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The Commercialization of Knowledge

Enlightening the Masses in Premodern Japan

Edited by
Stephan Köhn and Chantal Weber

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Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Foreword | VII |
| The Commercialization of Knowledge: Enlightening the Masses in Premodern Japan—An Introduction to this Volume— <i>Stephan Köhn and Chantal Weber</i> | 1 |
| The Current Status of Research on Books, Publishing and Social Changes in Premodern Japan—With a Special Focus on Chronological Tables and their Historical Significance— <i>Masaki Wakao</i> | 27 |
| Publishing Trends in Letter-writing Guides for Women in the Edo and Meiji Periods <i>Yoshinaga Koizumi</i> | 57 |
| Recycling or Transforming Knowledge: Augmented Editions in 17th Century Japan <i>Matthias Hayek</i> | 95 |
| Cashing in on Wrestling: “The Grand Compilation of Sumo Wrestling from Past to Present” and the Commercialization of Sumo Wrestling Knowledge <i>Christoph Reichenbächer</i> | 115 |
| On the Publication and Reception of the “Illustrated Reference Book” —from Premodern Reading Culture to Modern Database Usage— <i>Aki Ishigami</i> | 139 |
| The Making of an Attractive Guidebook: The Case of the “Illustrated Collection of Famous Things from the Mountains and Seas of Japan” (1754) <i>Annick Horiuchi</i> | 169 |
| Publishing Guidebooks about the Ise Pilgrimage in 17th and 18th Century Japan <i>Kaori Hayami</i> | 189 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Ekiken and Ryūshiken: Mapping Early Modern Japanese Landscape and Vision <i>Nobuko Toyosawa</i> | 223 |
| Takai Ranzan's "Pilgrimage to Tsukuba" (1813) and the Publishing of Textbooks on Pilgrimages to Shrines and Temples in Edo <i>Morgaine Setzer-Mori</i> | 243 |
| Idiosyncrasy and Nationalism: Takai Ranzan as Author and Compiler of Advice Books and Encyclopedias <i>Michael Kinski</i> | 267 |
| Capturing the User's Attention: New Developments in Timesaving Collections Towards the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries as Seen in "The Country's Most Precious Collection for Timesaving Use" (1810) <i>Martin Thomas</i> | 293 |
| Mines of Information, Sources of Profit: On the Commercialization of "Collections for Timesaving Use" in Early 18th Century Japan <i>Stephan Köhn</i> | 319 |
| The Revision of Knowledge: New Approaches of Improvement as Seen in Yamamoto Joshū's "Timesaving Collection for Men" (1716) <i>Stephan Köhn</i> | 345 |
| Providing Resources for the Research Community and the Public: "Collections for Timesaving Use" at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin <i>Christian Dunkel</i> | 367 |
| On the Verge of Becoming a Knowledge Society: Current Achievements and Future Tasks—In Lieu of an Epilogue— <i>Stephan Köhn and Chantal Weber</i> | 383 |
| Contributors | 389 |
| Glossary | 395 |
| Subject index | 399 |
| Title index | 405 |

Foreword

This book has its origins in the conference “The Commercialization of Knowledge in Edo Period Japan: Publishers, Editors, Print Products, and their impact on Premodern Cultural Life” which took place in Cologne in January 2022. This conference concluded our research project—“The Revision of Knowledge: on the Genesis of National Language Dictionaries (*kokugo jisho*) and the Commercialization of ‘Knowledge’ in 17th and 18th Century Ōsaka”—which was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) for a total of three years.

The conference aimed to explore the vibrant publishing market for practical guidebooks in 17th and 18th century Japan. To this end, it focused on popular genres such as letter-writing guides (*ōraimono*), encyclopedias (*chōhōki*), and aids for the correct writing in Chinese characters (*setsuyōshū*), examining how, why and by whom knowledge was commercialized in premodern Japan. The approach aimed to expose the proximity and entanglement of these various genres as regards their role(s) in the production of knowledge, specifically their interplay in the compilation of various texts. We conducted an extensive examination of very different kinds of practical guidebook genres and sought, thereby, to gain a more thorough understanding of the growing significance of knowledge as a lucrative commodity during the Edo period in Japan. The conference provided us with an invaluable opportunity for inter- and transdisciplinary exchange with distinguished experts from a number of fields. Thanks to the inspiring and insightful contributions made by our speakers, the conference was an enormous success.

We are now proud to present the findings in this edited volume. We would first like to thank all our contributors for sharing their research and insights with us: Christian Dunkel, Kaori Hayami, Matthias Hayek, Annick Horiuchi, Aki Ishigami, Michael Kinski, Yoshinaga Koizumi, Martin Thomas, Christoph Reichenbacher, Morgaine Setzer-Mori, Nobuko Toyosawa, and Masaki Wakao. We would also like to thank Michael Dorrity for the English proofreading and Luna Sartor for her diligent work in reviewing the galley proofs. Any remaining flaws and inaccuracies in the manuscript are the editors’ responsibility.

Cologne, November 2024

The editors