

Manuscripts in the Edo Period: Preliminary Study on Manuscripts Written by Seki Takakazu

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Abstract Hatsubi-Sanpō written by Seki Takakazu (ca.1642–1708) was published in 1674 in the form of woodblock printing. The rest of his works are known only in the form of hand-copied books. His case was not exceptional, however. A famous Confucianist Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725) was Seki’s colleague as a government official. Arai also wrote a lot of works as manuscripts but did not publish them in woodblock printings; his works spread widely as hand-copied books. Why they did not publish printed books? We can see some suggestion through recent studies on publications in the Edo period.

1 Studies on Manuscripts

According to former studies on the history of books during the Edo period (1603–1867), the woodblock printing was regarded as the most popular style of publications, while manuscripts and hand-copied printings were less popular and recognized as private publications.

On the contrary, recent research has proven the expansion of the hand-copied book market and advantages of manuscripts. In 2007, an epoch-making book *Sequel to Wahan for Beginners* [2] was published by Kōnosuke Hashiguchi [橋口侯之介], where *Wahan* [和本] means books in Japanese style. A lot of manuscripts and hand-copied printings were shown in it and we can see various ways of publication business in the Edo period. (For general information about books in the Edo period, see [1] and [3].)

In some cases, manuscripts and hand-copied books were more convenient for bookstores and at the same time for readers. It was easier to make hand-copied books than we think of, and less expensive for readers in those days. Those advantages had

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encouraged the wide spread of manuscripts and hand-copied books. That was one of the characteristics of culture in the Edo period.

Hand-copied books were handled just in the same way as printed books at any bookstores, and were one of the principal commodities in those days. They were also handled just in the same way as printed books at rental bookstores. Furthermore, there were many book copiers [書本屋 *kakihon-ya*] that received requests from customers and copied books with their hands.

Most of book copiers were young samurai who could not afford to buy enough commodities including books and stationaries. Manuscript business kept alive until the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1911). Details are written in the autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi [福沢諭吉], the founder of Keio University.

Most of experts in *Wasan* (Japanese traditional mathematics) could not afford to make woodblock printings because of lack of money. Some experts, however, might have had enough money to publish printed books, but they did not always sell well in those days.

On the other hand, hand-copied books were helpful for experts and readers. Experts could make them less expensively than woodblock printings. Because it did not cost much, some could make many hand-copied books in his or her life.

Another crucial advantage was the speed of publication, which was important to claim priorities. In general, it took a considerable time to publish a woodblock printing book. In a case, it took several years to publish a book because of prudent preparation. In another case, some mistakes found in manuscript delayed the publication. A lot of new mathematical ideas might be published during the period of preparation. A delay of publication sometimes caused a serious trouble.

Isomura Yoshinori [磯村吉徳] (?–1710), a famous expert of *Wasan* in the middle of the 17th century, published a book on *Wasan* entitled *Mathematical Methods without Doubts* [算法闕疑抄 *Sanpō Ketsugishō*] in 1659. In the preface, he blamed some pupils on the ground that they had published books on *Wasan* that included new mathematical ideas given by Isomura, and moreover, the presentation of the mathematical ideas written in those books were not satisfactory for Isomura. So he pointed out some mistakes in those books of pupils. Though he did not write their names clearly, researches on the books have revealed the names of two authors.

From the historical point of view, this trouble was caused in part by the delay of publication of *Mathematical Methods without Doubts*. In the end, some pupils could not wait for years; they might have wanted to be far ahead of the time in *Wasan*. However, hand-copied books were not yet popular in 1650's, and hence they could not make use of advantages of non-printing books developed later.

2 Hand-copied Books

In the 18th century, hand-copied book made an astonishing progress. A famous *Wasan* expert Aida Yasuaki [会田安明] (1747–1817) made thousands of manuscripts and some of them were spread as hand-copied books. Some were entitled

Commentary [評林 Hyōrin]. Aida wrote a lot of commentaries of books by other Wasan experts and compared with his own. In this way, he could publish up-to-date researches. It is quite similar to research articles in modern time.

Seki Takakazu [關孝和] also made a lot of manuscripts in the latter half of the 17th century. We can read them as hand-copied books, which may tell us how he always created new ideas in mathematics. Hand-copied books might be a suitable way for showing his new ideas.

Although hand-copied book business was not very popular until the beginning of the 18th century, some hand-copied books became famous and were widely circulated. For example, books written by Arai Hakuseki [新井白石] were among the most influential works throughout the Edo period. People in Edo period did not distinguish the difference between the two types of publications. We should reconsider books published in Edo period.

Former studies on the history of Wasan have conjectured that there were only closed or even exclusive groups of experts. One of the reasons was the existence of manuscripts and hand-copied books, which were considered as circulated in each small group. Taking into account the circulation of hand-copied books in the Edo period, we should also reconsider this conjecture.

References

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