Mechanisms and Systems Surrounding Edo Period Publishing

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1. IMPROVEMENT IN THE PUBLISHING MECHANISM

The first Japanese printed materials, and perhaps the first printed materials in the world, were the so-called "*Hyakuman-tō Darani*" mantras, which are thought to have been produced around 764–770 A.D. This was a massive project, done by imperial order, by which 1,000,000 copies of Buddhist mantras were printed. The printing method has not been determined, but it was either by woodblock or copper plate, or perhaps a combination of the two. Each printed mantra was put into a miniature wooden three-story pagoda about 20-centimeter high, and 100,000 of these were dedicated to each of the ten main temples of the era, including Tōdaiji, Kōfukuji, and Hōryūji.

This printing project was the first mass media production in Japan. However, this media production was not intended for the Japanese public. Rather, this major project may be understood as a variation of the practice of *shakyō*, or the hand-written copying of mantras offered in prayer to Buddha for divine protection of the nation. It was thus a communication gesture towards Buddha, who was presumably the sole "reader." It was, as it were, "printing as magic."

From the end of the eighth century to the beginning of the fourteenth century, there are some cases of Buddhist canons being printed, mostly at temples. Undoubtedly, this printing was done as a shakyō activity. But it did convey information to the lay people at the same time, in the sense that the will of the

person who wished the canons to be printed became information and was communicated to the society. It was natural that such printed canons, which originated as communications with Buddha, should be used as educational texts among the priests. But such use of the printed texts was quite limited within the temples.

During the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, printing took on new characteristics. First, *Gozan-ban* publications were frequently printed by priests of the Five Mountain temples (the Gozan). Most Gozan-ban publications were Zen Buddhist texts, but they occasionally included Chinese poetry, which was in the *geten* or non-Buddhist text category. This suggests that temple printing was slowly changing from spiritual communication with the Buddha to a more social circulation of texts. A second development was the appearance of publishers among urban commoners, specifically from those in the town of Sakai.

Sakai urban merchants (*Sakai Machishū*) published non-Buddhist texts such as the *Analects*, *Setsuyōshū*, and *Ishotaizen*. These were collectively called the *Sakai-ban*. Sakai-ban must have been inspired by the success of the Gozan-ban, but they also reflected the vibrancy of economy and public life of Sakai itself.

In 1590, "the Tensho Mission to Europe" returned to Japan with print blocks and a printing machine. This brought about a great change in the history of Japanese printing. Movable printing had first been conducted under the guidance of Jesuit missionary priests at their bases in Shimabara and Amakusa, and then done in Nagasaki as well. These printed works were called *Kirishitan-ban* (Christian books). Besides such publications, it was significant that there also was some publishing in Kyoto by non-Christians that used European movable type.

At the time, Toyotomi Hideyoshi's army invaded Korea, and his troops pillaged Korean publications that were printed with movable type. The type sets were brought back to Japan and even presented to the emperor. It is said that the emperor ordered his aides to do some trial printing. Given such historical circumstances, it has long been believed that the movable type publications other than the Kirishitan-ban were all done by means of Korean printing methods. Recently, however, Morigami Osamu, a bibliographer at the Central Library of Kinki University, has claimed otherwise. He has closely studied the formatting (*hanshiki*) of old printings, and concluded that they have characteristics quite specific to European formatting.

Japanese society in the sixteenth century clearly had the capability to import new technology from the West. Already before the introduction of movable type, there was that of guns. It was significant that Japanese warriors were confounded by the rifles (*teppō*) fired by the Mongol soldiers during their invasion towards the end of thirteenth century. There is no evidence that gunpowder or bullet discharging devices were known or developed in Japan during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Why was this? The reason was that social conditions were not yet ready for the acceptance of new civilization technology. In the thirteenth century, the Japanese printing medium still functioned as messages to Buddha.

This situation of the printing culture was symbolic of the stage Japanese society was at in terms of civilization.

Then, in 1543, guns were introduced to Tanegashima Island, and ten years later, Sakai had developed its own processes and facilities for manufacturing guns to meet orders of any quantity. And it was around this time, in 1533, that a new metallurgy technique called *haifuki-hō* (blowing-the-ashes method) was initiated at the Ikuno silver mine, leading to a major expansion of gold and silver production which in turn led to a transformation of the monetary system. Indeed, the sixteenth century in Japan was a dynamic period when a number of new technologies of civilization were introduced one after another. This was why European movable type was studied in order to use publishing as a new mechanism for the social transmission of information.

In the *Tōdaiki*, a book published in 1609, is the passage:

> For the last 53 years, there have been deeds called *"surihon."* Any book is printed in Kyoto, and the result is called *"han."* This will be extremely valuable for ages to come.

This quote shows that publishing in Kyoto was appreciated as a valuable technology of lasting significance. The Tōdaiki recorded information on politics and social events around the founding of the Tokugawa *Bakufu*. The author is unknown, but clearly had access to private information of the government. It is apparent that publishing was seen as symbolic of a new era by the leaders of the new Tokugawa government.

However, movable type printing did not take hold in seventeenth-century Japan. Instead, the emerging urban commoners' publication culture was propelled by traditional plate printing with woodblocks. What was the reason behind this? Given the above account, it would be insufficient to conclude that Japanese civilization was then just too immature for the technology.

2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PLATE-MAKING PRINTING MECHANISM

I believe there are at least five reasons for the preference for plate printing over movable type printing in seventeenth-century Japan, which are briefly outlined below:

1) The tightening of the ban on Christianity

Movable type printing rapidly gave way to traditional plate-making printing with the intense crack-down on Christians in the opening decades of the Tokugawa period. For example, the lord of Shimabara, Matsukura Shigemasa, executed 340 Christians who had been deported from Nagasaki by the magistrate in 1627. It was around then that the government adopted the test of *fumi-e* as a policy for rooting out believers (by which a person had to step on an image of Christ to test if s/he was

a believer). Clearly the disappearance of the European method of printing was connected to the official ban on Christianity.

2) The heritage of the visual format of *"shahon"* (hand-written copies of books)

Suminokura Soan and Hon'ami Kōetsu, whose publication of Japanese classics with movable type were called *Saga-bon*, were fascinated by the cursive style of the Japanese syllabary, the *kana*, by which the classics were written. Thus, for example, they used continuous type for the kana characters. This must have been a widespread aesthetic of writing among the intellectuals of the time. The plate-making method of printing was much more suitable than the movable type method to conveying the visual impact of the hand-written Japanese classics (the shahon).

3) Technological factors

Japanese movable type was made of wood (*mokkatsuji*), rather than metal. It was impossible to print more than a few hundred copies before the type wore out. It must have been the temple-affiliated woodblock artisans who made the earliest mokkatsuji. They eventually became independent of the monasteries, opened workshops, and trained apprentices in the skill. As they were originally skilled in woodblock carving, they probably preferred to continue to work with wood plates.

Furthermore, the Japanese language is written with three kinds of characters: the "kanji" characters (originally from China) and the two kana syllabaries (*hiragana* and *katakana*, both originating and developed from kanji). For printing Japanese, plate-making was more convenient than movable type. Finally, the plates could print more copies (usually 3,000–4,000 copies per set of plates, sometimes up to 5,000), and printing studios needed less equipment. Even in 1874, when the Ministry of Education authorized textbooks for about twenty school subjects, a total of about 3,000,000 textbooks were printed with wood plates. The technology was robust enough to meet publishing demands well into the first decade of the Meiji era.

4) Problems within the printing business: obsession with the *"hangi-kabu"*

Printing rights in the business were established by obtaining wood plates on which a text had already been carved. Such rights were called the *hangi-kabu* or *ita-kabu*. The proof of the printing rights was literally the plates themselves, and the rights rested with the printing house (or *"ie"*) and were retained as long as the house continued. It was only in the early eighteenth century that the Tokugawa government acknowledged such hangi-kabu rights, but among the publishers, the rights had been claimed as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century.

5) Censorship enforcement and printing rights

The hangi-kabu system of printing rights proved convenient for the Tokugawa government in enforcing censorship. The authorities protected the hangi-kabu of the publishers, and in turn, had them organize into publishers' guilds to which it

assigned censorship responsibility for anti-government materials.

In sum, for a complex of factors, traditional wood plate printing was revived in the first half of the seventeenth century to become the main publishing technology for the Tokugawa period. For the next three hundred years, until the latter half of the nineteenth century, this traditional technology was carried on by the private publishers.

It is said that the movable print invented by Johannes Gutenberg had enormous impact, not just in Germany but in national cultures all over Europe. Could one say that because Japan rejected Gutenberg's technology its cultural advancement was hampered? I would argue not. Wood plate printing technology strongly propelled the publishing industry, which was a basic condition for the formation of a national culture. I do not think that movable type alone has been a necessary stimulation for the development of modern civilization.

Japanese publishers aggressively acquired hangi-kabu printing rights. By the end of the seventeenth century, most of the Chinese classics (including Buddhist texts) and Japanese classics were printed and published. This can be regarded as a liberation of classical literature, promoting a national sharing of classics. Printing was supported by the vast intellectual needs of all of the public, and in turn, it stimulated the intellectual demand to create new writing.

Meanwhile, the Tokugawa government sought to more effectively enforce its powers through administrative controls and a strengthening of its financial basis. To these ends, all official orders, records, and bureaucratic procedures were recorded in writing on paper. Such systems of written forms were the basis not only of government operations but also of economic transactions and the organization of business, and of the management of the local affairs of village communities. The Edo period must also be seen as an era when all four social estates—warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants—were expected to learn to read and write, at least to some degree. Interestingly, then, the feudal system of the Tokugawa government had within itself a function of promoting literacy, in other words, of improving the intellectual degree of the nation. The Edo period publishing industry grew in relation to such an official promotion of literacy. Of course, it must be noted that the development of Japanese civilization as typified by the publishing industry also worked to undermine the Tokugawa government and its ruling system.

3. OFFICIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT FOR THE MEDIA PRODUCTION MECHANISM

As seen above, the publishing industry's establishment and early development revolved around Kyoto in the seventeenth century. I would like to review some quantitative data of the further development of the industry.

The number of books printed for sale by the end of the seventeenth century

was about 7,800. This I counted in the *Zōeki Shoseki Mokuroku Taizen*, which was a book catalogue published by Kawachi-ya Rihei in 1696. Another catalog, *Kōeki Shoseki Mokuroku*, published by "Four Kyoto Publishers" four years earlier, counted more than 7,000 books. The increase of 800 books in four years indicates that publishing was developing enormously at the end of the seventeenth century.

The Kawachi-ya book catalog classified publications in the Japanese alphabetic order of "*i-ro-ha*," whereas the earlier catalog had used a typical classification system of the time. This system allows us to get a sense of the number of books by content category:

1) Buddhist texts: about 2,800.
2) Confucian texts, including history, Chinese poetry and military: about 1,500.
3) Medical texts: about 450.
4) Texts in kana characters, including classics, Haiku, erotica, and calligraphy instruction: about 2,500.

The numbers indicate the titles and kinds of books published, but not the actual printing numbers per title, which cannot be determined. However, I would like to point out that there were bestsellers created in the seventeenth century. At the time, publishers held congratulatory parties whenever they sold 1,000 copies of a book, indicating that this sales total constituted a bestseller. *Kiyomizu Monogatari*, printed in kana in 1638, was a contemporary satire and is said to have sold 2,000–3,000 copies. A Genroku period textbook for composing poetry, *Sanjūin*, sold 3,000 copies. Both were publications intended for warrior intellectuals. *Kōshoku Ichidai Otoko* and *Nippon Eitai Gura*, by Ihara Saikaku, were only two of the many successful publications for the general public, and each is said to have sold 3,000–4,000 copies.

At the end of the seventeenth century, major publishers were still concentrated in Kyoto. The number of publishers who were financially capable of publishing continuously is said to have been 72. Among those, 29 publishers held hangi-kabu rights to at least 50 books. Publishing in Osaka began in the 1670s and grew on the strength of the booming Osaka economy and the emergence of the novelist, Ihara Saikaku. By the opening of the eighteenth century, there were some 24 Osaka publishing houses. Publishing in Edo began as the major Kyoto publishers set up branch offices there. By the second half of the seventeenth century, local Edo publishers emerged, featuring romantic novels (*ukiyo-e-bon*) by Hishikawa Moronobu and puppet theater scripts (*jōruri-bon*). However, the real development of the Edo publishing world had to wait for the second half of the eighteenth century. It was also around this time that publishers set up businesses in the major castle towns all over Japan; particularly noteworthy were those in Kanazawa, Wakayama, Nagoya, and Sendai.

It was only natural that the major publishers who had propelled the development of the industry sought to establish hegemony by protecting their interests. This was particularly evident among the publishers of Kyoto. With much investment, they claimed many exclusive publishing rights, and tried to establish legal support for these rights within the publishing industry.

It turned out to be a laborious process to obtain shogunate authorization for these hangi-kabu rights. Copying wood plate (*rui-han*) and illegal double printing (*jū-han*) were rampant, even at the end of the seventeenth century, because hangi-kabu rights were still not legally binding. The problem was that for the industry's own agreements about the status of the rights to be officially accepted and guaranteed, the existence and the rights of the publishers' guilds (*hon'ya nakama*) that had made the internal rule had first to be recognized by the Tokugawa authorities. And this, they were not prepared to do. Since edicts issued by Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi prior to the Tokugawa shogunate, it was the fundamental policy of the government to deny monopoly guilds in the major cities (the policy is known as *raku-ichi raku-za*). Market control by a privileged group and exclusive industry organizations were generally not permitted, and the publishing industry was no exception.

In September 1657, the government reiterated its prohibitions against guild activities among all merchants, dealers, and artisans of Edo. A ban (*ofure*) was proclaimed against private control of the market, and industry members were no longer permitted to convene (*nakama ichidō no yoriai*) or to form mutual agreements (*nakama ichidō no mōshiawase*). The proclamation was sent to all Edo districts, and each district tender a consent form bearing the signatures of all its registered dwellers. The ban listed 20 industries, including kimono makers, thread makers, cotton ball makers, paper traders, pharmacists, and the major publishers (*mono no hon'ya*). As mentioned above, at that time, many publishers in Edo were actually branch offices (*demise*) from the Kinki area, and the largest houses were almost entirely based in Kyoto. Thus, news of the government's move must have traveled quite rapidly to Kyoto.

In February of the same year, there was a government order in Kyoto that all publication of Japanese military texts (*wahon no gunsho no tagui*) must seek authorization from the Kyoto magistrate. The military texts in question were mostly records and tales of the unification activities of Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu. This constituted the Tokugawa government's first explicit order of censorship, and many more were to follow. Such censorship would not have been effective without the cooperation from the publishers' guild.

Kyoto, the center of seventeenth-century publishing, was a city of urbanites who prided in this heritage of self rule. Although unofficial, a publishers' guild had already been in existence since probably the Kan'ei period (1624–1644). It took the form of a *kō*, which were self-help and rotating credit associations organized for capital and sales cooperation and for religious purposes (e.g., *Ebisu-kō*, *Ise-kō*, and *Benten-kō*.)

Shogunal hostility toward guild activities, however, was soon to change. A publishers' guild of Kyoto (*Kyoto hon'ya nakama*) was officially recognized in 1685, and had three subdivisions based on location (the upper group *kamigumi*, the middle group *nakagumi*, and the lower group *shimogumi*). Because it was in that year that the Tokugawa authorities strengthened their prohibition of Christian-related texts, the publishers' guild must have assured its recognition and operation with a promise to cooperate with the authority.

In April 1715, the Tokugawa government ordered a new monetary system of gold and silver and, at the same time, directed merchants and manufactures to establish guilds (whose members were to convene monthly) in order to facilitate the exchange of the new coins with the old currencies. The Kyoto publishers' guild saw this as an opportunity to strengthen their organization. They proposed to the Kyoto magistrate that they pay him formal visits twice a year to express gratitude. The magistrate's acceptance of this offer was a de facto authorization of the guild.

Such publishers' guilds were encouraged in Edo and permitted in Osaka during the Kyōhō era (1716–1736), when finally each of the three major cities had its own publisher's guild. This moment may be taken as a measure of the full establishment of the Edo period publishing system. The legal basis for the system was the Publication Law of 1722, and this, in turn, provided the political mechanism for information control by the Tokugawa government.

4. ACTIVATING THE MEANS FOR MEDIA PRODUCTION

Cities function inherently as sites for the reception and transmission of information, and this flow of information was significantly heightened in Kyoto during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Private publishers, which did not exist until that moment, revolutionized the publishing trade and in turn more general intensified information flowed throughout the urban culture.

Also in Kyoto, various information mechanisms, such as permanent theaters and private schools were created. When goods in general possess a media function, the improvement in production and quality of manufactured goods in Kyoto can also be regarded as an improvement in the information transmission power of Kyoto. The information function of the temples must have also been activated with a particularly modern twist.

As already mentioned above, all three of the major cities in early modern Japan—Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo—grew enormously and became highly competitive during the Genroku period (1688–1704), and here I would like to note several of the conditions that sparked the florescence of media cultural production. First, many authors emerged to create literary works. In other words, the supply of manuscripts (the raw materials of publication) was abundant, prompted of course in part by urban citizen demand.

Secondly, supplies of paper and wood plates, equally important raw materials for publication, were also abundant. In Europe at this time, it is known that a

shortage of paper often hampered printing activities. However, in Japan, there was apparently never a case in which paper supplies were so low as to limit printing activities. The production of paper (*kami-suki gyō*) was widespread in villages throughout Japan and assured the urban presses with a supply of paper.

The value of the flow of paper into Osaka in 1714 was 14,464 *kan* in silver (or 241,067 *ryō* in gold coin), which made it the sixth most-valued commodity flowing into the urban market (after rice, rapeseed, construction wood, dried fish, and cotton). In 1736, paper imported from twenty-one regions accounted for 6,885 *kan* in silver, ranking third in value after rice and construction wood.

Construction wood flowing into the Osaka market, too, included that intended for carving wood plates, suggesting that there were abundant supplies of this material as well. Cherry wood, indigenous to Japan, was thought to be particularly suitable for wood plate carving; both wild and cultivated varieties were used. There may have even been some over-cutting of cherry trees for printing supplies, leaving mountainsides denuded in spring when the cherry blossoms were appreciated, but no firm evidence of this has been found so far.

Thirdly, there was abundant labor. Although we do not yet know the precise composition of the skilled labor force which was necessary for plate carving, it is known that in addition to professional carving artisans, there were some lower-ranking samurai with official shogunal ranks (*gokenin*) who carved wood as by-employment. There is a record, for instance, of engagement in such work by the samurai soldiers posted in Osaka in combat reserve during the war against the southern domain of Chōshū in the 1860s. And unlike samurai forced to take some forms of by-employment out of economic hardship, they were seemingly quite proud of their carving skills. The artisan master carvers undoubtedly were proud of occupation, and the existence of such skilled professionals supported mass publication of literary works. Master woodblock carvers in Edo numbered 317 by the mid-nineteenth century, and their subordinate workforce reached several thousand.

A final important element was a surprisingly broad readership. Priests had been the traditional reader base; there were about 60,000 temples during the Edo period, and this priesthood read voraciously. In addition, however, the samurai warriors were educated readers, conscious of their assumed role of bearers of a cultural tradition as well as a political station. Their wives and ladies-in-waiting constituted a further readership for the richly-illustrated books popular in Edo. And the commoner public increasingly read books as well. A measure and a means for this popular readership was the increase in the number of local temple schools (*terakoya*), for both urban and rural children. Ronald Dore has estimated that the percentage of children attending such schools reached perhaps 43% of boys and 10% of girls by the end of the Tokugawa period. The basic literacy that such schooling imparted was to provide a vital foundation for national development in the Meiji period.

5. THE INFORMATION ACTIVITIES OF FARMERS

So far I have shown some of the historical characteristics of urban patterns of information flow during the Edo period. However, both the production (writing and printing) and consumption (reading) of information was not limited to the major cities and towns, and in this section, I would like to offer some examples of information activities in the countryside.

The first case for which we have good evidence is of the situation during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in the 500 households of the eight villages of the rural county of Murayama in the northeastern region of Honshū (present-day Kahoku Town, Nishimurayama County, Yamagata Prefecture). In 1726, a textbook entitled *Yamadera-jō* and intended for the terakoya temple schools was published by the Kyoto shop of Yoshino-ya Tokubei of Kyoto, which was located in the heart of the city just north of the intersection of Teramachi and Sanjō. The subject of the book was an episode that took place in one of these Murayama villages, called Yaichi-gō, and it symbolizes the information pattern of not only of that single village but more generally those of the rural public of the time.

Yamadera-jō was originally written in Yachi-gō by a teacher at the local temple school for his pupils. It was primarily composed of a poem on the origins of Risshakuji, a temple in Murayama County that served as the center of regional religious activity, and of the miracles that were said to have occurred at that temple. Matsuo Bashō, the great haiku poet-monk of the mid-Tokugawa period, is known to have visited Risshakuji at the end of the seventeenth century. To the local people, the temple was simply known as "*yamadera*" (the mountain temple), hence the title of the text. After the writer's death, his former pupils, who were now leaders of the village, decided to commemorate their late mentor by having his text published by the Yoshino-ya firm in Kyoto so that it could be made available for pupils all over Japan. Having themselves been the recipients and consumers of information and publications from the urban centers, through their efforts to publish and disseminate the text, these farmers of the remote northeast now became purveyors and circulators of information as well.

The local leader in the drive to have *Yamadera-jō* published was a prosperous farmer and merchant by the name of Tamiya Goemon. He was in fact also something of an intellectual in the area, who read haiku and who wrote himself under the pennames of "Nengen," and "Baiin." Tamiya had been introduced to haiku by Suzuki Seifū, from the nearby Murayama town of Obanazawa. Seifū was a famous haiku colleague of Bashō; his name appears in the *Hon'ami Gyōjōki*, a family record of the Hon'amis of Kyoto. Seifū himself had edited publications of haiku poetry, and had many poet colleagues throughout Japan. One of his three haiku publications, *Inamushiro* (1685), was a compilation of 783 poems of more than one hundred of his fellow poets, from Tsugaru in the far north to Nagasaki and Tsushima in the extreme southwest. Naturally, many poems from his own region were selected for the book, and most of these were by people who had met

and been inspired by Bashō on his travels through the northeast. Of the regional poets whom Seifū selected for the compilation, fully 34 were residents of Murayama County, of whom six were villagers of Yachi-gō. Tamiya Goemon was the leading poet of the six, who formed a *haikai renju* or poetry collective. Similar groups were formed in towns and villages throughout this and other rural counties, creating a vast literary network. These people were naturally avid readers, taking in information not only from the cities but from all of Japan. Publications such as *Yamadera-jō* and *Inamushiro* demonstrated that they were active cultural information producers as well as consumers.

Because the poets are listed by their literary pennames, it is often difficult for scholars to determine their professions and backgrounds. Haiku poetry was, in effect, a cultural information activity engaged through pseudonyms. We do know, however, that those writers whose professions we have determined include more prosperous farmers and merchants, wealthy merchants in the Kinki countryside around Osaka, Kyoto, and Nara, village officials, Buddhist and Shinto priests, and country doctors. All of these constituent types were local political and economic leaders—the information flow elite, as it were.

Tamiya Goemon was one of the 30 households of the "upper guild" (kamigumi) of the Ōmachi settlement of Yachi-gō. We have records from 1684 of the household-head meetings of this guild, which was also known as the "*Ōmachi nenbutsu-kō.*" These record books (the *Ōmachi Nenbutsu-kō Chō*) offer a window onto the range of information that the villagers valued and circulated.

By the early to mid-eighteenth century, the entries in the guild books became quite detailed and covered a wide range of topics. There are entries, for example, of incidents of severe taxation that compelled the villagers to petition collectively for relief to the shogunal official, entries of how foodstuffs were held communally and distributed in times of shortage, and a record of the conflict of residents of the neighboring Nagatoro Village with their headman, and how their rioting had led to many being crucified, beheaded, or exiled. Tokugawa administrative appointments at both the central and local levels, nationwide crop conditions, crop prices in the markets of Osaka and Sakata as well the surrounding towns, meetings to select for rice varieties for cultivation, annual weather trends, reports of infectious disease from abroad and of government investigations of medicinal plants, an account of an elephant from India that was landed in Nagasaki, these and many other kinds of information filled the record books of the residents' association. The rice variety selection records are particularly important for agricultural history, and throughout, the national scope of data is striking. Crop prices, famines and disasters, and weather trends throughout the country appear year after year.

While the amount of news and information that came directly to individual farmers may not have been large, through such formal mechanisms of recording, sharing, and circulating information, everyone's range of knowledge of local and national conditions was greatly expanded. The literary networks of Tamiya

Goemon and Suzuki Seifū and the activities of groups such as the Ōmachi nenbutsu-kō must have played a major role in this collective gathering and exchanging of information.

The communal sharing and recording of information and such networking through literary activity is an analytical tool applicable to any local area. To analyze the social basis that supported the vitality of Tokugawa era media production, it is necessary to consider in detail the activities in the towns and countryside beyond the major cities as well as those at the urban core. I am happy to see that there are other such studies in progress. As I have shown here, the early modern farmers have left voluminous records about such activities, which testify to their capabilities and deep involvement in information flows.

6. CENSORSHIP AGAINST INFORMATION AND ITS BREAK DOWN

The Tokugawa government's efforts to control and censor the vibrant print culture began in earnest during its broad reform initiatives of the Kyōhō era (1716–1736). For example, the Publishing Law promulgated in 1722 had as its principal regulations that:

1) Writing on general topics was permitted so long as it did not include incitement or anti-government points of view (*"midari-naru gi isetsu"*).
2) Wood plates of erotica (*"kōshoku-bon"*) were to be confiscated, and their publication was banned.
3) Family heritage and ancestors were topics banned from publication.
4) All publications were to carry the true name of the author and the publisher.
5) Any topics pertaining to the shogunal family were banned.

Besides these five regulations, the guilds were encouraged to review the contents of all new books themselves. The law authorized the publishers' guilds in the three major cities to appoint collaborators for government censorship. At the time, there were some 200 publishers in Kyoto, 47 in Edo, and 32 in Osaka. All were ordered to prepare catalogs of their publications, and they eventually submitted listings of 7,446 books. The government in effect attempted to place all book publication and circulation under its control.

With such severe censorship, many books were banned, and even hand-written copies of books were kept from sale and lending. In edicts of subsequent shoguns (e.g., those of the Kansei era, 1789–1801), censorship of cultural activities was made even more harsh. At its most extreme, the shogunate moved to ban the use of any contemporary topics in kabuki plays or the *yose* (variety) shows of urban neighborhood theaters (including of course published scripts and texts).

However, at the same time, there were also new developments that counteracted such efforts at censoring the publication and flow of information,

including:

1) The nationalization of the sales network for publications, i.e. the creation of a national market for publication.
2) A widening circulation of underground material and news.
3) Greater interest in and knowledge of the Western information culture among intellectuals.
4) Increasing mass consumption of illustrated books (*ezōshi*, etc.)
5) Changes in the censorship of books and information on the part of the Tokugawa government itself.

These and other trends require further case studies to better appreciate their significance. However, it is already quite clear that the final decades of the Tokugawa shogunate (which is to say, the first half of the nineteenth century) witnessed the emergence of key conditions that predisposed the formation of the modern communication system towards the end of that century. I would like to stress in conclusion, therefore, that the foundations for the development of modern information civilization were laid during the early modern Tokugawa era.