

Catalogue of Japanese Manuscripts and Rare Books. Merete Pedersen.

The Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark. Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts, Xylographs, etc. in Danish Collections (COMDC). Vol. 10.1. — Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. — 446 p. ISBN: 978-87-7694-147-5

The largest in the Nordic countries Royal Library in Denmark has released the tenth volume of the series *Oriental Manuscripts, Xylographs, etc. in Danish Collections*— the **Catalogue of Japanese Manuscripts and Rare Books** prepared by the research librarian Merete Pedersen. The luxurious album-format volume with excellent full-page illustrations and detailed information about each of 152 titles represented in this edition gives an impression of a reputable research work answering the most sophisticated demands.

The majority of the early Japanese books from the Collection dates back to the Tokugawa era (1603–1867) or speaking more precisely to the second half of the 18th — the middle of 19th cc. The editions before 1603 are represented solely by some fragments of the Buddhist sutras. At the same time the library has many publications printed after 1868, but the catalogue introduces only a series of woodblock prints, traditional block-printed books, photo albums and few books made with the use of movable metal type. As the compiler of the catalogue points out, it was made to “illustrate the gradual development and transformation of traditional Japanese book printing and binding into modern book printing” (p. XI).

The most part of the collection was acquired at the end of 19th — beginning of 20th cc. (which is proved by the ex-libris) — the period when the traditional Japanese books have invaded the international market. Many books were purchased through the French dealer. At the same time, the catalogue as well enlists the editions bought or received as a gift in the last decades.

The detailed Introduction contains information about the collection, the history of its forming, its genre variety. And here one can see the first distinctive feature of the book: unlike another catalogues the author chooses the way of covering first all possible types and genres of books (and not only those that are introduced in the catalogue!) accentuating what types and genes are present in the collection and which ones are not. However, inside the catalogue entries this principle is less important as all attention is centered on each concrete title. And still there is a good reason that the

author underlines the importance of the process of the Japanese book evolution or to be more precise its format. The catalogue makes a special emphasize upon the book design which was dictated by the peculiarities of the text and its genre style.

The Introduction covers all genres that represent the range and wealth of the book culture while inside the catalogue the entries are given in accord with genre classification used in the already classic catalogue of *Early Japanese Books in Cambridge University Library* by Hayashi Nozomu and Peter F. Kornicki.¹

The rubrics are given in such an order: Encyclopedias, Shinto and Kokugaku, Christianity, Language, Literature, Music and Drama, History, Geography, Politics and Law, Education, Science, Medicine, Art, Sinology, Japanese Sinology.

M. Pedersen in her introduction clearly specifies the parameters used in the description of each entry. All terms are given in Japanese thus directing the readers towards Japanese approach to book description. For the readers who do not attain the advanced level of Japanese the catalogue is supplied with glossary that gives English language explanation of special terms. Besides, the catalogue contains the table of Nengo dates and what is especially useful! — the table of traditional book sizes (in centimeters) alongside with their names. Besides, the description of each entry is supplied with internet reference address where one can find the electronic copy of the edition and the data about the libraries and institutions it is preserved in as well as the catalogues with contain records about it. Moreover, in case of rare book the author specifies in what foreign countries one can find its virtual copy (for example, see No. 38). Anyone who opens the catalogue for the first time gets at his disposal an excellent instrument that enables him to freely navigate in the space of the Japanese book culture.

M. Pedersen demonstrates a profound or better say perfect knowledge of the material which in my opinion is one of the most important advantages of the catalogue. Excellent reference tools make the book a kind of encyclopedia for all those who are interested in the history of traditional Japanese book. The detailed bibliography, the great number of online resources, the list of online catalogues and image databases, web-based articles and blogs distinguish the catalogue from another catalogues of that type. The tremendous work done by the author provokes our professional admiration and deep respect.

Nevertheless, the doubtless merits of the catalogue some times could turn into its shortcoming when the desire to provide the reader with maximum of information leads to opposite results and the necessary data remains on the periphery. For example, the description in the rubric “Imprint” contains so much information about all editions of the concrete work that at the end it becomes difficult to understand when was published the concrete volume from the catalogue entry. Such confusion occurs not once forcing one to read the description several times in order to get a clear understanding of the definite publication date of the volume introduced in the index.

¹ Hayashi Nozomu and Peter F. Kornicki. 1991. *Early Japanese Books in Cambridge University Library: a Catalogue of the Aston, Satow and von Siebold Collections*. Cambridge [England]; Cambridge University Press.

There are some more shortcomings. For instance, in the entries related to the New Testament translations made by missionary B. Bettelheim (No. 8–13) the author indicates different dates of Bettelheim’s life — either 1811–1869 or 1811–1870. And what is more, once both versions of his life dates are met at the same page! It is also unclear why the “The Holy Gospel of Luke” which in Japanese transcription stands for “Roka den fukuinsho” (and it is given in the catalogue!) should be read as “Ruka den fukuinsho” (pp. 20, 24, 28). Besides, it is obscure why “The Epistle to the Romans” and “The Acts of the Apostles” are placed under the title “The Holy Gospel of the Luke”.

It is a pity not all Japanese titles have their English language equivalents, some English titles are given in the rubric “Contents”, some do not exist at all. There are several printing errors — by the irony of fate, the first misprint is in the title of the first entry where the last character has somehow disappeared...

However the few shortcomings do not spoil the general impression of the highly professional catalogue and don’t prevent it to fulfill its main task as it is formulated in the Preface — “to introduce to the world the collection of rare Japanese books from the Royal Library after many years of oblivion”. No doubt, this objective has been successfully accomplished.

Karine Genrikhovna Marandjian
Institute of Oriental Manuscripts,
Russian Academy of Sciences
