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Society Today! Edo Printed Books and the Revolution in Illustration

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Argument: the representation of people and human activity changed dramatically after 1600 in the graphic arts of Japan.

The change is apparent in the **content** of art, which came to feature ordinary people in the ordinary activities of the day—in a putatively real and contemporary world—as a primary focus of artistic interest.

This change in content was enabled by two other changes: one of them in the **media** of representation (which came to include printed books and sheets as major vehicles for artistic production); the other in the **audience or patronage** of art (which came to include paying customers of all stations in a new market economy).

The post-1600 change becomes clearer through contrasts with the pre-1600 **content** and **media** and **patronage** of art.

We shall briefly consider the major subjects of Japanese graphic art, the major materials (silk and paper inscribed with ink, pigments, and metallic ornaments), and the major formats (hand scrolls, albums, fans, hanging scrolls, screens, and wall paintings) before addressing the format of the book and the medium of print.

Some questions.

Is my claim concerning the novelty of post-1500 human representation sustainable?
What subjects and scenes came to crowd the repertoire?
What messages did the material convey? And why?

Among the subjects I shall engage are the dignity of work, the virtue of material things, the centrality of the social and sociability, and the celebration of both the city and the market.

Some illustrations.

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Humanity (*Jinrin kinmōzui*), first published in 1690 by the Heirakuji in Osaka and Edo.

The One Million Stupas and Sutra Texts (*Hyakumantō darani*), 770 C.E..

Screens Representing Scenes of Edo (*Edo-zu byōbu*), first half of the 17th century.

An Illustrated Encyclopedia for Women (*Joyô kinmôzui*), compiled by Okuda Shôhakuken and first published in 1687 by the Yorozuya in Edo.

Recommended Reading.

Peter Kornicki, *The Book in Japan* (Brill, 1998).

Peter Kornicki, ed., *The Female As Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan* (University of Michigan, Center for Japanese Studies, 2010).

Quitman Phillips, *The Practices of Painting in Japan, 1475-1500* (Stanford University Press, 2000).

Miyeko Murase, *Emaki, Narrative Scrolls from Japan* (The Asia Society, 1983).

Roger Keyes, *The Artist and the Book in Japan* (reprinted by the University of Washington Press, 2006).

Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period* (University of California Press, 2006).