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The Great Ceremony (Dai hōe no zu)

Ebisuya Shōshichi

Not on display

Title/Description: The Great Ceremony (Dai hōe no zu)

Artist/Maker: Ebisuya Shōshichi (Artist)

Born: 1850 circa - 1850

Measurements: Image h. 363 x w. 252 mm

Inscription: Censor's seals

Accession Number: 41462

Historic Period: Edo period (AD 1600-1868)

Utagawa Yoshitora (c. active 1836-1887) and his publisher Ebisuya Shōshichi issued this design around 1850. [1] The Sainsbury Centre's print constitutes the middle sheet of an incomplete triptych, missing a sheet on either side. An extremely limited amount of information appears on this central sheet making the identification of the design challenging.

The artist's name appears in a yellow cartouche in the bottom right-hand corner. Above the signature are two round censor's seals of the government-appointed censors, Kinugasa Fusajirō and Watanabe Gentarō. This provides a date range of 1846-1852. [2] In the bottom left-hand corner in black and white is the publisher's seal used by Ebisuya Shōshichi.

Yoshitora has depicted a gathering of courtiers dressed in court caps and wearing *kamishimo* formal dress. Central to the composition are two figures stood before a large Buddhist altar, both men look to their left. Fortunately, a complete version of this design is in the collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It is possible to glean more information about the print from this work. [3]

The title cartouche for Yoshitora's design appears on the missing right-hand sheet, which reads 'The Great Buddhist Ceremony' (*Dai hōe no zu*). This sheet also depicts the figure of Taira no Shigemori, dressed in black, carrying the child-Emperor Antoku. They are the focus of the courtiers' attention and are central to an understanding of the triptych design.

Minister of State, Taira no Ason Shigemori (1138-1179) built a Buddhist Hall of forty-eight bays, 'one for each of Amida's forty-eight vows,' where on the 14th day and the 15th day of each month Amida's name was invoked. [4] Yoshitora's design may portray the 'Great Invocation,' when shortly before his death Shigemori participated in a procession and prayers to Buddha Amida Nyorai. Emperor

Antoku (1178-1185) would have been very young at the time these ceremonies were held. However, the tension between the two figures on the dais and Taira no Shigemori suggests that the scene is confrontational.

The 13th-14th-century 'Tale of the Heike' (*Heike monogatari* 平家物語) chronicles the defeat of the Heike (Taira clan) by the Genji (Minamoto clan) during the Genpei War (1180-1185). Emperor Antoku's life was cut short at the sea battle of Dan-no-ura, in which many Heike drowned. Popular culture romanticized the fate of the Heike, and the paired figures of Taira no Shigemori (also called Komatsu Naidaijin Shigemori) and Emperor Antoku reoccur in 19th-century kabuki plots and woodblock prints. [5]

Yoshitora's triptych inspired a similar design from Utagawa Yoshiiku (1833-1904), issued in the first lunar month of 1861. Although Yoshiiku offers the scene in close-up, he duplicates many of the details found in Yoshitora's design. Again Taira no Shigemori, supporting the child-Emperor Antoku, is stood on the right and commands the attention of the courtiers in the ceremonial hall. [6]

Vanessa Tothill, June 2020

[1] The date of the print was provided by Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The design is mentioned in the 'Diary of Fujiokaya (*Fujiokaya Nikki*, 1804-1868), which was compiled by Yoshizō of the Fujiokaya bookstore in Shitaya.

[2] Andreas Marks, *Publishers of Japanese Woodblock Prints: A Compendium* (Leiden; Boston: Hotei Publishing, 2011), pp. 478-79.

[3] The complete triptych of this design is in the collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (object number: 11.41349a-c)

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/472332/the-great-ceremony-dai-hoe-no-zu?ctx=2368250d-a273-4ff0-9557-159805d0daf8&idx=0> [accessed 26 May 2020]

[4] Helen Craig McCullough, trans, *The Tale of the Heike* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 119.

[5] The British Museum (object number: 2008,3037.10705)

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_2008-3037-10705 [accessed 27 May 2020]

[6] Yoshiiku's design is titled 'Inner Minister Taira Shigemori Assisting the Young Lord', (*Naidaijin Taira Shigemori yōkun hosa no zu* 内大臣平家重盛若君の御成). An example is in the collection at Waseda University Library (object number: 05 04229 0020).

https://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/chi05/chi05_04229_0020/index.html [accessed 27 May 2020]
