

Even a sardine's head becomes holy: the role of household encyclopedias in sustaining civilisation in pre-industrial Japan

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Abstract: The experience of a stable but not stagnant Japan from the late 17th century to the late 19th century may provide us with valuable knowledge for considering a future global civilisation.

Whether sustainable coexistence between diverse elements in a close community works well or not largely depends on the quality of the intermediaries mediating between those elements. This paper focuses on the pivotal intermediary of that time, two genres of popular household encyclopedias, *setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho*: the former providing instruction in “elegant” forms of written communication, and the latter in “unoffending” behaviour towards the numerous gods in heaven and earth. Close examination of the wear and tear in extant copies of these books reveals what the users’ common concerns were. At the same time, anecdotes revealing former generations’ attitudes towards those books help us understand the enormous flexibility of interpretation that the texts allowed, preventing any growth of dogmatism. Supported by the lasting popularity of courtly behaviour towards others – including non-humans – such guides contributed to the civility of the population. However, people eventually developed a sense of humour with which they could laugh at themselves for behaving timidly in accordance with the instructions those books offered.

The concluding part of this paper discusses the quality of the intermediary roles of such guides in terms of the traditional East Asian notion of civilisation, and presents an image of a past polytheistic society in which humans and their environment, including heavenly bodies and insects, shared one world.

Keywords: civilisation, household encyclopedias, Yin-Yang school, civility towards non-humans, pre-industrial Japanese society.

Introduction

Iwashi no atama mo shinjin kara. Or, in English, “Even a sardine’s head becomes holy if one worships it.” This somewhat puzzling expression is an old Japanese proverb, one early record of which can be found in *Kefukigusa*, an essay written by Matsue Shigeyori, a poet active in early 17th century Kyoto. The proverb carries a double message. On the one hand, it offers an observation of the relationship between gods

and their believers; that is, that the more a person believes in a god, the holier the god becomes in the person's mind. On the other hand, it is a satirical remark on human nature, ridiculing the tendency to seek something to rely on.

Since the early 1980s, I have tried to locate, in many parts of Japan, extant copies of two kinds of household encyclopedia, *setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho* (or *ōzatsusho*). These volumes were popular in Japan from the late 17th century to the late 19th century and my interest in them was related to the various degrees of wear and tear they exhibited, which reflected their users' preoccupations in their daily lives, particularly when undertaking more or less serious and important acts. Modern historians have tended to emphasise that secularism increased in Japanese society during the 17th century, but my study of the usage of *setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho* suggests otherwise. Its conclusions can be summarised as follows. First, even during the 19th century, belief in the Yin-Yang school of astrology and geomancy (*onmyōdō*) persisted, as many Japanese lived a delicately restrained mode of life that involved maintaining a certain civility towards the numerous gods in heaven and on earth with whom they believed the world was shared. Second, this civility towards the invisible seems to have been sustained by a rising admiration for courtly elegance among the general populace, whose ideas of court life had often been associated with sensitivity towards the invisible. It seems to me that the old "even a sardine's head..." proverb encapsulates, in a few words, their attitudes.

A study of stable societies

In so-called "modernised societies", individualism, free competition and social change have tended to be valued highly at the cost of communal civility. For those who are accustomed to such societies, it is difficult to imagine a time when things changed very little between generations. Yet, Japan towards the turn of the 17th century was increasingly becoming such a stable society. Geographical frontiers had been closed, the pace of increase in arable land had distinctly slowed, the size of the population had become more or less constant, the vocation of each household was commonly accepted as fixed and sumptuary decrees were repeated to suppress consumerism.

This stability was not without its critics. In the early 1730s, Takarazu Shusō, an 80-year-old *hatamoto*, or direct vassal of the Shogun, gave bitter voice to his complaints. He was appalled, for example, by the fact that custom-made swords had become things of the past: "Old men's swords and those of the middle aged or of the young look similar...the reason for this is that their bearers are no longer of the calibre (*kiryō*) that used to enable them to consider fighting this way or that way with their own swords...Their sole concern these days is to look trendy in the eyes of others

[with regard to the shape and decoration of sword]" (ZNZT 1981: 40). He also lamented: "In recent years, girls in long-sleeved kimono of ages of 14 to 15...or of 30, 40, or even older women, all wear [cloths of certain stripe patterns], with broadened sashes round high up near their bosoms and their hips looking unusually long-shaped, walking *dota dota* [with no modesty]." Shusō's conclusion was that "women too have lost their calibre and all mimic each other" (Ibid: 37). "In the old days," he recollected, "once or twice, nay, five to six times a year, there were occasions when calls in loud voices for swords and spears were heard in warriors' houses... Youngsters these days wear no swords in their houses..." (Ibid: 62). Instead, complained Shusō, youngsters were interested in little other than "food...monetary gain...the games of *go* and *shōgi* [Japanese chess], the tea ceremony, *haikai* [the prototype of *haiku*]...gossip about actors...and nothing about the way of the military man at all" (Ibid: 40).

Shusō's resentment was not without foundation. The Shimabara Rebellion in Kyushu had been suppressed in 1638 and, by the end of the 17th century, there were already few left who could talk of their own experiences of that last major military confrontation. The symbolic event that perhaps best reflects the changing social climate was the issue of a new constitution for the military, the *Buke Shohatto*, by the Fifth Tokugawa Shogun Tsunayoshi in 1683. Its first article emphasised the importance of *reigi* – ritual propriety or civility – in contrast to former versions that had stated first of all the importance of archery and horsemanship. Life was being afforded new meaning – in particular, in the sense of living life in relation to others. This new sensitivity included paying consideration to the lives of creatures other than humans. For example, Kawachiya Kashō, a learned village-head living in Daigazuka, south of Osaka, who kept a diary for 20 years from the late 1680s, wrote that he had abandoned the idea of developing a hillside into a farm because of a "very clear" dream in which he dreamed that the old inhabitants of the area, "grasshoppers, rabbits and the like", had protested against his plans for development "with tears in their eyes" (SSS 1955: 307-9). This entry was written perhaps under the influence of the well-known decrees issued by the Shogun beginning in 1687, which commanded mercy for all living creatures, much to the utter dismay of hunters and fishermen. Likewise, politeness in the interests of avoiding unnecessary conflict and antagonism became the first and foremost standard with regard to social relationships. *Hōshiki*, or formalities, began to flourish in almost every aspect of social life, extending far beyond matters of flower arranging or table manners. This tendency towards costly formalism was increasingly conspicuous even among common people, as was reflected in the contemporary scornful sumptuary decrees.

In 1989, a small group of historians and ethnologists started a seminar in the hills north of Kyoto to collect and discuss records of the culture of stable societies in human history. The meeting was repeated annually for 10 years under the title Kyoto International Seminar on Stable Societies. Midway through the series, the organisers of the seminar sought help from a group of ecologists and animal scientists who provided the participants with broad comparative perspectives. Further support came from craftsmen, a forest owner, a sake brewer, a martial artist, a member of the courtly house of poetry and a producer of a genre of traditional performing arts – individuals outside academia, whose lives reflected manners and customs that had been maintained for generations (Yokoyama et al. 2000). One of the major findings of the seminar was that intermediaries – that is, any persons or things playing intermediary roles – enjoyed a rich social function in non-stagnant stable societies. This was particularly true of intermediaries for communication that existed not only among humans but also between humans and their environment.

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The theme of this paper – the role of two popular household encyclopedias, *setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho*, in Japan between the late 17th and late 19th centuries – builds upon the findings of the afore-mentioned seminar in exploring the role played by these intermediaries in bringing about a uniquely stable society. These genres were the product of common people's rising interest in polite and formal language and behaviour, as well as the corresponding efforts of publishers. Naturally, the old samurai Shusō did not miss a chance to comment on the prevalence of the new written forms of communication. He grumbled: "In the old days, exchanging letters for any form of business was rare. Errand boys conveyed messages orally... For this reason, the need for paper was one tenth that of nowadays... In recent years even matters that could be handled orally are written down and, moreover wrapped up, so wrapping paper is also necessary..." (ZNZT 1981: 61).

Setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho

Notwithstanding their combined social role, these two genres of literature were very different in their emphasis. The *setsuyōshū* taught its users civility towards other humans, in particular, manners in written communication. The *ōzassho*, on the other hand, instructed its readers in civility towards non-humans, in particular, the myriad gods surrounding the human society from heaven and earth.

The history of *setsuyōshū* is longer than that of *ōzassho*. The meaning of the word *setsuyō* has been explained in two ways; either "for economising tasks" or "for

occasional use". As a genre, it developed from its initial form as a quick-reference Japanese-Chinese dictionary in the mid-15th century, into a household encyclopedia with additional pages containing useful knowledge for daily life from the late 17th century onwards. Later, popular appendices included a chronology of the Ten'nō (Emperor) and a basic guide to the Ogasawara School of Etiquette. Until the genre ceased to be widely used in the early 20th century, however, the dictionary portion remained its core. In this section, Japanese nouns were arranged in the *iroha* order by which the Japanese alphabet was traditionally arranged, with subdivisions for categories ranging from gods to insects, accompanied by an additional category for verbs, adverbs and adjectives. This helped users quickly convert Japanese words into their corresponding literary Chinese characters, a long established practice of Japanese men when writing official documents or composing poetry in the continental style. For example, in vernacular Japanese, a shooting star was called "*yobahi-boshi*", meaning "night-creeping naughty star", but for a formal written communication, the "proper" word to be used was "*ryū-sei*", meaning "flowing star" in Chinese characters. In general, the higher the social position of the addressee, the less cursory the mode of writing ought to be. All such conversions were assisted by the *setsuyōshū*.

It is estimated that about 500 printed editions of *setsuyōshū* had appeared by the end of the 1860s (Satō 1996). Among them were encyclopedic editions of more than 700 pages produced around the end of the 18th century. The most widely circulated edition of this kind was *Eitai Setsuyō Mujinzō* (abbreviated hereafter as *Eitai Setsuyō*), which appeared in Kyoto and Edo in the early 1830s and was revised twice in the 1840s and 1860s. This bulky *Eitai Setsuyō* provided its readers with two types of guidance. First, it offered information that helped readers situate themselves in the universe by providing them with, for example, the cosmic image of the *shumisen* (the imaginary central mountain) of Buddhism, an illustrated history of Japan, maps of the world and many lists, including those of court nobles and *daimyo* (feudal lords). Second, it gave information that instructed readers in "proper" civility. Instruction, for example, in letter writing, at which time the reader might need assistance in choosing from the seven different written forms of the Chinese honorific suffix *-sama* to be attached to the name of the addressee: from *jō-jō* (very high), *tsugi no jō* (next high), *mata tsugi no jō* (one grade down from next high), *mata mata tsugi no jō* (two grades down from next high), *jō* (high), *chū* (middle), and down to *ge* (low). Instruction was offered on almost every aspect of human activity, such as how to blow one's nose "properly"; that is, one must face the opposite way to the honourable point of the room and blow "three times, first in an under-tone, second high and loud, and the last under-tone again". Another example was how to avoid certain days and directions when undertaking anything serious, so as not to offend various deities latent in one's environment.



It was this last group of instructions that *ōzassho*, meaning “great book of miscellany”, gave more attention to, making it quite a different type of household encyclopedia. Published from the early 17th century onwards, it is estimated that about 100 editions of *ōzassho* had been produced by the end of the 1860s (Hashimoto 1995: 1). The contents of the early editions offered readers knowledge of the nomenclature used in the solar-lunar calendar. It also instructed them how to choose the “right” days and face in the “proper” geographical directions on certain serious occasions, such as commencing a house construction, holding a matrimonial ceremony, entering a school, wearing a new garment or taking a bath.

An important characteristic of *ōzassho* is the introduction of a new calendar notation, that of the *daimyō-nichi*, meaning “a great bright day”. To start anything on a day carrying that note in the calendar was considered “greatly auspicious”, even if the same calendar carried “ominous” notes for the same day for doing something particular, such as washing or planting. The introduction of this new note can be regarded as a revolutionary invention to alleviate people’s anxiety when choosing “proper” days, as almost all the days in contemporary calendars tended to carry several restrictive notes. Appearing in frequency almost once in two days, the *daimyō-nichi* acted as a sweepingly powerful note that, if observed seriously, would have made other traditional notes in the calendar all but meaningless. Notably, however, the contemporary and later calendars showed that their makers kept on printing both old and new notes, while the *ōzassho* also took care to give explanations of both kinds of notes. This meant that the text of *ōzassho* offered conflicting messages from their early stages: on one hand reinforcing the traditional sensitivity towards shades of difference among old calendar notes and, on the other, propounding a new boldness that would encourage the readers to free themselves from such conventional concerns.

The composition of *ōzassho* began to change towards the end of the 17th century, but the core part concerning divination of time and space remained unchanged. The new editions, however, included a list of annual events centering on the court and showed an increase in the number of articles relating to divination about individual matters. It stated, for example, that the previous incarnation of a person born in a certain year was “a mouse in the Shrine of Atsuta” near Nagoya, or “a cow in the Temple of Zenkōji” near Nagano. There was also a noticeable increase in the politeness of the language used throughout the text, a typical example being the addition of the honorific prefix *on-* to the names of gods.

In the early 19th century, some editions of *ōzassho* enhanced their encyclopedic character. The trend is represented by the 1838 edition of *Eitai Daizassho Banreki Taisei* (abbreviated hereafter as *Eitai Daizassho*), a volume of nearly 700 pages that

was reprinted well into the 20th century. In it, old and new instructions were arranged compactly in chapters for easy reference. Chapter titles included “Houses and Rooms”, “Tailoring”, “Illness”, “Acupuncture and Moxibustion”, “Outings and Travelling”, “Agriculture”, “Servants”, “Trading”, “Food”, “Geomancy”, “Health” and “Pregnancy”. These chapters were followed by articles covering physiognomy and palmistry. In addition, there were multi-page head rows instructing readers on a wide array of matters, such as how to counteract an inauspicious dream, how to practise home medicine, even how to give first aid to goldfish.

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Both the *setsuyōshū* and the *ōzassho* began assuming the character of household encyclopedias from about the end of the 17th century, and it was at that time that tinges of courtly elegance began to appear in their pages. In both genres, the lists of annual events broadly covered court rituals presided over by members of the family of “heavenly descent”. In some *setsuyōshū*, the vocabulary of court language (*gosho-kotoba*), such as *kuruma-yose* for porch and *o-hiya* for water, began to appear. In the illustrated articles on fortune-telling, those fortunate persons who would attain success in the future were depicted wearing court attire. The bulky editions of both genres published around the middle of the 19th century tended to emphasise, in language and illustrations, Japan’s importance as a *shinkoku* or “divine country”. Editions of *Eitai Setsuyō*, for example, continued to print frontispiece illustrations of holy places, such as the “divine” Mt. Yoshino that “had flown from India”, and the “sacred and matchless” Mt. Fuji. The readers of *Eitai Setsuyō* were also encouraged to aspire to literary excellence through numerous illustrations of historic “immortals” such as *kasen*, the deified *waka* poets. They could reputedly “move” deities or heaven and earth – an idea rooted in the East Asian literary tradition since the “Great Preface” to *The Book of Odes* and Tsurayuki’s “Preface” to *Kokin Waka Shū* (the courtly anthology of Japanese odes past and present, AD 905). In each case, the message that Japan was a “divine country” was not xenophobic in tone. The intent of the volumes was instead to award Japan equal weight with India and China.

To comprehend, however, the historical significance of the wide dissemination of the two genres of polite knowledge, we must observe the ways in which they were actually used.

The usage of *setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho*

Towards the end of the 1980s, I was busy visiting various houses in Japan to listen to the current generation’s memories of former users of these books. In the case of the

setsuyōshū, at least one copy was indispensable in each of the approximately 60,000 households that constituted the lower reaches of local administration, whether in villages or in towns. One may therefore imagine a “galaxy” of *setsuyōshū* covering the whole of Japan. In the course of my research locating extant copies of *setsuyōshū*, copies of both *setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho* were often found in the storehouse of an old family. The ownership of those books was, according to my survey, in most cases public knowledge. Everyone in a local community knew that a certain house had one such copy. Although few people had direct access to the copy, anyone in the community could request information from the book whenever necessary. The majority of the last generation of the users, however, passed away during the first quarter of the 20th century; consequently, the stories I heard about them were often all too vague.

Over the course of my visits, I began to notice a variety of darkish stains on the bottom of each copy I came across, where the lower edges of all the pages could be seen at once. Why the bottom surface in particular? Because, each time a reader opens the pages to read, his or her fingers touch the lower edges of the opened pages and make faint stains without damaging neighbouring pages. Through prolonged use across the course of two or three generations on average, even the slightest stains accumulate, turning themselves eventually into groups of darkish lines on a volume's bottom surface. These lines therefore tell us which pages were consulted more frequently than others. Considering the whole range of day-to-day civility that those bulky books contained, these lines can be regarded as a record of the pursuit of civilisation, logged unintentionally by the books' users.

By the early 1990s, I had a systematic technology for dealing with these stains using photography, digitalised images and analytical software (Yokoyama et al. 1998). By this method, I was able to make digital records of about 60 copies of *Eitai Setsuyō Mujinzō* found in 14 prefectures of Japan. A large number of copies fell into two out of a total nine categories, where each category was determined in accordance to patterns of usage revealed by the distribution of staining. I named the first and largest of these two categories “*highly literate elegance-oriented*” because it showed frequent use of the dictionary portion and strong interest in secular civility as well as the Yin-Yang school. The second I called “*moderately literate outing-oriented*”¹ because it demonstrated a keen interest in both eminent Buddhist temples – popular as leisure (as well as spiritual) haunts – and the Yin-Yang school. In the former category, referred to hereafter as the “*elegance*” type, there were more than 10 copies for which evidence existed as to where they had been used. Among those copies, three had been used in court society and two were kept at town houses in Kyoto; of the latter houses, one was the home of a leading kimono dealer, whose genealogy was linked to a minor *daimyo* in the late 17th century. The other house belonged to a family that had made sliding

doors for generations. One copy came from a former village-head's house near Uji, in Kyoto Prefecture, and another from a house near Lake Biwa, formerly the possession of a flourishing *tatami*-mat dealer. Four copies that belonged to families with different occupations are kept in the City Library of Kanazawa. To mention only two, one was from the house of an Edo express messenger, while another was from an upper-class samurai house. Further north, a copy was found that used to belong to a private physician of Lord Date of Sendai.

There is comparatively little information available on the origins of the copies that fell into the second category of usage, referred to hereafter as the “outing” type. Two copies in this category are known to have belonged to schools: one to Kōjōkan, Lord Uesugi's school in Yonezawa, and the other to Shiga Pedagogical College. All the other copies had left the houses of their original users and entered various public or private collections long before I had the chance to look at them. It would seem that, for some reason, many of the houses keeping the volumes in this category became unable to keep the old things that their ancestors had treasured. A few copies bear the seals of their former users, in the form of elegant studio names such as *Suishō-tei*, green-pine pavilion, and *Ran-tei*, orchid pavilion. These were assumed probably for literary activities.

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Having determined these categories of *Eitai Setsuyō* users – the “elegance” type and “outing” type – I examined further the volumes in both categories, looking this time for any differences or patterns with regard to the pages treating issues relating to civility, both secular and non-secular. The wear and tear of pages carrying the portraits of the “immortal” poets and the “immortal” warriors revealed that users in the “elegance” category were strongly attracted by “divine” figures, in particular those of a military nature. In contrast, users in the “outing” category did not appear to show any keen interest in such pages (Yokoyama 1999: 211, 217). This observation tallied with the two types' different modes of wear and tear of the pages dealing with the Ying-Yang school. The “elegance” type showed a strong but general interest in the Yin-Yang school, whereas the “outing” type showed a more specific and therefore serious concern with diverse practical divinations. As regards the “elegance” type users, one wonders whether the many divinities of the Yin-Yang school really filled them with awe. In the unpublished discourse *Jingi Kun* (Instructions on gods in heaven and earth), the neo-Confucian thinker, Kaibara Ekiken (1630-1714), criticised scornfully the rising desire among commoners to become “gods” in person and to be so called by others (Yokoyama 1992: 48). Ekiken's observations in the early 18th century seem to correspond with what the current study has revealed in the “elegance” type;

that is, an attitude that fell short of observing civility towards deities. It was almost exclusively the “*elegance*” type that showed interest in the pages on *nō* and *ko-utai* (short recitations from *nō* texts). This may be related to their lack of serious reverence for any “divine” existence because the essence of these performing arts is to be trained on stage to transform oneself into the super-human or the divine.

The above indicates the existence of two different modes of relationship with super-humans: one is ambitiously concerned with getting near the immortal while the other is more modest, inward-looking and apparently concerned to maintain respectful relations with the various deities. The two attitudes may appear contradictory but their basic common characteristics emerge if we contrast them with attitudes revealed by the wear and tear of extant copies of *Eitai Setsuyō* used in the same period by contemporary Europeans. One copy, an 1864 edition used by the diplomat and eminent Japanologist, Ernest Satow, and kept today in Cambridge University Library, shows no hand stains at all on the pages of the Yin-Yang school. Instead, a certain wear and tear can be observed in the pages listing Japanese era-names, the different Shogunates and the chronology of events in Japanese history. A copy of an 1849 edition, formerly owned by Alexander von Siebold, a diplomat and Japanese government employee, shows interest in some illustrated pages on the above-mentioned chronology and a few pages in the list of Buddhist temples, but none in the pages of the Yin-Yang school.² In comparison, we can see that both the “*elegance*” and “*outing*” types in the domestically used volumes reveal a marked divinity-consciousness on the part of their users.



All this seems to create the impression that Japan was a country in which the Yin-Yang school thrived: an *onmyōdō sakiwau kuni*. How might a brief study of the modes of usage of *ōzassho* alter this impression? Unlike the bulky *setsuyōshū*, the extant copies of *ōzassho* do not generally stand up to quantitative analysis in that the conditions of wear and tear of extant copies are often extremely bad. Among a number of memorable fairly worn copies of the bulky *Eitai Daizassho* that I have come across, there was a copy of the 1842 edition used by the Ashida family in Ayabe in northern Kyoto Prefecture. The house of Ashida used to be an *ō-jōya*, or great-village-head, with more than 10 villages under its jurisdiction, and later produced Prime Minister Ashida Hitoshi after World War II. Other examples were copies of the 1856 edition: one that was used at the Office of Odes in the Court, and another that was kept in the collection of Oda Kakusai, a neo-Confucian scholar active in Tokyo in the early 20th century.

Close examination of the patterns of wear and tear on the lower edge of these and other copies of *ōzassho* kept today in public archives or local libraries revealed that at

least three sections were consulted consistently by users. First, the *rokujū-zu* or “chart of sixty”; second, sections relating to *nan'nyo aishō* or male-female compatibility; and third, sections on physiognomy. The first, the *rokujū-zu*, was particularly important in terms of divinity consciousness. It is a diagram consisting of two cosmic dimensions: first, *jukkan-jūnishi*, the popular calendar notes in the sexagenary cycle, and second, *gogyō*, the five elementary categories of wood, fire, soil, metal and water. It was believed, for example, that wood gave birth to fire and, therefore, the combination of wood and fire was auspicious; on the other hand, as fire was believed to kill metal, the matching of fire and metal was classified as ominous. Use of the “chart of sixty” allowed an individual to ascertain quickly which of the five basic cosmic attributes he or she possessed in accordance with the year of birth, classified in terms of the sexagenary cycle. The “chart of sixty” thus provided a point of entry into the world of Yin-Yang divination because the majority of divinations in the book were based on the compatibility between one's five-element attribute and that of one's partner, or of one's intended action.

Anecdotal stories from a number of people who had close relationships with the former users of some privately owned volumes – the wear and tear of which I could also observe – furthered my understanding of how *ōzassho* were used. Here, I recount three of them.

The first such case related to a number of copies of *ōzassho* published in the 1830s and 1850s that survived in a house in Noma, south of Nagoya, once a flourishing base for the shipping trade between Nagoya and Edo (now Tokyo). In these copies, I could see conspicuous hand stains on the “chart of sixty”, fortune-telling, list of ciphers, and male-female compatibility. There were also a number of fairly worn pages showing how to choose auspicious days for going out. In Noma, I was told, women managed the shipping business using *setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho* to help them with their paperwork. The men-folk, meanwhile, faced the rough seas from an early age and had little chance of learning to read or write.

The second story concerns an 1830s edition of *ōzassho* found in a small village called Hanazono, deep in the former domain of Mount Koya's monasteries. Its most conspicuously worn pages carried instructions for users to avoid certain directions when going out on a certain day. Matters of geomancy were a serious issue for the local people, with many villagers engaged in activities in the forested areas of high mountains and deep valleys. These villagers frequently became lost for long periods. Likewise, the villagers' concern with divinations about the seriousness of illness was clear from the wear and tear of the book. The current generation of the house that had kept the copy explained that if a man or a woman born in a certain year became ill on a certain day, the question soon arose as to his or her chances of survival. The answer to

such a question was of grave importance for the village because there were no medical practitioners nearby. Villagers would have needed to make difficult decisions, depending on the divination guide given in *ōzassho*, as to whether prepare their village hanging-palanquin to send for a doctor from a monastery on far-away Mount Koya or abandon all hopes for the unfortunate patient.

The third anecdote relates to a fairly worn copy of *Eitai Daizassho* that was recently found at Hoshitate village on the island of Iriomote in the Yaeyama archipelago, south of Okinawa. The last user of this copy, the late father of the current head of the village, had been respected as a diviner who located stolen rice hidden in a rock off the shore; cured someone abandoned by the only doctor on the island when all prospects of a cure were gone; and helped islanders give their children proper names when requested. The father had treated the *ōzassho* with great reverence, wrapping it up carefully before depositing it in the family's Buddhist shrine for safe keeping and purifying his hands with salt whenever he took it out to use it. Its most conspicuously worn pages were those referring to home medicine, the "chart of sixty", compatible naming, divination depending upon year and month, and physiognomy.

While these examples are not in themselves sufficient for any statistical analysis, one begins to see how each volume of *ōzassho* acted as a kind of public institution, deeply interconnected with the daily lives of the members of the local community. In particular, when a user of *ōzassho* was thought to have some divining talent, the book and its readings gained extra weight. The inspiration and energy such people received from the non-human world were expressed in the forms and words that were readily available in the pages of *ōzassho*. In this sense, the book acquired a strong life power of its own, functioning as an intermediary between a given community and the invisible world.

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The invocation of this sort of life power might also have been the case with many copies of *setsuyōshū*, although in a more secular context. The *setsuyōshū* would appear to have given their users a sense of exultation at being within the range of "the proper" or "the elegant". It is not so difficult to imagine the feeling of security shared by people relying on the book for the "proper" word for a formal letter, or the "proper" manner of putting a freshwater fish on a platter at a formal dinner. *Senryū*, a comical verse of the late 18th century, expresses this well: *Mura-jū de setsuyō-dono to tōtomare*; meaning that every villager respectfully calls the owner of *setsuyōshū*, "The Hon. *Setsuyō* Esquire" (*Yanagidaru*, Vol. 85). The majority of people in possession of those bulky editions must have felt blessed to be the owners of such books, the normal cost of which was about one *ryō*, sufficient to employ a young servant for more than half a year. During my visits to the houses that kept these books, the common story

often told by the current generation aged about 70 or 80 was that their grandfathers used to tell their sons and grandsons never to let the books leave the house.

The above analysis leaves us with some important questions. What kind of civility did the *setsuyōshū* and the *ōzassho* disseminate in Japan? And what was the nature of their influence on contemporary society? Did they contribute to society's stability or stagnation?

Was Japan sufficiently civilised?

Four points can be made to summarise the civilising messages that these two popular encyclopedias seem to have given their users. First, they gave each user a certain world view, together with a sense of his or her position in that world; second, they gave each user his or her cosmic attributes, together with a sense that would urge one to put more value on relations between the members of a community (in Japanese, *aishō*) than on the merit of each individual; third, the books infused each user with a common sense concerning the "proper" forms of communication and behaviour; and, fourth, the books exerted varying degrees of restraint, or *tsutsushimi*, on each user.

Looking back, one might suppose that a society sustained by the kind of self-restrictive, harmony-oriented mentality defined above might have become oppressive and inclined to gloomy stagnation. After all, a society so concerned with community relations might seem to offer little scope for the exercise of free will and individual endeavour so prized today. Yet it is easy to imagine that people gained a certain comfort from the sense of community defined by *ōzassho* and *setsuyōshū*, in the sense of being humble but irreplaceable parts of an all-embracing grand cosmos. In this respect, the nature of restraint or *tsutsushimi* the books placed upon their users, needs further consideration. A restrained act, undertaken carefully in accordance with the books' instructions, need not necessarily be restrictive. Instructions could also be empowering; inspiring in their followers a state of mind that is called *hari* in Japanese, or high-spiritedness.

Returning to the question of the "propriety" extolled in both these volumes, it is important to note that throughout the long history of their publication, there was a gradual tendency to moderate some of the contents. For example, instructions on certain secular manners in later editions were often accompanied with the phrase, "this is the authentic way (*kore honshiki nari*)", implying that readers need not follow the given instruction when the occasion was less formal. Some *setsuyōshū* – even, for example, a *setsuyōshū* for ladies published in Osaka in the middle of the 18th century (*On'na Setsuyōshū Keshibukuro Kahō Taisei*, 1743) – warned that their users should

not overuse the politest language forms. Here is perhaps a reflection of the 17th century literary taste of *haikai* poets for flexible diction in accordance with the situation. In this sense, these texts could hardly be said to have fostered either dogmatism or orthodoxy. One may interpret such flexibility as reflecting the feeble coercive political power of the court, the traditional patron of the Yin-Yang school, combined with the inconsistent attitudes of the Shogunate and local *daimyo* governments towards such beliefs.

Similarly, one must not dismiss the urbanity then prevalent across the classes in many corners of Japan. To this end, we might consider the afore-mentioned copy of the *Eitai Setsuyō* owned by the family of a kimono dealer in Kyoto. The family had been prominent patrons of the neo-Confucian movement, Sekimon Shingaku, led by Ishida Baigan (1685-1744). Their copy of the *Eitai Setsuyō* reveals faint but unmistakable stains on the pages of the Yin-Yang school, in spite of their adherence to the Sekimon Shingaku tradition which rejected *all* Yin-Yang rituals. Even the disciplined members of a proud house such as this were ready to pay due consideration to their neighbours' concerns, perhaps murmuring: "Even a sardine's head..." as they thumbed through the pages. Also of note was the emergence of mild satire from the latter half of the 18th century onwards, ridiculing people's dependence on these books. The satirists were often directing laughter at themselves as well as others. Take, for example, a verse that appeared in an anthology in 1760 that reads: "*Setsuyō de chigire chigire no shitsuke gata*", meaning, "Taught by *setsuyōshū*, my manners consist of bits and pieces" (*Senryū Hyō Manku Awase*, the 10th year of Hōreki). The champion of this trend was probably Shikitei Sanba (1776-1822), the popular humorist of Edo. Sanba published a parody of a comprehensive *setsuyōshū* with *ōzassho* appendices in the early 19th century (NSBSS, 1974). The book included sections on physiognomy and palmistry, which mimicked the well-known descriptions, and offered in a section entitled "Non-manners" meticulous instruction on how to blow one's nose: "Use your hand, and afterwards rub your wet fingers on either the *tatami* or your kimono... When with somebody else, face that person and [using paper] blow *tzun* [loudly], open the paper and look into it, then again *chiin*, *chiin* [honk, honk], as loud as you please."

The authors of parodies such as these were not rejecting the popular concerns they mocked. Rather, they were shedding fresh light upon popular adherence to elegance or to divination, in full awareness of the irreplaceable roles played by the popular intermediaries, *setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho*. Sanba was not proposing a substitute: he seemed instead to accept that a stable society needed certain formalities – however ostensibly observed – such as the kind of reverence that might make a sardine's head holy. Still, he was eager to remind his audience that members of a stable society would do well to cultivate the urbane sense of detachment that would enable them to laugh at themselves – without this, society might easily become stagnant.

Conclusion

The civilising messages of the *setsuyōshū* and the *ōzassho*, with their intrinsic textual flexibility and the social milieu in which those books thrived, may remind us of the East Asian traditional notion of civilisation, *wenming* in Chinese, *moonmyong* in Korean, or *bunmei* in Japanese. The early examples of the use of this word appear in *The Book of Changes*, one of the five Confucian classics. The basic and enduring meaning of the word was, and still is among intellectuals versed in Chinese classics, “a radiantly interwoven harmony of the universe”.

To what extent did the two popular encyclopedias help people in Japan to get near such a grand notion of civilisation? Did they make them “universally interwoven”? This study does not enable us simply to say “Yes” but, at the same time, we now cannot say bluntly “No”. The reality was a sustainable type of polytheistic society with a tendency towards a kind of civilisation in which most members, including non-humans, or to use a modern expression, their “environment”, could share *one world*, assisted by the flexibility with which those books played innumerable intermediary roles. One person seems to embody this East Asian notion of civilisation through his ideas, words and deeds during the latter half of the 19th century. To close this paper, I should like to introduce this person, in the hope that some future historians concerned with environmental issues will become interested in studying this almost forgotten figure in global contexts.

An account of a journey in 1876 from London to Shanghai, via Germany, Russia, Turkey and Egypt, was published in Tokyo in 1878 – its author a gentleman who had been in the diplomatic service in London. Well versed in Chinese classics and celebrated as a poet in Chinese poetry circles, the author included in his account about 30 Chinese poems that he had composed on his travels. Near Penang, he had noticed with some emotion a British man-of-war returning home after suppressing a “riot” on the Malay Peninsula, noting that “the business of many Westerners is to make expeditions”. He criticised the Japanese government’s eagerness to follow the path of the Western powers, in reaching out to “touch Korea recently” (MBZ 1955: 327); this at a time when Japan’s expansionist project in East Asia was under way. He noted in the book’s conclusion that “Even European countries cannot at all be said to have attained *makoto no bunmei* [the true civilisation]” (Ibid: 344). His use of the word *bunmei* in this sentence suggests that a different ideal of civilisation animated his mind. Accordingly, he emphasised the importance for Japan of pursuing “*waeki*” or “amity” internationally, and urged the Japanese government to open schools for the study of the various Chinese dialects in order to encourage better communication with Japan’s neighbours (Ibid: 327). In all this, his opinions were most unusual at that time.

The author was Nakai Hiroshi, a man not unknown for his deeds at the time he wrote the account. One of the former Satsuma samurai rebels during the restoration of imperial rule in Japan in the late 1860s, Nakai was presented with a gold sword by Queen Victoria for saving the life of the British minister Sir Harry Parkes in Kyoto in 1868. He was known for his dislike of the military and of stiff, glittering Western courtier's clothing. Unlike other leaders of the new Japan, he chose not to have a moustache or beard and proved rather good at keeping himself out of the limelight. That said, near the close of his life, in the years 1893-94, Nakai was busy in his role as the Governor of Kyoto Prefecture, preparing for the 1100th anniversary of the founding of the capital and the fourth national exposition in Okazaki – a site made up of former radish fields to the east of Kyoto. Records of his speeches and letters at that time reveal that he was deeply concerned with the harmonious development of the area in preparing for the festivities, anxious not to overwhelm the scenic beauty of the area with the construction of the “large, rough and inconsistent [*zappaku sodai*]” buildings. The ideal proportion, he suggested, was one that would “make the beauty of human arts inside [the area] and the work of nature outside face each other radiantly [*aitai eizu*]” (*ŌSSE* 1896: 225).

In this, Nakai was standing on the ground of the cultural heritage that Japan had accumulated over the previous centuries and speaking out with the voice of a time that was coming to a close: the time of *setsuyōshū* and *ōzassho*. Today, as we find ourselves at yet another critical historical juncture, the question arises as to what we can do with the cultural heritages of our past – a past where humans and non-humans and the terrestrial and non-terrestrial were in their own ways tightly interconnected – in framing a sustainable civilisation for the shared future of our planet.

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Notes

¹ Formerly named “mildly literate salvation-oriented” (Yokoyama 1999: 214).

² The library reference numbers are Cambridge U. Lib. FJ.467.17-18, and Brit. Lib. 16000 a4, respectively.

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