Introduction

This book is about the relationship between visual images and Buddhist proselytization. The Buddhist art that I explore here refers to the images for religious proselytization that helped disseminate Buddhism, especially among the common people. Japanese Buddhism, since its introduction in the sixth century, patronized the literate elite class in art, scriptures, and rituals, and it remained a prerogative primarily of the aristocracy until the end of the twelfth century. With the decline of the aristocracy’s political and fiscal powers between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, Buddhists turned to lay commoners, including both men and women, for financial support, a group whom elitist Buddhism had previously excluded from salvation. In proselytizing the Buddhist faith, monks used paintings to accommodate subliterate audiences. This pictorial preaching, known as etoki, or pictorial decipherment, helped bridge the worlds between Buddhism and lay commoners. Hence the study of etoki preaching reveals much about the role of art in the context of didactic storytelling and proselytization.

Although using paintings for didactic storytelling is prevalent virtually everywhere in the world, pictorial preaching as an act of deciphering images for Japan’s medieval audiences is distinct. The word “deciphering” suggests that people viewed the paintings as puzzles to be solved. Who could decipher these images? Indeed, at that time, what did “deciphering images” mean? Using several cases of etoki as paradigms, in this book I address these issues.

This study of etoki, a method of popularizing Buddhism, also reexamines the history of medieval Buddhism. Until recently, leading scholars of Japanese Buddhism depicted the Kamakura period as a Buddhist renaissance led by renegade heretics against a corrupt orthodoxy. Conventionally, historians of Kamakura Buddhism focus on Hōnen (1133–1212), Eisai (1141–1215), Shinran (1173–1262), Dōgen (1200–1253), Nichiren (1222–1282), and Ippen (1239–1289)—the founders of “Kamakura New Buddhism” (the Jōdo, Rinzai Zen, Jōdo-shin, Sōtō Zen, Nichiren, and Ji sects, respectively). These monks have been portrayed as revolutionaries who broke away from the “old” Buddhism,
which consisted of recondite, esoteric schools serving only the aristocracy, to
focus on the salvation of nonaristocratic men and women.

The opposition of old and new Buddhism was not necessarily clear-cut,
however. Kuroda Toshio has shown that mainstream Buddhism in the Kamakura
period was still the old orthodoxy. Even the “founders” of new Buddhism ini-
tially trained in the orthodox old schools. In addition, Richard Payne, James
Dobbins, and others have recently pointed out a methodological problem in the
conventional comparisons made between Kamakura Buddhism and Reformation
Christianity. The history of Kamakura Buddhism had been written as a
series of religious movements from which today’s most popular Buddhist sects stem.

Dobbins urges that we discard such “retrospectivist historiography,”
since the teachings of so-called Kamakura New Buddhism were neither new
nor revolutionary. Popularization, which gradually brought these new schools
into the mainstream, did not occur until the fourteenth century.

These recent studies, to which I subscribe, clarify many myths about
Kamakura Buddhism, yet they do not explain how such a marginal sect as Pure
Land Buddhism became mainstream in the fourteenth century. I contend that it
was primarily through the use of didactic images that Buddhism was spread
among the common classes. Combining visual images with preaching was more
effective than verbal didactics alone, making the popularization of Buddhism in
the fourteenth century a visual cultural phenomenon. Significant numbers of
extant images of Buddhist paradise and hell produced in the thirteenth and
fourteenth centuries indicate the popular use of didactic images in the period.

Etoki, with its enticing stories and intricate pictures, was one of the most
effective and direct methods of proselytizing faith not only through the lower
strata of society but also among all classes in more remote regions of the coun-
try. Accordingly, etoki offers us complex issues involving the interrelation
of faith, art, and propagandistic narratives. In this book I explore how deciphers
of images controlled the meanings illustrated in paintings and, moreover, how
this power of controlling images related directly to the power of propagating
religious beliefs.

WHAT IS ETOKI?

Luis Frois (1532–1597), a Jesuit missionary from Portugal, spent the last thirty-
three years of his life in Japan proselytizing Christianity. Throughout those years
he kept a journal in which he recorded his observations of the people, things,
and strange customs of Japan: married women blackened their teeth; paper and
wood were the chief building materials; the main seasoning was soybean paste
Among other things, Frois was surprised at the large number of Japanese women who were literate, and he used this point to compare Japanese and European education. Indeed, Frois wrote that highborn Japanese women valued literacy as essential to their status. As a Jesuit, Frois must have welcomed the custom of reading among his future converts, yet he could not wait for Japanese people to become fluent in a European language. Instead Frois, like other Jesuits, resorted to visual texts for proselytization. Paintings of Madonna and Child, the Crucifixion of Christ, and printed illustrated books of events in the life of Jesus eloquently supplemented verbal descriptions of Christianity to the Japanese. In other words, Christian missionaries promoted visual literacy in an attempt to make the Japanese people visually fluent in Christian symbols. Yet visual literacy in religious symbols was nothing new to Japan. These Christian missionaries were not the only champions of visual proselytization; Japanese Buddhists had long used pictorial images to promote their own faith. This Buddhist system of pictorial proselytization was called etoki (literally, “picture decipherment”).

Contemporary Japanese for the most part do not associate etoki with Buddhism; rather, etoki generally refers to such printed materials as illustrated guidebooks, instructional manuals, and maps. Illustrations are often simple drawings—much like the omnipresent comic books called manga. Japanese people of all ages and both genders avidly read manga, spending hours at coffee shops, under the eaves of manga bookstores, and on commuter trains, consuming millions of comic-book magazines every year. Manga are exceedingly popular, and their popularity depends on lively, often exaggerated, illustrations that contain minimal verbal texts. Manga readers have a high degree of visual literacy and can absorb an entire magazine at what seems to be a glance. This visual literacy has its roots, at least in part, in the premodern practices of etoki.

Etoki’s origins reach to medieval times, when Buddhist preachers displayed large, intricately detailed paintings to explain their faith to practitioners and nonbelievers alike. Images narrated various stories of Buddhist paradise and heroic tales of saints and prophets. Illustrated storytelling was not only educational but entertaining—which parallels what manga comics and other visual media offer an audience. In this sense, etoki was a form of medieval popular culture. Although Buddhist performances of etoki have become less frequent at major temples, the practice continues at certain smaller temples even today. In this context, etoki means “pictorial sermon”; it is a method of preaching with visual aids.

There are two definitions of etoki—illustrated books and pictorial sermons—both of which derive from the literal meaning of e (pictures, images) and toki
E-toki can mean “elucidation by images,” as in the case of illustrations in guidebooks, or “elucidation of images,” as in pictorial sermons. The word etoki therefore simultaneously signifies the painted images themselves and the performance of pictorial sermons before a live audience. Thus in the Buddhist context, paintings visually decipher the written texts and preachers decipher the visual images. Medieval Buddhists paid attention to both acts—the deciphering of written texts into illustrations and the deciphering of painted images into verbal preaching. For them, etoki signified both activities.

But there is also a third definition: etoki can be the person who explains the meaning of the painting for an audience. Consequently, the same word signifies both the preacher of etoki pictorial sermons and the preaching of etoki, as though there were no distinction between actor and action. To put all these definitions in a diagram would result in a tripartite signification of etoki—the performance, the performer, and the painting (Fig. I.1). Each process of this tripartite signification, from words to images and then to speech, is transformative. The transformation is a decipherment: the toki (explanation) of etoki. The diagram shows that the painting translates the written text, and the preacher, who has the advantage of familiarity with the base text, translates the painting for the audience. Barbara Ruch regards etoki as a “media” literature: “Painting, story, chanter, and even the sounding of musical instruments (often non-melodic background sound) combined to create a total audio-visual experience rare, if not unique, in the premodern history of world literature.” Although this diagram conveys the neat organization of complicated relationships between texts, the arrows can be deceptive. The straight arrows suggest that the meaning contained in the literary text is accurately transformed into images and then into speech. The original meaning seems intact. At once I am reminded of Walter Benjamin’s discussion of transparent translation. He writes: “[Translation] allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.” Benjamin is principally concerned with the quality of a translation as a finished work, not the power relationship between an original (in which “original” implies “unique”) and its translation (a copy in another language). Similarly, although etoki as performative acts translated multiple texts for the viewing audience, the performance was important not as a translation but as the primary expression of ideas that gave both the performance (etoki) and the preacher (etoki) their power.

At an etoki sermon, the preacher is both the translator of images and the authority who controls the meaning of the various sources of texts. At this moment, these original texts become available to the audience for the first time.
Through the techniques of performance, the preacher adds qualities of importance, value, or originality—and in doing so goes beyond the translator’s task of presenting original texts in another language. Since the paintings used at etoki sermons are, for the most part, illustrations of literary texts, they could be regarded as an inferior mode of symbols according to semantic studies of word and image, which often subordinate images to texts. A visually aided sermon does seem to subordinate illustration to text because the painting requires verbal explanation. One who focuses on the text might ask: Isn’t it impossible to read the images without a knowledge of the texts on which they are based? And aren’t the images alone inadequate translators of the text, therefore requiring further explanation by words? Such questions, however, ignore cultural or sociohistorical sources of meaning. Semiotic studies are logocentric and linguistic preoccupations. Instead of looking at etoki as a system where images are incompetent and inadequate translations, in this work I look at the visual images called etoki as an original text that redefines the written text through pictorial forms.

Equally, the other etoki—the pictorial sermon—produces yet another original text every time it is performed. Mediation between painting and audience is more than a simple retelling of the narrative; it is also a presentation of the image as a complex diagram and a decipherable enigma. Part of the “original text” is the mystery created by the narrator in relation to the pictorial image; the narrator both creates and solves the mystery. The paintings of etoki are complicated, and their interpreters present them as the primary objects of ritual ceremony and preaching that need to be explained by image interpreters. Etoki sermons are sometimes compared to the talks presented by docents who lead tours through museum galleries, but this comparison is inaccurate; docents do

**FIGURE 1.1. Tripartite signification chart showing three kinds of etoki.**
not preach the moral tenets of paintings and etoki preachers do not explain the historical or artistic significance of paintings. The task of etoki preachers is to dispense religious propaganda among an audience of potential converts and patrons.

ETOKI AS PROPAGANDA

For many people, pairing religion and propaganda may seem jarring since propaganda typically elicits a negative reaction to manipulative, political messages. Propaganda is often equated with “lies, distortion, deceit, manipulation, mind control, psychological warfare, brainwashing, and palaver.”

Propaganda as a means of controlling public opinion has a long history dating back to the ancient world, as Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell show in their book Propaganda and Persuasion. They consider the most successfully persuasive propaganda campaigns in history to have been the religious proselytization of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Despite differences in religious views, religious propagandists have used strategies similar to those of modern political propaganda, including the introduction of charismatic personages and symbols in visual images. Indeed, the distinction between political and religious propaganda is a false one. Politics often are religiously motivated, and religion inevitably deals with political power. Wars have been and, unfortunately, still are fought in the name of religious faith. Among the most visually simple yet powerful propaganda symbols is the form of a cross made of strips of cloth that medieval Christians wore as a sign of crusade.

Although we usually do not associate religion and propaganda with each other, the word “propaganda” itself derives from the work of the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith), a committee of cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church that Pope Gregory XV founded in 1622 to oversee the jurisdiction of missionary territories in foreign countries. In this context, propaganda’s literal meaning, “extension,” is used in naming a religious office that took care of the missionary work of “propagating” doctrine. By no means was this work always nefarious. To borrow Jowett and O’Donnell’s expression, “One person’s propaganda may be another person’s education.”

Historically, then, “propaganda” has strong religious connotations. Propaganda originally signified missionary work carried out to convert people to Christianity and solicit donations from lay believers. Japanese Buddhists too conducted religious campaigns in the medieval and early modern periods, propagating Pure Land Buddhism among commoners. The act of
Buddhist proselytizing was termed *kanjin* and *shōdō*, both of which I translate as “propaganda.”

From its religious usage—the systematic, persuasive propagation of a doctrine—propaganda came to mean various manipulative schemes for the propagation of ideas or opinions, which is how we perceive it today. The pejorative overtones that most people today associate with the term are a reaction to modern political propaganda. At present, whether a country is under dictatorial rule or is protected by rights of free speech, mass media play an important role; the difference is that it is sometimes difficult to discern a propaganda system at work in countries with private media and no formal censorship.

Mass media control opinion by serving as the main channel to inculcate uniform values and beliefs. In the past as well as today, visual images have certainly been indispensable tools for mass communication and effective propaganda.

Political posters are visible everywhere in public places. They communicate their message directly, sometimes with written words. Uncle Sam’s *I Want You* poster, for example, or more likely today a bumper sticker saying “An Army of One,” are so familiar that many Americans probably see both as advertisements for a job opportunity rather than as political propaganda. These images introduced in a literary context may seem simplistically self-explanatory, but this is a common misunderstanding. The deeper subtext of the Caucasian Uncle Sam wearing a Stars-and-Stripes suit is that of a patriotic American: the image of the strong man who represents the majority of the nation. Images are complex cultural products. When propounding slogans, propagandists and publicists must always keep in mind their audience. Propaganda often criticizes political enemies, seemingly targeting the supporters of opponents, but more often than not propaganda is addressed to one’s own supporters in order to confirm widely held opinions. Propagandistic images need to speak the same cultural language as the viewer; the accompanying slogans are intended to minimize misunderstanding and enforce meaning. John Dower notes that for months on end after Pearl Harbor, one popular magazine in Japan ran a different patriotic slogan in the margin of every page of every issue. Religious propaganda uses similar methods. Robert Scribner’s *For the Sake of Simple Folk* reveals how religious propaganda in Reformation-era Germany was directed toward common folk by using popular printed images from picture books and broadsheets.

Although the pictures used for *etoki* are hardly the same kind of images as those used in Reformation propaganda, the intent and function of the visual material are analogous. *Etoki*, by combining pictures and preaching, aimed at
the semiliterate classes much as Reformation prints did in Germany. Scribner mentions the famous saying attributed to Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) concerning the word versus the image: the book is for the literate; the image is for the unlettered.20 The saying works in medieval Japan as well. The opening statement of the Priest Hōnen Picture Scroll (Hōnen Shōnin eden) notes: “The illustrated biography of Hōnen is put together in several scrolls for the uneducated (orokanaru mono) to understand easily and to promote religiosity.”21 Most etoki images consist of numerous vignettes in complex, large-scale formats. The storyteller then slowly unravels these illustrations for the viewers. Etoki performers understandably rely on viewers’ positive responses.

Superficially, it might seem helpful here to employ reception theory, which examines viewers’ responses to artworks. As the art historian Madeline Caviness has demonstrated, the theory is particularly useful for reconstructing medieval readings of art as functional objects for the original users and viewers.22 Reception theory shifts the scholar’s focus from the biographical study of master artists or iconographic and formal study of artworks to users’ receptions. Reception theory is especially helpful in studying religious artworks—“functional” artifacts that manifest a concept of art different from our modern conception. For viewers of etoki paintings, however, there is little chance of free interpretation since preachers dictate their meaning. In other words, etoki performers strive for a uniform reception from an audience. Etoki preachers act as decipherers of visual images (also called etoki), which are highly diagrammatic and often hardly readable unless one has some previous knowledge. A need for a translator, a person who performs etoki, created the proselytizer’s opportunity to preach religious propaganda.

ETOKI AS PERFORMANCE
Etoki is not a form of theater; nor did the practitioners of etoki form a school.23 Nevertheless, etoki has theatrical characteristics with a pictorial spectacle for a live audience. I thus treat etoki as performance. I use the term “performance” in the context of religious ritual, primarily Buddhist, but also include the beliefs in nature, spirits of the dead, and kami (divine spirits). Etoki performers remind us of Edward Shils’ statement: “Belief could exist without rituals; rituals, however, could not exist without beliefs.”24 Ritual and belief, although theoretically separable, meet in actual practice.

Theories of cultural performance and discussions of dramatism help to illuminate the religious ritual aspect of etoki.25 As we shall see in Chapter 2, etoki preachers act out prescribed protocol and convention as though etoki perfor-
mance meant ritual drama. Moreover, many no and kabuki plays offer the same subject and story as medieval etoki narratives. The phenomenon indicates interactions between theatrical performers and etoki preachers—and, more important, the popularization of religious (Buddhist) morals via entertainment media. The situation recalls what Victor Turner termed “social drama,” in which religious ritual performances generate a cultural phenomenon. Ritual presents, as Clifford Geertz points out, sacred symbols that produce “the mood and motivations” that formulate the order of existence. According to Geertz, the two realms—actual and imagined—meld under the single set of symbolic forms into the same world in one’s sense of reality. Therefore, anything goes in such a world yet appears commonsensical or rational.

But the melding of the two worlds does not necessarily mean that medieval people were ignorant about science. Religious doctrines, Buddhist philosophy and worldviews, served as their scientific reference and knowledge. As much Buddhist literature reveals, Buddhism explained strange phenomena just as science does today. Buddhism was their science, and etoki ritual confirmed Buddhist truths with paintings, the visual confirmation. The detailed images of Buddhist paradise or hell showed viewers worlds of the unseeable and explained these invisible worlds realistically. As soon as the abstract ideal took a pictorial form, the intangible idea became unalterably identified with the image. In an etoki performance, the painting was more than a prop. Rather, it made the image an icon, a powerful object of worship.

In sum, then, a successful etoki performance relies on two assumptions: first, only the words in a literary text can convey messages directly to the reader; second, only a specialist can unravel the ulterior meanings inscribed in the pictorial language that is so different from verbal language. An etoki sermon represents a performative moment during which a preacher aurally and orally assumes the seat of religious authority through the “magic” act of decipherment. Etoki performances provided both didactic opportunities for missionaries and visual enticement for the audience.

**Pictorial Categories of Etoki**

The subject matter of the paintings used at etoki performances varies greatly—an inevitable outcome of the diverse genres of Buddhist texts that accompany images. These texts include canonical scriptures (sutras), moralizing folktales, biographies of the Buddha, eminent monks, and historical figures, legends of the foundation of temples (engi), and historical narratives. An exhibition titled *Nihon no setsuwa-ga* (Illustrations of Japanese folk literature), held at the Kyoto
National Museum in 1960, showed a wide range of paintings that had been historically used as pedagogical tools. Although the word etoki was not used at this exhibition, the exhibited works represented the subject matter of etoki popularly used at various religious centers. Understandably, the subject matter and style of the paintings varied from temple to temple, from sect to sect, and from studio to studio.

Hayashi Masahiko, a leading scholar of etoki, classifies them by narrative genre:

1. **NARRATIVE PAINTINGS BASED ON BUDDHIST CANONS AND DOCTRINES:**
   - Lotus Sutra mandala (*Hokkekyō mandara zu*)
   - Visualization Sutra mandala (*Taïma mandara*)
   - Scenes of hell and paradise (*Jigokuyō gokuraku zu*)
   - Pictures of ten worlds (*Jikkai zu*)
   - Ten-worlds mandala of Kumano (*Kumano kanshin jikkai zu*)
   - Six realms of reincarnation (*Rikudō e*)
   - Illustrations of the Essentials of Salvation (*Tōjōshō gokuraku on-e zu*)
   - Hell mandala (*Jigoku mandara*)
   - Five wheels of life (*Goshu shōji rin*)
   - Ten kings of hell (*Jū jū* zu)
   - Two-rivers-and-white-road (*Nikawa byakudō*) and the like

2. **THE BUDDHA SHAKAMUNI’S LIFE STORIES:**
   - Life of the Buddha (*Butsu den zu*)
   - Eight aspects of Shakamuni (*Shaka hassō zu*)
   - The Buddha’s nirvana (*Nehan zu*) and the like

3. **HAGIOGRAPHIES OF HISTORICAL FIGURES AND BUDDHIST MONKS:**
   - Prince Shōtoku, Kōbō Daishi, Kaizan Shōnin, Hōnen Shōnin, Shinran Shōnin, Rennyu Shōnin, Ippen Shōnin, and the like

4. **ORIGINS OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF HOLY MOUNTAINS AND Temples:**
   - Tateyama Mountains mandala (*Tateyama mandara*)
   - Mount Haku mandala (*Hakusan mandara*)
   - Mount Fuji pilgrimage mandala (*Fuji sankei mandara*)
   - Taga Shrine pilgrimage mandala (*Tagasha sankei mandara*)
   - Kiyomizu-dera pilgrimage mandala (*Kiyomizudera sankei mandara*)
   - Foundation story of Seiganji (*Seiganji engi e*)
   - Nachi Waterfall pilgrimage mandala (*Nachi sankei mandara*)
Ki-Mii-dera pilgrimage mandala (Ki miidera sankei mandara)
Kokawadera pilgrimage mandala (Kokawadera sankei mandara)
Foundation story of Arima Onsenji (Arima-onsenji engi e)
Foundation story of Shidoji (Shidoji engi)
Foundation story of Tamatare Palace (Tamadaregû engi e)
Zenkôji pilgrimage mandala (Zenkôji sankei mandara)
Zenkôji Buddha pictorial biography (Zenkoji nyorai e den)
Tale of Jizô Bodhisattva of Yata (Yata jizô engi e)

5 WAR TALES:
The Battle of Heiji at Rokuhara in Kyoto (Kyoto Rokuhara kassen)
The Last of Minamoto Yoshitomo (Minamoto Yoshitomo-kô saigo no e zu)
Legend of Emperor Antoku (Antoku tennô on-engi e zu)
The Battle of Miki (Miki kassen zu)

6 LEGENDARY TALES:
Priest Karukaya (Karukaya Dôshin Ishidômaru o yako on e zu)
Emon Saburô
Oguri Hangan (Oguri Hangan ichidai-ki)
Dôjôji legend (Dôjôji engi emaki)
Koizukadera origin (Koizukadera engi e)
Nine aspects of decay of Ono no Komachi (Ono no Komachi kusôzu)
Nine aspects of decay of Empress Danrin (Danrin kôgô kusôzu)
Shuten Dôji (Shuten dôji emaki)

This list lays out the breadth of etoki topics, themes, and types. These titles (except for category 5) represent nearly the entire body of religious paintings studied in Japanese art history. Indeed this list indicates that almost all religious paintings were associated with etoki practice as didactic or promotional propaganda images.

The formats and materials of these paintings vary widely: wall paintings, hanging scrolls, and handscrolls painted on silk, paper, or wood. Their styles varied widely, too. Some paintings were elaborately crafted on expensive silk while others were economically executed on cheap paper. Some were painted by known professional artists while many portable scrolls carried by itinerant monks and nuns were made by untrained hands. This diverse range in subject matter, presentation format, and artistic execution presents complex issues involving the interrelationship of narrative texts, religious paintings, and sermons in the context of Buddhist propaganda.
ABOUT THE BOOK

The goal of this study is to decipher how pictorial and performative Buddhist propaganda worked in Japan between the tenth and nineteenth centuries. While I map out the nine centuries of etoki tradition chronologically, I do not mean to suggest a systematic development in etoki method and practice. Rather, I see a pattern in religious proselytization beyond institutional, sectarian, gender, or regional differences. In fact, etoki’s ubiquity is something I wish to highlight. To give a coherent framework to etoki’s diverse themes, issues, and problems, I explore the propagandistic qualities of etoki using examples selected from Hayashi’s list. These include the pictorial hagiography of the founder of Japanese Buddhism, the pictorial projections of Buddhist paradise and hell, the pictorial explanations of sacred mountains, and preachers and nuns on missions. These specific examples of etoki will help us to analyze the idea of etoki deciphering (toki) and unravel their propagandistic subtext.

The book has four parts. Part One covers the period between the late tenth and mid-twelfth centuries with a focus on the early documentation of etoki and the earliest established examples. Chapter 1 concerns the evidence of etoki found in documents such as aristocrats’ diaries and temple records. From this study, the illustrated biography of Prince Shōtoku emerges as the earliest theme of etoki, through which the founder of Japanese Buddhism was introduced and constructed. Chapter 2 investigates how etoki helped establish the medieval cult of Prince Shōtoku.

Part Two covers the period between the late twelfth and fourteenth centuries with a focus on Pure Land Buddhist propaganda and its use in etoki practice. Chapter 3 examines the idea of visualization that was promoted as a method of meditation in Pure Land Buddhism. Etoki sermons given on the Taima Mandala—the visual description of the Pure Land Buddhist canons—show how visualizing the land of bliss substitutes for meditative concentration to gain enlightenment. Chapter 4 explores the relationship between etoki and Pure Land evangelism.

Part Three covers the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries with a focus on itinerant etoki performers and itinerant performing artists. Itinerant performers of etoki preached on the road and embodied the teachings of Buddhism, including begging, preaching, and chanting (Chapter 5). Through their missionary work, itinerants reached out to commoners and etoki became an effective method of proselytization and solicitation of alms. In the late medieval period, contemporary audiences regarded itinerant etoki preachers much like itinerant performing artists and vendors, leading some modern
scholars to believe that itinerant etoki preachers desecrated sacred religious rituals. In chapter 6 this historiographic problem is reconsidered in relation to the social meaning of itinerant performing artists in the later medieval period.

Part Four covers the period between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries with a focus on etoki’s effect on the popularization of sacred mountain worship, especially worship of the Kumano and Tateyama mountains. These two sites, although hundreds of miles apart, show similar characteristics: missionaries of both sects used etoki to spread their cult; their etoki paintings combined representational mountain images and Buddhist ideas of salvation; and women played important roles in salvation. In the case of Kumano, women worked as the chief missionaries (known as Kumano bikuni, or the nuns of Kumano) who performed etoki. In both cases, women were the targeted patrons. Chapter 7 focuses on propagandistic images of Kumano used by Kumano bikuni. Curiously, their paintings show forms of pictorial organization developed in Indo-Tibetan Asia as well as in Christian Europe. This leads me to explore how Christian religious imagery was exploited in seventeenth-century Buddhist propaganda. Chapter 8 examines how etoki campaigns made the remote mountain of Tateyama a popular pilgrimage site late in early modern Japan.

These four parts correspond with the conventional periodization of Japanese history: Part One corresponds with the late Heian period (ca. 900–1185), Part Two with the Kamakura period (1185–1333), Part Three with the Muromachi and Azuchi-Momoyama periods (1333–1600), and Part Four with the Edo period (1615–1868). I generally opted not to use these periodization names, however, because they signify the centers of geopolitical power. Instead I use a more neutral categorization: premedieval, early medieval, late medieval, and early modern. One of the objectives of this book is to avoid elitist history. Being itinerant, medieval etoki performers were fluid and ubiquitous: they moved about the country in and out of geopolitical capitals as well as aristocratic residences. The social class system generally did not restrict their movements. Itinerant artisans depended on the aristocracy, but the reverse was also true.

ETOKI AND POPULAR RELIGION

As the tripartite signification (Fig. I.1) indicates, the study of etoki intersects the disciplines of art history, religion, literature, and performance studies. Bridging these disciplines, my strategy is to examine religious images as propaganda. Images alone, of course, could not have popularized the Buddhist faith among the common folk. Buddhist proselytization was a gradual achievement, owing
much to grassroots evangelical work, without which the dissemination of religious propaganda throughout the country would have been slower and more difficult. Buddhism, although not directly available to commoners before the medieval period, was represented by art and architecture supported by the aristocracy and thereby indirectly affected people living near them. Missionaries steadily built the mood of piety, gradually popularizing Buddhism among the lower strata of society.

Buddhism is an iconolatrous tradition. Since its early development, Buddhists have created images and worshipped them. The power of the images empowers the art of proselytizing. And as Mimi Hall Yiengprukusawan has elegantly demonstrated in her book *Hiraizumi*, the power of religious art empowers those who control its images. The finely made statues and ornaments housed in Buddhist temples created a theater: a showcase to display a patron’s splendor. Religious art, requiring a space for ritual and worship, also required the performer of rituals. *Etoki* performed on various moralizing stories created a medium for people to understand Buddhism and eventually led to its popularity among commoners.

Popularization here also means the secularization of religious ideas and beliefs—that is, *minkan shinkō* (popular creeds), to use a category of religious anthropology. All major popular cults such as Jōdo (Pure Land) shinkō, Taishi (Shōtoku) shinkō, and Sangaku (mountain worship) shinkō have employed the *etoki* method. The formation of Jōdo shinkō images depicting the land of Amida and the various scenes of hell, for example, helped believers visualize the abstract idea of the Pure Land. Similarly, popular images of Prince Shōtoku that led to the formation of Taishi shinkō originated from the illustrated biography of Shōtoku Taishi, while images of sacred mountains such as Tateyama and Kumano were indispensable for spreading mountain worship all over Japan.

These popular cults, emphasizing beliefs in paradise and the afterlife, represent aspects of the Pure Land Buddhist school. In spreading their creed, they programmed *etoki* into their system of proselytization. Pure Land Buddhists capitalized on the visual power of *etoki* paintings to explain Pure Land Buddhist thought, making the Pure Land faith the most popular school of Buddhism in Japan. Hence the study of *etoki* means the study of popularized Pure Land propaganda.