

## On Nara Ehon/Emaki (Japanese Illustrated Books and Scrolls)

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**Toru Ishikawa**

*Keio University, Japan*

### Abstract

This presentation discusses the relationship between Japanese narrative and picture, focusing on a group of illustrated books called *Nara Ehon*.

### Resumo

Esta apresentação discute a relação entre a narrativa japonesa e ilustrações, focando-se especialmente num tipo de livros denominado *Nara Ehon*.

### 要約

本稿では、日本の物語と絵の関係につき、特に奈良絵本と呼ばれる絵入り本に焦点をあて議論する

### Keywords キーワード

*Nara Ehon*, Japanese Illustrated Books; Japanese Tales

*Nara Ehon*, Livros Ilustrados Japoneses, Contos Japoneses

奈良絵本、絵巻物、日本の昔話

I am Toru Ishikawa of Keio University. First of all, I would like to thank all of you who took part in organizing this wonderful event.

I study classical Japanese literature, with particular focus on narrative literature, so I deal with many illustrated books. Today I would like to discuss the relationship between Japanese narrative and picture, especially a group of illustrated books called *Nara Ehon*.

In Japan, stories written in *hiragana* (a type of Japanese syllabic script) began to be produced in the Heian period. The first of these was *The Tale of Bamboo Cutter* from the ninth century. *The Tale of Genji*, of which name you may have heard before, was written by Murasaki Shikibu in the beginning of the eleventh century. We do not know when *The Tale of Genji* was completed, but we do know that by 1008 its production had been at an advanced stage. Therefore, in 2008 many exhibitions and symposia were held to celebrate the millennium of the creation of *The Tale*.

Not surprisingly, the original manuscript of *The Tale of Genji* written by Murasaki Shikibu does not survive. It is very rare that the original manuscript of a story or its contemporary copies survive, which may also be the case in other countries. The oldest surviving manuscript of *The Tale of Bamboo Cutter* is from the fifteenth century, and indeed in fragments.

In the case of *The Tale of Genji*, which was already famous when it was written, many manuscripts survive from the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. Yet from the Heian period, only parts of a set of illustrated scrolls, the *Genji Monogatari Emaki* (the illustrated scroll of *The Tale of Genji*), survive. Being the only surviving copy of a narrative story from the Heian period, the *Genji Monogatari Emaki* is designated a national treasure of Japan. It was probably produced around a century after the creation of *The Tale*.

*Emaki* (illustrated scroll), also called *emakimono*, has already been described in *The Tale of Genji* as being enjoyed by people, which indicates that by the mid-Heian period, Japanese-style *emaki* had already been produced. Nonetheless, the earliest that survives is the abovementioned national treasure.

An *emaki* is produced by pasting alternately text and picture sheets. In many works the text and the pictures were executed by different individuals, which means that the text was written by an able calligrapher and the pictures were finished by a professional painter. The sheets finished by these individuals were then pasted alternately to produce an *emaki*. This procedure was employed for whatever length of the story, but in the case of such long stories as *The Tale of Genji*, many copies were in fact excerpts of the entire story.

The text of the national treasure copy is also an excerpt. It appears that a *Tale of Genji emaki* with the complete text was never made. Indeed, a complete *Genji emaki* would

have been in more than two hundred volumes, the production of which must have been a difficult feat in terms of time and money.

Stories other than *The Tale of Genji* were also made into *emaki*, and those of a few stories from the late Heian period have survived. Though not well known, many *emaki* were made in the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, namely around the five hundred years between c.1100 and the late 1500s. Interestingly, though many *emaki* were produced during this period, illustrated codices were rare. Generally speaking, *emaki* is not a suitable format for reading. I suppose illustrated scrolls were seldom made in the West at the time; it may well have been that the scroll format, which does not allow an easy handling, was not considered for illustrated books in the West.

However in Japan, illustrated books were almost always made in the scroll format, and few codices with illustration survive from an early period. This phenomenon has remained undiscussed in Japan, but it is an important issue. It is not easy to find an answer to this, but since there was a custom in Japan to have important materials in scroll, it is possible that the scroll format was chosen to keep precious pictures.

When did the illustrated codex appear in Japan, then? There are only a few such survivals from the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, and we must look to the end of Muromachi to the beginning of the Edo period, namely c.1600, for evidence of production of illustrated codices on a certain scale. In fact, this was exactly the period when Japan entered into a relationship with the West. In the mid-sixteenth century, gun and Christianity were brought to Japan from the West, whereby Japanese culture gradually changed. It is not easy to conclude that the introduction of the Western culture had an influence on the emergence of the illustrated codex in Japan, but it is also true that they occurred at the same period.

Having said that, as we shall see, Japanese illustrated codices are very different from those of the West, and in any case it is probably more correct to surmise that the Japanese illustrated codex developed from the indigenous illustrated scroll. If the Western book indeed has some sort of influence on the Japanese illustrated codex, it could have been on the pigment. Pigments for the Western oil painting and those for the Japanese painting appear quite different, but both were mainly of mineral base, so it is possible that some pigments were imported to Japan from the West. Furthermore, Islamic miniatures are similar in some respects to the illustrated codices which will be discussed below. They both became popular around the same period, so it may be interesting to see if there was some kind of connection between the two.

To summarize, in Japan, illustrated stories were traditionally made into scrolls, but the illustrated codex appeared around the end of the sixteenth century. In the early Edo period, not only illustrated codices but illustrated scrolls were also produced in a large number. In fact, this was the period when most illustrated scrolls were produced in Japanese history. These scrolls have been little studied in Japan, and it is not even known how many of them are kept by whom. But since they are visually attractive and interesting, in recent years many museums and galleries have begun to exhibit them.

However, because their research has lagged behind, very often mistakes are found in the descriptions. Also, just like the *ukiyoe*, which became popular in the late Edo period, many of these scrolls have scattered abroad, so it may be possible that some of the institutions in Portugal own these types of Japanese illustrated codices and scrolls.

Now, the earliest type of illustrated codices in manuscript produced for around 150 years between the end of the Muromachi period and the mid-Edo period is called *Nara Ehon*. The term *Nara* is the same as that for the Nara period or the city of Nara, although *Nara Ehon* was neither made in that period nor in Nara region. It is not clear why they are called *Nara Ehon*, but it may be because the illustrations in these books were similar to *Nara e* (literally, “Nara picture”), a type of illustration that was popular in Nara region.

Illustrated scrolls that were produced in the same period as the *Nara Ehon* have many things in common. I therefore call them together as *Nara Ehon/Emaki*, which is the main subject of my current research. I shall show you some digital images of them.

In the early Edo period, many illustrated codices were printed, but those from the seventeenth century were not beautifully coloured like the *ukiyoe* from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is therefore very easy to distinguish between the *Nara Ehon* and the illustrated codices in print. In addition, printed books have colophons which contain the year of publication and the name of the publisher, but no such pieces of information are added to *Nara Ehon/Emaki*. This is one reason why the research on them has not progressed and they have remained rather mysterious.

However, by examining many examples of *Nara Ehon/Emaki*, it became clear when and how they were made. Generally speaking, in *Nara Ehon/Emaki*, the scribe and the painter were different. A recent study has demonstrated that their scribes included the famous *kana zoshi* (literally “a book in *kana* script”; a popular literary form) author Asai Ryoï. In addition, it was found that there was a woman who worked both as a scribe and a painter of the *Nara Ehon/Emaki*. Through these findings it became possible to date works of *Nara Ehon/Emaki*.

As I have discussed, study on *Nara Ehon/Emaki* has just begun. Therefore, it still focuses on basic research, and has yet to proceed to a comprehensive analysis of text and image. As research materials, *Nara Ehon/Emaki* are visually attractive and their contents interesting, and furthermore, a great number of them have survived. I believe that they will attract more scholarly attention from the fields of both literature and art history.

For the rest of the time I would like to show you some examples of *Nara Ehon* from the images in my portable laptop. This desktop image is from the story called *Shuten Doji*, which is about an ogre of that name. This illustration is from a scroll made in the seventeenth century. The story is known for a scene of *Shuten Doji* eating humans, but in the end he is beheaded by warriors. The detached head is still alive, and as you see here it attacks the warrior who beheaded him. Let us see the details of this story from copies of *Nara Ehon/Emaki*.

The next story is *Hachi Kazuki*. This is a story of a princess with a bowl that gets stuck on her head and cannot be taken off. She was mistreated by her stepmother and leaves the

house, but in the end she lives happily ever after. The text describes that the face of the princess is completely covered by the bowl; thus it should be impossible to see her face. This princess falls in love with a young aristocratic man. Although he cannot see her face, he is utterly moved by her beautiful hands and feet and decides to marry her. However, in the illustration we see the face of the princess being depicted. One may suppose that the painter, who deemed an illustrated book without a depiction of the protagonist's face defective, decided to paint the princess' face. This is a simple example, but the text-image relationship is one of the important issues that need to be studied further.

As you have seen, *Nara Ehon/Emaki* are very interesting and beautiful. Today Japanese *manga* and *anime* are well known, but I hope that you will remember that these works existed more than three hundred years ago. Thank you very much for your attention.