

**IN THE SOUP, HAND MADE:
THE THOUSAND SLICED ARMS
OF THE BODHISATTVA OF MERCY**

Daihi no Senrokuhon (1785)

a *kibyōshi* by Shiba Zenkō

Introduced and Translated by
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INTRODUCTION

Daihi no Senrokuhon (also known as *Daihi no senroppon*) is one of the classics of the *kibyōshi* genre. It was published in Edo in Tenmei 5 (1785), two years after the eruption of Mount Asama which spread hair-like filaments of ash over the Kantō region, alluded to in Section 3 of the text.

The author, Shiba Zenkō (1750-1793; *tsūshō* Yamamoto Tōjūrō) was born into a merchant-class family in the Shiba district of Edo and made his living as a player in the Mito domain *kyōgen* troupe of Yamamoto Tōshichi. He began writing *kibyōshi* in the An'ei period, producing approximately forty over the course of his career. Shiba is generally ranked with Koikawa Harumachi, Santō Kyōden, and Hōseidō Kisanji as one of the representative

kibyōshi authors. His works are noted for their mastery of the technique of thematic juxtaposition known as *shukō*, often mixing material from legends, Nō, and Kabuki with references to topical contemporary lore, as well as for their urbane treatment of the pleasure-quarter subculture and irreverent handling of religion, a trait most conspicuous in the text translated here. He was much admired by Shikitei Sanba, whose *Kusazōshi kojitsuke nendaiki* (*Kusazōshi*, A burlesque chronicle, 1802) includes *Daihi no senrokuhon* and five other *kibyōshi* by Shiba in its list of the 23 all-time *kusazōshi* classics.¹

The illustrations by Kitao Masanobu (i.e. Santō Kyōden) make *Daihi no senrokuhon* an exemplar of the principle that text and pictures are equally integral elements in the *kibyōshi*, with neither subordinate to the other. Among the distinctive touches that may be noted are the assortment of footwear lying outside the shop in the illustration for Section 2, each pair presumably to be associated by the reader with one of the customers gathered inside;² the absence of eyebrows on the face of Yokichi's purportedly "hairless" wife in the illustration for Section 3, and the depiction of the warrior Tamuramaru (based on an 8th/9th-century historical figure) contentedly smoking a pipe in the illustration for Section 8.

The most striking features of the text are its exuberant wordplay and its handling of *shukō*. As in many *kibyōshi*, the punning begins with a virtuoso display in the title: the *tsunogaki*, *Oteryōri oshiru no mi*, sets up a context of food-related terms (hand-made soup ingredients; the *te* in *teryōri* may also connote "amateur"³) which are then both echoed and transformed by *Daihi no senrokuhon*, with its simultaneous evocation of *daikon no senroppon* (giant radish cut into thin strips) and the thousand arms of Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Mercy (*Daihi*). Other examples of the *gesaku* predilection for yoking together similar sounds with disparate meanings include, but are not limited to, the multiple variations on *te/ju* ('hand[s]'), *sen* ('thousand'), and *kiri* ('cut'). Zenkō does not fail to exploit the dual meanings of the term *Senju Kannon*, 'Thousand-armed Bodhisattva' and 'lice', although the latter has been metamorphosed into 'millipede' in the translation in an attempt to retain something of the flavor of the original pun.

The staple *gesaku* technique of *fukiyose*, the collection of numerous seemingly unrelated elements based on the ingenious and sometimes absurd ascription of a common feature, is also very much in evidence, most notably in the assortment of "handless" characters which includes not only

those actually missing a member but a prostitute who lacks the artifices (*te*) required to maintain her customer base, an illiterate, and an aspiring shamisen performer who is not yet a proficient hand at her instrument.

Elements in the rich brew of *shukō* include the initial throwing together of the otherworldly Kannon with an all too worldly moneymaking venture and incongruous allusions to two Nō plays, *Tadanori* and *Tamura*, as well as take-offs on a number of historical episodes, legends, and contemporary popular songs. A bit of explanation will be offered here in order to avoid obstructing the forward movement of the story with footnotes:

- Taira no Tadanori (1144-1184): Brother of Taira no Kiyomori; an accomplished poet as well as a warrior, he is said to have studied poetry with the great Fujiwara no Toshinari (Shunzei). The circumstances surrounding the celebrated episode of Shunzei's inclusion of Tadanori's verse *Sazanami ya Shiga no miyako wa arenishi o mukashi nagara no yamazakura kana* (It lies ruined now—/ the old Shiga capital/ at Sazanami—/ yet the Nagara cherry trees/ bloom as in days gone by⁴) in the *Senzaishū* as the work of an "anonymous poet" (*yomibito shirazu*) after the Taira clan's fall into disgrace and Tadanori's

tragic death after losing an arm in a duel with the Minamoto warrior Okabe no Rokuyata and his retainers at the Battle of Ichinotani are both described in *The Tale of the Heike* (Chs. 7 and 9 respectively). The latter episode also provides the basis for Zeami's Nō drama *Tadanori*; the lines

"There's nothing for it now," he thought to himself, and made some random left-handed scribbles; without even bothering to face westward toward the Pure Land, he murmured "This is the end," and intoned the invocation to the Buddha of Salvation"

in the *kibyōshi* echo the following lines from the play:

...one of Rokutaya's men, circling round Lord Tadanori, who was on top, from behind struck off his right arm. Seizing Rokuyata with his left, Tadanori shoved the fellow away, knowing full well his time had come. 'Get back,' he cried, 'leave me room, let me turn to the Western Paradise!'⁵

- Ibaraki Dōji - A demon supposed to have haunted Rashōmon in Kyoto; his loss of an arm to the warrior Watanabe no Tsuna is recounted in various sources including *Konjaku monogatari*, the Nō play *Rashōmon*, and the *otogizōshi Shuten dōji*, although the application of the name "Ibaraki Dōji" to this character appears to date only from the Edo period.

- The figure of Tenbō (One-handed) Masamune is derived from legends surrounding the life of the master swordsmith Okazaki Gorō Masamune of the Kamakura period; according to one of these, recounted in the *kanazōshi Usuyuki monogatari* and the *jōruri* drama *Shin Usuyuki monogatari*, the figure in question is the swordsmith's son Dankurō, whose hand was cut off by his father.
- Kandanodai no Yokichi and his wife appear in popular song, *kibyōshi*, and *senryū*; in one version Yokichi is supposed to have remedied her lack of bodily hair by gluing on some that he had taken from a wild boar on Mount Atago.
- The warrior Tamuramaru is associated with the historical figure Sakanoue no Tamuramaro (758-811), who led imperial forces in fighting on the northern frontier and became the first commander to receive the title of Shōgun from the court. The Nō play *Tamura* recounts the legend of his expedition to the Mountains of Suzuka, where he subjugated demons with divine assistance from Kannon, establishing the precedent that Tamuramaru finds himself having to live up to in Section 7.

Closure is brought about not through plot resolution, but by adopting the tone of a theatrical-

style parting scene in the final lines of dialogue with sound effects imitating the sound of act-ending (*makugire*) wooden clappers or a *jōruri* shamisen and then capping off all the inspired nonsense with a punchline in the form of one final aural/visual pun. The reference to Lord Yakushi in the final lines is a take-off on the practice of offering tablets inscribed with multiple copies of the hiragana character *me* to the Buddha Yakushi Nyorai in the hope of obtaining divine intercession for the cure of eye ailments. In a neat intratextual maneuver, this tale of a Bodhisattva ends with an invocation of another Buddhist deity.

Notes

¹ Mizuno Minoru, "Kaisetsu," in Mizuno, ed., *Kibyōshi sharebon shū*, Nihon koten bungaku taikei vol. 59 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958), pp. 15-16.

² Nakamura Yukihiro, "Gesaku hyōgen no tokushoku - 1," in *Nakamura Yukihiro chosakushū*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Sha, 1982), p. 132.

³ Hayashiya Tatsuzaburō, *Kabuki izen* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 1954/1973), p.169.

⁴ Translation from Helen McCullough, *The Tale of the Heike* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p.247.

⁵ Translation from Royall Tyler, "Tadanori," in *Japanese Nō Dramas* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 275.