NAMAZU-E

Earthquake catfish motif art (Japanese woodblock print)



The idea of catfish causing the earthquake existed since 16th century. When “Ansei Edo” earthquake occurred on 11th November 1855, Namazu-e (catfish motif earthquake art, Japanese woodblock print) became popular in Edo. This is one of the Nishiki-e (print using multiple colored woodblocks), and was published more than 200 kinds in 2 months.

The pictures of god Kashima, restraining the catfish using Kaname-ishi rock, were used as a charm to protect from the future earthquake.

For the prints published just after the quake, a scene where earthquake victims revenge on the catfish for causing the destruction is pictured.



When the economic status of Edo became better by the rebuilding phase after the earthquake, the catfish was transformed to be a hero of setting the world aright.

A namazu-e or catfish motif earthquake art, entitled Shin Yoshiwara ōnamazu yurai or "The cause of the great catfish at Shin Yoshiwara"

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The 1855 Ansei Edo earthquake

WHEN:10PM, 11th November, 1855

MAGNITUDE: around 7

EPICENTER: from northern Tokyo bay to Koutou district

TYPE: Inland earthquake

DEATH TOLL: more than 7000