The 1855 Ansei Edo Earthquake as a Political Event

1. Alignment of geology, geography, political power
2. Earthquake as *yo-naoshi*
3. Amaterasu comes to Edo; EQ shakes “Japan”
4. Catfish as voice of the people
5. Folk memory 12 years later in 1867?
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<th>Basic Facts About the Ansei Edo Earthquake:</th>
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<td>❖ 10pm, 2\textsuperscript{nd} day, 10\textsuperscript{th} month, 1855 (11 November); an \textit{okage} year</td>
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<td>❖ Shallow focus; Richter magnitude est. 6.9 – 7.2</td>
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<td>❖ Civilian casualties 7-10,000 (military casualties unknown, but likely similar); 1 in 170 on average</td>
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<td>❖ Casualties uneven; shortage of coffins made deaths seem higher than they were</td>
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<td>❖ Approximately 14,000 structures damaged, especially storehouses</td>
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<td>❖ Extensive aftershocks for a month afterward, as many as 80 per day at their peak.</td>
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EDO
1602
Wave amplitude increases
Path of waves shifts vertically
Waves become trapped by the basement rock
Bottom line: ground movement greatly amplified; much more destruction

Soil base and ground motions in an earthquake
Worst damage: Fukagawa, Yoshiwara, “Daimyō Lane”
Although Fukagawa and Yoshiwara were exceptions, in general, commoner neighborhoods fared well. Some daimyō mansions also did well. But large concentration of destroyed *fudai* mansions, bakufu offices, and the offshore artillery installations contrasted dramatically with the low level of destruction in the neighborhoods just across the moat.
Bakufu Relief:

☞ Food & medical aid

☞ Temporary housing (5 locations)

☞ Survey of casualties & property damage

☞ Coordination of relief with neighborhood heads

☞ Pressed wealthy individuals and businesses to provide relief & coordinated it (there was no duplication of relief)

☞ Basis of food relief was not the extent of EQ damage, but rather one’s income/socio-economic level—poverty relief conducted in the name of EQ relief. Why?

☞ “Disaster utopia”--contrast with 1923

☞ Attempted, without success, to keep wage and price increases down. This lack of success generally aided ordinary townspeople

☞ Overall effect: reinforced sense of EQ as “world rectification”

“Yo-naoshi,” “yo-naori,” and “manzairaku” were talismanic chants during earthquakes and tsunamis. Only in the 1855 Ansei Edo Earthquake does yo-naoshi become a descriptive term used to characterize the event.
EQ as Medicine

EQ as Windfall
Kashima demoted; Amaterasu rides into town on a white horse; Amaterasu described as the “ruler of Japan”; EQ described as having “shaken Japan”
Catfish as voice of the people; EQ became an opportunity to comment on the condition of society.

Bakufu prohibited *namazu-e* after 1 month; prohibition ignored; after another month bakufu cracked down harder, bringing the *namazu-e* to an end.
Part of an *ee ja nai ka* song points out that 12 years ago an earthquake (*jishin*) half destroyed the military houses and that this year the military houses will complete the project of their destruction by “themselves” (*jishin*).
For more on this topic . . .


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Book in progress