

Narrating History under Censorship and Commerce: Warriors and Rulership in Popular Historical Fiction of Early Modern Japan

A05 (Strand “Narrating History”)

Summary

This project inquires into the popular narration of history in Japan of the 17th–19th century. Its main object of study is the *Ehon Taikōki* (*The Illustrated Chronicles of the Regent*, 1797–1802), which depicts the life of one of the country’s unifiers, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) and was banned by governmental authority in 1804. The portrayal of a morally ideal warrior and ruler was a widespread subject of historical fiction sold to the common people. Due to the relation to the social identity of the warrior class, it was of high concern to the shogunate. Using the examples of the popular biography and two other works of comparison, including Hideyoshi’s earlier biography *Taikōki* (*Chronicles of the Regent*, 1626), the project sheds light on how different narrative approaches have reacted to censorship and vice versa.

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Methodology

- (1) Quantitative analysis of the narrative structure
- (2) Comparative close readings of key chapters
- (3) Intermedial analysis of illustrations and text

Corpus

- How was history told in a politically repressive, yet commercialized environment?
- Are there narrative differences between censored works of historical fiction and works, which were successfully adapted to regulations?
- If so, on which narrative levels do these differences occur?
- Did narrative techniques and strategies of popularization change over time?
- To what extent can ‘western’ narratological theoretical frameworks and quantitative analyses through digital tools be applied to Japanese source material?



Toyotomi Hideyoshi giving silver coins to his servants
(*Ehon Taikōki* owned by National Institute of Japanese Literature, vol. 6/2,
pp. 2v–3r)