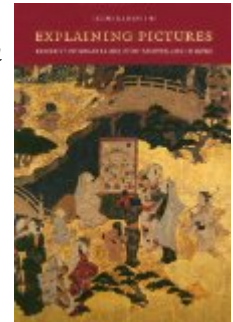


Ikumi Kaminishi. *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Etoki Storytelling in Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. x + 284 pp. \$52.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-2697-0.



Reviewed by Monika Dix

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Ikumi Kaminishi adds an important contribution to studies of Japanese religion, art history, and culture with the first English-language book-length study of the didactic practice of picture explaining, called *etoki* in Japanese. Unlike conventional Japanese and western scholarly work on *etoki* which has tended to be more selective in addressing particular aspects of picture explaining, as for example Hisao Kawaguchi's study of folk literature (*setsuwa*) and Barbara Ruch's pioneering work on itinerant *bikuni* nuns, Kaminishi has distinguished herself in her methodological approach to the subject matter.[1] By situating the practice of "picture decipherment" (p. 5) within a larger, more comprehensive framework, she successfully traces the origin and development of *etoki* from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries across a variety of genres, including painting, poetry, and drama. The author's definition of *etoki* as a tripartite model comprised of visual images, words, and speech/didactic proselytizing, not only sheds light on the reflexive interplay of art history, literature, religion, and performance studies, but also demonstrates the growing significance of interdisciplinary research. Whether we consider

each chapter on its own or the book as a whole, the end result of Kaminishi's strategy is always substantially revisionist.

In chapter 1 ("Etoki in History"), Kaminishi launches her discussion with an eclectic survey of the earliest extant Japanese textual records mentioning *etoki* practice: aristocratic diaries, journals, and essays dating from the tenth to the fifteenth century. Examples of historical sources cited by Kaminishi include a twelfth-century copy of Prince Shigeakira's (906-954) diary, *Rih? o ki* (which recounts an *etoki* performance by the abbot of J?gan-ji in Kyoto during the prince's visit in 931), as a representative of didactic temple *etoki*. She also cites an entry dated 1480 in Sanj?nishi Sanetaka's diary, *Sanetaka ko ki*, as one of the earliest records of an itinerant *etoki* performance. Kaminishi follows her effective usage of these historical documents to position *etoki* in historical perspective with a well-articulated analysis of the role *etoki* played in the spread of the cult of Sh?toku Taishi. In chapter two ("Deciphering the Founder of Japanese Buddhism"), she illustrates how the narrative medium of didactic picture ex-

planation serves as the primary catalyst in the proselytizing of Shōtoku Taishi's cult by turning this historical figure into a highly venerated deity.

Chapter 3 ("Deciphering Pure Land Imagery") examines the significance of *mandala etoki* as a method of expounding religious doctrine in order to promote Pure Land images and faith. Kaminishi discusses the use of *etoki* as guides to attain enlightenment through the meditative process of visualizing Amida Buddha's Pure Land Western Paradise. Her case studies focus on the *Taima mandala*, an eighth-century tapestry depicting Amida's Pure Land, and the *Taima mandala engi emaki*, a mid thirteenth-century narrative hand scroll painting illustrating Chōjime's account of female salvation. Chapter 4 ("Etoki as a Pure Land Method of Proselytization") shifts our attention to the narratives and practices of evangelical monks such as Ryōnin, depicted in the *Yōzō nenbutsu engi emaki* (1314), whose *etoki* performances among common people served as a model for temple solicitation and proselytizing for itinerant monks from the fourteenth century onward.

Chapter 5 ("Itinerant Etoki: Solicitors of Buddhism") examines the socio-historical, political, and religious environment in which the practice of religious picture deciphering changed hands from didactic temple *etoki* to itinerant *etoki* performers. Kaminishi's analysis of the *Ippen hijiri-e* (1299) concludes that the activities of itinerant *etoki* preachers transcended the boundaries between the religious and the mundane, and that it was their freedom from social constraints that allowed them to be visible proselytizers in secular society. In chapter 6 ("Deciphering the Quasi-Religious Etoki Performer"), Kaminishi expands her discussion to include the interrelationship of secular narratives and popular legends (such as *The Thirty-two Artisans Scroll* and the *Dōjōji engi emaki*) with *etoki* performance in order to show how these entertaining narratives were transformed by itinerant preachers to proselytize for their faith.

The book concludes with a look at the influence of *etoki* on the sacred mountain worship of Kumano and Tateyama. In chapter seven ("Kumano Images and Propaganda for Women") Kaminishi presents a detailed analysis of seventeenth-century female itinerant *etoki* preachers in the Kumano region (the so-called Kumano *bikuni*) and the propagandistic images they used for their female audiences, such as the *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandala* to guide them to salvation. The final chapter ("Deciphering Mountain Worship") sheds light on the myths and legends concerning Tateyama which were popularized through *etoki* practice in the Edo period (1603-1868) and which transformed the Tateyama area into the sacred mountain it remains today.

Ironically, the comprehensive nature and the wide historical scope of *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Etoki Storytelling in Japan* constitute the book's strengths as well as its weaknesses. In the introduction, Kaminishi states that she will "look at the visual images called *etoki* as an original text that redefines the written text through pictorial form" (p. 7). This statement is problematic because 1) Kaminishi does not define the meaning of the term "original text" within the context of her discussion, and 2) in terms of literary studies, the statement fails to address the following questions: Which texts are visualized in which period and why? To what extent is the choice of the "original text" dependent on the different audiences for *etoki* performances? How much is a written text transformed by its being rendered in pictorial form?

Further, some chapters lack in-depth analysis of key issues that the author briefly identifies in chapter introductions but which she subsequently does not fully pursue. For example, in chapter 1 ("Etoki in History"), Kaminishi discusses the development of *etoki* in Japan but does not investigate its links to similar cross-cultural practices in other parts of Asia antedating those in Japan. Kaminishi's unprecedented use of historical sources

such as Prince Shigeakira's diary successfully aids in documenting the existence, subject matter, performers, and audience of early *etoki*. The discussion falls short, however, of locating *etoki* within the socio-political and cultural context of Heian-period (794-1185) Japan. For example, why did Prince Shigeakira attend the *etoki* performance at Jōgan-ji in 931? Although Kaminishi argues that the subject matter of the *Eight Phases* (*hassō*) was the earliest known pictorial narrative and Shigeakira's visit spontaneous (for which she does not cite any references), she needs to further question the reason for the abbot's selection of the story of the Buddha's life, as well as the appropriateness of this particular narrative for Prince Shigeakira's visit in terms of patronage, political career, and faith.

In spite of these shortcomings, as well as some spelling mistakes and incorrect translations of official ranks and titles, Kaminishi's book is a pioneering study that provides the reader with a well-informed survey of *etoki* practice in Japan. Therefore, taken as a whole, *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Etoki Storytelling in Japan* contributes not only to Japanese art history, literature, religion, and performance studies in particular but also to Japanese cultural studies at large, making it a book to be enjoyed by a wide range of audiences.

Note

[1]. Hisao Kawaguchi, *Etoki no sekai: Tonkō kara no kage* (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1981); Barbara Ruch, "Woman to Woman: Kumano Bikuni Prose-lytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan," in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Pre-modern Japan*, ed. Barbara Ruch (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan Press, 2002), 537-580.

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