

Kokugakuin University Museum
Special Exhibition

The Edo period : Eras connected by manuscripts

Jun. 17, 2016 (Fri) - Jul. 16, (Sat)

Following the Sengoku period (Period of Warring States), the populace received “the peace of Tokugawa,” at which time lives became more stable and cultural productions flourished. During the Edo period (1603-1868), it is a fact that the use of characters to transmit information advanced societal connections between people from various classes and regions.

Ancient manuscripts connect people, things, and happenings. They contain information about rules, ranks, descriptions of daily life, culture, and so on, all of which is necessary for the setting of Edo period society. These manuscripts are more than just characters; one of the defining features of these documents is the abundance of pictures.

This exhibition looks at the Edo period through manuscripts. While samurai, nobility, and commoners were all part of different societies, manuscripts also show the connections between these societies. Beyond the distinction between characters and pictures, we can also appreciate the variety of ancient manuscripts, including differences in shape and size.

What are the “connections” between ancient manuscripts?

Ancient manuscripts convey information of connections and provide a panoramic view of various societies and happenings. For example, connections between the following events from the Genroku period usually are not made, the great pine corridor in “Diagrams of Edo Castle’s Inner Palace and Quarters;” the garments of “Illustration of Samurai in Costume;” “Letter from Master of Political Rites and Ceremonies Kira Yoshinaka;” and the “Letter to Kada no Azumaru affixed to a folding screen”.

Moreover, ancient documents connect the past with the current age. A map of a decision in a land dispute from the Kyoho era—three hundred years ago—depicts boundaries that remain unchanged at present

In front of you are ancient documents which connect the Edo era with the present and convey the feelings of people from that time to us.

We hope you enjoy this exhibition and the various ways ancient documents are linked.

We have marked three representative connections with an arrow (→). Following the arrow, we hope you will enjoy following the connections.

Tokugawa Ieyasu's Sons

Documents from the Ako Vendetta

Forms of Various Names

Highlights of the Exhibition

Samurai : From War to Peace

Following the Battle of Sekigahara, Tokugawa Ieyasu was a unifying leader and became shogun in Keicho 8 (1603), establishing the Tokugawa shogunate under the principal of maintaining the peace. Although retaining the power of the samurai government, [Tokugawa] governed by documents and in the environs of Edo Castle stressed ritual systems and order.

This section explores how Tokugawa's government brought forth "the peace of Tokugawa from a time of wars, by focusing on documents addressing connections with the succeeding generations.



Oam monogatari (Tales of the Oam)

Edo period

okugakuin University Faculty of Letters

The Populace : People who held up the Edo Period

In the Edo period, the development of production and the distribution of goods was the work of the populace. Concerning villages in the Edo period, one most likely has a gloomy image of feudal lords' rigid collection of annual taxes. However in ancient manuscripts, we discover that while accepting the Tokugawa shogunate's rule, villages maintained local governmental autonomy. Village documents show this kind of practical rule was necessary for maintaining peace.

In this section, connections between the populace and authorities are understood by looking at how education, training, livelihoods, and assurances of production are presented in ancient documents.



Box for circulating letters
Ansei 3 (1856), November
Kokugakuin University Museum

Nobility : Sources of Culture and Traditional Authority

The imperial court and nobility routinely performed numerous rituals in order to protect the nation-state from natural disasters and extra-ordinary happenings. Subsequently people derived notions of “refinement (雅 *miyabi*)” and connections with respect. In addition, investitures of rank and office were absolute necessities to for those engaged in religious, cultural, academic activities.

In this section, based on ancient documents we break from the common impression that political power was kept away from the imperial court and present an image of comprise.



Higashiyama Tenno Kuzen –an
(Certificate of Office and Rank)
Genroku7 (1694) , May14
Kokugakuin University Library

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