

Selections from NDL collections

## Sumo Wrestling during the late Edo Period as Seen Through the Eyes of the Popular Writer Tatekawa Enba

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This material is explained in Chapter 5.

### 1. Introduction

Tatekawa (Utei) Enba II (1792–1862) was a writer of popular literature, who was fascinated by the world of sumo wrestling during the late Edo period. After studying under Yoshida Oikaze XX, who was an expert in the traditions of sumo, he even held a position as a referee under the name Shikimori Kiichiro. Although his real name was Yamazaki Shojiro, he wrote extensively about sumo and published a number of works of fiction, including pornography, using the nom-de-plume Tatekawa (Utei) Enba II, which is how he is best known today. But was also known popularly by the names Sukeemon and Hourai Sanjin. Yamazaki was also at one time a magistrate of the Minamimachi Bugyosho, but because of his refusal to lead a conventional life, he was forced to yield his inheritance to his younger brother, after which he led a life of leisurely indulgence in the Fukagawa pleasure quarters.

Although sumo wrestling had once been prohibited as a public nuisance in and around the city of Edo by the Tokugawa Shogunate, by the late 18th century it had regained popularity, and temples and shrines throughout Japan would sponsor tournaments as a means of incidental fund raising. Tournaments were also organized by the Shogunate for the pleasure of the aristocracy or by established temples like Ekoin in Ryogoku as a means of securing steady income. Enba's fascination with sumo dates to the early 19th century, when the emergence of popular culture in Edo heightened the popularity of sumo wrestling to the point that it became a common subject of kabuki theater and other storytelling traditions such as *rakugo* and *kodan*.

*Chikarakurabe omoteura sumo torikumi zue* was first published in 1843. That same year, a sumo tournament held at Fukiage'en in Edo Castle to honor Tokugawa Ieyoshi, the 12th Shogun, attracted significant interest. In fact, the roots of contemporary sumo wrestling can be traced back to the sumo of this period.

Together with *ukiyo-e* of sumo wrestlers, Enba's writing provides us with a glimpse of how sumo grew to become a popular entertainment. His detailed descriptions of the customs of the day, which include enduring traditions such as the *dohyo-iri* (ring-entering ceremony) and *kesho-mawashi* (ornamental apron) are valuable historical records for modern scholars.

As an author of popular fiction, Enba helped popularize sumo through his writings, and his inside knowledge of the sport as well as his close relationships with referees, wrestlers, and others makes his work a primary source on sumo culture during the late Edo Period. For example, *Sumosechie meimeiden* (1845) is a book that explains the origins and traditions of sumo as well as contains stories about wrestlers during the Edo period. Written by Enba and illustrated by Utagawa Toyokuni, it is now a part of the [Kano Collection at the Tohoku University Library](#).

In this article, we will look at works by Enba and others from the NDL's collection and explore various aspects of sumo's popularity at the time.

## 2. *Kakutei shosetsu katsukongoden*



*Kakutei shosetsu katsukongoden*. Compiled by Shojuro Nagatoshi, illustrated by Utagawa Kuninao and Utagawa Kunimaru, published by Nishimuraya Yohachi, 1828, NDL Call No. 214-181.

\* The above image is "Sumo *keikozu*," which depicts sumo wrestlers training themselves while *toshiyoril oyakata* (the stable master) are watching over.

*Kakutei shosetsu katsukongoden* was written to help popularize sumo by providing illustrated explanations of the history and traditions of sumo as well as of the places where sumo wrestlers lived and trained. It is noteworthy as an example of a popular general introduction to sumo. It provides explanations of the origins of sumo in China, Korea, India, and Japan; the *Sumaino sechie*, in which sumo wrestlers from around the world performed for the Emperor and other members of the imperial court; the origins of private sumo tournaments for fund raising; customary behavior when in the ring while a *shogun* or other feudal lord is present; the traditional forty-eight winning techniques; the license of a *Yokozuna* (the highest rank given to a sumo wrestler); the bow-twirling ceremony; and contemporary information on notable sumo wrestlers as well as the names of referees.

## 3. *Sumo kongoden*



*Sumo kongoden*. Part 2. Compiled by Tatekawa Enba, also known as Hourai Sanjin, illustrated by Utagawa Kuniyasu, collated by Kimura Shonosuke and Shikimori Inosuke, revised by Kimura Shotaro, Shikimori Yodayu, and Kimura Tajima, published by Nishimuraya Yohachi, 1828, NDL Call No. 132-201.

\* Illustrated in the above image is Ozora Buzaemon, shown here wearing an ornamental apron, who was nearly 220 centimeters tall.

*Sumo kongoden*, a sequel to *Kakutei shosetsu katsukongoden*, is an entertaining directory of sumo wrestlers who were active in the latter part of the Edo period.

It begins with an illustration of the bow-twirling ceremony followed by biographies of 88 sumo wrestlers, which include portraits as well as information on their stable, birthplace, and name changes as well as the names of the feudal lords who sponsored the more prestigious wrestlers. There is also information on 31 stable masters, 10 sumo referees, and illustrations of the *gunbai uchiwa* (ceremonial fans) used by major referees. Furthermore, it is obvious that Enba was deeply involved in sumo world since the directory was collated by head referee Kimura Shonosuke and others.



From left to right: Narutaki Mataemon, Takasago Uraemon, Inazuma Raigoro, and Yotsugamine Tokichi. Inazuma Raigoro (1795–1877) is famous as a legendary sumo wrestler with two Yokozuna titles from the Gojo family and the Yoshida Tsukasa family. Each wrestler in this illustration is wearing a kesho-mawashi (an ornamental apron) provided by the feudal lord who sponsored him.

#### 4. *Shijuhatte sekitori kagami*



*Shijuhatte sekitori kagami*. Compiled by Horai Sanjin, illustrated by Utagawa Kuniyasu, published by Nishimuraya Yohachi, 1828, NDL Call No. 209-22.

\* The above image is four of the forty-eight winning techniques.

*Shijuhatte sekitori kagami* is one of the important historical materials on the original winning techniques in sumo. Its illustrations depict how to put on a loincloth, the room in the arena where wrestlers got ready for their matches, the ceremonial stomping of the feet in the ring, the initial charge at the start of a match, the day's matches or parings of wrestlers, and the ring-entering ceremony as well as the forty-eight winning techniques of sumo with commentary.

The expression "forty-eight winning techniques of sumo" originally meant simply a variety of winning techniques. After the publication of *Sumo no zushiki* (reprint included in *Shinpen kisho fukuseikai sosho*. Vol. 42, Published by Rinsen Shoten, 1991, NDL Call No. KH5-E2.) from the late 17th century to the beginning of 18th century, concrete definitions of each technique were formulated and became well known to sumo fans in general. In modern sumo, there are currently 82 winning techniques and five non-techniques recognized as rationale for determining the winner of a match.

#### 5. *Chikarakurabe omoteura sumo torikumi zue*



*Chikarakurabe omoteura sumo torikumi zue*. Edited by Tatekawa Enba, illustrated by Utagawa Kunisada, published by Honya Matasuke, 1843, NDL Call No. 209-23.

*Chikarakurabe omoteura sumo torikumi zue* is a revised edition of *Shijuhatte sekitori kagami* and focuses on the 48 winning techniques. Its front cover is adorned with an illustration of a *gunbai uchiwa* used by a sumo referee and decorated with the four-*kanji* idiom *ichimi seifu* (一味清風), which is a reference to the importance of tradition in sumo. It is said that this tradition originated around 1570, when Yoshida Oikaze XIII, who was responsible for governing sumo at that time, was given a fan with this expression on it by the chief advisor to the emperor, Nijo Hareyoshi (Haruyoshi).

In the preface to this edition, Enba writes that "There were quite a few errors in the previous edition, so with the help of sumo referee Kimura Shonosuke VIII, who is extremely knowledgeable about the history of sumo, and Utagawa Kunisada, who has drawn the detailed

illustrations of sumo matches, I have tried to create a new book that can be enjoyed by children and young people who are interested in sumo." He then proclaims himself to be expert on sumo as he provides easy-to-understand explanations of the basics of sumo and the history of the winning techniques.



A page explaining six of the 12 winning techniques categorized as sorite (backwards body drop techniques).

Although the previous version had only two examples per page, this version shows three examples per page of winning techniques, depicted even more dynamically and in greater detail.



This is an illustration of a match between Iwamigata (Later Hidenoyama, he also appears under the name of Hidenoyama in the next picture.) and Tsurugiyama. The text at the top of the page says that after watching a sumo tournament at the Jorakuji Temple in Goshu (present-day Shiga Prefecture) in 1570, Oda Nobunaga presented the winning wrestler, Miyai Ganzamon, a prestigious Japanese bow with a wrapped-rattan grip.

## 6. Sekitori meisho zue



Sekitori meisho zue. Edited by Tatekawa Enba, illustrated by Ichiyosai Toyokuni, published by Honya Matasuke, 1849, NDL Call No. 209-24.

\* The above image is of Hidenoyama, who also wrestled under the names Tategami and Iwamigata, was a Yokozuna, although he was just 164 centimeters tall. This page depicts Hidenoyama visiting scenic landscapes related to his various names, such as two rocks bound together with a heavy rope made of rice straw, near a coast line with beautiful mountains in the background.

This book features illustrations of 39 sumo wrestlers visiting scenic landscapes related to their names. *Sumo-e*, or portraits of popular sumo wrestlers were best sellers at the time, not unlike photojournalism that depicts today's celebrities in picturesque locations. Included at the end of the book is a glossary that explains sumo terms with analogies to scenic landscapes and regional specialties.



Left: Kashiwado Sogoro (1810–1886), depicted in 1847. Available from the [NDL Digital Collections](#). \* From *Sumo nishiki-e* illustrated by Utagawa Toyokuni.  
Right: Edo Arauma Daigoro (1826–1889), depicted in 1859. Available from the [NDL Digital Collections](#). \* From *Sumo nishiki-e* illustrated by Utagawa Toyokuni.

## 7. Sumai suikoden



*Sumai suikoden*. Edited by Tatekawa Enba, illustrated by Utagawa Kuniyasu and Utagawa Kuninao, published by Iwatoya Kisaburo, 1830-1832, NDL Call No. 207-1520.

\* The word *sumai* in the book title is the ancient pronunciation of *sumo*. The image above is of the front cover of the first volume, showing a powerful man from the Heian Period, Oguma Korenari, killing a large bear with his bare hands. Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).

This is a series of books featuring tales of daring and legendary personalities. Popular stories—adapted from classical literature such as *Konjaku monogatari*, *Kokon chomonju*, and *Genpei seisuiki*—are full of action-packed stories set in an imaginary world. The first story tells of a famous sumo match between Kino Natora, who comes from a noble family, and Tomono Yoshio, who battle to settle a disputed succession in the Imperial family. Other stories tell of powerful characters who kill savage beasts and monsters. Both male and female protagonists appear, including an interesting story about a woman of extraordinary strength named Takashima no Ooiko from Omi Province (present-day Shiga Prefecture). Enba was a huge fan of sumo, and this entertaining story shows us what a talented storyteller he was, as well.



The front cover of the second volume features an illustration of Makamino Narimura who wrestled a long-nosed goblin during the Heian Period.

(Translated by Yuko Kumakura and Mika Oshima)

### Reference (in Japanese):

- Sakai, Tadamasu. *Nihon sumoshi*. Vol. 1. Dai Nihon Sumo Kyokai, 1956, NDL Call No. 788.1-Sa394n.
- Furukawa, Miki. *Edo jidai oozumo*. Yuzankaku, 1968, NDL Call No. KD971-2.
- Nitta, Ichiro. *Sumo no rekishi*. Kodansha, 2010, NDL Call No. KD971-J51
- *Shiryō shusei edo jidai sumo meikan*. edited by Shoichi Iida, Nichigai asoshietsu, 2001, NDL Call No. KD9-G42.

### Related Links:

- Grand Sumo Special—From sacred ritual to martial arts and entertainment  
[https://www.library.metro.tokyo.jp/portals/0/edo/tokyo\\_library/english/sumo/index.html](https://www.library.metro.tokyo.jp/portals/0/edo/tokyo_library/english/sumo/index.html)
- Grand SUMO Highlights  
<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/tv/sumo/>

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