

Illustrated texts as living objects in eighteenth and nineteenth century Japan

It all started in a basement in Tokyo. I was an undergraduate student on my year abroad, discovering my interest in early modern Japanese literature. I asked a scholar if he knew where I could see as many different books from pre-modernisation Japan as possible, and he told me to go to the Union of Antique Book Sellers. What I saw had me coming back once a week for the rest of my stay. Strewn about on tables were hundreds of early modern books, and they were all for sale. It turned out that every Saturday antique book sellers came together to cheaply sell the wares that they otherwise could not shift: books that were missing covers, damaged or part of incomplete sets. But what interested me as I flicked through their pages was how, despite them being in this basement because of their supposed worthlessness, each one was unique. They had signatures of former owners, illustrations coloured in by children, covers that had been rebound after sale. I realised that I held more than just books containing stories and information, but books with their own material histories.

These trips formed the basis of my collection. I decided to focus on illustrated texts (my research subject) and try to reflect the large variety of different types I was seeing. But I did not look for specific titles. Instead I hunted for books that caught my eye for their individuality, regardless of their condition. No. 7, for example, is in terrible shape. It is missing its cover and is only a chapter of the full book, but whoever owned it doodled their reactions in the margins and wrote “Fascinating!” across the final page. My collection also has incomplete sets, but that is part of the charm. Take no. 13, published in four volumes but that I only own in three. That is not because I could only find three but because the original owner only thought three existed, crossing out the volume numbers on the covers and renumbering them. As such my collection shows that books have lives, that they can connect a child in nineteenth century Japan with a young researcher in twenty-first century England. It does not simply reflect the eclectic publishing market of Edo (now Tokyo), but also the people who took part in that market. Scholars have long argued that you can only understand this period of Japanese literature by grasping how it was read at the time, so I find this marginalia invaluable for my research.¹

When I return to Japan I will continue my searches, hoping to be surprised by what I find. In the meantime I will selectively add to my collection, as I cannot browse and have to buy specific titles online. This means the additions will be more tightly focused on my research area, illustrated travel literature, but I will not forget to consider the history of any book that I include.

¹ Nakano Mitsutoshi 中野三敏. “Saikaku gesaku setsu saikō: Edo no manako to gendai no manako no motsu imi” 西鶴戯作説再考：江戸の眼と現代の眼の持つ意味. *Bungaku* 文学 15, no. 1 (2014): 140–58.

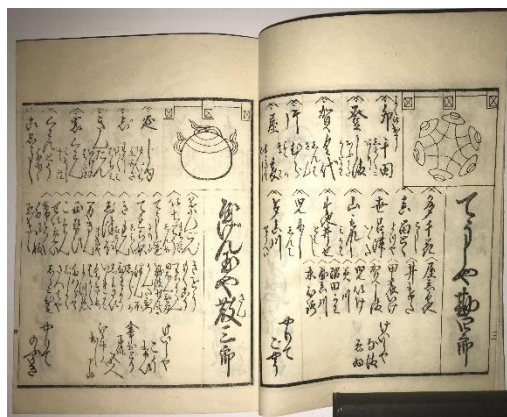
1. Akisato Ritō 秋里離島 (author) and Takehara Shunchōsai 竹原春朝齋 (illustrator). *Shūi: Miyako meisho zue*. Publisher unknown, 1787.

Description: Perfect condition. 50 leaves.
26cm x 18cm.

Comments: In 1780 Akisato Ritō published *Miyako meisho zue* 都名所図会, An Illustrated Guide to the Capital. Its detailed descriptions and realistic illustrations of Kyoto spawned an entire new type of travel literature in its wake, the *meisho zue*. It sold well and merited a second series, and this book is volume 2 of said series. It was owned by Mr Matsuo 松尾, but whether he bought the book in Kyoto, Osaka or Edo cannot be gleaned from this copy alone. It has been theorised that these types of travel guides were not meant to be brought on the road but to be used to imagine travelling, so Mr Matsuo may have been using this book to fantasise about what the ancient capital was like.



2. Chobian Minso 猪尾庵眠鼠. *Jiyū jizai* 自遊徒座居. Edo: publisher unknown, 1780.



Description: Perfect condition. 12 leaves.
18cm x 13.5cm.

Comments: This book is a collection of fake famous products, satirising the rampant commercialism of early modern Japan and especially its souvenir industry. The version I own is a reprint from 1924 using the original blocks. In fact, no known copies of the original survive, just these reprints. This particular one is no. 138 of a batch of only 300 produced. This book shows that

not just the text but also the woodblocks can have a life and a story. This work would have been lost to history if not for the woodblocks being reused in the inter-war period. As an aside, the name of the author is almost certainly a pseudonym.

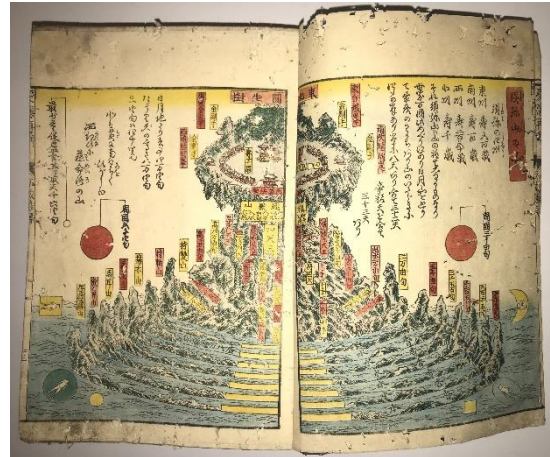
3. *Keiō saikoku: Banzai zassho nichiyō takara taizen* 慶應再刻／萬歲雜書日用宝大全. Osaka: Toyodaya Uzaemon 豊田屋宇左エ門, 1866.

Description: Original cover and title slip. Extreme worm damage.
198 leaves. 25.5cm x 19cm.

Comments: This gargantuan volume is an illustrated encyclopaedia to the world and everything in it. The first version was published in 1801 but this was part of a republishing run under



a different publisher in 1866. The owner of the book has written his name and address along the spine. He is one Nagano Tokutarō 長野徳太郎, from Araiama-mura in Niigata province. It makes you wonder how this book was published in Osaka, travelled to Niigata, and then eventually ended up in Tokyo to be bought by me?



4. *Kinkaku kojōsoroi Yamato kagami* 金鶴古状揃倭鑑. Edo: Izumiya Ichibee 和泉屋市兵衛, 1834.



Description: Slightly damaged cover. 32 leaves.
25.5cm x 17.5cm.

Comments: This is an all-in-one textbook, teaching letter-writing, abacus skills, history, literacy, legend and astronomy. It seems to have been used by a child as it has blots of ink on many pages, but unfortunately there is no writing. There is a name on the final page but it is illegible.

5. Koikawa Harumachi 恋川春町 (author and illustrator). *Mimasu masu uroko no hajime* 三升増鱗祖. Edo: Urokogataya 鱗形屋, 1777. Vols 1, 2, 3 [3 of 3].

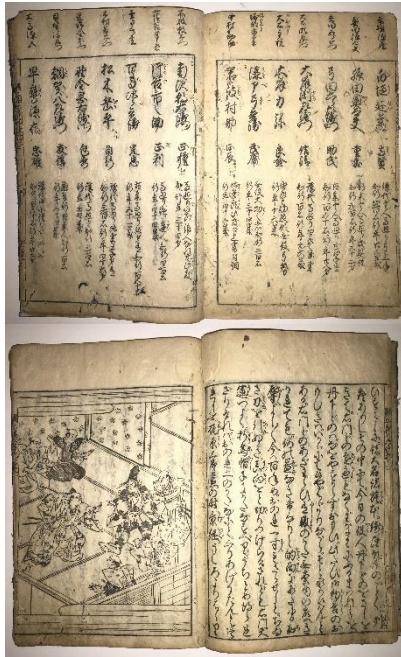
Description: Perfect condition. 5 leaves each. 19cm x 13.5cm.

Comments: This is an illustrated story fictionalising the creation of the Urokogataya publishing house, which itself published this book. It can therefore be seen as a piece of self-advertisement in narrative form. The copies I own are from reprints from 1927, and are the 301st of a 500-batch print run. As with no. 2 this text is very rare in its original printing, and without the woodblocks being reused it may not have seen the light of day.



6. Miyako no nishiki 都の錦 (author) and Yoshikawa Morinobu 吉川盛信 (illustrator). *Chūgi Taiheiki taizen* 忠義太平記大全. Kyoto: Hishiiya Jibee 菱屋治兵衛, 1717. Vols 1-2, 4-12 [11 of 12].

Description: New covers, no title slips. Significant worm damage. Bound into 4 books. 49, 72, 75 and 64 leaves respectively. 25.5cm x 17.5cm.

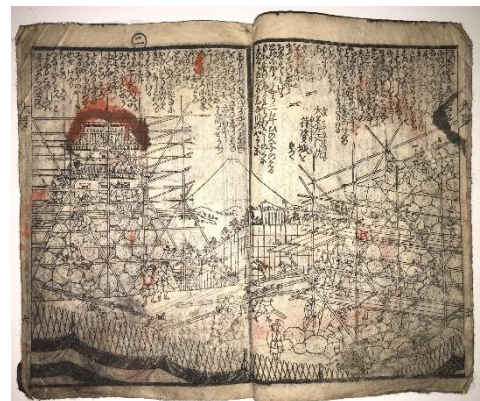


Comments: This is a 12 volume illustrated retelling of the tale of the 47 ronin, the most famous revenge narrative in Japanese history. In brief, 47 samurai are left leaderless after their lord, Asano Naganori 浅野長矩, was compelled to commit suicide for assaulting a court official, Kira Yoshinaka 吉良義央. They break into Edo castle and kill Kira, and are subsequently themselves forced to commit suicide for the murder. The story became emblematic of samurai loyalty and was adapted into plays, children's books, illustrated literature and wartime propaganda. The owner of these books only had 11 of the 12 volumes but nonetheless chose to remove the covers and rebind them into 4 books. The final one is of particular interest, as the last pages list off the names of the 47 ronin. Whoever owned this book, however, clearly did not agree with the list, as they have written alternative names for the ronin in the margins above!

7. Nagashima Ikkaisha 長嶋一魁車 (author) and Utagawa Yoshitora 歌川芳虎 (illustrator). *Mukashi gatari tataso* 昔語太多礎. Edo: Yamaguchiya Tōbee 山口屋藤兵衛, 1850. Vol 1a [1 of 2]

Description: Slightly damaged with original cover and binding. 10 leaves. 17.5 x 11.5cm.

Comments: I would class this as my favourite item in the collection. It is a compilation of different samurai tales in a comic book-like format called a *gōkan* 合巻. The last person who owned it coloured in all the faces and many auxiliary items like flags or fire, making it unique. This book is also special because of its rarity – as far as I can trace there are only 4 copies of it in the world including mine.



8. Nakajima Sōbee Jufuku 中島惣兵衛寿福. *Arami meizukushi kōshū* 新刃銘尽後集. Kyoto: Kitao Hachibee 北尾八兵衛, 1735. Vol 1 [1 of 6].

Description: Good condition, original cover and title slip. Weak imprint. 43 leaves. 25.5cm x 18cm.

Comments: This is the first of 6 volumes cataloguing different sword shops across Japan, with each book covering a different geographical area (this one being Yamashiro prefecture). Each shop's name is

accompanied by a drawing of the sword they specialise in. However the printing is quite

worn out in certain areas, implying that this was an extremely popular text printed enough times to wear out the woodblock. This copy was owned by Ueda Bunbee 上田文兵衛, who wrote on the inside cover that it is one of six. Hence he likely owned all of the volumes, but where the rest are is unknowable.

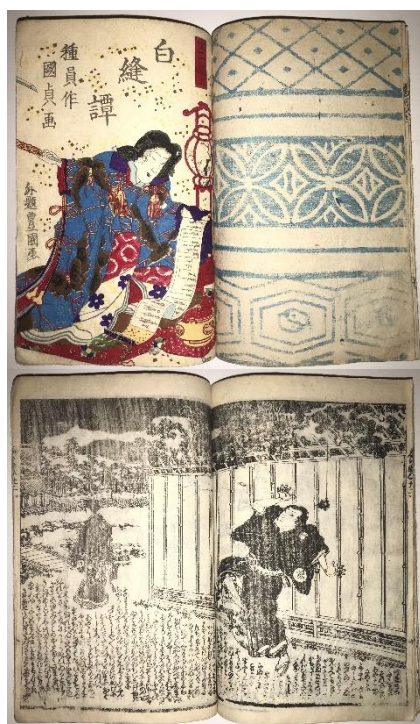
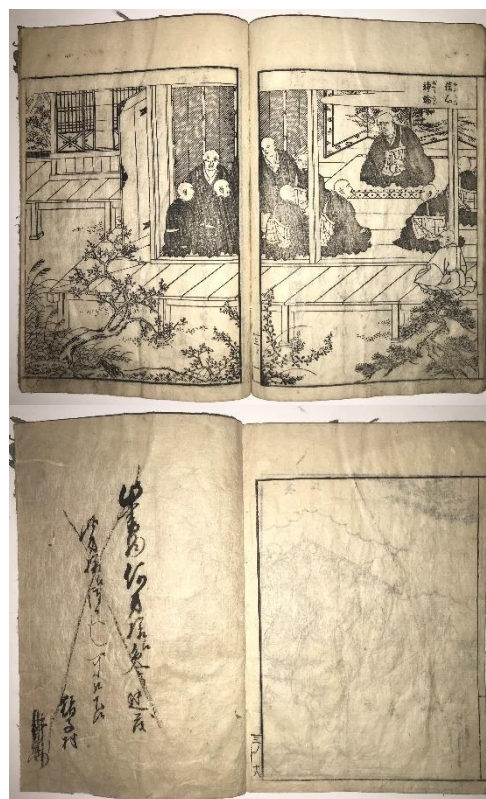
9. Nishimura Chūwa 西村中和 (illustrator). *Takaso*

***Seijin: Goden erylakuge* 高祖聖人／御傳絵略解.**

Kyoto: publisher unknown, 1810. Vols 1-3 [3 of 5] x 2 sets.

Description: Original covers, 2 copies. One copy retains its title slip. Water damage on both. 38 leaves. 25.3cm x 17.7cm.

Comments: These books are illustrated retellings of the life of the Buddhist monk Shinran 親鸞, who was the founder of the Pure Land sect of Buddhism, one of the major Buddhist sects throughout Japanese history. The first copy was bought in Kyoto for 25 *zeni* (~£40) in 1889 by Nakano Nizaemon 中野仁左エ門. Where it was before is unknown, and according to the inside back cover Mr Nakano bought all 5 volumes. Where are the missing two? The second copy was owned by a lending library, as the inside back cover contains a (crossed-out) hand written message demanding the book's return to Inoko-mura 猪子村.



10. Ryūkatei Tanekazu 柳下亭種損 (author) and

Utagawa Kunisada II (illustrator). *Shiranui monogatari* 白

縫譚. Edo: Fujiokaya Keijirō 藤岡屋慶次郎, 1856. Vols 15a, 15b, 21a, 21b, 22a, 22b [6 of 180].

Description: Near perfect condition. Some worm damage that has been repaired. Vols 15a and 15b are loose (10 leaves each) and 21–22 are bound into one book of 40 leaves. 17.5cm x 11.5cm.

Comments: These are three full chapters from the longest book series in early modern Japanese history: *Shiranui monogatari*. The full series runs to 90 chapters of 2 volumes each, the first being published in 1849 and the last in 1885. As such collecting this series completely would be a mammoth task. Volumes 15a and 15b are loose, retained as they were sold. But the 4 volumes that make up chapters 21 and 22 have been repaired and

bound into one book. The name Ōno Tadao 大野忠雄 is written on the back cover; it is likely that he rebound them. The back cover also says “number 2 of set 3”, implying that more bound collections were created at the same time. Reuniting this book with its siblings is unfortunately unlikely.

11. *Shin shōbai ōrai dōken shō* 新商売往来童見抄. Edo: Urokogataya Magobee 鱗形屋孫兵衛, 1780s.

Description: Damaged cover and title slip, no internal damage. 14 leaves. 26.5cm x 18.5cm.

Comments: This is a textbook for the children of merchants and designed to teach two things. First is the different types of products that would be sold in the capital, which are illustrated across the top of each page. The second is the language that would be used in bills, contracts and trade deals—specifically the Chinese characters that would be used—making up the bottom half of each page. This one has clearly been consulted often as a large number of the illustrations have been carefully coloured in.



12. *Tajiri Baiō* 田尻梅翁. *Wakan e-iri: Jokun kōkyō oshie no kotobuki* 和漢絵入／女訓孝經教寿. Edo: Suharaya Mohee 須原屋茂兵衛, 1822. 2 sets.



Description: Near perfect condition. 2 copies. 44 leaves and 59 leaves respectively. 25.5cm x 18cm and 26.5cm x 18cm.

Comments: This book is also a textbook, designed to teach young girls the proper way to behave in society according to Neo-Confucian values. However this item is interesting because I have two copies, the second being a forgery. The first copy was owned by the Nakayama family. The second copy does not have any notable provenance, but what is more interesting is that it is slightly bigger than the

first and contains a whole other text bolted on to the end. This makes it likely to be a *kabusebōri* 被せ彫り, a forgery. These were created by taking a published book, pulling it apart, using the pages as tracing paper to carve your own woodblock and then printing it yourself. In this case the forger not only copied the book, but appended an extra text too. Original (left), forgery (right).

13. Tomioka Kirin 富岡貴林. *Ningen isshō: Hatsumeī dōchūki* 人間一生／発明道中記.

Tokyo: Bunbundō 文々堂, 1875. Vols 1a, 2a, 2b [3 of 4].

Description: Original covers, new binding. Title slip missing on Vol 1. 26, 21 and 27 leaves respectively. 22cm x 15cm.

Comments: This book is a fictional travel guide revolving around the theme of modernisation, a process that was started in Japan in 1868 (7 years prior to this publication). It is split up into imaginary stations, based on the new railway lines being built at the time, and contains a plethora of fake place names that play with the new technologies and concepts that were being

introduced. These were owned by Sawa Jōtarō 澤常太郎, who wrote his name on each of the covers

and bought them on the 29th August 1882. The text was published in four volumes but Mr Sawa only had three, and renumbered the covers from volumes 1a, 1b, 2a and 2b to volumes 1a, 1b and 1c (he was missing vol 1b). Volume 1a contains marginalia, including a child's drawings and their attempts to practice writing the syllabic alphabet.



14. Tōzaian Nanboku 東西庵南北 (author) and Yanagawa Shigenobu 柳川重信

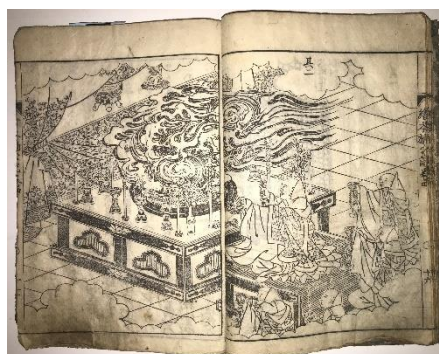
(illustrator). *Beni jitate onna daruma* 紅染女達磨. Edo: Nishimuraya Yohachi 西村屋与八, 1816. Vol 3a [1 of 12].



Description: Missing cover, significant creasing, slight tearing. 15 leaves. 17.5cm x 12.5cm.

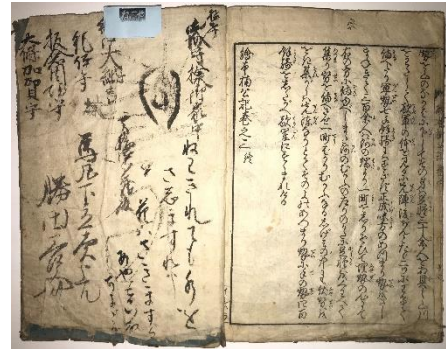
Comments: This is one half of a chapter from a *gōkan* 合巻, a type of highly illustrated commoner literature popular in the early 1800s. *Gōkan* can be spotted by their high density of text crammed into the null space of the images which take up most of the pages. This copy has been extensively annotated by its previous owner, including writing the word “Fantastic!” (ヲモシロエ) on the final page and “Catch her!” (ダイテヤレ) on another.

15. Yamada Nokakashi 山田案山子 (author) and Hayami Shungyōsai 速水春暁斎 (illustrator). *Ehon Nankōki* 絵本楠公記. Edo: Suharaya Mohee 須原屋茂兵衛, 1800. Series 1, Vols 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 [6 of 10].



Description: Damaged covers and title slips on all volumes. Otherwise minimal damage. 14 leaves each. 22cm x 16cm.

Comments: This is a 3-series retelling of the life of the legendary figure Kusunoki Masashige 楠木正成, known throughout Edo culture as the ideal of samurai loyalty. He was known for supporting the Emperor in the Kenmu Restoration and later died in a battle that he knew he could not win in order to defend the throne. His story therefore naturally got turned into propaganda during the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when the Emperor once more rose to prominence. These volumes contain a lot of paratextual information about their various owners, especially volume 3.



16. Yanagi Seishi 柳精子. Rekijitsu genkai 暦日諺解. Edo: Mankyūdō 萬笈堂, 1789.



Description: Original cover and title slip. No damage. 40 leaves and 4 leaves of advertisements. 22.5cm x 15.5cm.

Comments: This is a book explaining the lunar calendar, the auspicious days of the year and what you should do and avoid doing on said days. It does this through taking quotes from Chinese treatises on the subject and fully explaining them in vernacular Japanese. These publications were incredibly popular in early modern Japan. This copy was originally owned by Sawatari Jirōemon 沢渡治郎衛門, who has

written his name on the back cover.

17. Yo watari meisho zue 世渡名所図会. Edo: Nishimura Sōshichi 西村宗七, Kyoto: En'ya Genhachirō 円屋源八郎, 1802. Vols 2, 4 [2 of 5].

Description: Original covers, title slip missing on Vol 4 and damaged on Vol 2. No internal damage. 17 and 15 leaves respectively. 22.2cm x 15.5cm.

Comments: This book is another fictional travel guide that closely mirrors the layout and structure of the *meisho zue* 名所図会 ("illustrated guides to famous places") typology of guidebooks. The two volumes have come from different owners: volume 2 has an unfortunately illegible name written on the inside back cover; and volume 4 has



had some of its illustrations coloured in. Volume 4 also has a name on its outer back cover, but again the damage to the cover itself renders the writing illegible.

18. *Morobito ichidai dōchūzu* 諸人一代道中図. Edo: publisher unknown, post-1756.



Description: A scroll in very good condition. Some creasing. 169cm x 60cm.

Comments: Bound books were not the only literary medium in early modern Japan – scrolls were also popular. This one is half-text and half-map, copying the depiction of a fictional land that first appeared in the 1756 title: *Zen'aku ryōdōchū hitori annai* 善悪両道中独案内 by

Hiyūtei 飛雄亭. Across the top half is an excerpt of story from the book while the bottom half is a map lifted from it as well. There is no sign as to who bought this, when or where but the scroll is ornate, patterned in red and gold. It is also mounted on a wall hanging, making it a decorative hanging scroll (a *kakejiku* 掛け軸).

This scroll is not only a re-imagining of another text, showing how books can travel and be transformed even into other media, but it is an ornament that would have been hung and viewed often in a wealthy household.

諸人一代道中國

[illegible]