

Takashi MIURA

The Buddha in Yoshiwara

Religion and Visual Entertainment in Tokugawa Japan as Seen through *Kibyōshi*

This article examines humorous portrayals of divinities in *kibyōshi*, a genre of satirical illustrated fiction that became popular in Edo in the late eighteenth century. Comical and irreverent appropriations of religious icons including kami, buddhas, and bodhisattvas constituted a common technique employed by *kibyōshi* artists to produce parodic effects. One of the most widely read genres in the latter part of the Tokugawa period, *kibyōshi* served as an important avenue through which people interacted with or “consumed” religious images in the early modern period. Although it is problematic to presume a direct historical link between *kibyōshi* and contemporary visual media such as manga and anime, the genre of *kibyōshi* represents a significant precedent in which religious icons served as key elements in popular entertainment. The article aims to historicize the relationship between religion and visual entertainment, which is a growing area of research in the study of religion in contemporary Japan.

KEYWORDS: *kibyōshi*—religion and entertainment—parody—popular culture—manga

Takashi MIURA is Assistant Professor in the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Arizona.

IN RECENT YEARS, the relationship between religion and popular visual entertainment has become a focal point of research on contemporary Japanese religion. Religious imagery and themes are ubiquitous in entertainment media such as anime and manga, from Tezuka Osamu's *Buddha* to Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away* to Takei Hiroyuki's *Buddha Zone* (THOMAS 2012). The use of religious symbols for popular consumption, however, is not unique to contemporary Japan. This becomes readily evident by turning to the rich visual and literary traditions of Tokugawa Japan. In particular, a genre of illustrated satirical fiction called *kibyōshi* 黄表紙 (literally, "yellow covers"), which many describe as an ancestor of manga, serves as a compelling example of a pre-modern popular medium making extensive use of religious symbols for the purpose of entertainment. More precisely, the genre of *kibyōshi* is notable for its comical and humorous depictions of religious icons. A number of divinities serve as protagonists and play comedic roles in the satirical world of *kibyōshi*, sometimes at the expense of their sacrosanct status. For example, divinities in *kibyōshi* frequent the pleasure quarters of Edo and fall in love with courtesans (FIGURE 1). They also suffer from financial difficulties due to a stagnant economy or personal debt. Venerable deities are rendered susceptible to mundane human emotions and limitations. This unusual juxtaposition is one of the hallmarks of the genre of *kibyōshi*.

As Thomas argues, "parodic or irreverent portrayals" of religious icons is also a prevalent theme in today's manga and anime. A recent example of this is *Saint Young Men* by Nakamura Hikaru, in which the Buddha and Jesus live as roommates in contemporary Tachikawa and enjoy their vacation in modern-day urban living (THOMAS 2012, 8, 14–15). As will be discussed more below, it is problematic to presume a direct historical link between manga and *kibyōshi*, yet humorous appropriations of religious icons represent a technique that can be traced back at least to the late eighteenth century, when *kibyōshi* was one of the most widely read genres in the city of Edo.

This article will historicize the relationship between religion and popular visual culture through an analysis of *kibyōshi* and the representations of various divinities therein. *Kibyōshi* artists produced comedic effects by placing kami, buddhas, and bodhisattvas in profane and iconoclastic situations. Despite its

* I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer of this manuscript for their insightful comments and extremely helpful references.



FIGURE 1. Shakamuni, Yakushi, and Jizō mingling with courtesans (from *A Revealing of the Refined Buddhas in the Contemporary World*, National Diet Library).

irreverent or playful stance on religion, *kibyōshi* served as an important avenue through which a significant number of individuals interacted with religious symbols in the late eighteenth century. This is an aspect of Japanese religion that is impossible to grasp through an analysis of documents produced by religious professionals alone.

First offering an outline of the genre of *kibyōshi* and its relationship to contemporary visual media, this article will then focus on a select number of deities that figure prominently in the genre of *kibyōshi*. Divinities that appear in *kibyōshi* were those that were familiar to residents of Edo, including figures such as the Seven Lucky Gods (*shichifukujin* 七福神), Kannon, and Jizō. For the sake of convenience, the article will discuss one deity or a group of deities at a time. It should nonetheless be pointed out that explicit denominational lines are mostly disregarded in *kibyōshi*. *Kibyōshi* artists often introduced multiple deities in a single title and gave them a variety of comical roles to play. The malleability of religious icons is an enduring feature of visual entertainment in Japan.¹

1. THOMAS (2012, 15) uses the adjective “iconoplastic” to describe the malleability of religious icons.

What is Kibyōshi?

The designation *kibyōshi* refers to satirical illustrated fictions that enjoyed a wide readership during the roughly thirty-year period between 1775 and 1806, primarily in Edo. Its name, “yellow covers,” derives from the fact that many *kibyōshi* had yellow or yellow-green covers. Scholars generally classify *kibyōshi* as a subgenre within the wider rubric of illustrated storybooks called *kusazōshi* 草双紙 (literally, “grass books”). The *kusazōshi* genre as a whole dates back to the late seventeenth century and features a variety of contents such as children’s stories, romance, and war tales. The history of *kibyōshi* as its subgenre started in 1775 with the publication of a work titled *Kinkin sensei eiga no yume* 金々先生栄花夢 (Mr. Posh and his dream of splendor) by Koikawa Harumachi 恋川春町. This work revolves around a young country bumpkin who travels to Edo hoping to make a fortune in the city. On his way, he takes a nap at a dumpling restaurant in Meguro while waiting for his order of millet dumplings and sees a dream of becoming a big shot in Edo’s pleasure quarters. In this dream, the young man tries to attract courtesans by showcasing his wealth, but instead becomes an object of derision for his unrefined manners. He eventually becomes penniless after squandering all his wealth. The young man wakes up and finds his millet dumplings ready. Realizing that material splendor amounts to nothing but a transient dream, he decides to return to the countryside. This work, modeled after a classic Chinese story in which a young man dreams of material glory while taking a nap before a meal, marked a radical departure from previous *kusazōshi* titles. By depicting the life of the sophisticate (*tsūjin* 通人) in the pleasure quarters through the comic failure of a country bumpkin, Harumachi succeeded in establishing an independent satirical subgenre.²

Unlike earlier *kusazōshi*, which had appealed primarily to juvenile readers, *kibyōshi* appealed to more mature readers of Edo, mostly townspeople and low-class samurai (KOIKE et al. 1980, 3). Early *kibyōshi* mostly dealt with themes related to Edo’s pleasure quarters, but later works satirized and parodied anything from the Chinese classics to notable current events to political affairs. Although popularized as an adult satire, *kibyōshi* largely maintained the format of earlier *kusazōshi*, with each page covered with illustrations and open spaces filled with texts, mostly in calligraphic kana. Considered “middle-size books,” *kibyōshi* typically comprised of papers approximately seven inches long and five inches wide and had around thirty pages per title on average. Scholars estimate that during the period between 1775 and 1806, approximately 1,800 titles were published in Edo. Popular titles sold several thousand copies. Some works by Santō Kyōden 山東京伝, one of the most prominent *kibyōshi* authors, possibly

2. As with many *kibyōshi*, this title has been digitized and is available online. See KOIKAWA (1775). Links to digital versions are provided whenever possible.

sold over ten thousand copies, making *kibyōshi* one of the most widely read genres in all of Tokugawa literature (TANAHASHI 2012, 20–21). Although it is extremely difficult to ascertain how much it would have cost for an Edo resident to purchase *kibyōshi*, Tanahashi puts the estimate at around thirty *mon* for a typical title with thirty pages, roughly comparable to buying a weekly manga magazine in Japan today.³ The era of *kibyōshi* came to a close in the early 1800s partly due to the influence of the Kansei Reforms (*Kansei no kaikaku* 寛政の改革), which placed tighter restrictions on satirical works, and also with the popularity of a new genre of illustrated fiction called *gōkan* 合巻 (literally, “bounded volumes”), which mostly featured longer vendetta and adventure tales.⁴

The genre of *kibyōshi* has received much attention in recent years, particularly as a progenitor of manga. A number of similarities have been highlighted to suggest a connection between the two media. Both *kibyōshi* and manga utilize a combination of text and images to present a narrative. *Kibyōshi* and manga also share similar production processes in which text and images are first prepared by artists and then taken to publishers for printing and distribution. In producing *kibyōshi*, main artists drew the protagonists and assistants worked on the background, much like manga artists and their assistants today (TANAHASHI 2000, 24). Both *kibyōshi* and manga are mass-produced media, the former reproduced through woodblock printing and the latter through electronic printing. Furthermore, the two media share a similar target audience, consumers in a money-market economy with disposable income for cheap entertainment. Highlighting these similarities, some go so far as to claim that a kind of “manga culture” had existed since the Tokugawa period and that this culture served as the foundation of modern manga.⁵

This viewpoint linking *kibyōshi* and manga, although prevalent, has received criticism. As Kern argues, it is inaccurate to say that *kibyōshi* had a direct influence on the development of modern manga. *Kibyōshi* as a genre came to an end in the early nineteenth century, and there is no evidence to suggest that producers of modern manga in the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries looked to *kibyōshi* as a model. In fact, modern manga as a genre is more directly connected to Western comic books than to the native visual tradition. This problematizes the notion that some sort of monolithic and trans-historical “manga culture” had existed unchanged since the Edo period. Furthermore,

3. For more on the estimation of the cost of buying a *kibyōshi*, see TANAHASHI (2012, 22–28).

4. On the development of the genre of *kibyōshi*, also see SHIRANE (2002, 672–73). Some have criticized the explicit periodization of 1775–1806, especially the notion that *kibyōshi* vanished suddenly in 1806. See (KERN 2006, 239–41).

5. “Manga culture” is a phrase used by Yumoto Kōichi, a popular ethnologist and author. As Kern argues, a number of cultural commentators have advocated similar viewpoints (KERN 2006, 129–32).

although *kibyōshi* and manga on the surface seem to share a number of visual features, these similarities do not necessarily signify historical continuity. *Kibyōshi* and modern manga are similar media, but two separate genres. Supporters of modern manga tend to link manga to a variety of visual traditions throughout Japanese history in an attempt to legitimize manga as a visual medium worthy of respect. However, *kibyōshi* deserves attention as an independent genre, not merely as a precursor of manga (KERN 2006, 129–32, 144–46).

Taking this criticism seriously, the present study focuses on the appropriations of religious icons as an important strategy in the genre of *kibyōshi* without presuming a direct link to modern manga. At the same time, recognizing *kibyōshi* and manga as two independent genres does not necessarily preclude the possibility of meaningful comparison between the two. A comparative lens can be helpful for examining prominent patterns in the use of religious symbols in popular visual culture.

Comical Gods in Kibyōshi

Humorous depictions of divinities are ubiquitous in *kibyōshi*. With 1,800 separate titles existing in the genre, only a select number of examples can be analyzed here, and priority will be given to works featuring divinities that were frequently chosen by *kibyōshi* artists as ingredients through which to produce comical effects.⁶ A number of recurring themes emerge from this analysis, such as the use of the context of the pleasure quarters, depictions of deities suffering from financial woes, and the narrative structure in which divinities intervene in human affairs either by influencing the actions of humans or by granting them worldly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益). Furthermore, treatment of divinities in *kibyōshi* reflects the genre's decidedly parodic nature. *Kibyōshi* authors expected readers to have some level of knowledge about the featured deities, including their basic characteristics as well as mythologies or miracles particularly associated with them. This shared space of religious knowledge served as the foundation for irreverent and at times iconoclastic portrayals of divinities in *kibyōshi*.

THE SEVEN LUCKY GODS

The practice of designating a group of seven deities as Seven Lucky Gods dates back to the Muromachi period. Although the members of the Seven Lucky Gods were not fixed at first, they typically included Daikoku, Ebisu, Bishamonten, Benzaiten, Fukurokuju, Jurōjin, and Hotei. The Seven Lucky Gods became pop-

6. The most extensive and reliable catalogue of extant *kibyōshi* is *Kibyōshi sōran* 黄表紙総覧 (abbreviated as ks), compiled by Tanahashi. It lists all known *kibyōshi* titles with short summaries and bibliographic information.

ular icons in the city of Edo during the Tokugawa period. People made special pilgrimages to temples and shrines dedicated to each of the Seven Lucky Gods (*shichifuku sankei* 七福参詣) for good luck (KIDA 1998). It is not very surprising then that the Seven Lucky Gods appear very frequently in *kibyōshi*, either individually or collectively.

True to their name, the Seven Lucky Gods typically play the role of bringing good fortune and granting a variety of this-worldly wishes, often in absurdly exaggerated ways. For example, in *Daifuku chōjagura* 大福長者蔵 (Great fortune, a storage of the rich) by Juge Sekijō 樹下石上, the lucky gods turn the human world into a utopia by making silver fall from the sky in place of snow, allowing gold to grow on potted plants, and letting saké flow freely in rivers (JUGE 1796; KS 2: 423). The lucky gods fill the world with so much wealth that people going out to gather clamshells on mudflats (*shiohigari* 潮干狩り) end up finding gold coins instead. Author Sekijō frequently employs this hyperbolic utopian narrative featuring money-yielding trees and various goods descending from the sky due to the benevolence of the Seven Lucky Gods. Other artists also make use of similar narrative plots, for example, by introducing characters that become wealthy after undertaking a pilgrimage to one or more of the Seven Lucky Gods.

Of the Seven Lucky Gods, Daikoku often makes a solo appearance as a bringer of material wealth, at times portrayed as the diametrical opposite of poverty kami (*binbōgami* びんぼう神). In *Daikokubashira kogane no ishizue* 大黒楹黄金柱礎 (A central pillar, golden foundations) by Kyokutei Bakin 曲亭馬琴, a merchant by the name of Manemon passes on his successful business to his son, Nuketarō (KYOKUTEI 1797; KS 2: 558–59). However, a poverty kami, represented as a shabby old man, lures Nuketarō into evil and persuades him to use all his money at the pleasure quarters. In response to Manemon's daily prayers, Daikoku tries to protect Nuketarō from the poverty kami's temptations. Daikoku eventually succeeds in driving away the poverty kami with the help of anthropomorphized mice, an animal traditionally associated with Daikoku, and Nuketarō's business prospers as a result. This work positions commercial success as a boon granted by Daikoku while comically depicting the vulnerability of humans to the power of a poverty kami.⁷ The rivalry between Daikoku and poverty kami is a motif that appears in several different titles. A humorous touch is added to this relationship in a work titled *Musō no Daikokugin* 夢想大黒銀 (Dreamy silver of Daikoku) by Iba Kashō 伊庭可笑 (IBA 1781; KS 1: 303–304). In this piece, Daikoku runs short of money and is forced to incur debt from a pov-

7. It should be noted that a poverty kami makes satirical appearances in some Edo-period fictions that predate the *kusazōshi* genre. One notable example can be found in the fourth volume of *Nippon eitaigura* 日本永代蔵 (The eternal storehouse of Japan) by Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴. In one of the stories contained therein, a poor merchant couple prays to a poverty kami, who, in response, appears in their dream and helps their business prosper (IHARA 1688, 115–20).

erty kami. Although temporarily impoverished, Daikoku soon regains his status as a kami of wealth through the help of the other six lucky gods.

As is evident in *Mr. Posh and His Dream of Splendor*, the pleasure quarters of Edo represent a typical setting through which laughter is produced in *kibyōshi*. This holds true for works involving the Seven Lucky Gods. In *Daikokumai* 大黒舞 (Dances of Daikoku) by Kinka 金花, the lucky gods go on a pleasure outing to Yoshiwara on a ship, leaving behind Benzaiten, the sole female deity in the group (KINKA 1778; KS 1: 129). At Yoshiwara, a merchant by the name of Shōjirō had made a name for himself through his extravagant patronage of a courtesan named Kinzan. Jealous of Shōjirō's high profile, two thugs, one named Mukade (literally, "centipede") and the other Amanojaku ("evil spirit"), beat up Shōjirō. One of the Seven Lucky Gods, Fukurokuju, arrives at the scene and rescues Shōjirō. Furthermore, Bishamonten hears of this incident and drives out the thugs, showcasing his might as a warrior deity. Although there is not much in terms of plot development, the comical effect of having the Seven Lucky Gods participate in the sensual affairs of Yoshiwara is particularly strong in this work.

Another notable technique employed by *kibyōshi* artists to humorously portray the Seven Lucky Gods is to invest them with human-like qualities. The Seven Lucky Gods in *kibyōshi* have emotions, and they make mistakes. *Warai masu yakubarai no kōshaku* 笑増厄災除講釈 (A lecture on increasing laughter and removing disasters) by Shicchin Manpō 七珍万宝 features the Seven Lucky Gods enjoying drinks together at an end-of-the-year party hosted by a wealthy merchant as an expression of gratitude for their daily protection over his business (SHICCHIN 1791a; KS 2: 208–209). The lucky gods get completely drunk at the party and eventually fall asleep. This temporary suspension of the power of the lucky gods gives ogres (*oni*) an opportunity to reign free, but thanks to Shōki 鍾馗, a deity traditionally associated with prevention of calamities and who had accompanied the lucky gods at the party but remained sober, the ogres are driven away. Furthermore, in several different titles, certain members of the Seven Lucky Gods, usually Daikoku, Ebisu, or Bishamonten, fall in love with Benzaiten and compete with one another to seek her attention. In Koikawa Harumachi's *Kinzanji Daikoku denki* 金山寺大黒伝記 (The legend of Daikoku on Kinzan temple), Benzaiten and Ebisu are in love, but Daikoku becomes jealous and tries to kidnap Benzaiten by using one of his mouse servants (KOIKAWA 1783a; KS 1: 424). *Yakubarai nishi no unabara* 厄払西海原 (Dispelling misfortunes, the western sea) by Jippensha Ikku 十返舎一九 has a similar plot, but features Taira no Kiyomori, who tries to seduce Benzaiten (JIPPENSHA 1801; KS 3: 40). Angered by this, the Seven Lucky Gods go to war against Kiyomori, eventually succeeding to drive his army away to the western sea.

These portrayals of the Seven Lucky Gods as a whole can be understood as a satire on the popularity of the Seven Lucky Gods in Edo, especially as protec-

tors of the merchant class. The satirical message is particularly strong in works that depict merchants and townspeople elating over absurd wishes granted by the lucky gods. The satires are complemented by the comedic representations of the Seven Lucky Gods themselves. The lucky gods frequent the pleasure quarters, get drunk, and are at times overrun by human-like emotions such as love and jealousy. The significant presence of the Seven Lucky Gods in the genre of *kibyōshi* not only reflects the familiarity of these religious icons to Edo residents, but also suggests that these familiar deities were comically potent and readily accessible for parodic appropriations.

THE HEAVENLY EMPEROR

“Heavenly Emperor” is a literal translation of *Tentei* 天帝, one of several different names by which this deity is known. Other names include *Tendō* and *Tentō* 天道, both literally meaning the “Way of Heaven.” The Heavenly Emperor is traditionally understood to be a kind of creator deity who rules over as well as controls all things under heaven. During the Edo period, the Heavenly Emperor was frequently represented through the symbolism of the sun and came to be regarded as an embodiment of moral principles.⁸ The Heavenly Emperor played a central role in *Shingaku* 心学 (literally, “the learning of the mind”), a movement that emphasized self-cultivation for the purpose of perfecting ethical ideals that had gained popularity in Edo by the late eighteenth century (TANAHASHI 2012, 61–62). Many *kibyōshi* titles utilize *Shingaku* as an ingredient for satire and feature the Heavenly Emperor as a character in the plot.

This is the case for one of the most successful works in the *kibyōshi* genre, *Shingaku hayasomogusa* 心学早染艸 (A quick guide to the learning of the mind) by Santō Kyōden (SANTŌ 1790; KS 2: 114–28). This piece starts with a brief description of the Heavenly Emperor as a “noble kami” (*tōtoki kami* たうとき神) who resides in heaven. The Heavenly Emperor is portrayed as a young man with long hair dressed in a priestly robe. He is standing on a cloud and cheerfully blowing what seem to be soap bubbles (*shabon* シャボン). Each of these bubbles is in fact a human soul. The human soul is perfectly pure and round at birth but can get crooked if influenced by delusive thoughts. Pure souls are called “good souls” (*yoki tamashii* よきたましい) and corrupted souls are called “evil souls” (*warudamashii* わるたましい). These souls are depicted as anthropomorphized

8. A detailed analysis of the complex origin of the Heavenly Emperor is beyond the scope of this article. The word *tentei* has historical associations with Chinese emperors as well as the Vedic God Indra (*Taishakuten* 帝釈天). The expression *tendō* was often used in connection to the Judeo-Christian Creator God after the arrival of Jesuits in Japan. These multilayered associations remain to be examined fully. This article focuses on the Heavenly Emperor as it is presented in key *kibyōshi* titles.



FIGURE 2. The Heavenly Emperor preventing an evil soul from attaching itself to Rihei's son and attaching a good soul instead (National Diet Library).

figures, each having a human body and a head bearing the character of either “good” 善 or “evil” 悪. The narrative then transitions to a scene in which a son is born to a virtuous merchant by the name of Rihei. Having witnessed this birth, one of the evil souls tries to attach itself to Rihei's son, but the Heavenly Emperor prevents this and attaches a good soul instead (FIGURE 2). This is explained as a blessing of the Heavenly Emperor made possible by Rihei's virtuous character.

Rihei's son, Ritarō, grows up to be an upright individual, thanks to him being endowed with a good soul. Ritarō is diligent, frugal, and filial, all qualities that merchants would desire in their successors. However, a group of evil souls get together and plot to corrupt Ritarō by taking over his body. One day, Ritarō falls asleep while keeping the books. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the evil souls assault the good soul inside Ritarō and render it immobile by tying it up with a rope. The evil souls, now in control of Ritarō's body, entice him to go to Yoshiwara's pleasure quarters. Although hesitant at first, Ritarō gives in to the temptation, heads to Yoshiwara, and becomes enamored by the sensual scene there. He exclaims, “What a shame that I wasn't aware of such an entertaining place until now.” Ritarō spends the night with a courtesan.

In the meantime, the good soul manages to free itself of the entrapment and succeeds in regaining control over Ritarō's body. Ritarō goes back to his senses and resumes his daily duties. However, he soon receives a love letter from the

courtesan with whom he had slept, and his heart wavers. The good soul tries to prevent Ritarō from returning to Yoshiwara, but one of the evil souls slays the good soul with a sword. Ritarō is once again controlled by the evil souls and becomes a complete debaucher who stays at Yoshiwara for days on end, spending a fortune on courtesans, saké, and gambling. He is soon disowned by his parents. Ritarō eventually becomes penniless and is reduced to feeding himself as a petty thief. The evil souls are euphoric, laughing hysterically at Ritarō's fate.

Fortunately, Ritarō encounters a Shingaku teacher who takes him in and teaches him the “noble way of Confucius, Buddha, and kami” (*ju butsu shin no tōtoki michi* じゆふつしんのたうとき道). This teacher is aptly named “Mr. Principle” (*dōri sensei* 道理先生), most likely a parody of Nakazawa Dōni 中沢道二, a Shingaku preacher renowned in Edo at the time of the publication of this work for his easy-to-understand guidance on Shingaku principles. With the help of Mr. Principle, Ritarō repents his wrongdoings, and this allows good souls—the two sons of the original soul that was slain—to drive out the evil souls. The story concludes with Ritarō returning to his parents. Their business prospers once again thanks to Ritarō's diligence and filiality. The good souls also live happily ever after in Ritarō's body.

This work may strike some as a rather straightforward regurgitation of ideals such as diligence, filiality, and frugality, all promoted by the Shingaku movement, but author Kyōden adds a comical twist through the playful interactions between the good and evil souls and depictions of a human caught helplessly in between. The reader cannot help but project oneself onto the figure of Ritarō, who wavers constantly between conflicting emotions. The Heavenly Emperor is introduced as a kami that resides in heaven as well as the creator of human souls. The Heavenly Emperor intervenes in human affairs to some extent, as is evident from the fact that he initially prevents an evil soul from entering Ritarō's body, but he more or less stays out of the rivalry between good and bad souls in the human world. It is the responsibility of Shingaku teachers, such as Mr. Principle, to convey the teachings of the gods and prevent people from giving into the ways of evil souls. The synthetic characteristic of Shingaku is clearly evident in this work, as its teachings are associated not with one particular religious tradition but to kami, Buddha, and Confucius (SAWADA 1993, 5).

In some *kibyōshi*, the Heavenly Emperor has more direct control over events in the human world. For example, in *Tentō daifukuchō* 天道大福帳 (The Heavenly Way, an account book of great fortune) by Hōseidō Kisanji 朋誠堂喜三二, the Heavenly Emperor presides over the developments of the famous vendetta of the forty-seven *rōnin* (HŌSEIDŌ 1786; KS 1: 633). In this piece, the Heavenly Emperor has a human body but his head is the sun, constantly emitting rays of light. He coordinates with his heavenly subordinates to arrange the course of events so as to ensure a smooth progression of the vendetta plot. The penulti-

mate scene features the forty-seven *rōnin* raiding the mansion of their enemy and successfully avenging their fallen master. One of the heavenly subordinates remarks sarcastically, “They say that the Heavenly Emperor doesn’t kill people, but he surely killed many this time [during the raid].” This comment is referring to a popular saying expressing the idea that the compassion of the Heavenly Emperor does not allow anyone to be abandoned to die (*Tendō hito o korosazu* 天道人を殺さず). This satirical remark aside, the whole sequence of events is ultimately presented as a manifestation of the will of the Heavenly Emperor.

Furthermore, *Onatsuraezome chōju gomōn* 御詠染長寿小紋 (A fabric of longevity made to order) by Santō Kyoden humorously makes use of the identity of the Heavenly Emperor as the source of all life (SANTŌ 1802; KS 3: 75–77). The Heavenly Emperor is depicted as a merchant running a shop that sells and distributes “life” (*inochi* 命). The Heavenly Emperor and his five assistants, each representing one of the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water, sell life in the form of a stick, at the top of which the Chinese character “life” is affixed. Some sticks are long and thick while others are short and frail, reflecting the length and robustness of life. All living things, including humans and animals, are given sticks of appropriate length according to their karma. Only the gods are allowed to purchase life at will, and accordingly, the Heavenly Emperor’s shop is always bustling with various kami and Buddhist divinities looking to purchase life. Humans, on the other hand, must be content with whatever length of life is given to them. Each human carries a stick of life, some making good use of the time that is allotted to them, while others waste their lives away through saké, irresponsible sexual relations, and other unhealthy undertakings.

Although the Heavenly Emperor exhibits slightly varying characteristics in different titles, he is generally portrayed as a kami that presides over all human affairs. The religious principles that he embodies are synthetic, running the gamut from filial piety to karmic retributions. This makes sense given his association with the teachings of the Shingaku movement. *Kibyōshi* artists often portrayed the Heavenly Emperor in a playful light, for example by having him blow the “bubbles” of human souls and by depicting him as a merchant of life. The comical representations of the Heavenly Emperor, combined with illustrations of humans caught between positive and negative ethical decisions, served as a way for *kibyōshi* artists to render the popularity of Shingaku in the city of Edo as an object of satire.

KAMI OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGIES

Kami such as Amaterasu, Susanoō, Izanagi, and Izanami play significant roles in the classical mythologies of the *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 and are regarded as quintessential examples of kami today. However, these kami do not

appear as frequently in *kibyōshi* when compared to the Seven Lucky Gods and the Heavenly Emperor. The relatively few works in which they do make an appearance often refer to stories in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* and add parodic interpretations to them. *Tsūgen shindai no maki* 通言神代巻 (Reliving the age of the gods today) by Koikawa Harumachi features the Izanagi and Izanami pair along with their daughter, Amaterasu, and three sons, Tsukiyomi, Ebisu, and Susanoō, all residing in heaven.⁹ Izanagi and Izanami are contemplating creating new lands (*shinchi* しん地) under heaven. The world under heaven is referred to as the “Central Country of the Plentiful Reed Plain” (*Toyoashihara no nakatsu kuni* 豊あしはらの中つ国), a traditional name for the Japanese archipelago. Izanagi and Izanami send Ebisu to oversee the construction of the new lands while Tsukiyomi, the eldest son prone to sickness, remains in his heavenly residence accompanied by Amaterasu. The new lands are eventually completed, and various entertainment venues such as teashops, pubs, and meeting halls are built. Readers at this point realize that the “new lands” in fact refer to the Nakasu 中洲 entertainment district, a reclaimed land in the Nihonbashi area (notice the pun between “Nakasu” and “Nakatsu”).

In the meantime, Susanoō also descends to earth and falls in love with Princess Inada, who owes money to Yamata no Orochi, the eight-headed serpent monster. Susanoō promises Yamata no Orochi that he will pay the money on behalf of Princess Inada and opens a teashop in the new lands with the princess. However, Susanoō defies his promise to pay up princess’s debt. Upset, Yamata no Orochi confronts Susanoō, but gets drunk after being fed saké. Susanoō slays the eight-headed monster in its inebriated state, and in order to take responsibility for his action, disappears. Ebisu, on the other hand, splurges in the various entertainment venues of the new lands and amasses debt from his friend Daikoku. Ebisu is unable to pay back the debt, and a group of mice, emissaries from Daikoku, confront Izanagi to collect the debt his son had incurred. Infuriated by his son’s irresponsible actions, Izanagi disowns Ebisu.

With two of their three sons caught in financial scandals and their eldest son sick, Izanagi and Izanami decide to let Amaterasu become the ruler of the new lands. Amaterasu, however, is unhappy with this arrangement, as she feels unfit to reign over the new lands as a woman. Amaterasu hides herself behind a cedar sliding door (*sugido* 杉戸), refusing to come out. In order to lure Amaterasu out of her hiding place, various kami get together and have a feast in front of the sliding door. As Amaterasu opens the door slightly to see what is going on, the powerful Tajikarao pulls her out of her seclusion, and Amaterasu is officially installed as the ruler of the new lands. At the end of the narrative, it is revealed that

9. KOIKAWA (1783b; KS 1: 426). Ebisu is traditionally associated with the “leech child,” whom Izanagi and Izanami abandon.

Ebisu and Susano'o's debacles were all orchestrated in order to allow Amaterasu to become the supreme ruler.

Author Harumachi assumes that readers are familiar with the original mythologies including Izanagi and Izanami's creation of the Japanese islands, Susano'o's defeat of Yamata no Orochi, and Amaterasu's seclusion in a cave. Harumachi recasts these stories in the context of contemporary Edo by referencing the Nakasu entertainment district and by adding slight but effective modifications that portray the deities in a mundane and humorous light. Examples of this include Susano'o's monetary struggles with Yamata no Orochi, and Amaterasu's cave being replaced with a cedar sliding door, which was a style of sliding door commonly used in the pleasure quarters. As with many other *kibyōshi*, this title utilizes financial problems and sensual entertainment as two main avenues through which to produce parodic effects.

A similar example can also be found in *Daisensekai kakine no soto* 大千世界牆の外 (An unexpected view of the great thousand-fold world) by Tōrai Sanna 唐来参和 (TōRAI 1784; KS 1: 567–69). This work starts with a depiction of the primeval world before the arrival of Izanagi and Izanami. The world is in a chaotic state, heaven and earth yet to be separated. The “earthquake catfish” is running wild and causing destruction, a reference to a contemporaneous view that earthquakes are caused by the movement of a giant subterranean catfish. According to tradition, the catfish is usually suppressed by a kami enshrined at Kashima Shrine, but since this kami has not been born yet, the catfish is unrestrained, occasionally turning the world upside down by causing massive earthquakes. Nonetheless, the world itself is in such a chaotic state that this actually does not make any difference.

Eventually a group of primordial kami called “strange kami” (*henjin* 変神) gets together to put things into order. They begin by consolidating heaven and earth, followed by the creation of the sun, moon, and various stars. Then they construct the Heavenly Bridge (*Ame no ukihashi* 天のうきはし), a bridge upon which Izanagi and Izanami will later stand. The strange kami also build beneath the sea an island named Onokoro をのころ, the first island that is to emerge after Izanagi and Izanami thrust a spear into formless waters from the Heavenly Bridge. The strange kami refer to Onokoro Island as a kind of *seridashi* せり出し, or a rising platform used in kabuki plays that can be lifted up to the stage at an appropriate time. The plan is to have Onokoro Island emerge on the surface when Izanagi and Izanami thrust their spear so that it will seem as if they created the island. As exemplified by this, the strange kami are portrayed as backstage workers of a theater performance. They are making all the necessary preparations for a grand play of the gods. As a finishing touch to their work, the strange kami create Kunitokotachi, one of the first kami to be created in both the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. The strange kami ultimately float away to a distant place on

a cloud. The newly-created Kunitokotachi laments the departure of the strange kami, upset that he is being left hind.

The fact that there are relatively fewer works featuring kami from the classical mythologies may be an indication that these divinities were not directly relevant to the lives of many Edo readers and therefore less comically potent. An important point to note here is that unlike the Seven Lucky Gods and the Heavenly Emperor, kami such as Amaterasu and Susano'o for the most part do not involve themselves in human affairs by influencing their moral decisions or by granting them worldly benefits. These kami mostly remain in the mythological world of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, although at times they are recast in a contemporary setting. It is possible that these kami were perceived as somewhat distant and therefore ineffective as characters with which to satirize human activities or current events. However, it remains true that the parodic effects of *kibyōshi* featuring these kami depend almost entirely upon readers' prior knowledge about the deities and mythologies surrounding them. The majority of Edo readers most likely had a basic familiarity with these kami and were able to appreciate the humorous renditions of the mythologies of the age of the gods.

BUDDHAS

Buddhist divinities, including buddhas, bodhisattvas, and protective deities, also occupy a significant presence in the *kibyōshi* genre, perhaps more so than the kami introduced above. A number of buddhas appear as protagonists in *kibyōshi*, but the most common ones include Shakamuni, the Big Buddha of Nara, Amida, and Yakushi. Some *kibyōshi* are highly irreverent in their portrayals of the enlightened ones, some outright iconoclastic. *Daibutsu hidari nejiri* 大仏左捻 (The Big Buddha's excrement) by Hakusanjin Kakō 白山人可候 is a good example, as evident from the title (HAKUSANJIN 1786; KS 2: 370–74). This work starts by alluding to the success of a revealing (*kaichō* 開帳) of Saga Shakamuni 嵯峨釈迦牟尼 in Edo, which had taken place in the year previous to the publication of this title (KS 2: 371). The statue of Saga Shakamuni at Seiryōji in Kyoto, needless to say, is one of the most revered religious images in Japanese history. Having heard of the profit made through the *kaichō* event and perhaps also jealous of the attention that Saga Shakamuni had received in Edo, the Big Buddha of Nara, another celebrity icon in Japanese Buddhism, decides to travel to Edo himself.¹⁰ The Big Buddha, depicted as a giant smoking a pipe, walks across Honshu from Nara to Edo. Upon arriving in Suruga (present-day Shizuoka), the Big Buddha decides to climb Mount Fuji, as he had always wanted to see how tall he was in comparison to the tallest mountain in Japan. He climbs to the summit, his

10. For an analysis of economic motives surrounding *kaichō* events, see HUR (2009).



FIGURE 3. The Big Buddha defecating on the Milky Way (National Diet Library).

head reaching into heaven. Heavenly deities are at first startled by the Big Buddha's sudden appearance but soon invite him to the Heavenly Emperor's palace. The Big Buddha receives a warm welcome from the Heavenly Emperor.

In his conversation with the Heavenly Emperor, the Big Buddha learns that there is a shortage of water in the human world and that heavenly workers had been working tirelessly to prepare enough rainfall. The Big Buddha decides to help them out by urinating and farting from heaven, thereby causing rain and wind in the human world. Thankful for the Big Buddha's assistance, the Heavenly Emperor treats him to a heavenly feast. The Big Buddha enjoys the feast to his heart's content, and, having become full, wishes to use the toilet. After learning that there is no toilet in heaven, the Big Buddha decides to use the Milky Way as a makeshift toilet. This causes havoc in the human world, as his excrement falls directly onto it. Edo residents now suffer from the foul odor of the Big Buddha's excrement (FIGURE 3).

A man by the name of Shōbei eventually comes up with a way to turn this situation into a lucrative business opportunity. He collects all the excrement and sells it to farmers as a fertilizer, amassing a fortune as a result. The Big Buddha also thinks of doing the same thing in the hopes of using the profit as his travel money to Edo, but realizes that Shōbei has beaten him to it. Frustrated, the Big Buddha puts his buttocks into Shōbei's house to harass him. Shōbei realizes that the excrement from which he had benefited belonged to none other than the Big

Buddha. As an expression of his gratitude, Shōbei builds a majestic hall for the Big Buddha in Nara. He also starts a successful business in front of the Buddha hall selling rice cakes. This eventually becomes the famous “rice cakes of the Big Buddha” (*Daibutsumochi* 大ぶつ餅).

The irreverent portrayals of various kami in the previous sections pale in comparison to the vulgar depictions of the Big Buddha in this piece. The Big Buddha is portrayed as a profit-seeking simpleton who contaminates the human world through his urine, farts, and excrement. As clearly referenced at the beginning of the narrative, the primary motive behind the Big Buddha’s travel to Edo was the success of a *kaichō* event in Edo. In fact, many *kibyōshi* artists took advantage of various *kaichō* occasions in Edo by featuring these events as a major motif in their works or by referencing them indirectly. *The Big Buddha’s Excrement* satirizes the commercial aspects of *kaichō* by describing the contemporary world as “a world dominated by money” (*kane no yo no naka* 金の世の中) in which even venerable buddhas have to make money by exposing themselves to the public’s gaze.

As is expected in the genre of *kibyōshi*, buddhas also frequent the pleasure quarters of Edo. *Nara no daibutsu Edo kenbutsu* 奈良大仏江戸見物 (The Big Buddha’s sightseeing in Edo) by Kyorori 虚呂利 once again features the Big Buddha of Nara, who comes to Edo for sightseeing but suffers from a lack of travel money because of various expenses incurred due to his enormous size (KYORORI 1793; KS 2: 366–370). In order to make money, he renounces his monkhood and starts working as a fire watchman. As a layman, he gives into sensual desires and starts patronizing the pleasure quarters of Shinagawa. However, he soon regains his Buddhahood in order to serve as the main feature of a *kaichō* event. In *Sangoku ichidai tsū no honchi* 三国一大通之本地 (Three countries, the original ground of refinement) by Tonda Kotoda 飛田琴太, Shakamuni and Devadatta travel to Japan together all the way from India and become disciples of Hōseidō Kisanji, an actual *kibyōshi* artist, in order to learn the refined ways of the pleasure quarters from him (TONDA 1784; KS 1: 557–58). Furthermore, *Ryōgoku Shinodazome* 両国信田染 (Ryōgoku, Shinoda dyeing) by Santō Keikō 山東鶏告 focuses on the Saga Shakamuni of Seiryōji, whose *kaichō* event held in Edo in 1785 was mentioned briefly at the beginning of the *Big Buddha’s Excrement* (SANTŌ 1786; KS 1: 645–46). In this work, Shakamuni makes the most of his visit to Edo by immersing himself in Yoshiwara and mingling with courtesans.

There are numerous more *kibyōshi* in which buddhas appear, but the ones highlighted above are particularly poignant in their irreverent representations. In general, comical effects are generated by imposing mundane situations onto the buddhas, as in the buddhas being forced to earn money in order to travel to Edo, as well as by depicting the buddhas becoming infatuated with courtesans at the pleasure quarters. When compared to the portrayals of various kami in *kibyōshi*, those of the buddhas are decidedly more profane, as exemplified by

a graphic depiction of the Big Buddha's excrement and scenes of the buddhas enjoying themselves with courtesans. In general, it seems that *kibyōshi* artists felt more at ease deploying Buddhist divinities for derogatory uses than deploying kami to the same effect.

It should be pointed out that buddhas also play more “sober” roles in some *kibyōshi*, granting amusing wishes or offering protection to major characters. In *Mazemise hachinin ichiza* 交見世八人一坐 (Mixed views of an eight-person theater) by Santō Kyōden, an average-looking man by the name of Otonosuke wishes to become more popular with women and prays to Octopus Yakushi (*Tako yakushi* 蛸薬師), a renowned religious icon at Eifukuji in Kyoto and at Jōjuin in Meguro particularly famous for offering blessings to those who make a vow to quit eating octopus (SANTŌ 1789; KS 2: 25–26). Octopus Yakushi responds by transforming Otonosuke into an extremely handsome man, and to Otonosuke's delight, women start fighting over him. He eventually marries a woman by the name of Ayame working at the Imperial Palace. They live happily ever after running an incense shop. In *Yoninzume nanpen ayatsuri* 四人詰南片傀儡 (Four-person Nanjing marionettes), author Santō Kyōden himself makes an appearance as a preacher and explains that human beings are nothing more than marionettes controlled by the gods (SANTŌ 1793; KS 2: 315–17). According to him, all humans are connected to buddhas and ogres in heaven and are controlled by them through invisible threads. Buddhas promote virtuous, frugal, and filial actions while ogres encourage violent and wasteful behaviors. The human world is an elaborate marionette play all coordinated by the gods according to karmic principles. Much like *A Quick Guide to the Learning of the Mind*, this work characterizes the human world as influenced by the power of invisible beings. Buddhas are undoubtedly forces of good, but they work together with ogres to orchestrate the great “play” of the human world. In one scene, a buddha is shown to be taking a break back stage with ogres while smoking a pipe.

KANNON

Bodhisattvas play active roles in *kibyōshi* as well. In particular, Kannon appears in numerous works, more frequently than any other bodhisattvas. One important example is a critically successful piece by Shiba Zenkō 芝全交 titled *Daihi no senrokuhon* 大悲千祿本 (Thousand arms of great compassion, julienned) (SHIBA 1785; KS 1: 592–94). In this piece, Thousand-Armed Kannon is struggling to make ends meet and decides to make a profit by lending out arms for a fee. The narrative starts with a shocking scene of Kannon's arms being chopped off by merchants who had agreed to operate this business by purchasing the thousand arms for one *ryō* each. The Bodhisattva of Compassion is left armless, but the business itself prospers, particularly popular among those with a missing arm who

can happily make use of a divine prosthetic arm. The merchants advertise this profitable business with a conspicuous bulletin board outlining the terms of the lease, one of which prohibits the use of an arm for a hand job. Some customers are left unsatisfied, however, as is the case with an illiterate person who rents an arm hoping to acquire the ability to write beautifully but finds out that Kannon's arm can only write Sanskrit letters. Kannon eventually collects back all of the arms, but not all of them are intact. The arm rented out to a store selling dye has become blue due to contact with the dye, one rented to a salt shop comes back salty, and the arm rented to a candy store has become sticky, to mention just a few of the damages. At the end of the story, the legendary warrior Tamuramaru, the lead character in the noh play *Tamura*, makes an appearance and expresses a wish to rent Kannon's thousand arms in order to quell a demon. Tamuramaru, however, refuses to pay the full price of one *ryō* per arm as the arms have been damaged, and Kannon agrees to rent them at one eighth the original rate.

The financial plight of the Bodhisattva of Compassion would have had an immediate satirical appeal to contemporaneous readers who were in the midst of a prolonged economic crisis in the 1780s, triggered in part by the Great Famine of Tenmei (*Tenmei no daikikin* 天明の大飢饉) starting in 1782.¹¹ The episode involving Tamuramaru is a reference to a fiscal policy implemented by the powerful bakufu bureaucrat Tanuma Okitsugu 田沼意次, who, in order to relieve the debt of the samurai class, forced upon the merchant class a silver coin at one eighth the value of a gold coin. This measure, having gone into effect in 1772, was met with fierce oppositions and protests in major cities including Edo well into the 1780s. It was not difficult for readers in Edo, therefore, to associate Tamuramaru with Tanuma.¹² Despite it being very short, this piece by Shiba Zenkō was one of the most popular titles in the *kibyōshi* genre, so much so that it became difficult to obtain a copy of this work after the printing blocks were worn out due to overuse (NIHON MEICHO ZENSHŪ KANKŌKAI 1926, 28–29).

Kannon in the above work functions as an effective symbol for political satire. However, in the majority of titles, Kannon is portrayed in an apolitical light, often as a granter of worldly wishes for a variety of Edo residents. In *Kakiatsume akuta no kawagawa* 書集芥の川々 (Written compilations, rivers of nonsense) by Tōrai Sanna, Eleven-Headed Kannon helps a group of eleven men and women make a

11. This observation also holds true for other *kibyōshi* from the 1780s that portray deities facing financial challenges.

12. See KERN (2006, 210). It should be pointed out that this work was published just a year after Tanuma Okitomo 田沼意知, Okitsugu's eldest son, was killed by a low-ranking guard by the name of Sano Masakoto 佐野政言. Masakoto was ordered to commit *seppuku*, but Edo residents deified him as an "august kami of world renewal" (*yonaoshi daimyōjin* 世直し大明神) when the price of rice in Edo fell coincidentally shortly after his death. The unpopularity of the Tanuma family is evident from this episode alone (see FUJITA 2007, 209–27).

fortune by offering divine aid in winning a lottery (TŌRAI 1785; KS 1: 609–10). This work was inspired most likely by a series of *kaichō* events in Edo featuring Eleven-Headed Kannon in the early Tenmei years. It also makes use of the popularity of the lottery (*tomikuji* 富籤) in Edo, in which participants purchased a plaque or a piece of paper bearing a certain number. A comical outcome is achieved as readers find out that Eleven-Headed Kannon had magically arranged number eleven to be the winning number. *Nifukutsui eiga no harubukuro* 二幅对栄花春袋 (A pair of New Year's bags for prosperity) by Juge Sekijō revolves around Kinkin-no-suke, a son of a rich merchant family who is extremely handsome and constantly sought after by women, and Otafuku, a daughter of another rich family who is incredibly ugly (JUGE 1800; KS 2: 733–34). Kinkin-no-suke prays to Asakusa Kannon hoping to be less popular with women. Even in going to Asakusa to offer a prayer, Kinkin-no-suke has to wear a mask to conceal his face so as not to inadvertently attract women around him. Hearing his prayer, Kannon transforms Kinkin-no-suke into a hideous-looking man. With the help of a matchmaking kami, Kinkin-no-suke and Otafuku eventually get married. At the end of the story, Benzaiten also makes an appearance and magically transforms Kinkin-no-suke back into a handsome man and Otafuku into a beauty.

Furthermore, one recurring comedic pattern involving Kannon is one in which protagonists gain an ability to transform at will into animals and other creatures through the power of a magical jewel or bean bestowed upon them by Kannon. In *Uwaki no hayagawari* 虚気の早替 (Quick changes of the fleeting mind) by Ran'i 蘭衣, a man by the name of Muchiuta is presented with a magical jewel after praying to Asakusa Kannon for seven days straight (RAN'I 1806; KS 3: 482–83). With the power of this jewel, Muchiuta first transforms himself into a handsome man and becomes a popular customer at the pleasure quarters. Muchiuta soon gets embroiled in a scuffle with ruffians, but manages to evade this crisis by transforming himself into a giant Niō 仁王 (guardian deity) and crushing the ruffians. Muchiuta seeks to further satisfy his ambitions by changing into a samurai lord with numerous concubines. He also transforms into a tiger, but is cornered by a warrior named Watōnai, the lead character in the puppet play *Kokusen'ya kassen* 国性爺合戦 (The battles of Coxinga) by Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門.¹³ At this point, it is revealed that Watōnai is a manifestation of Kannon, and Muchiuta comes to his senses after Kannon reprimands him for his misuse of the magical jewel. Santō Kyōden's *Tadagokoro oniuchimame* 唯心鬼打豆 (Mind only, toasted beans to ward off ogres) has a similar plot in which a man by the name of Tokutarō receives from Asakusa Kannon magical beans that allow him to switch souls with other creatures (SANTŌ 1792; KS 2: 246–51). Tokutarō switches places with various animals and observes human beings from their

13. CHIKAMATSU (1715). For a translation of this play, see KEENE (1998, 57–131).

perspectives. He eventually learns that filial piety is the most important virtue after learning that even crows and pigeons treat their elders with respect.

Kannon's role in *kibyōshi* resembles that of the Seven Lucky Gods in that the emphasis is often placed on providing benefits to ordinary townspeople through various supernatural means. Characters in *kibyōshi* seek Kannon's help for all sorts of reasons, and this no doubt reflects the prevalence of Kannon worship for practical worldly benefits in Tokugawa society. The majority of *kibyōshi* featuring Kannon can be understood as tongue-in-cheek parodies of the popularity of Kannon, but some more explicitly so than others. *Kareki ni hana sakusha no seigan* 枯木花作者之誓願 (Flowers on a dead tree, the author's vows) by Shicchin Manpō, for example, revolves around a man named Yokurō, who wonders what it is like to be Kannon and is soon given an opportunity to switch places with the Bodhisattva of Compassion temporarily (SHICCHIN 1791b; KS 2: 206–207). People start praying to Yokurō, who now bears a halo and stands on a lotus flower. Although pleased with all the monetary offerings he receives, Yokurō eventually grows weary of his role as Kannon after discovering how self-serving people's wishes are.

JIZŌ

Another bodhisattva that figures prominently in the *kibyōshi* genre is Jizō. Of all Jizō's appearances, a work titled *Tōsei daitō butsu kaichō* 当世大通仏開帳 (A revealing of the refined buddhas in the contemporary world) by Shiba Zenkō represents the most comical as well as irreverent treatment of the bodhisattva (SHIBA 1781; KS 1: 321–23). This work parodies the famous "Parent-and-Child" Jizō (*oyako Jizō* 親子地藏) of Saikōji, located not far from the more famous Zenkōji. The story begins when the father Jizō comes to Edo for a *kaichō*. He laments how people these days are disregarding Buddhist teachings and are only concerned about sexual pleasures. Given the unpopularity of Buddhism, Jizō decides to abandon Buddhism himself and pursue the path of love and romance. He heads to the pleasure quarters in Shinagawa while camouflaged as a doctor, as was the customary practice among Buddhist priests who frequented pleasure districts during the Edo period. Jizō invites the Reclining Buddha (Nejaka 寝釈迦) and Octopus Yakushi, both popular icons in the nearby Meguro area, to come along with him. After a sumptuous feast, the three of them spend the night with courtesans. This is most humorously visualized in a scene in which the Reclining Buddha is shown lying down with a courtesan in a futon. In the next room, a courtesan by the name of Matsuwaka asks Jizō to take off his halo before going into bed with her (FIGURE 4).

Jizō is infatuated with Matsuwaka and ends up staying with her for days on end (*itsuzuke* いつづけ). Jizō's son, the child counterpart of the *oyako Jizō* pair,



FIGURE 4. Jizō and the two Buddhas spending the night with courtesans (National Diet Library).

eventually learns of his father's depravity. The son seeks help from Kōbō Daishi, who agrees to accompany him to Edo in an attempt to convince the father Jizō to come to his senses. This effort proves futile, however, and the father Jizō decides to elope with Matsuwaka. Mimicking the plot of a popular song (*yōkyoku* 謡曲) in which a *tengu* 天狗 kidnaps a child named Matsuwaka, Jizō camouflages himself as a *tengu* and flies away with his favorite courtesan. Thereafter, Jizō lives peacefully with Matsuwaka making a living as an eye doctor. Jizō's occupation as an eye doctor is most likely a parody of a Jizō statue at Sensōji in Asakusa, particularly famous at the time for its efficacy in curing eye-related diseases.

Meanwhile, the Reclining Buddha, who had accompanied Jizō to Shinagawa, is suffering from a debt of three hundred *ryō* after squandering his wealth at the pleasure quarters. The remaining debt notwithstanding, the Buddha achieves his final release (*gonyūmetzu* 御にうめつ) on the fifteenth day of the second month, traditionally identified as the day of the Buddha's *parinirvana* in East Asia. Upon hearing of the Buddha's passing, courtesans, teashop owners, servants, and other workers of Shinagawa gather around the Reclining Buddha and start weeping by his side, lamenting not his departure but the massive debt he left behind. However, the Buddha's mother, Maya, comes to rescue riding on a purple cloud and promises to pay back all of the debt that her son had accrued.

This work by Shiba Zenkō is particularly rich with humorous portrayals of

familiar Buddhist icons, embedded within layer after layer of satirical references and witty puns, only a few of which could be touched upon in the summary above. This work was published soon after a *kaichō* ceremony in Meguro featuring the “Parent-and-Child” Jizō of Saikōji. Part of the plot derives from the origin story of this renowned father-son pair of Jizō bodhisattvas, which is important for understanding the parody and can be summarized as follows, although some variations exist. Katō Shigeuji, governor of Tsukushi, decides to renounce his secular life and live as a monk on Mount Kōya. Leaving his wife and young son behind, he takes up the name of Karukaya Dōshin. However, his son, Ishidōmaru, eventually comes to Mount Kōya looking for his father. Karukaya conceals his identity and tells his son that his father had died. Nonetheless, Ishidōmaru also becomes a monk on Mount Kōya following his mother’s death. Karukaya and Ishidōmaru train together on Mount Kōya, the former never revealing his true identity. Some years later, Karukaya sees a vision of the Amida Buddha of Zenkōji and departs Mount Kōya for Zenkōji, spending the rest of his life there. Ishidōmaru also has a vision of the Amida Buddha and learns that Karukaya was his father. This father-son pair posthumously became known as the “Parent-and-Child” Jizō. This story, known simply as “Karukaya,” was undoubtedly familiar to Edo residents and was featured in a highly successful *jōruri* play in Edo in the fifth year of An’ei 安永 (1776) (KOIKE et al. 1984, 187–90; KAMINISHI 2006, 130–31). Zenkō’s work is a highly irreverent and timely parody of this story with the *kaichō* event in Meguro in mind. It includes loose allusions to the original narrative, including the appearance of Kōbō Daishi, who, in one version of “Karukaya,” forbids his mother from climbing Mount Kōya due to a restriction against women entering a sacred space (*nyonin kinsei* 女人禁制). Following this regulation, Ishidōmaru’s mother is discouraged from climbing Mount Kōya as well.¹⁴ It is not difficult to appreciate the satirical impact of Jizō’s succumbing to sensual pleasures given this exclusionary practice against women in the original story.

The motif of Jizō falling in love with a courtesan is also central in another *kibyōshi* titled *Kiyūgaki sōshi* 亀遊書双昏 (Kiyū’s grass book) by Hōraisanjin Kiyū 蓬萊山人亀遊, published in 1783 (MORI 1972, 362–67; KS 1: 510–11). This piece starts with Asakusa Kannon making an announcement to various divinities enshrined in the Sensōji complex that they will have to start paying monthly rent and fees from now on. This is due to a stagnant economy, the rising cost of goods, and the decreasing number of devout followers. Asakusa Kannon is now forced to act as a kind of leasing agent for the Sensōji complex and collect money from its “tenants.” Kannon stipulates that those who are unable to pay the

14. KIMBROUGH (2008, 201–205). Also see MATISOFF (2002) for more on the history of “Karukaya” and a discussion on gender parameters implicit in the narrative.

money must leave. Jizō, one of the tenants, struggles to fulfill this new responsibility because he has been using all of his money to woo a Yoshiwara courtesan named Shioginu. Despite repeated requests from Kannon, Jizō is unable to make the payment and is punished for it by being confined in a wooden bathtub (*okebuse* 桶伏せ). This was a traditional method of punishing those who failed to pay up for services provided at the pleasure quarters. A wooden bathtub was placed upside down over these clients, who would then be displayed outside for public derision. Jizō is thus confined but is eventually let free by a group of children as an expression of their gratitude for the divine help they receive daily from Jizō—a clear reference to Jizō's identity as the savior of children (GLASSMAN 2012, 6). Shioginu then recommends Jizō to start a business, and Jizō attempts to make a profit through a variety of means. At the end, however, Jizō finds out that Shioginu has fallen for another man much more handsome than him. Finally, the Amida Buddha of Zenkōji appears and admonishes Jizō for being blinded by attachment.

The two works highlighted above stand out for their particularly provocative depictions of the bodhisattva, effectively combining both sensual and economic motifs. Readers' prior knowledge about Jizō, including the story of the "Parent-and-Child" Jizō, the popularity of the Jizō statue in Asakusa, and Jizō's identity as the divine patron of children, complement these comedic elements. Parodic effects are also enhanced through scenes in which Buddhist icons such as Kōbō Daishi and Amida try to save Jizō from his depravity. Jizō does play more didactic roles in a few titles, giving spiritual guidance or offering supernatural help to characters in the plot.¹⁵ But his roles in these titles tend to be more marginal. Jizō, perhaps the most familiar Buddhist icon for many readers, served as the focal point of some of the most unabashedly irreverent portrayals in the entire *kibyōshi* genre (GLASSMAN 2012, 8).

Laughing at the Gods

The examples analyzed above are only a small fraction of *kibyōshi* in which religious icons serve as ingredients for satire and parody. They are enough, however, to demonstrate that irreverent and humorous portrayals of divinities represent a common technique that *kibyōshi* artists employed.¹⁶ Kami, buddhas, and bodhisattvas were stripped of their usual sacrosanct robes and were given comical and at times vulgar roles to play, from granting people ludicrous worldly benefits to amassing debt at the pleasure quarters to eloping with courtesans.

15. For a few examples of this, see KS 2: 198 and KS 3: 432–33.

16. There are many more examples of divinities that appear frequently in *kibyōshi*, including such familiar figures as Inari, Enma, and the Dragon King, but an analysis of these figures have to await a future opportunity.

As highlighted several times already, sex and money are two major channels through which humorous effects are generated. The gods in *kibyōshi* often succumb to sensual desires and are constrained by a variety of financial challenges. The narrative schemes involving sexual depravation and economic downfalls are commonly seen in the genre of *kibyōshi* and are not unique to works featuring divinities, but it is particularly intriguing to impose these profane situations upon the gods. Judging by the popularity of works such as *Thousand Arms of Compassion, Julienned*, which satirized the economic stagnation of the 1780s, it seems that contemporary readers enjoyed projecting their financial and political difficulties onto supernatural entities.

For these satirical designs to be effective, it was necessary for readers to have some background knowledge about the featured deities and be able to appreciate references to their particular characteristics or mythologies. It is safe to assume that the majority of parodic references in *kibyōshi* were common knowledge to most readers in Edo, including basic information such as the composition of the Seven Lucky Gods and stories in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. This is also attested by the prevalence in *kibyōshi* of deities that were well known for their efficacies in granting practical worldly benefits as well as of movements that were in vogue in Edo in the late eighteenth century, represented most notably by the Shingaku movement. At the same time, readers had to be up to date on current events in Edo to identify certain allusions, particularly in those works that satirized specific political figures or various *kaichō* occasions in the city.

Although this article is sectioned by individual divinities for the sake of organizational convenience, strict doctrinal and denominational distinctions are irrelevant when it comes to the deployment of religious icons for comical ends, as mentioned at the beginning. There is hardly any difference between kami and Buddhist deities in terms of the roles they play, with the only exception of a tendency among *kibyōshi* artists to reserve explicitly vulgar or sexual situations for Buddhist divinities. Venerable buddhas sleep with courtesans and defecate on the human world, but there are no comparable examples for, say, deities such as Amaterasu and Susanō. It is difficult to ascertain precisely why *kibyōshi* artists felt more at ease mobilizing Buddhist divinities for these purposes. It is tempting to revert to the discourse of “Buddhist decadence” to explain this phenomenon, that the prevailing image of the corrupt Buddhist clergy encouraged *kibyōshi* artists to depict Buddhist divinities through an especially irreverent lens and that these vulgar depictions served as satirical critiques of the Buddhist clergy as a whole. Yet, such a claim would have to be supported by a thorough analysis of the discourse of decadence in relation to Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan.¹⁷

17. See KLAUTAU (2008) for the development of the discourse of Buddhist decadence from the late Edo period to the early twentieth century.

Kibyōshi and modern manga represent two independent genres of Japanese visual culture, but parodic appropriations of religious icons is a technique seen in both. At the same time, there are subtle differences in the ways in which religious symbols are employed in *kibyōshi* and manga. First, partly due to the particular nature of *kibyōshi* as a purely satirical genre, deities depicted therein almost always play comedic roles. The general tongue-in-cheek attitude of *kibyōshi* is not always shared by manga, as evident in works such as Tezuka Osamu's *Buddha*. Second, unlike some manga, *kibyōshi* never promotes a particular religion. As THOMAS points out, a number of religious institutions utilize the medium of manga for the purpose of proselytization today (2012, 81–82). No such examples exist in the genre of *kibyōshi*. Although works such as *A Quick Guide to the Learning of the Mind* feign the appearance of an introductory text on Shingaku, this is done for satirical purposes and need not be taken at face value. Third, despite the fact that both manga and *kibyōshi* utilize irreverent depictions of divinities, the level of irreverence in *kibyōshi* seems on the whole to far exceed that of manga. From the Seven Lucky Gods' drinking spree to the Big Buddha's defecation to Jizō's love affairs with courtesans, deities in *kibyōshi* are often desecralized to a degree that would probably surprise many manga readers today.

These differences notwithstanding, it remains significant that the two literary genres share comparative aspects in their parodic deployments of religious symbols. The purpose of this analysis is not to reduce the genre of *kibyōshi* to a mere precursor of manga or to argue for a direct historical connection between the two genres. It is not necessarily the case that manga artists who make comical use of religious icons today found inspiration in *kibyōshi* in particular. *Kibyōshi*, however, deserves attention as an independent historical precedent of a popular visual medium humorously appropriating religious icons. In a similar vein, other forms of Edo literature such as parodic fictions by Ihara Saikaku and children's books that feature divinities also merit further research, as these genres also capitalize on satirical treatments of deities comparable to those seen in *kibyōshi*.¹⁸

Thanks to some innovative research in recent years, much has come to light concerning the intersection between religion and visual entertainment in contemporary Japan. As THOMAS puts it, one of the fundamental questions in this area of research is: "Why—in light of Japan's evident and often fervent secularism—were manga and anime with apparently religious themes so numerous and so popular?" (2012, viii). While this peculiar situation in Japan today naturally requires an analysis grounded in contemporary material, it is also important to recognize that the relationship between religion and popular entertainment extends beyond the contemporary period and has a kind of historical weight,

18. See, for example, KIMBROUGH (2015) for an analysis of seventeenth-century children's books.

if not direct historical continuity. *Kibyōshi* and comparable pre-modern visual-literary genres have much to offer when outlining the genealogy of this relationship and illuminating the ways in which people in different historical contexts interacted with religious symbols and images through popular media. These sources make it abundantly clear that an irreverent and humorous attitude exhibited toward divinities within the context of entertainment is a perennial aspect of Japanese religiosity.

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