

Selections from NDL collections

Kokkei doke anmon—Writing summer greetings to a thunder god

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Kokkei doke anmon

Written by: Hanasanjin; Illustrated by: KEISAI Eisen;

Published by: Gyokusendo; 1 volume 18.0 cm × 12.0 cm; NDL Call No. 245-147,

* Held at the [Rare Books and Old Materials Room](#), Tokyo Main Library of the NDL

Kokkei doke anmon is a book comprising 40 sample letters, such as New Year's greetings, letters of sympathy, and letters of request, but written in humorously ostentatious language. For example, there is an example of how to write midsummer greetings to a thunder god as well as of how to write a letter to an evil spirit. *Kokkeibon* means "humorous book" in Japanese and is considered a subgenre of *gesaku*, or popular literature. This genre flourished during the first half of the 19th century, and late Edo period readers liked to amuse themselves with wordplay and funny stories.

Kokkei doke anmon was quite a popular book among ordinary Japanese, who were already familiar with what

were often dogmatic textbooks for things like *tenaraibon* (penmanship), *oraimono* (correspondence courses in primary education), *setsuyoushu* (Japanese-language dictionaries), and *chohoki* (how-to books about daily life). *Kokkei douke anmon* parodied its more stodgy cousins, much to the amusement of the common man.

Kokkei douke anmon was written by a man named [Hanasanjin](#) (1791–1858), who used a number of pseudonyms, including the name Torisanjin, and was a pupil of the *gesaku* writer [SANTO Kyoden](#) (1716–1816). In addition to *kokkeibon*, Hanasanjin also wrote *sharebon* (stories of the pleasure quarters), *ninjobon* (love stories), and *gokan* (bound volumes of illustrated books). He was

fond of *kyōka* and *haikai*, which are humorous parodies of traditional poetry, and was an intimate associate of [KEISAI Eisen](#), the *ukiyo-e* artist who is thought to be the illustrator of this book.

The preface was written by SHOTEI Kinsui, a *ninjobon* writer, whose name is given as "Shotei no aruji (lit. Master of Shotei) and who praises the book humorously in an overly refined and officious manner, writing "This book stands unrivalled across the ages, against which all other works of this kind pale in comparison. Thumb through the leaves of this masterpiece only at the risk of dislocating your jaw in laughter and rolling on the floor in delirium."



Pictured table of contents

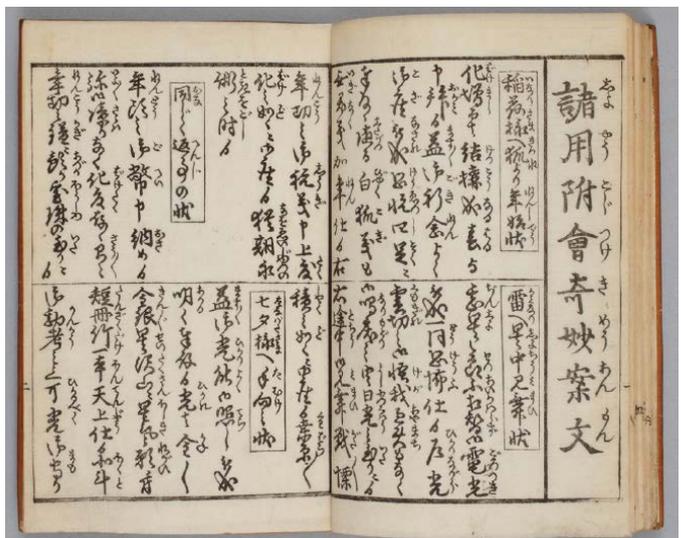


Preface (left) and title page (right)

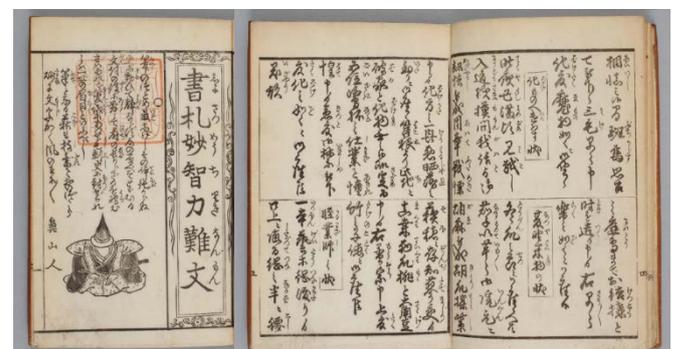
The preface is followed by a table of contents, which comprises comical illustrations, intended to pique the reader's interest.



The sample letters are sorted into two categories, *shoyo kojitsuke kimyo anmon* (sophistically strange expressions for all occasions) and *shosatsu myochiriki nanmon* (peculiarly difficult wisdom for written documents), although there is no clear distinction made between the two.



Shoyo kojitsuke kimyo anmon



Shosatsu myochiriki nanmon and the author's preface (right)

At the beginning of *shosatsu myochiriki nanmon*, the author's preface contains a beautiful *waka* that reflects the depth of his knowledge in literature. It reads, "*Fude to naru hagi mo shidarete onozukara suna ni moji kaku kaze no manimani*" (The bush clover hangs its branches

in the wind, drawing letters in the sand as it sways and dreams of being made into a writing brush.)

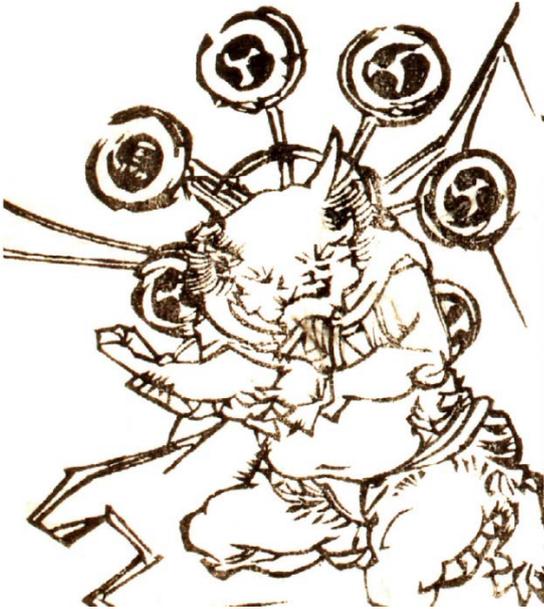


Illustration of a thunder god from the table of contents

Here is a letter that conveys midsummer greetings to a thunder god, an object of fear and awe since olden times. The idea of writing to a thunder god is comical by itself. It reads:

Your excellency, Mr. Thunder God,

In this midst of hottest summer, we tremble with fear at the sound of your thunder and sight of your lightning, looking on in awe as you blaze as bright as the Sun and fall upon the Earth through rent clouds without so much as a bruise. For mercy's sake, do not strike us down. Absit omen.

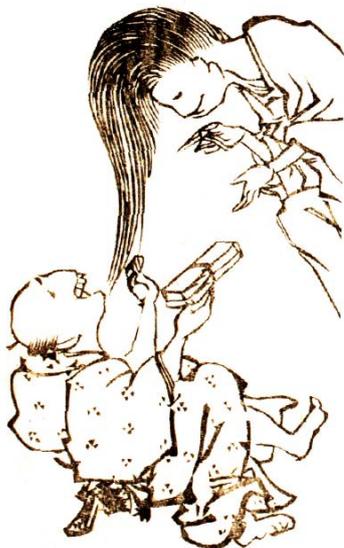


Illustration of a yokai from the table of contents

This next example is a letter to a *yokai*, an evil spirit that is commonly associated with summertime.

My dearest *Yokai*,

In the dead of the night, around three in the morning, I awoke in horror to find myself in the presence of a *mikoshi nyudo* (long-necked man) and *momonga* (hairy old man). I was dumbfounded to realize it was nothing more than a night heron's mischief. But when creatures of such stature bother themselves to visit one such as myself, it can only mean their appearance was meant as an admonition from you.

*To see illustrations of these creatures, search for the keywords 見越し入道 (*mikoshi nyudo*) and ももんがあ (*momonga*) in the *yokai* database (Japanese only) at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

Paintings of Strange Phenomena and Yōkai (Ghosts, Monsters, Spirits)

<http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/YoukaiGazou/index-name.html>

Modern readers can enjoy the humor of these letters and illustrations as well as learn something of the wordplay and intellectual playfulness that was popular among ordinary people during the Edo period.

Some of the sample letters were originally published in a work called *shoyo kojitsuke anmon* (諸用附会案文) by JIPPENSHA Ikku, but Hanasanjin's witty writing and the unique illustrations by Eisen give this work an enduring charm and provide us with a clear glimpse into what was popular at the time, what people looked for in *kokkeibon*, and how artists of the time associated with each other.

(Translated by Aya Nakazawa and Shihoko Yokota)

Reference (in Japanese):

- OZAKI Hisaya, "Torisanjin no gyoseki," pp. 241-255, 3 (13) *Edo nanpa kenkyu* (reprint ed.) Kashiwa Shobo Kabushiki Gaisha, 1981. NDL call no. Z13-2597
- JINBO Kazuya, "Hanasanjin," pp. 306-328, *Tamenaga shunsui no kenkyu* Hakujitsusha, 1964. NDL call no. 913.54-Ta658Zt
- JINBO Fumio, "Kinsei horitsu bunsho no gibun," pp. 1-35, (255) *Nagoya University, journal of law and politics* 2014. NDL call no. Z2--177
- TAKAGI Tadashi, "Old pun literature as legal document templates: a commoners' consciousness of contract in the Tokugawa period" pp. 1-39, (105) *Senshu hogaku ronshu* 2009. NDL call no. Z2-190
- JIPPENSHA Ikku, *Shoyo kojitsuke anmon*, 1804 (preface). NDL call no. 208-167 *Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).