

Call for Papers

Conference:

“The Commercialization of Knowledge in Edo Period Japan—Publishers, Editors, Print Products, and their Impact on Pre-Modern Cultural Life”

Location: University of Cologne

Date: 12–14 January 2023

The 17th century ushered in a new age of book publishing in Japan. In the first two decades, private run publishing houses emerged in the capital of Kyôto, laying the foundation for a highly commercialized publishing industry which also spread to the cities of Edo and Ôsaka. For the publishers, book publishing became both a very profitable and competitive business, and more and more publishers and print products began to compete for their readers’ favor. It therefore became necessary to regulate the publishing market in order to guarantee the interests of each and every publisher by protecting intellectual property rights in terms of copyright (*hanken*). After the foundation of the publishers’ guild at the beginning of the 18th century, copyright infringement was no longer considered a peccadillo. Quite the contrary; offenses now often entailed drastic consequences for the accused publisher.

Within this vibrant publishing business, the market for practical guidebooks (*jitsuyôsho*) flourished particularly, as a short glimpse into contemporary book catalogues soon reveals. “Guides for letter writing” (*ôraimono*), “everyday encyclopedias” (*chôhōki*), or “aids for correct writing in Chinese characters” (*setsuyôshū*), to name only a few of the most popular *genres*, became main pillars for many publishing businesses that began to specialize in the production of non-fictional books. The huge number of practical guidebooks published during the Edo period impressively shows that “knowledge” had become a popular, and, above all, lucrative “commodity” in the Edo period. Since society stood at the verge of becoming a pre-modern “knowledge society”, the demand for this new “commodity” was enormous. And the publishers responded to this demand quickly, proactively, and also very creatively.

The upcoming conference “The Commercialization of Knowledge in Japan—Publishers, Editors, Print Products, and their Impact on Pre-Modern Cultural Life” aims to examine the market of practical guidebooks in a more comprehensive perspective. For this purpose, it places a focus on different guidebook genres such as *ôraimono*, *chôhōki*, or *setsuyôshū* with regard to the question how, why and by whom knowledge was commercialized in pre-modern Japan. An extensive examination of different kinds of practical guidebook genres will hopefully provide new insights into the interrelatedness and interwovenness of these genres with regard to the

compilation and production of knowledge. By that, it will help to get a better understanding of the growing significance of “knowledge” as a “commodity” in the daily life of the Edo period.

This conference will conclude the research project “The Revision of Knowledge” (<https://japanologie.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/forschung/forschungsprojekte/neuordnung-des-wissens>), which has been funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) over the last three years. The project focuses on the “Completion of the Wish-fulfilling Jewel: the Timesaving Collection for Men” (*Otoko setsuyōshū nyoī hōju taisei*), published in 1716 in Ōsaka, advocating the thesis that the editor, Yamamoto Joshū, undertakes with this work a revision of knowledge that has been uncritically passed on by former *setsuyōshū*. For that purpose, the project pursues the following three objectives: 1) the edition and translation of the original text; 2) the development of a database for *setsuyōshū* vocabulary; and finally 3) the examination of the network structures of publishers specialized on *setsuyōshū* in Ōsaka.

The conference welcomes contributions that examine all kinds of practical guidebooks (in the broadest sense of the word) regarding their impact on pre-modern cultural life. Such contributions could be examinations of a single work or a genre, of an editor/author or a publisher, as well as analyses of practices and strategies in publishing, disseminating, or archiving “knowledge”. We put the inter- and transdisciplinary exchange of expertise at the center of our conference and hope to contribute toward rendering visible processes, strategies, and mechanisms of the commercialization of knowledge in all of their complexity and scope.

Our conference is intended as an open space for an exchange of ideas. Contributions from scientists and researchers at the beginning of their careers are thus expressly desired. Short abstracts of up to 250 words should be submitted by 30 September 2022.

Contact: Martin Thomas (martin.thomas@uni-koeln.de) and Paul Schoppe (paul.schoppe@uni-koeln.de)

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University
of Cologne

