

BOOK REVIEWS

*Hon—katachi to bunka: kotenseki, kindai
bunken no mikata, tanoshimikata*

本 かたちと文化：古典籍・近代文献の見方・楽しみ方

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This exceptionally useful and informative book has its origins in a series of annual workshops held at the National Institute of Japanese Literature (Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan 国文学研究資料館; hereafter Kokubunken 国文研) in cooperation with the National Diet Library. Those origins are clearly visible to readers, for not only are the chapters described as ‘lectures’ but also the language is that of oral exposition, with honorifics used to address listeners/readers. Why adopt this kind of approach? A cynical reader might suppose that the various contributors found it less trouble simply to recycle their oral presentations, but, in the absence of an explanation from the editors, my guess is that this was rather a deliberate choice, an attempt to make the book more accessible to a wider range of readers by avoiding an academic expository style and eschewing the format of a manual. That would be a worthy goal in keeping with the Kokubunken’s mission as a national institution with a commitment to engage not only with the scholarly community within Japan and elsewhere but also with the Japanese public. It was doubtless with that goal in mind that this is published as a soft-covered book with an attractive cover which includes pictorial and textual references to the subject matter of the various lectures=chapters.

The title might be translated ‘Books: form and culture – ways of looking at and enjoying old and modern books’. In other words, although it is exclusively concerned with Japanese books, the title does not say so. Perhaps this, too, may be a deliberate choice of words. As Kansaku Ken’ichi 神作研一 makes clear in the initial lecture, there are an embarrassing number of overlapping terms in general use, including *kotenseki* 古典籍, *wabon* 和本, *wasbo* 和書, *wakosho* 和古書, and *kokusho* 国書. Using the common word *hon* 本 neatly avoids the limitations of these terms, but it does rather leave an important question hanging in the air: what IS a Japanese book?

Language is obviously an unsatisfactory criterion for defining what is a Japanese book, for in past centuries many Japanese wrote in literary Chinese, or something akin to it: to exclude their writings in Chinese would be like excluding books written in Latin from the history of the book in Britain. For similar reasons, it would be unreasonable to define Japanese books as those books written by Japanese people, for the many Buddhist texts copied or printed in Heian Japan were of course not of Japanese authorship, and the same goes for the famous edition of the Confucian Analects printed in Sakai 堺 and the Japanese editions of works of the Korean Confucian scholar Yi T'oegye 李退溪 printed in the early Edo period. Nobody would surely deny that the Latin Bible printed by Gutenberg in the middle of the fifteenth century marks an epochal moment in the history of the book in Germany, even though the Bible he printed was not in German and was not written by a German. The problem is, of course, that books do not fit neatly into national straightjackets. They do not need passports to travel beyond state boundaries and some of them are subsequently reprinted or translated. This is surely true of all book cultures, Japan included. Although this question is not explicitly addressed in this book, the examples and illustrations show that the editors take a liberal approach, including books written in Chinese by Japanese authors and books written in Chinese but copied or printed in Japan.

The eight 'lectures' or chapters forming the backbone of this book cover the following topics: first encounters with old books; *kuzushiji* くずし字 (handwritten abbreviated forms of characters and *kana* 仮名); manuscripts; printed books; binding and paper; covers; seals of ownership; the publishing culture of the Edo period; and the world of the Meiji book. These are easy to read and often highly informative, but they are not uniformly written with beginners in mind. The first chapter, for example, goes into the compilation of catalogues of old books at some length, though that is probably not a major concern of beginners. Similarly, the third chapter goes into fascinating detail about the information contained in colophons (*okugaki* 奥書) and inscriptions (*shikigo* 識語) found in manuscripts, but the focus is on pre-Edo manuscripts, whereas most 'beginners' are much more likely to encounter manuscripts written or copied in the Edo period, which exist in profusion and can be easily and cheaply acquired.

The eighth chapter, which is ostensibly concerned with the publishing culture of the Edo period, in fact focuses on the typographic editions (*kokatsujiban* 古活字版) of the early Edo period. These have attracted a lot of attention from bibliographers and book historians, partly because Japan was, in the 1590s, in the unique position of being simultaneously exposed to the quite different European and Korean traditions of printing with moveable type (typography), and partly because the sponsorship of typographic printing by emperors Go-Yōzei 後陽成 and Go-Mizunoo 後水尾 and by Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 seems to have marked the end of medieval printing in Japan. From the late Heian period up to the end of the Muromachi period, almost all printing was undertaken by

Buddhist temples and most printed books were Buddhist sutras or doctrinal works, although a very small number of other works were printed as well, including Confucian texts, medical texts and dictionaries. Again, almost all these works were in Chinese, and only two were in Japanese using the *kana* syllabaries. By contrast, the typographic editions of the early Edo period were mostly not printed by temples and they were mostly not Buddhist texts. It is widely considered that these developments gave a kick start to the publishing boom of the Edo period, in which secular works in Japanese were printed in profusion. There is, however, a fly in the ointment, and that is the fact that typography went into a decline in the 1630s with the result that the publishing boom of the Edo period was sustained by woodblock printing, not by typography. Consequently, it is a matter of debate just how representative of the publishing culture of the Edo period the typographic editions of the early decades of the 17th century really were.

In addition to the eight 'lectures', there are a number of 'columns', which presumably did not form part of the original workshops on which this book is based. These are detailed explorations of topics that do not fit into the lectures/chapters, and most of them are fascinating. One covers the practice of cutting up old manuscripts as samples of ancient calligraphy (*kobitsugire* 古筆切). Another explains how to compare side by side two digital images of the same title to see if they were printed from identical woodblocks and then shows, through examination of different copies of *Saiga shokunin burui* 彩画職人部類, how useful this facility is. Others explore the use of discarded printed pages as backing for covers and the information conveyed by the ownership seals of book rental merchants (*kashibon'ya* 貸本屋). Another, by Iriguchi Atsushi 入口敦志, addresses the 'puzzles' that with our present knowledge we are unable to solve. One of these is why the Korean tradition of typography was not transmitted to Japan much earlier, given that Japanese were frequent visitors to Korea in the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. Another is the question why no works of Heian literature were printed before the Edo period, for the technology was available. These really are questions to which no clear answer can be given. Another puzzle, which he does not address, is why typography was abandoned in Japan by 1650. In this case the advantages of woodblock printing must have been telling: woodblocks were far more flexible, for they could include illustrations, different kinds of text and even *furigana* 振り仮名 and *kunten* 訓点 with ease, and what is more they could be stored for frequent reprinting.

No book can satisfy everybody. Let me now draw attention to a few points that occurred to me when reading it. Firstly, in the midst of an informative passage on the seals of publishers and the significance of impressions of those seals on the colophons of printed books there is an illustration (no. 6 on p. 194) which shows the colophon of the Kokubunken copy of Kagawa Kageki's 香川景樹 *utaamase* 歌合 book *Usugoori* 薄ごほり, which was published in 1835. According to the caption, this illustration shows the impression of a publisher's seal but the

quality of the reproduction is so poor that the seal is almost invisible. I consulted the image of the NIJL copy of this work available on the Kokusho Dētabēsu 国書データベース and found that there is indeed a seal under the name of the second publisher from the right, Kawachiya Tasuke 河内屋太助 of Osaka. On looking at the illustration again I could just about make it out, but that was only because I knew where to look for it. It is a pity that the illustration does not fulfil the purpose it was intended to serve.

Secondly, although Unno Keisuke 海野圭介 gives a good account of Japanese manuscripts, he primarily concerns himself with manuscripts from the centuries before the Edo period. Consequently, there is very little sense in this book of the sheer profusion of ordinary manuscripts that were produced and circulated from the beginning of the Edo period right up to the mid Meiji period. In the first lecture Kansaku draws attention to the ways in which manuscripts differ from printed books and argues that one of the differences is that manuscripts have fewer readers (17-18). That may seem obvious, but is it really true? What about a manuscript like *Keian Taiheiki* 慶安太平記, which is a fictionalized version of the rebellion of Yui Shōsetsu 由井正雪 in 1657? I have traced around 300 extant copies of this manuscript, and use of the Kokusho Dētabēsu shows that there are many other manuscripts extant in more than 100 copies. By contrast, there are many printed books which survive in very few copies. It seems to me that, in the context of the Edo period, it is not necessarily true that manuscripts reached fewer readers than printed books, although in many cases it is undoubtedly true.

Thirdly, there is not much sense in this book of Japanese books as part of a global phenomenon. Imported books from China and Korea have played a very important part in the history of the book in Japan from before the Nara period, and in the Edo period imports from Qing China and Joseon Korea were often reprinted in Japan. And that is to say nothing of the small numbers of Dutch books which were also reaching Japan in the Edo period. As Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 recalled, students of Dutch could make good money at the end of the Edo period by making manuscript copies of rare Dutch books for daimyo. These imported books often contain the ownership seals of Japanese collectors. Conversely, from the Heian period onwards Japanese books have been leaving Japanese shores. Up to the end of the Muromachi period they were reaching only China and Korea, but from the beginning of the Edo period they were reaching Europe. The clearest sign of this is the donation of three printed *utaibon* 謡本 (chanting texts of No plays) to the Bodleian Library in Oxford in 1629.

All the same, there is much to be grateful for in this book. I particularly appreciated the emphasis by Kansaku on the need for cataloguers to take proper responsibility for assigning rough dates to undated MSS and printed books (25). It is of no help to users when a catalogue uses notation such as [..]刊 or [..]写, making no distinction between the Heian period and the late Edo period. Cataloguers ought to have sufficient skills to assign a tentative dating period and, in my view,

should instead use notation such as [室町]刊, [江戸後期]刊, [江戸初期]写 or [幕末]写. The inclusion in this book of bibliographies and internet links for all the topics covered is hugely helpful. It is worth remembering, though, that not all relevant academic work is easily available. As Kansaku points out (31), Kaken hōkokusho 科研報告書 get little circulation and this has always seemed to me bizarre: research undertaken using public funds should surely as a matter of principle be made available to the public that has provided the funds.

In short, this book can be highly recommended, not only to ‘beginners’ but also to bibliographers and book historians. There will be very few people who will gain nothing from reading it carefully.

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