

A Comparison of Western and Japanese Classical Books: Bindings and Illustrations in Focus¹

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Abstract

If we look at the history of the book from a comparative (East-West) perspective we notice that there are some major differences. While the codex, as standard book format, was firstly adopted in the West, East-Asian book culture anticipated the usage of paper and the discovery of printing. There are five types of bindings which were primarily used in Japan until the modern era, and all of them were introduced from China. However, differing from China, whose book culture revolved around printed publications, in Japan the manuscript tradition continued for a long period of time. For this reason, Japanese developed their own distinctive usage of Chinese-style bindings.

On the one hand, in the West there is a very old tradition of codices/booklets enriched with illustrations. On the other hand, in East Asia there is a strong connection between illustrations and scrolls. It is only in the 16th century that illustrations were introduced in Japanese codices/booklets. But it is not until the 17th century, after the establishment of commercial publishers, that such illustrated booklets began to be widely produced. The reasons why illustrated booklets began to be produced in 16th century remain unknown. Perhaps, we may suppose the possibility of Western influence, for this is also the period in which Japan began trade exchanges with Europe. In my future research I would like to carry this investigation further.

要旨

西洋と東洋の書物の歴史を比較すると、冊子の成立は西洋が早く、紙の使用と印刷の発明は東洋が早いという大きな違いがある。日本で近代以前に用いられた装訂は主に5種類で、いずれも中国から伝わったものだが、版本が書物の中心となった中国と異なり、写本の時代が長く続いたことにより、独自の装訂の使い分けが行われた。

西洋では古くから冊子と挿絵の関係が密接であるのに対し、東洋では挿絵は卷子装との関係が濃密で、日本で冊子に挿絵が入るようになるのは16世紀になってからであった。17世紀に商業出版が確立すると、日本でも絵入り冊子本はありふれた存在になる。16世紀に絵入り冊子本が生まれた理由は不明であるが、この時期がヨーロッパとの交流の開始時期であることと関連する可能性があり、今後も調査を継続したい。

Keywords キーワード

Bibliography, Comparison of East and West, Japanese Classical Books, Bindings, Illustrations

書誌学、東西比較、日本古典籍、装訂、挿絵

Comparing the histories of books in the West and the East, one observes three notable differences. The first is that the emergence of the codex was much earlier in the West than in the East; the second is that the use of paper was much earlier in the East than in the West; and the third is that employment of printing was likewise earlier in the East than in the West. Here the issue of precedence is not to be understood as the superiority of one culture over another. The abovementioned differences are the results of varying natural and social environments, and what we understand from these differences is an important issue to be dealt with in bibliographical studies.

In the West (in this paper, the term “West” includes Egypt and Asia Minor), the origin of the book goes back to the scrolls made from papyrus around 2000BC. Although papyrus shares certain qualities with paper, it is greatly different from it in that only one side of the sheet can be used and that it is not suited for folded use. For a long time papyrus was used to produce books, but as is well known, parchment was introduced around the second century BC through the competition of two libraries for the size of their collections. Parchment was far more expensive than papyrus, but it was sturdier, and moreover it could be written on both sides and was suited for folded use. Initially, parchment was used to produce scrolls, but whereas papyrus sheets were easy to be glued together, parchment sheets were not. Therefore they were usually sewn together with thread.

It is believed that the codex format emerged in the West around the second century as a form suited for parchment. A codex Old Testament of around the fourth century has survived, which is now kept at the Vatican Library. However, the emergence of the codex format did not completely wipe out the production of scrolls; texts and documents of tradition and authority were continued to be made in this format, as has been shown by an Old Testament scroll produced in the twelfth or thirteenth century discovered in the University of Bologna.

In the East, paper is documented to have been invented in China in 105, but it is generally believed to have been used as early as the pre-Christian era. It was only in the thirteenth century that the paper manufacture was introduced to the West and begun to be produced. One might be surprised at how long it took for the paper to be introduced to the West, but this may be an indication of how superior parchment was as a support for the book.

In China, before the invention of paper, fabric such as silk was used for books, as well as oblong pieces of wood or bamboo tied together with strings into a scroll format. Obviously, they were far less suitable supports for the book compared to parchment. It

is easily understood that the invention of paper was prompted by the need for a better support.

Books on paper certainly arrived in Japan by the sixth century, and many Buddhist sutras survive in Japan from the eighth century made of paper produced locally. As plants used for paper were abundant in Japan, it proved to be fit for the paper manufacture.

It may be interesting to point out that the earliest format used for the book on paper in China was the scroll, the same format used for the book on papyrus, though it is thought that the scroll format in China derived from the way in which fabric was preserved. Moreover, the scroll in China developed into *orihon* 折り本 (accordion book) (Fig.1), which was used widely especially for sutras.

The codex format is considered to have been invented in China around the eighth century, and different types of bindings also developed, with variations in the ways paper sheets were bound. These bindings are thought to have been introduced to Japan one by one as they were invented, but they were used very differently from China. Printing is said to have been invented in China by the seventh century, and particularly during the time of the Song Dynasty (10-13th centuries), with the standardization of Confucian texts under the governmental instruction, it was actively promoted. As a result, with exceptions of the scroll and the accordion book formats that were used for sutras, only the bindings suitable for printing were used, driving out those that were not relevant for printing.

In Japan, printing, which had been introduced to the country by the eighth century, did not spread beyond its use for publication of sutras by temples. For a long time, manuscript was predominant in Japan, and as a result, various types of bindings were employed according to the varying aims of production and the contents of texts. There are mainly five types of bindings used in Japan: A. *kansubon* 卷子本 (scroll); B. *orihon* 折り本 (accordion book); C. *detchousou* 粘葉装 (pasted paper leaf book); D. *tetsuyousou* 綴葉装 (multisection book); E. *fukurotoji* 袋綴 (pouch-binding). In China, E was also called *sensou* 線装, the type most commonly used for printing.

The bindings A and B may not need any explanation. Binding C is produced by stacking a desired number of folded sheets and pasting them together along the folded edge. D is produced by stitching together several gatherings of sheets; its form is very close to the codex binding of the West. It has long been believed that D was invented in Japan. However the same type of binding was discovered in Dunhuang, which seems to suggest that it was in fact invented in China and then introduced to Japan, after which it ceased to be used in the country of origin. Binding E is a type in which a stack of folded sheets is stitched together at the edge opposite to the folds.

It may take hours to discuss the different uses of these five binding types, so here I shall limit myself to discussing their relationships to the illustration. In the West, both scrolls and codices have included illustrations from an early period, but in Japan, illustration had been closely linked to the scroll format (A), and it was only in the second

half of the sixteenth century that codices began to be illustrated. This indicates that there was an unwritten rule that pictures should only be preserved in scrolls.

Because the scrolls that were first imported from China contained either new and important knowledge and technologies or religious texts, the format itself assumed authority. Hence it tended to be used for texts of importance. Texts written in *kanji* (Chinese characters) were generally regarded to be 'good enough' for scrolls, but as for those written in *kana* (the alphabet invented in Japan), their contents mattered; texts that were highly recognized in the society were accepted in the scroll format, but fictional stories, which were seen to be against the Buddhist teaching not to tell a lie, were not produced in scrolls. However, fictional stories with illustrations were made in scrolls, commonly called "*emakimono* 絵巻物" (Fig.2). *Emakimono* indeed symbolizes the close relationship between the scroll format and the illustration.

As for the other binding types, it was uncommon to contain illustrations in binding B, likely due to the folds. Binding C is the only codex format that can be evidenced to have contained illustration before the fifteenth century, and even that was very rare. Binding E (pouch-binding) was the type employed for the production of illustrated codices which began in the second half of the sixteenth century. When printing business was established in the seventeenth century, this binding was used for printed books with illustrations (Fig.3). Around the same period, illustrated manuscripts were also produced in numbers in the pouch-binding, and it became the most common binding for illustrated codices. Binding D (multisection book), which had been used from the tenth century and regarded a superior codex format, began to be used for illustrated books only in the mid-seventeenth century, likely due to the demand for illustrated manuscripts (Fig.4) that are higher-end than those in the pouch-binding.

We have overviewed the relationships between the different binding types and illustration in Japanese books, but one question still remains: why did codices began to be illustrated in the sixteenth century? One might consider the influence of illustrated publications from China, but they existed from before the sixteenth century and thus does not answer our question. As an alternative possibility, one should note that Japan's first encounter with Europe happened in the sixteenth century; the gun was first brought to Japan from Europe in 1543, and in 1549, the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier (Francisco Javier) began his missionary work in Japan. It is well known that missionaries in Japan employed printing with movable type to produce publications for their teaching, but they must have also brought with them many books from home. It is beyond doubt that many of such books contained illustrations, as can be determined from the abundance of illustrated religious texts in the West. I should like to think that these illustrated books could have made a significant impact on the history of illustrated books in Japan, but because Christianity was banned in the seventeenth century, few Western books from that period have survived in Japan, and documents about them are likewise rare. Please let me know whether there are materials related to such issue in Portugal.



Fig. 1 - "Hakke (Fortune-telling book)"
Seventeenth Century Private Collection



Fig. 2 - "Kumikō-Emaki (The picture scroll of smelling of incense)"
Sixteenth Century Private Collection



Fig. 3 - "Tsuki-Shima" (The book of *Kōwaka-mai*)
Seventeenth Century Private Collection



Fig. 4 - "Bunshyō-no-Sōshi" (The book of the Nara picture-book)
Seventeenth Century Private Collection