

Selections from NDL collections

Hiragana shimbun osana etoki

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The publication of broadsheet newspapers in Japan began in 1870 with the *Mainichi Shimbun*, which targeted well-educated people and did not include illustrations. Shortly thereafter, one-sheet, illustrated newspapers also appeared, and during the seven years from 1874 to 1881, attained a certain level of popularity as souvenirs and conversation pieces. These tabloids featured articles about murders and other crimes as well as heartwarming personal interest stories written by authors of popular fiction such as Jono Saigiku and Takabatake Ransen or comic storytellers like Shorin Hakuen and San'yutei Encho and illustrated by *ukiyo-e* artists Ochiai Yoshiiku, Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, and others.

One of these tabloids was the *Hiragana shimbun osana etoki*, which was launched with the hope of taking advantage of the rising popularity of illustrated newspapers and came in a handy, storybook size with a single story on each page, the text of which was annotated with hiragana for readers who were unfamiliar with kanji.

Republished in *osana etoki* were 61 articles that appeared in other newspapers from February to May of 1875. These included 20 articles from the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 13 articles from the *Yūbin Hōchi Shimbun*, 11 articles from the *Chōya Shimbun*, 9 articles from the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun*, and 8 articles from the *Hiragana Eiri Shimbun*. *Osana etoki* was published using two different styles of editing and composition, which for convenience's sake we will refer to as Style A and Style B.

Style A:

Hiragana shimbun osana etoki, illustrated by Baido Kunimasa, publisher and year of publication not clear. 3 volumes (Issue Nos. 1–3), 8 folios per volume, 18.0 cm × 12.0 cm, bound in Japanese style, NDL Call Nos. Y994-J12114, Y994-J12115, and Y994-J12116.

Style B:

Hiragana shimbun osana etoki, edited and illustrated by Baido Kunimasa (Takeuchi Eikyu), published by Kiyūdō in April and June 1875. 2 volumes (Issue Nos. 1 & 2), 12 folios per volume, 18.0 cm × 12.0 cm, bound in Japanese style

*Monochrome images of [Issue Nos. 1](#) and [2](#) are available in the NDL Digital Library Collections.



Image 1: Covers to Issue Nos. 1–3 of Style A

Four issues were published in Style A, each with a color illustration on the cover (See Image 1.) and monochrome illustrations accompanying the text. Two issues were published in Style B, with no illustration on the cover but color illustrations accompanying the text. Comparing these two styles, the printed pages of Style B issues are

more realistic and have a greater impact than those of Style A. The National Diet Library (NDL) holds copies of all issues except for Style A Issue No. 4. Other institutions known to hold copies of these publications are shown in the table below.

Institutions other than the NDL holding issues of *osana etoki*

Owner	Style A	Style B
Meiji Shinbun Zasshi Bunko at the University of Tokyo	All issues Folio 8 of Issue No. 4 is missing.	All issues Issue No. 1 includes a Japanese paper case with color illustration.
The Japan Newspaper Museum	Issue No. 4 only	Issue No. 1 only
National Institute of Japanese Literature	Issue Nos. 3 & 4	No issues held
Special Collections Room in the Waseda University Central Library	Issue No. 1 only	No issues held

Osana etoki was written, edited, and illustrated by Baido Kunimasa (1848–1920), whose real name was Takeuchi Eikyu. He studied under Utogawa Toyokuni III, from whom he inherited the name of Utogawa Kunisada III, and his favorite subjects included depicting civilization and enlightenment during the Meiji period as well as portraits of kabuki actors like Ichikawa Sadanji. In the preface to Issue No. 1 of Style B, which is shown in Image 2, he wrote that he had edited articles from other newspapers, annotated then with phonetic hiragana characters, and added illustrations to make them easier to read for women and children. He also says that reading newspaper articles is an excellent way for the general public to enhance its knowledge as well as for children to learn things that will be useful in making their way in the world.



Image 2: Issue No. 1 of Book B, front page (right) and preface (left)

Images 3 and 4 illustrate the differences between Style A (Image 3) and Style B (Image 4). The right-hand side of either image illustrates an article about a murder in Kanagawa Prefecture, that first appeared in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* No. 73, published March 31, 1875. The story tells of a man who took some teasing from a friend too much to heart, got into an argument with a woman he knew, and then murdered both the woman and his friend

in a pique, after which he killed himself.



Image 3: Issue No. 2 of Style A, folio 7 verso and folio 8 recto



Image 4: Issue No. 1 of Style B, folio 11 verso and folio 12 recto

The left-hand side of either image illustrates an article about the slaying of a pair of foxes in a little village in Nagasaki Prefecture, that was published in the *Yūbin Hōchi Shimbun* No. 628 on March 30, 1875. The old foxes, a male and a female, were said to have terrified women and children by making strange noises every night in a

field, where they were trapped, clubbed to death, and then had their heads put on display by a group of young men.



Image 5: Illustrated newspaper *Yūbin Hōchi Shimbun* No. 628, illustrated by Taiso Yoshitoshi, published by Kinshodo in 1875, 34.5 cm × 24.0 cm, one scrapbook of *Shimbun furoku azuma nishikie*. NDL Call No. 234-85

*Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).

Image 5 shows an illustration by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi of the article about the slaying of the foxes from the *Yūbin Hōchi Shimbun*. Kunimasa focused on the drama of the young men hunting the foxes, while Yoshitoshi depicted the consequences of the incident, in which people came to see the fox heads. Judging from the dates of publication, Kunimasa's illustration was done before Yoshitoshi's.

While articles in the *osana etoki* sometimes contained factual errors or misattributions of their sources, Issue No. 4 of Style A also contains stories about a phantom thief in the Netherlands and a French couple's divorce, which convey a feeling of the trend toward westernization and other signs of the times. These issues illustrate for us much about the social situations, the increased availability of publications to the general public, and how information was acquired during the early Meiji period. It is also an interesting example of material intended for the edification of children.

(Translated by Rie Watanabe)

References (in Japanese):

- Yoshimi Shun'ya, Supervised by Tsuchiya Reiko, *Meiji no mediashitachi Nishikie shimbun no sekai : Kikakuten*. Edited and published by Newspark: An interactive museum of information and newspapers in Yokohama in 2001. NDL Call No. UC126-G43
- *Bunmei kaika no nishikie shinbun: Tokyo nichinichi shinbun yūbin hōchi shimbun zensakuhin*, Edited by Chibashi Bijutsukan, published by Kokusho Kankokai in 2008. NDL Call No. UC126-J1