the early modern and modern periods, which resembled Western pamphlets in function, and provided news reports, maps and illustrations, or satire. Second are book-length disaster reports, consisting of a variety of visual and literary genres, which I call disaster publications. Three prominent examples are presented here: *Kaname'ishi* ('Keystone') from 1663, *Ansei kenmonshi* ('Account of Seen and Heard Things of the Ansei Period') from 1855, and *Taishō daishinsai daikasai* ('The Great Earthquake and Great Fire of the Taishō Period') from 1923. This selection allows us to trace visual representations, narrative genres, and tropes employed to report and illustrate earthquake disasters in important stages of the genre in detail: from the initial appearance of disaster publications in the seventeenth century, their peak towards the end of the Edo period which manifested in a rich print production after the aforementioned Ansei Edo Earthquake of 1855, to their transformation through the arrival of Western technology in the second half of the nineteenth century and their emergence as part of the modern mass press in the aftermath of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923

4 Itoko Kitahara, *Saigai jōnarizumu. Mukashihen* ('Disaster Journalism. Volume on the Past') (Tokyo: Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan Shinkōkai, 2001), 82.

5 Kitahara, *Saigai jōnarizumu*, 11–12; Hideo Ono, *Kawaraban monogatari. Edo jidai masukomi no rekishi* ('The Kawaraban Story. The History of Edo Period Mass Media') (Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1988). Of the 572 prints of the Ono collection, 258 deal with fires, earthquakes, storms, floods, and volcanic eruptions.

(the worst earthquake disaster in Japanese history, which caused the death of over 105,000 people and destroyed two thirds of Tokyo).

This chapter shows, in five parts, the continuities and changes in Japanese disaster prints and publications and their history, highlighting the development of selected visual representations, narrative genres, tropes, and motifs that not only conveyed reports on damages but also spatial imaginations of the disaster's scale and a variety of emotions and interpretations of disasters. In the first part, I explain the emergence of disaster prints and publications within the early modern print culture, their accessibility and consumption, and their transformation after the arrival of Western print technology and culture. The next two parts concern imageries of disaster. In the second part, I explore the catfish lore and its use as a satirical symbol of earthquakes. The catfish prints also give clues about how earthquake disasters were interpreted in Japan – not only as tragedies but also as a cosmic rectification or business opportunities. The third part traces the visual representation of threat experienced by the earthquake victims from the seventeenth to the twentieth century: earthquake victims were consistently depicted as mindlessly running in between buildings that were simultaneously burning and crumbling. The last two parts shed light on spatial representation and narrative genres. The fourth part analyses visual and narrative techniques used to represent the degree and spatial extent of damage. These included maps, lists, and descriptions of city tours. The last part is concerned with how the fates of individuals during disasters were conveyed. They were told in a variety of narrative genres such as tragic stories (*aiwa*), heroic 'beautiful tales' (*bidan*), and ghost stories (*kaidan*), which became increasingly standardised over time.

Japanese Print Culture and Disaster Reporting

In the Edo period, print culture emerged along with a flourishing urban consumer culture. Japan in the early modern period was marked by a long period of peace maintained by the Tokugawa Shogunate and enjoyed a steady population growth and an increase in urbanisation, production, and trade. This led to the rise of consumerism especially in Edo, which, with over one million inhabitants, surpassed European capitals in the early 1700s. Entertainment facilities and consumer products sprang up to satisfy samurai serving the Edo court as well as a growing number of wealthy merchants and city dwellers.⁶ Consequently, print culture also experienced a boom. Prints began to enjoy

6 For an overview of Edo-period Japan, see Tipton, *Modern Japan*, 1–23.

wide distribution and differentiation beginning at the end of the seventeenth century. Instead of movable type, printers employed single woodblock prints, which made it easy to combine script and illustrations, thereby increasing their commercial appeal. Pictures were increasingly printed in colour and reached a high level of sophistication while remaining relatively cheap and accessible.⁷ The Tokugawa Shogunate tried to control the flourishing printing industry by enacting strict censorship: The author and publisher had to be fully listed in the print and were held responsible for its contents.⁸ Therefore, quickly produced single-page newsprints, the aforementioned *kawaraban*, were printed anonymously. However, prints were tolerated as long as the content was not offensive to the Tokugawa Shogunate, as was the case with natural disasters.⁹

As literacy in Japan was remarkably high, prints were accessible to a multitude of people.¹⁰ In addition, the *kawaraban* were sold by so-called *yomiuri* (literally 'read-sellers'), who read the contents aloud when they sold their prints, thus also making printed content available to illiterate audiences.¹¹ *Kawaraban* were an important medium of disaster coverage, listing damage, providing maps illustrating the scope of the disaster, or offering satire. They were used as memorials: some disaster *kawaraban* were found included in individual diaries. Some people also used them to communicate their disaster experience or report their safety to their families in the provinces. There were disaster *kawaraban* printed that deliberately left space to write on.¹²

A large market for popular books intended to entertain also emerged, the so-called *kusazōshi* (literally 'grass books') that encompassed a multitude of genres. They were distinguished by the colours of their book covers and ranged from novels and travel guidebooks to pornography.¹³ Conceptualised as consumer goods, they increasingly featured rich coloured illustrations.

7 On the publishing and reading culture in Edo Japan, see Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print. Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Peter F. Kornicki, *The Book in Japan. A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

8 Richard H. Mitchell, *Censorship in Imperial Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 3–5; Kornicki, *The Book in Japan*, 324–52.

9 Sepp Linhart, 'Die mediale Bewältigung von Erdbebenkatastrophen in Japans Geschichte. Flugblätter und Ansichtskarten', in Hammerl and Steffelbauer, *Naturkatastrophen*, 64–89, at 65–66.

10 Richard Rubinger, *Popular Literacy in Early Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

11 Gerald Groemer, 'Singing the News. Yomiuri in Japan During the Edo and Meiji Periods', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54 (1994), 233–61. The largest newspaper in Japan is still named after the *yomiuri*, reflecting the premodern practice.

12 Ono, *Kawaraban monogatari*, 213–14; Kitahara, *Saigai jōnarizumu*, 23–25.

13 Mitsutoshi Nakano, *Edo no shuppan* ('Publishing in Japan') (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2005), 49; Ekkehard May, *Die Kommerzialisierung der japanischen Literatur in der späten Edo-Zeit (1750–1868)*.

Books were printed in the urban centres such as Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka, but with travelling book vendors they were also circulated in rural regions. Book lending and reading aloud were regular practices. Thus, books enjoyed broad popularity.¹⁴

Disaster publications, reports on individual disasters in book form, emerged as an independent genre with the beginning of print culture in the seventeenth century. The first known disaster publication devoted to an earthquake, *Kaname'ishi*, was published in 1663 and laid the foundations of the genre by providing a potpourri of information, including descriptions of earthquake damage, anecdotes of individual experiences, and explanations for the quake's causes.¹⁵ Many publications followed this approach of providing an entertaining mix of information about a disaster, a genre that peaked in the nineteenth century. *Ansei kenmonshi*, which appeared after the 1855 Ansei Edo Earthquake, might be the best-known disaster publication from the Edo period because of its prominent author, Kanagaki Robun (1829–1894) and its famous illustrator, woodblock print master Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861). It is therefore also analysed in this chapter.¹⁶

These disaster publications appeared with a short gap of one to several months after the earthquake. This allowed for a first general assessment of the disaster event. Compiled into one or multiple book volumes, disaster publications provided a comprehensive narrative of a disaster that addressed both the temporal sequence of events and the spatial extent of the damage, as well as cosmological interpretations and historical background. Japanese disaster publications thus helped to structure disaster events and give them a coherent narrative.¹⁷ As Ansgar Nünning has written regarding catastrophes and crises, eventful occurrences like natural disasters are told as stories with specific cultural tropes and plot patterns attached, which preconfigures

Rahmenbedingungen und Entwicklungstendenzen der erzählenden Prosa im Zeitalter ihrer ersten Vermarktung (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 150–81.

14 See note 7 of this chapter.

15 Ryōi Asai, 'Kaname'ishi', in Masachika Taniwaki, Masahiko Oka, and Kazuhito Inoue (eds), *Kanazōshishū* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1999), 11–83; Itoko Kitahara (ed.), *Nihon saigaishi* ('Disaster History of Japan') (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2006), 239.

16 Robun Kanagaki, '*Berichte über Gesehenes und Gehörtes aus der Ansei-Zeit*'. *Kanagaki Robuns (1829–1894) Bericht über das große Ansei-Erdbeben 1855 als Repräsentant des Genres der 'Katastrophendarstellungen'*, ed. Stephan Köhn, 2 vols (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), vol. 1, 37–44. Stephan Köhn provides a detailed genre history for disaster publications which he calls 'Katastrophendarstellungen'.

17 Ryūichi Narita, 'Kantō daishinsai no metahisutorī no tameni. Hōdō, aiwa, bidan', in *Kindai toshi kukan no bunka keiken* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 197–213.

the interpretation and specific meaning attached to a situation.¹⁸ Following historian Reinhart Koselleck, disasters must first be identified as events by providing a beginning and an end in retrospect.¹⁹ According to Hayden White's notion on 'metahistory', historical events are then moulded into stories using known narrative traditions and tropes.²⁰ Disaster publications played an important role shaping those narratives, while they were subjected to established narrative traditions and genre conventions. This, in turn, shaped disaster experiences. Disaster publications assessed and mapped damage; narrated individual experiences of the disaster as tragedies, heroic tales, and absurdities that emerged from disaster; and concluded on a positive note with first reports on reconstruction. They were consumer goods, sold primarily as entertainment and served a certain voyeurism. But they also aspired to help the readers comprehend the incomprehensible tragedy, come to terms with the disaster, and move on. They gave cosmological or scientific explanations for the disaster and contextualised it in the long history of similar events.²¹ They not only provided a chronological narrative of the disaster but also laid out the spatial extent of the disaster down to the level of city blocks. Thus, victims could situate their individual experiences within the historical event. In addition, they also included dramatic tales of individual experiences, so readers who were not present during the event were afforded a way to witness and participate in the disaster. Disaster publications therefore also took part in moulding disasters into collective experiences beyond the local level.²² They could serve as an individual *lieux de mémoire* of the disaster that could be kept on one's own bookshelf.²³

As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, many traditions of disaster reporting survived the transformation of print culture by the

18 Ansgar Nünning, 'Making Crises and Catastrophes. Metaphors and Narratives Shaping the Cultural Life of Crises and Catastrophes', in Carsten Meiner and Kristin Veel (eds), *The Cultural Life of Catastrophes and Crises. Facts, Forms, Fantasies* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 59–88.

19 Reinhart Koselleck and Wolf-Dieter Stempel (eds), *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung* (Munich: Fink, 1973), 560–71. On disasters as events, see Christiane Eifert, 'Das Erdbeben von Lissabon 1755', *Historische Zeitschrift* 274 (2002), 633–64.

20 Hayden V. White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

21 Kitahara, *Nihon saigaishi*, 239. In the last volume of *Kaname'ishi*, a list of devastating historical earthquakes and cosmological explanations of the earthquake are given to present the described earthquake as a natural occurrence; it finishes by explaining its title (*Kaname'ishi* is the mythical stone that controls the earthquake-causing catfish) as an expression for the hope that the book would serve as a capstone helping the reader to move on from the tragedy.

22 Narita, 'Kantō daishinsai no metahisutorī no tamenī', 205–13.

23 On the concept of memory space or *lieux de mémoire*, see Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History. Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations* 26 (1989), 7–24.

arrival of Western technologies in the Meiji period (1868–1912). Following the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1868, the threat of colonisation by the Western powers was met by the new Meiji government with fundamental reforms introducing Western technology and institutions. Their goal was to build a strong military supported by modern industry and to gain Western recognition by meeting their standard of ‘civilisation’.²⁴ This included the introduction of a modern press. Beginning in the 1870s, newspapers following Western models swept the markets and helped foster political debates. However, many woodblock printers still prevailed until the end of the nineteenth century and continued to provide illustrations.²⁵ After the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, the Japanese press followed their Western counterparts in establishing a mass press, which was aided by the introduction of the rotation press and the effects of compulsory schooling established in the 1890s.²⁶ Disaster publications continued to play an important role, even for the development for the modern mass press: In 1923 the disaster publication *Taishō daishinsai daikasai* achieved a print run of a record-breaking 500,000 copies, paving the way for the first popular magazine to reach a million copies two years later by the same publisher, Kōdansha.²⁷ Since then, disaster publications have developed into glossy photo magazines that regularly appear after disaster events.²⁸ Visual representations, narrative genres, and tropes are explored below in greater detail.

24 See, for example, Mark Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations of the World. Japan's Meiji Restoration in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

25 Itoko Kitahara, *Media kankyō no kindai. Saigai shashin o chūshin ni* (‘The Modernization of the Media Environment. With Emphasis on Disaster Photography’) (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 2012).

26 On the development of the mass press in Japan, see James L. Huffman, *Creating a Public. People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997); Gregory James Kasza, *The State and the Mass Media in Japan, 1918–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Amy Bliss Marshall, *Magazines and the Making of Mass Culture in Japan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

27 Katsumi Iwasaki, ‘Kaigenreika no besutoserā “Taishō daishinsai daikasai”. 72 nengo no shohyō’ (‘The Bestseller under Martial Law “The Great Earthquake and Great Fire of the Taishō Period”. A Review 72 Years Later’), *Masukomi-jānarizumu ronshū* 4 (1996), 56–84.

28 For the 2011 disaster, for example, Asahi Shinbunsha (ed.), *Asahi guraifu Tōhoku Kantō daishinsai. Ōtsunami to genpatsu* (‘Asahi Graph on the Great Northeastern Disaster. The Great Tsunami and the Nuclear Power Plant’) (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2011).

The Catfish as an Earthquake Symbol

In the aforementioned catfish picture prints of the 1855 earthquake, the catfish symbolised the earthquake both for satirical purposes and for conveying certain interpretations of the disaster. The use of animals in satire had a long tradition in Japan and was especially popular in the late Edo period.²⁹ The catfish had been associated with earthquakes since at least the seventeenth century and became subsequently established as a popular symbol for earthquake disasters. Apart from satire, the catfish prints also served as coping mechanisms derived from popular lore and vernacular religious beliefs on disasters. The lore has invited several explanations: It is believed that the catfish developed from a mythological dragon, which is located at the world's foundation in Buddhist cosmology and amalgamated with traditional local serpent deities.³⁰ Another popular explanation states that catfish were so sensitive that they could sense anomalies in the earth and thus were more likely to be caught shortly before earthquakes. This explanation was already offered in the Edo period and points to a popular practice of looking for unusual animal behaviour to predict earthquakes.³¹ In either case, the catfish was also part of the Japanese animistic folk religion, Shinto, that assigned spirits and deities to sites in nature and natural phenomena.

The *namazu* lore thus operated within the Shinto myths: the catfish caused earthquakes through its movements. This was usually prevented by a keystone, the *kaname'ishi*, which restrains the catfish. Because the 1855 earthquake had happened in November, it was said that the Shinto deity that usually guarded the *kaname'ishi* had been away attending the annual gathering of deities in Izumo. Many 1855 catfish picture prints thus depicted how the catfish was reigned in again by the deity Kashima, who placed the *kaname'ishi* on top of it, as seen in the anonymous print *Namazu e no korashime* ('The Punishment for the Catfish', Fig. 12.1). Kashima is the bearded figure on the right of the catfish. The stone he is carrying has *kaname'ishi* written on it. This print combines this image with another popular recurring motif: one or several catfishes are beaten up by earthquake victims. In other cases, the catfish apologise for the

29 Monika Jankiewicz-Brzostowska, 'Depictions of Animals in the Satirical War Prints of Kobayashi Kiyochika', *Art of the Orient* 9 (2020), 134–54, at 134–36.

30 Anna Andreeva, 'The "Earthquake Insect". Conceptualizing Disasters in Pre-Modern Japan', in Monica Juneja and Gerrit Jasper Schenk (eds), *Disaster as Image. Iconographies and Media Strategies Across Europe and Asia* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2014), 81–90; Gregory Smits, 'Conduits of Power. What the Origins of Japan's Earthquake Catfish Reveal about Religious Geography', *Japan Review* 24 (2012), 41–65.

31 Smits, *Seismic Japan*, 182–88.



Figure 12.1 *Namazu e no korashime* ('The Punishment for the Catfish'), 1855. The University of Tokyo General Library, Ishimoto Collection, I-02-012. Source: University of Tokyo General Library

mess they caused or even help rescue victims. It can be assumed that these prints served as a coping mechanism to overcome disaster. Some prints were even sold as charms and advertised to keep further earthquake damage away.³²

More often, however, the catfish picture prints of 1855 convey a reading of the disaster rooted in Chinese cosmology. Natural disasters were the expression of heavenly discontent with the ruling dynasty, and therefore both Chinese and Japanese rulers rushed to help disaster victims and aid with reconstruction. When the world was out of balance, divine intervention rectified it through natural disasters. For the urban population of the Edo period, imbalance especially meant inequalities of wealth. Urbanisation and trade had given rise to a class of wealthy merchants, upsetting the Confucian status order of the four occupations prevailing in the Edo period, which placed the merchants as the lowest status group behind the samurai, peasants, and the artisans and craftsmen. Therefore, many catfish picture prints depict flows of coins rectifying wealth distribution, for example catfish throwing coins. There are also other kinds of prints that pitted groups consisting of professions that profited from the disaster – mostly carpenters and other

32 Smits, 'Shaking Up Japan', 1052–58; Formanek, 'Japanische Reaktionen auf (Natur-)Katastrophen', 56.

artisans involved in building houses, sometimes also prostitutes – against professions that lost.³³ This motif is also present in *Namazu e no korashime*: two carpenters, who can be identified by their typical black clothing, and a monk (who profited from giving memorial services) try to defend or plead for the anthropomorphic catfish in the middle who is beaten up by a book vendor, a merchant with his abacus, a female with a pipe, and a ghost (who has a flame where his feet should be) (Fig. 12.1). Employing satire, the catfish prints critiqued Tokugawa rule and society.

The *namazu* did not vanish with the end of the Edo period. They reappeared again as a symbol for heavenly rectification after the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, which happened during a period when consumerism became ubiquitous in urban areas and became debated as a negative effect of Western modernism and individualism.³⁴ The earthquake consequently caused a debate over whether this disaster was heavenly punishment for a society that had degenerated through decadent Western influences. Therefore, in cartoons that criticised consumerism the catfish appeared as a rectifying force threatening figures dressed in Western-inspired fashionable clothing pursuing frivolous activities.³⁵ Today catfish are enjoying a revival as government mascots, used to make disaster education more appealing.³⁶

Visualising Threat

To visualise the experience of threat during an ongoing disaster, the early modern Japanese disaster prints offered dramatic and dynamic depictions of the ongoing disaster. These followed established visual tropes. Since fires were a typical consequence of earthquakes in Japan's cramped cities, victims running away from the flames became one major way of visualising earthquake disasters. An early example can be found in a disaster publication about one of the most notorious urban fires in early modern Japan, the

33 Smits, 'Shaking Up Japan', 1057–61.

34 Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity. History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

35 J. Charles Schencking, *The Great Kantō Earthquake and the Chimera of National Reconstruction in Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 116–52; Gennifer Weisenfeld, *Imaging Disaster. Tokyo and the Visual Culture of Japan's Great Earthquake of 1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 178–89.

36 On the use of mascots and anthropomorphism in Japanese government institutions and companies, see Iain Macpherson and Teri Jane Bryant, 'Softening Power. Cuteness as Organizational Communication Strategy in Japan and the West', *Journal of International and Advanced Japanese Studies* 10 (2018), 39–55.

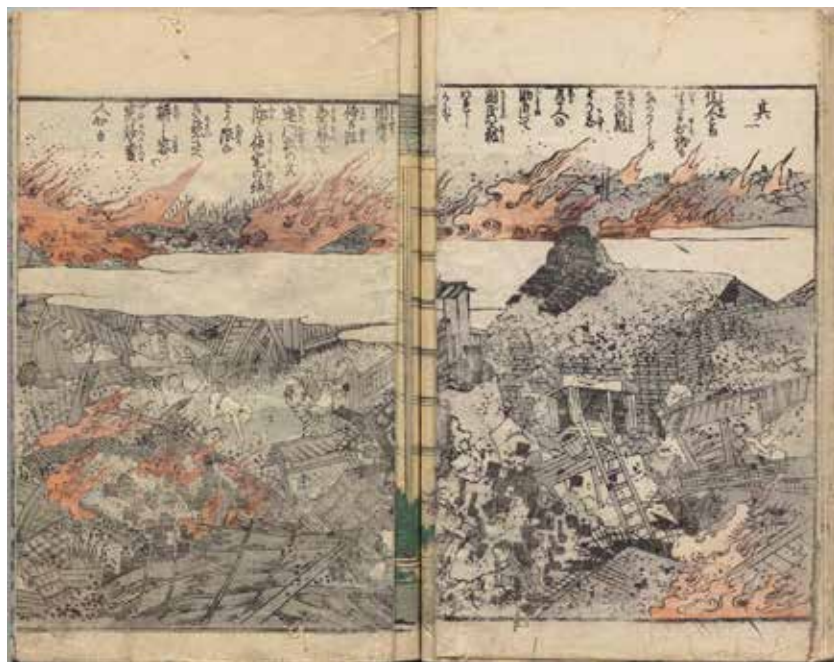


Figure 12.2 Kanagaki Robun, *Ansei kenmonshi* ('Account of Seen and Heard Things of the Ansei Period') (Edo, 1855), vol. 1. National Archives of Japan, Tokyo, 166-0416

Great Meireki Fire of 1657, *Musashiabumi* (literally 'Stirrup of Musashi', 1661) by Asai Ryōi (1612–1691) which was illustrated with uncoloured woodblock prints. In almost every image, people are depicted fleeing from the fire that engulfs the surrounding buildings. They are running agitatedly, some carrying luggage with them, which is also on fire. In the first disaster publication on earthquakes *Kaname'ishi* (1663), by the same author, architectural structures can be seen collapsing, for example a bridge which takes two people down with it. There is no fire present in the illustrations, probably because Kyoto had a tight-knit social fire control which prevented major fires.³⁷

By the nineteenth century, the two depictions of disasters – collapsing building structures that bury people under them and people running from fires – were combined to create a dramatic effect. These include several such depictions by Utagawa Kuniyoshi in *Ansei kenmonshi* (1855) (Fig. 12.2).

37 Toshiaki Maruyama, *Kyōto no machiya to hikeshishū. Sono hataraki kishin no gotoshi* ('The Town Houses in Kyoto and the Fire Fighters. Their Deeds Resemble Gods') (Kyoto: Shōwadō, 2011).

The illustrations are in colour, and the fires are depicted in bright red. Here, the spectator sees buildings shaken up and collapsing, indicated by flying debris around them. People can be seen buried in or narrowly escaping the rubble. The houses are burning and people are fleeing. Everything is happening simultaneously, knit together in a crowded, lively illustration. The illustrations tell individual stories as well: on the right, a man is running out of the house naked, and another is carrying his elderly mother. These share similarities with the popular stories about individual experiences discussed below. This aggregation of the main earthquake destruction and fires was not realistic, as fires take some time to break out.³⁸ Nonetheless, this became a standard depiction of earthquake disasters.

The dramatic simultaneous depiction of earthquake and fire disaster was such a powerful and expected trope that it prevailed despite the problems the introduction of photography posed. Photography arrived with other Western technology in Japan in the mid-nineteenth century. Soon studios run by foreigners and Japanese sold photographs as souvenirs abroad and as attractions domestically.³⁹ However, as the long exposure times of early photography made it difficult to capture movement, woodblock prints still continued to flourish, as they allowed dynamic illustrations. This was especially true for depicting disasters. For example, after the 1891 Nōbi Earthquake, most pictures were taken for scientific purposes. A photo book of the earthquake was compiled with the help of John Milne, a leading British seismologist at the time, and mostly sold abroad.⁴⁰ At the same time, woodblock prints of the earthquake also circulated. In a woodblock print by Utagawa Kunitoshi (1847–1899), from the same artisan school as the illustrator of *Ansei kenmonshi* (1855), the familiar dynamic of buildings in the process of collapsing, bright red fires (now even more lively because of the use of aniline colours), and panicked people can be seen. Especially striking in this woodblock print is the emphasis on the collapse of modern architectural structures adopted from the West: on the right, a brick factory chimney, a

38 From pre-war experiments, it is known that traditional Japanese wooden houses take approximately twenty minutes to be noticeably on fire. Uchida Yoshibumi, *Kenchiku to kasai* ('Architecture and Fires') (Tokyo: Sagami Shobō, 1942), 44. Theoretically, the scene could depict an aftershock, when already destabilised structures collapse, but this picture seems to show the main earthquake. For the study of historical seismology and aftershocks, see Emanuela Guidoboni and John E. Ebel (eds), *Earthquakes and Tsunamis in the Past. A Guide to Techniques in Historical Seismology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

39 Anne Tucker, Kōtarō Iizawa, and Naoyuki Kinoshita, *The History of Japanese Photography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

40 Kitahara, *Media kankyō no kindai*, 40–55; John Milne and W. K. Burton, *The Great Earthquake in Japan, 1891* (Hong Kong: Lane, Crawford & Co., 1892).

symbol of modernity, is seen breaking off and crumbling, while a train is heading towards a collapsed iron bridge in the background.⁴¹ As Gregory Clancey has elaborated, pointing to the failure of Western architecture was popular after the 1891 earthquake and led to a new appreciation of traditional Japanese artisanry.⁴² Mirroring this, the traditional woodblock print was proven to be more efficient in depicting earthquakes in a dynamic manner than the then cumbersome Western photography.

By the time the Great Kantō Earthquake occurred in 1923, photography had mostly taken over as the main visual medium in the press. Photographs featured prominently in newspapers, magazines, and photo books. However, the Great Kantō Earthquake had caused damage to most of Tokyo's publishers or had at least toppled the type cases. Thus, news coverage stopped for several days. In this situation, reporting on disasters fell back to premodern patterns using a new medium: Postcards were printed in large quantities as they were cheap to produce. They were circulated widely and anonymously, as their premodern predecessors had been. This time, they dramatically showed the destruction and devastation of the earthquake and its aftermath, including piles of corpses.⁴³ Despite the advances in photographic technology, problems with capturing events in motion persisted. Therefore, illustrated prints and paintings remained popular ways to depict the Great Kantō Earthquake.⁴⁴ When photographs were used, they were manipulated and montaged, according to the publication's needs. For example, a quite peaceful scene of pedestrians was entitled 'People fleeing mindlessly while chased by the fire'. That photo was probably taken a few days after the disaster, when the smoke was still hanging over the city.⁴⁵ In other cases, the smoke was either montaged or painted in (in bright red) afterwards. In a postcard of the collapsed Western-style brick tower, the *Asakusa Jūnikai*, the first skyscraper in Japan and then a well-known landmark, a photograph of a row of people walking into the background was probably inserted on the right side (Fig. 12.3). Fire and smoke are painted in, while crumbling brick is added to the broken-off tower, reminiscent of the woodblock print illustrations of collapsing

41 Kunitoshi Utagawa, 'Gifu shigai ōjishin no zu' ('Figure of the Great Earthquake in Gifu City'), 1891. University of Tokyo Library, Ishimoto Collection II-02-009.

42 Gregory Clancey, 'The Meiji Earthquake. Nature, Nation, and the Ambiguities of Catastrophe', *Modern Asian Studies* 40 (2006), 909–51.

43 Linhart, 'Die mediale Bewältigung', 76–84.

44 Weisenfeld, *Imaging Disaster*, 82–118.

45 Kōdansha (ed.), *Taishō daishinsai daikasai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1923), 8 of the photography section.



Figure 12.3 Tatsuo Kimura and Toshio Ishi'i (eds), *Ehagaki ga kataru Kantō Dashinsai. Ishi'i Toshio korekushon* ('The Great Kantō Earthquake Told by Postcards. The Ishi'i Toshio Collection') (Tokyo: Tsuge Shobō, 1990), 11. Source: Tsuge Shobō, Tokyo

buildings. To deliver the visual cues for disaster established in the early modern period, 1923 postcard vendors had to combine photographs and illustration. When photography technology further improved, illustrations lost their importance. In 2011 the ubiquity of smart phones allowed for wide circulation of dramatic videos showing the ongoing disaster and people fleeing the approaching tsunami.

Spatial Distribution and Extent of Damage

One of the central roles of disaster prints was to give an orientation of the spatial extent of the disaster and to provide descriptions of how much damage had occurred. Descriptions of cities and tour guides were a popular genre in Edo literature, which is not surprising given the mobility between the capital and the provinces.⁴⁶ Disaster publications often adapted their tropes and techniques, making them disaster 'tour guides'. The three main techniques employed were visual representation on

⁴⁶ Berry, *Japan in Print*, 139–84; Evelyn Schulz, *Stadt-Diskurse in den 'Aufzeichnungen über das Prosperieren von Tōkyō' (Tōkyō-hanjō-ki). Eine Gattung der topografischen Literatur Japans und ihre Bilder von Tōkyō (1832–1958)* (Munich: Iudicium, 2004).

maps, lists of damage sorted by location, and descriptions structured as city walks.

The easiest way to visualise damage was to indicate it on maps. Since the Edo period, which was plagued by frequent urban conflagrations in its crammed wooden cities, there had been a tradition to blacken or redden burnt areas on maps. Presumably, this developed from a pragmatic technique that allowed a quick distribution of disaster maps: woodblock printers simply printed with red over existing city maps that were often sold to allow visitors to orient themselves in the crammed chaotic neighbourhoods.⁴⁷ This form of visualising burnt areas was carried over to the modern period. The 1923 disaster publication *Taishō daishinsai daikasai* even utilises the early modern form: all inserted maps are printed in blue or black and the burnt or damaged areas are printed over them in red.⁴⁸ As Western disaster cartography employed colouring in a similar way, this form of visualising destruction is still prominently used today.⁴⁹

The most common way to report on the intensity of damage and its spatial distribution was the use of lists. These were most often employed on *kawaraban* reporting on natural disasters. They listed damage by location. Japanese disaster historian Kitahara Itoko suspects they were leaked from official records and assessment of damage.⁵⁰ These damage lists were also printed in modern disaster publications, which reported disaster counts from the authorities: numbers of victims killed and destroyed houses, sorted by total and partial destruction. In *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, the numbers are broken down to the district level, giving a very detailed account of the distribution and severity of destruction in the capital.⁵¹

The most popular way to give an impression of the damage within the urban space was to provide the narrative of a city walk. These were most common in disaster publications, which in the Edo period were structured as city walks. This reflects the connection between the act of speaking and measuring space through walking that historian Michel de Certeau has pointed out: The perception of space is structured by the pacing, trajectories, and places the walker ascribes meaning to (more popularly referred to as landmarks). This process echoes the act of speaking, which is also a tool of

47 Kitahara, *Saigai jānarizumu*, 22–23.

48 Kōdansha, *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, first map.

49 For example, an official map of the 1995 Kōbe Earthquake: Bosai Literacy Research Laboratory, 'Kōbeshi shigaichi chūshinbu de no higai', <http://bosailiteracy.org/literacy/earthquake/house-damage/> (accessed 3 April 2023).

50 Kitahara, *Saigai jānarizumu*, 33–35.

51 Kōdansha, *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, 1–27.

appropriating or constructing space in everyday life.⁵² The narrated city walks in the disaster publications thus provided a spatial imagination of the disaster in which the reader could immerse themselves.

Landmarks (*meisho*, literally 'famous places') also played an important role in Japanese urban literature, which ascribed stereotypical properties to places, popularising them in the process. As such, they became commonly known tourist destinations.⁵³ Disaster walks had their own landmarks, either as especially memorable places that suffered devastating losses or already famous landmarks that suffered damage or miraculously survived. The contrast between the existing image of a popular landmark in the minds of readers and how it was affected by the disaster provided a powerful indication of the severity of the disaster, although contrasting before and after depictions do not seem to have been popular before the twentieth century.⁵⁴

The first known disaster publication on an earthquake, *Kaname'ishi* (1663) already had parts structured as a city walk. In its first volume, each chapter was anchored in a district of earthquake-stricken Kyoto, moving from northwest to southeast. The second volume surveys the damage in regions surrounding Kyoto before returning to southeast Kyoto. Each chapter provides loose descriptions of earthquake damage and stories of individual ordeals. These stories often take place at famous temples and landmarks that are known to the readers. Only the third volume alters the format to provide cosmological explanations and reactions of religious leaders. The later *Ansei kenmonshi* (1855) was more intricately structured. The title (literally 'a record of seen and heard things from the Ansei period') suggests it was conceptualised as a reportage. It is again structured by districts and results in a city walk starting from the hard-hit east to northeast of Edo, northeast to northwest in the second volume, and west to south in the last volume. It provides a greater variety of information, which was in large portion taken from *kawaraban* published on the earthquake.⁵⁵ *Ansei kenmonshi* provides lists of damage suffered in the respective districts and praises financial contributors to reconstruction. In between, there are collections of stories as well as a large variety of curious facts such as the workings of an earthquake-detecting machine.

52 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91–110.

53 Schulz, *Stadt-Diskurse*, 63–68.

54 *Taishō daishinsai daikasai* only shows one example of a tourist landmark before and after. Kōdansha, *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, 74 of the photography section.

55 Kanagaki, 'Berichte über Gesehenes', vol. 1, 273.

In the twentieth-century disaster publication *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, the structure anchored in space has given way to a structure dictated by narrative genres. However, the city tour is still an important structuring element of these narratives. The city tour also got its own narrative genre: it entered a text genre comparable to Anglo-Saxon New Journalism, reportage narrated from the author's subjective point of view.⁵⁶ The city tour not only contains descriptions of the damage and of some individual tragedies but is also supported by the emotions expressed by the author. *Taishō daishinsai daikasai* includes a reportage that takes the reader on a disaster city tour to infamous disaster landmarks of mass death, such as an evacuation space in eastern Tokyo where 6,000 evacuees died in a firestorm.⁵⁷ Another mourns the lost famous landmarks of Tokyo.⁵⁸

Narrating Fates of Individuals

The emotional core of disaster publications consisted of narrating the fate of individuals experiencing the disaster, the examples varying from tragic mothers losing their children to filial sons rescuing their fathers to miraculous survivals due to a supernatural phenomenon. In the Edo period, such narratives were sprinkled among other bits of information on a certain place within the disaster publication. Thus, the narratives were part of an entertaining variety of texts which represented the disaster story of a particular place. The stories were always tied to a specific space. Originally, they were probably orally transmitted (with questionable authenticity) and were collected to fit a certain expectation of narratives.⁵⁹ Over time, the stories were structured in increasingly standardised narrative genres. These were not exclusive to disasters but interacted with an emerging culture of telling and collecting stories in Edo Japan.⁶⁰

These stories were used not only to evoke compassion by conveying individual tragedies and the catastrophes suffered by the victims, although

56 Matthew C. Strecher, 'From Kwaraban to Reportage. Toward a Theory for Japanese Literary Journalism', *Ritsumeikan Kokusai Kenkyū* 21: 3 (2009), 491–507.

57 Kōdansha, *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, 33–46.

58 Kōdansha, *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, 207–12.

59 In *Ansei kenmonshi*, some of the stories are given authenticity by claiming they were told by acquaintances of the author. In 1923 some magazines explicitly invited readers to send in *hiwa* or tragic stories. Narita, 'Kantō daishinsai no metahisutorī no tameni', 213–14.

60 Noriko T. Reider, "'The Emergence of 'kaidan-shū'. The Collection of Tales of the Strange and Mysterious in the Edo Period', *Asian Folklore Studies* 60: 1 (2001), 79–99.

this was maybe the most prominent genre (*aiwa*, literally 'sad stories'). There were also exemplary stories to praise morally upstanding or heroic acts (*bidan*, literally 'beautiful tales') which were intended to be morally uplifting. Ghost stories and accounts of supernatural occurrences (*kaidan*, literally 'strange stories') were not only 'scary' but also provided closure by having ghosts take care of unfinished business. Finally, there were curious and peculiar stories which mainly provided entertainment and humour, such as miraculous survivals. In the following paragraphs, the development of the narratives is traced in the three aforementioned disaster publications, *Kaname'ishi* (1663), *Ansei kenmonshi* (1855), and *Taishō daishinsai daikasai* (1923).

In the seventeenth-century *Kaname'ishi*, the stories were distributed throughout the entire text. They culminated in short poems that were claimed to have been written by the stories' protagonists and often served as punch lines. The stories already featured typical tropes of the later genres but fluctuated between different kinds of emotional impacts, whereas the later standardised narratives served a single purpose. For example, tragic deaths in *Kaname'ishi* are always framed as deaths of beloved family members, a fixture in the moving *aiwa*. However, one *aiwa* also clearly fed voyeurism: a graphically described story about a woman dying while having her baby ripped out of her womb.⁶¹ In another story, a child is crushed by a stone lantern in a temple, which is framed as tragic but also as heavenly punishment. The child had stolen food and behaved inappropriately in the temple before.⁶² Other stories present entertaining curiosities, such as survivals: two people survive the disaster on the five-storied pagoda in Yasaka, which sways but does not collapse, but become very nauseous in the process.⁶³

In all cases, the story is anchored in a specific place, in this case the intact pagoda as a disaster landmark. Many stories report strange or supernatural occurrences connected with the earthquake, such as animals changing behaviour or sightings of peculiar balls of light. In one third of the stories, the superstitiousness of the disaster victims or the helplessness of religious figures is pointed out as a curiosity. For example, because a shrine is rumoured to having been spared shocks during the earthquake, people in the vicinity rush to rip grass from the shrine's lawn as a talisman until the lawn

61 Asai, 'Kaname'ishi', 21–22.

62 Asai, 'Kaname'ishi', 18–21.

63 Asai, 'Kaname'ishi', 30–32.

is stripped bare.⁶⁴ *Kaname'ishi* already shows many themes regularly taken up by later disaster publications. It also uses a typical narrative structure leading towards a moralising conclusion or a punchline which was intended to emphasise the exceptionality and curiosity of the occurrences witnessed during the disasters.

In *Ansei kenmonshi* of 1855, the stories are told in a more choreographed way and appear in loosely grouped collections inserted among the damage reports. The stories are still anchored in particular places and thus are not strictly sorted by genre, but it seems that one story was deliberately moved from the second volume to the third, where it starts a collection of stories highlighting good and bad human behaviour after the disaster.⁶⁵ About two thirds of the stories accordingly appear assembled in vaguely themed collections. The first volume lists several stories on miraculous survival, while the second volume has a collection of individuals that received warnings and survived as well as some stories of tragic deaths. The third volume assembles stories of strange supernatural occurrences and *bidan* about exemplary individuals displaying filial piety or loyalty to their superiors, disregarding their own situation. The stories are clearly intended for entertainment. There are *aiwa* reporting mass deaths or a story of a mother buried with her child with dramatic illustration. In *bidan*, although the protagonists are lauded as exemplary, the curiosities or ironies in the stories are highlighted. In one story, a man rescues his father buried by a collapsed house by cutting off his arm. What would normally be considered a crime is now an act of filial piety and rewarded with the pair's survival.⁶⁶ About one third of the stories concern apparitions and individuals predicting the earthquake, which leads to the survival of those who receive them. There are also ghost stories that follow typical patterns of *kaidan*: A stranger encounters a woman who entrusts him with a message for her father. Later, she turns out to be a ghost.⁶⁷ *Ansei kenmonshi* lists the stories concerning supernatural phenomena as equally authentic as other 'heard' stories, often citing acquaintances of the author as sources.

In the modern disaster publications circulating after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, the narratives of individual fates were firmly grouped into their genres, and collections of those stories were titled with their genre names.⁶⁸ *Aiwa* collected emotional stories of torn-apart families but also

64 Asai, 'Kaname'ishi', 56–59.

65 The story is announced in the table of contents for volume 2, which covers the Ueno district where the story is said to have taken place. Kanagaki, '*Berichte über Gesehenes*', vol. 2, 26–27.

66 Kanagaki, '*Berichte über Gesehenes*', vol. 2, 134–35.

67 Kanagaki, '*Berichte über Gesehenes*', vol. 2, 162–67.

68 Kōdansha, *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, 107–98.

mass death sites. The most important genre for the 1920s were the *bidan*, the 'beautiful tales', depicting exemplary individuals acting heroically during the disaster or fulfilling their professional duties. They often cross the genre boundaries to *aiwa*, because these heroic acts involve a disregard for individual safety.⁶⁹ For example, there is a story about a police officer who selflessly fulfils his duty while his entire family dies somewhere else. In the end, he dies heroically while saving children.⁷⁰ Others are exemplary in filial piety, rescuing elderly parents, or in their duty towards the emperor by sacrificing themselves while rescuing the emperor's portrait, which was venerated in schools in the context of State Shintō emperor worship. Given the values the *bidan* reflected, it is not surprising that they were later systematically collected and used in schools to educate children in moral values, supporting the ultra-nationalist values of the state, as historian Janet Borland has analysed.⁷¹

Various forms of entertaining stories were still present in *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, which had a strong mass appeal but did not feature in other magazines which preferred *aiwa* and *bidan*. In *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, the term *ibun* (literally 'strange hearsay') was invented to denominate them, but the stories show a greater variety. This indicates that they never formed a genre as specific as *aiwa* and *bidan* were. Nonetheless, the *ibun* show a greater continuity with Edo-period narratives because they often share an ironic or humorous punch line at the end. There were stories of miraculous survival. For example, a person survived the collapse of the Asakusa Jūnikai skyscraper because his shirt got stuck on a neon sign. Stories of seemingly heavenly intervention are told as curiosities. People declared dead scare their families who believe they are encountering ghosts but turn out to be very much alive. Another popular type of story included descriptions of business opportunities and professions profiting from the earthquake disaster, reminiscent of the Edo-period view that disasters rectified monetary imbalances. Still, ironies were important in these stories. For example, one describes how a temple that survived the fire made a lot of money from charm buyers while a water god temple nearby had burned down miserably.⁷² While in the Edo period the explanation of supernatural phenomena was left ambiguous, the 1920s publication followed a scientific explanation of the disaster. Thus, the 'supernatural' stories in *Taishō daishinsai daikasai* were reduced to their humorous effect.

69 Narita, 'Kantō daishinsai no metahisutorī no tameni', 217–19.

70 Kōdansha, *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, 141–44.

71 Janet Borland, 'Stories of Ideal Japanese Subjects from the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923', *Japanese Studies* 25: 1 (2005), 21–34.

72 Kōdansha, *Taishō daishinsai daikasai*, 170–98.

A variety of narratives were told about earthquake disasters in Japan, which were remarkably consistent over the centuries in subject matter and narrative structure. They aimed not only for compassion but also for catharsis. Some of them even professed educational aspirations or told morally uplifting tales. Many included ironies and humorous punch lines to provide relief from tragedy or voyeuristic entertainment. To the present day, collections of disaster stories can be bought as books, especially *aiwa* and *bidan*, as well as *kaidan*, the ghost stories.⁷³

Conclusion

Disaster prints and publications in early modern Japan flourished due to the harsh censorship of the Tokugawa Shogunate on political discourse and developed a variety of visual representations, narrative genres, and tropes. There were several types of single-page woodblock prints, for which visual representations of the disaster played an important role. Most memorably after the Ansei Edo Earthquake in 1855, the earthquake was depicted as a catfish for satirical purposes and served as a coping mechanism rooted in folk religion. Illustrations of the disaster showed dramatic scenes of destruction and escape. The spatial extent of disasters was conveyed using maps and the degree of destruction using lists.

Tying those elements together, disaster publications in book form provided a first comprehensive assessment and narrative of the disaster. They were illustrated and structured as walks through the city destroyed by the earthquake and provided both a quantitative assessment of damage and narratives of individual experiences. Visual representations and narratives were tied to specific places and featured landmarks that were either already known to the readers or newly emerged as landmarks of the disaster. The narratives followed increasingly standardised patterns with different purposes: *aiwa* presented individual tragedies, *bidan* recounted exemplary deeds of morally upstanding individuals, and others were primarily entertaining, most notably (while other stories reported curiosities and absurdities caused by the disaster), tales of miraculous escapes or supernatural occurrences, or *kaidan*, ghost stories.

73 e.g. *Shinsai de hontō ni atta nakeru hanashi* (Tear Inducing Stories That Really Happened During the Earthquake) (Tokyo: East Press, 2011); Iku Asō, Mae e. *Higashinohon Daishinsai to tatakatta mumei senshitachi no kiroku* (Move Forward. The Record of the Anonymous Fighters Who Fought with the Great East Japan Earthquake) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2011); Keisuke Udagawa, *Shinsaigo no fushigi na hanashi. Sanriku no 'kaidan'* (Strange Stories after the Earthquake. The 'kaidan' from Sanriku) (Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha, 2016).

The Edo-period disaster narratives and motifs and their role in society were remarkably persistent beyond the introduction of Western thought and technologies in Japan. Most notably, the motif of people fleeing mindlessly from earthquake and fire depicted in dramatic interpretations was so powerful that until 1923, visualisations fell back on older illustration technologies or manipulated photographs to achieve the same effect. When modern printing technology failed, postcards were used in a similar way as the single-page woodblock prints in the Edo period. Other motifs and narratives also morphed into modern forms. In the case of city tours, the modern form of the reportage was employed. The narratives of individual experiences became even more differentiated and recognised as their own form of literary genres, such as *aiwa*, *bidan*, and *kaidan*.

The disaster prints served several purposes. They were commercialised entertainment, but they were also designed to narrate a comprehensive story of the disaster, to provide closure, to help victims see themselves as part of history, and to serve as *lieux de mémoire* for individual remembrance. The narratives also hint at various forms of perceiving and interpreting disasters. They were not only individual catastrophes but also macabre opportunities for entertainment or satire. In premodern Japan, earthquakes were also a cosmic rectifying force that balanced (monetary) injustice in society and punished evil acts. Although continuities from the premodern period survived Meiji modernisation, the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 marked a turning point: the earthquake was discussed as a punishment for an immoral westernised and commercialised society for a last time, but in its aftermath, disaster prevention by technology and scientific disaster education became ubiquitous, shifting the main interpretation of disasters to human failures.⁷⁴

About the Author

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⁷⁴ Schencking, *The Great Kantō Earthquake*, 116–52; Julia Mariko Jacoby, 'Disaster Prevention in Japan 1885–1978. Natural Disasters, Scientific Expertise, and Global Transfers of Knowledge', PhD dissertation, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, 2021.

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