ABSTRACT

Namazu, the earthquake-causing subterranean catfish of Japanese folklore, is a well-known icon of earthquake folklore. Following the Ansei Edo Earthquake in late 1855, anonymous entrepreneurs produced and sold hundreds of varieties of catfish picture prints (namazu-e). Many of these 1855 prints were sophisticated expressions of thinly-veiled political views, using the earthquakecatfish and other symbols as cover to avoid censure by the military government.

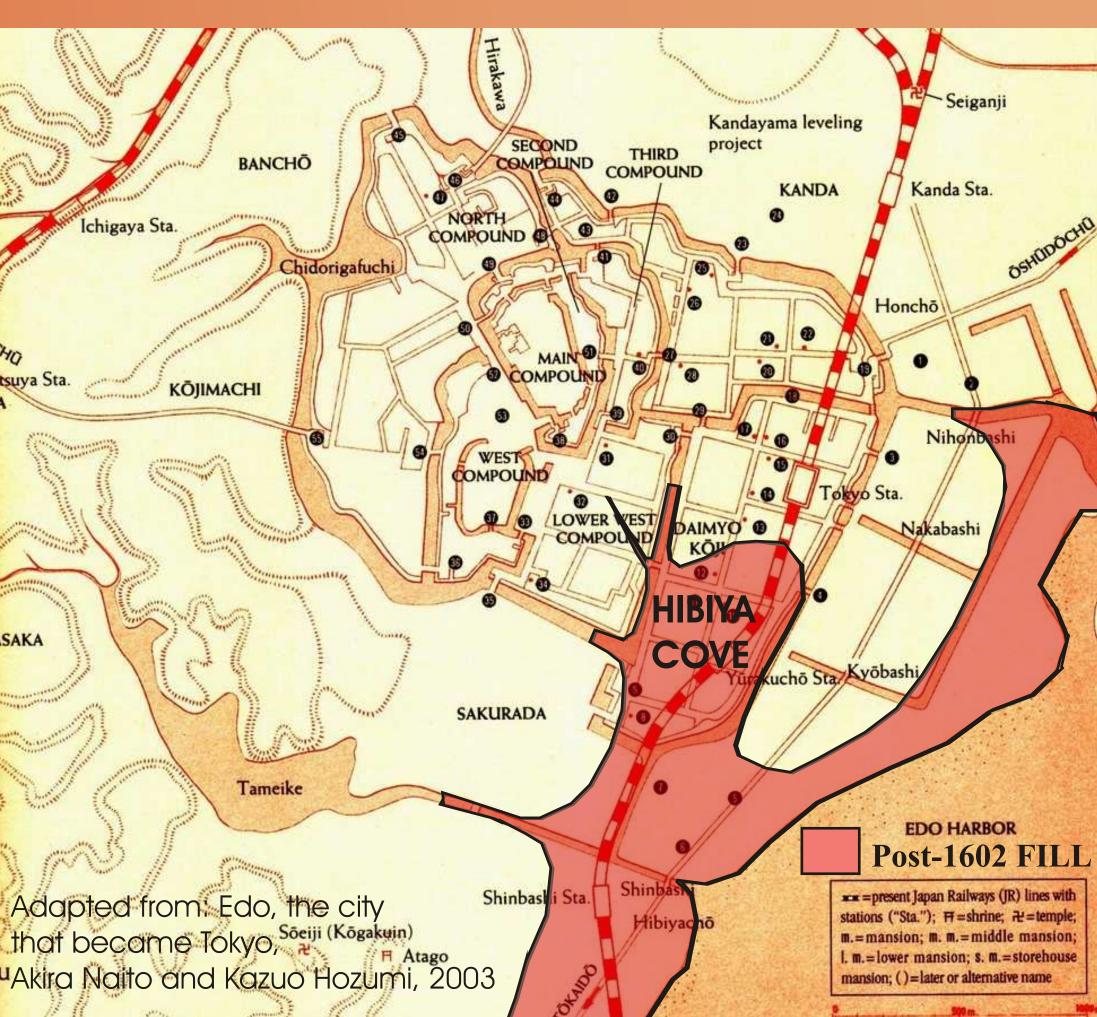
Geology textbooks and works dealing with the social or historical ramifications of earthquakes commonly suggest an ancient origin for the earthquake catfish (Bolt, 1993; Zeilinga de Boer & Sanders, 2005; Hanada Kiyoteru, 1972). However, primary sources indicate that the earthquake-catfish only began to manifest itself in Japanese culture in the seventeenth century, and was not well known until at least a century later. Throughout the early nineteenth century, images of giant catfish occasionally appeared in the popular press in connection with stories about earthquakes, and the Namazu came to full prominence following the Ansei-Edo earthquake of 1855, when the overturning moment of the earthquake coincided with social unrest, advances in printing technology and the need for discretion.

Tokyo 1855 - Government offices on unconsolidated fill

On the site of the former Hibiya Cove, Government offices and the mansions of major warrior households were heavily damaged in the earthquake of 1855. In striking contrast, the commoner neighborhood just across the moat, built on firmer ground, was

Printers took advantage of government disarray to avoid censorship. None of the catfish prints include the required censor's seal. Eventually the military government reasserted their authority and publication of the prints stopped about two months

Catfish prints from 1855 typically expand an immediate visual joke with texts that portray the earthquake as a frightening disaster, a divine retribution, and as a financial opportunity.



Evolution of the Catfish (namazu) as an earthquake symbol in Japan

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Itinerant Medicine Vendor

Instead of powdered packets of medicine, the Catfish offers workers from trades that might benefit during

The text indicates that the earthquake is a medicine that restores the flow and circulation of money collected in storehouses, restores warmth to the cold-hearted, cures poverty, reduces laziness and ameliorates the ill effects of luxurious living.



Subduing the Catfish

The Kashima deity and Thunder God pin down the dragon-tailed namazu. The little catfish are labeled with references to earlier earthquakes that damaged urban areas; in Kyoto (M 6.5, 1830), Shianano (M 7.4, 1847), Odawara (M 6.7, 1853) and Ise (1854).

Matsudaira Shungaku, a prominent official of the military government, wrote that these severe earthquakes, coupled with other natural disasters and unwelcome visits of American, Russian and British naval vessels "definitely constitute a heavenly warning."

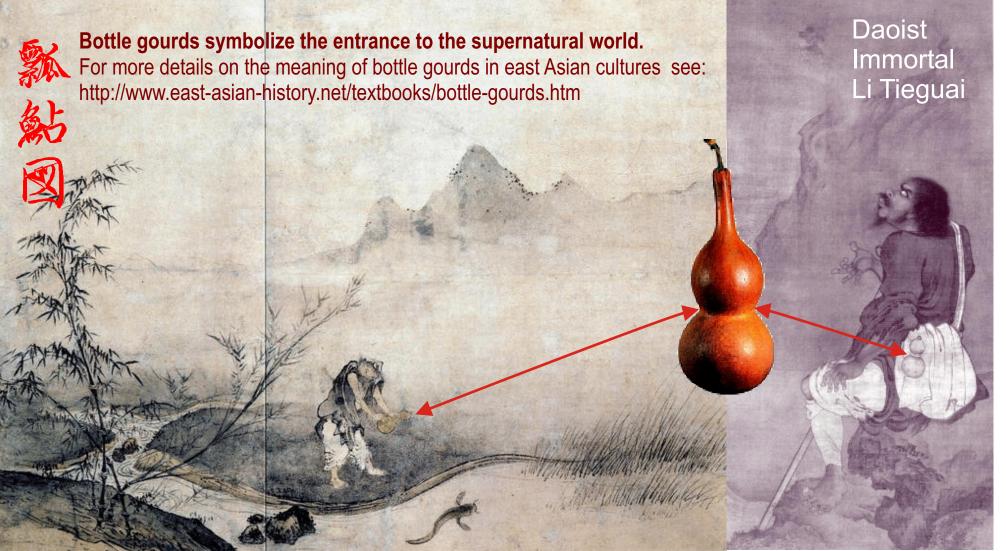
Origin and historic develpment of the Catfish as an Earthquake symbol

A Brief Account of the Catfish (Namazu) as a Cultural Symbol in Japan, 15th-20th Centuries

political messages. During the Meiji and Taishō eras important (puffed up) government officials, but



earthquakes that relies in part on Chinese notions of geomancy and in part on the idea of a balance between the five agents of vin and vang. The giant catfish is a metaphor for this more complex process In a different catfish print, a giant catfish declares his innocence before an angry crowd, stating that everyone knows that earthquakes are caused by imbalances in yin and yang forces and that a catfish could not possibly cause them. Introductory geology texts sometimes point out that "the Japanese" all believed that a giant catfish caused earthquakes, but it is not at all clear how many Japanese really believed this notion literally. For most, the catfish was a metaphor.



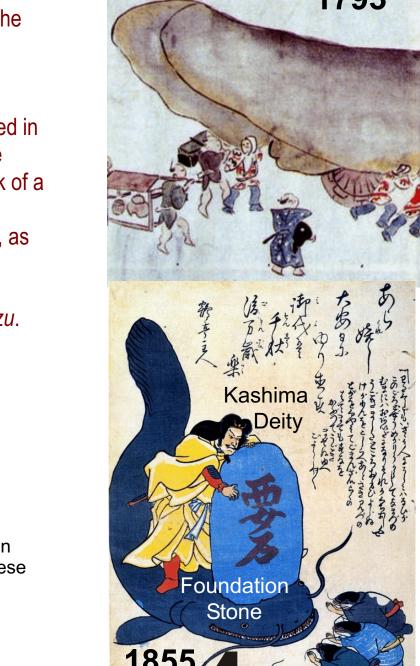


directions plus the center, and the whole print functions as a talismanic charm to ward off

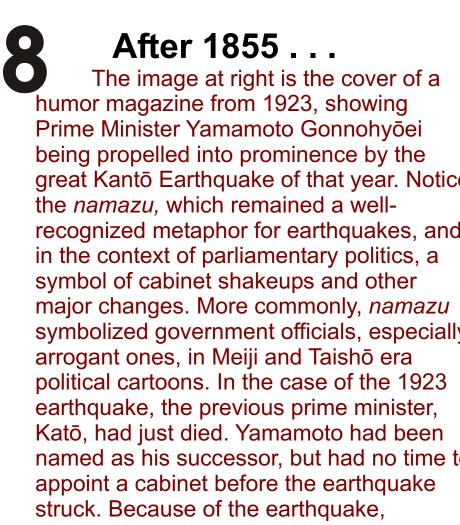




the gold layer, or floating on a monster.



traditional medicine seller, with small images stuck in his straw- tipped pole being occupations profiting form the earthquake. At right, the namazu cuts open his belly in atonement for the shaking, from which pour gold coins. But the spirits of the dead loom ominously overhead.



Yamamoto was able to appoint a cabinet namazu in their titles.



Foreign Treaties

Commodore Perry and the Namazu in a contest of strength. Referee awards points to the namazu.

Beginning in July 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry brought armed fleets to Edo (Tokyo) and pressured the military government to negotiate a trade agreement with the US. A preliminary treaty was reached in March 1854 because the military government was not strong enough to resist Perry's demands entirely. This image suggests that only divine intervention can counter international pressure.

Near the end of 1854, a Russian warship attempting to negotiate a trade agreement was damaged by a tsunami when two great tsunamigenic subduction-zone earthquakes (Ansei-Tōkai and Ansei-Nankai) occurred on subsequent days. The text here refers to that incident.



Prayers for the Dead A catfish dressed as a wandering priest uses a Buddhist rosary to pray with a carpenter, a plasterer, roofers, physician, a lumber merchant, and a rickshaw puller. These professions benefitted from the earthquake and offer prayers to assuage their guilt over profiting at the expense of the dead. The ghosts of the dead include a samurai drawing his sword against an unseen opponent. Samurai are rarely depicted in namazu-e prints, and this samurai may be Miyamoto Kakuzo, a

bannerman who lost his house in the

earthquake, went mad, and killed



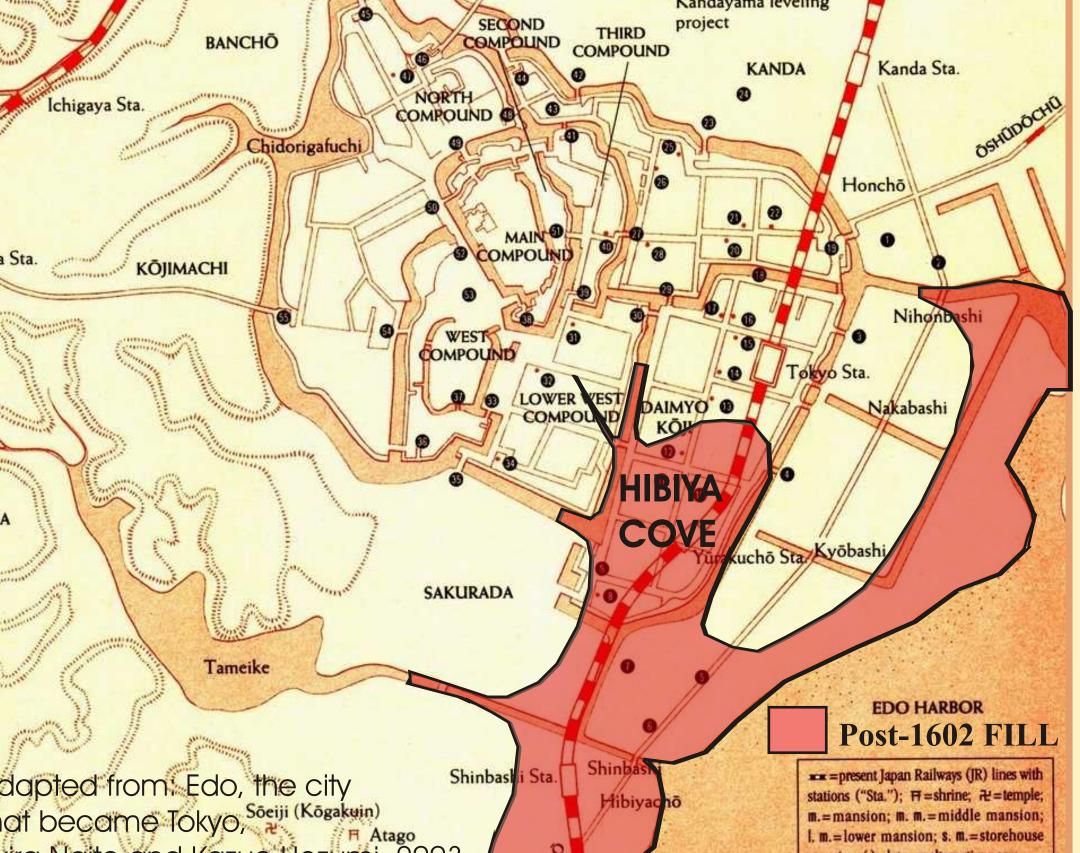
References

Noguchi Takehiko, Ansei Edo jishin: saigai to seiji kenryoku (The Ansei Edo Earthquake: calamity and political authority) (Tokyo, 1997).

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the work of anthropologist Cornelis Ouwehand (1920-1996) on namazu-e, and to seismologist Bruce Bolt (1930-2005) and seismologist/photographer Harry T. Halverson (1919-2001), for their interest in the impact of earthquakes on culture and society.





"The metal disease of millionaires"

The catfish forces wealthy men to disgorge gold ryô coins ext to a damaged storehouse with a propped-up wall. rehouses, built to resist fire and safeguard wealth, were rigid one to earthquake damage.

loarding large quantities of wealth (i.e. metal) was isidered unhealthy for society because metal is an essential pay for rebuilding and were also obliged to make charitable donations. Money went into the pockets of the laborers and culated throughout society, thus restoring economic health.