

Sub-project A01

Means of Knowledge: Paratexts in Buddhist Manuscripts of Medieval Japan (12th-17th century)

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The Project

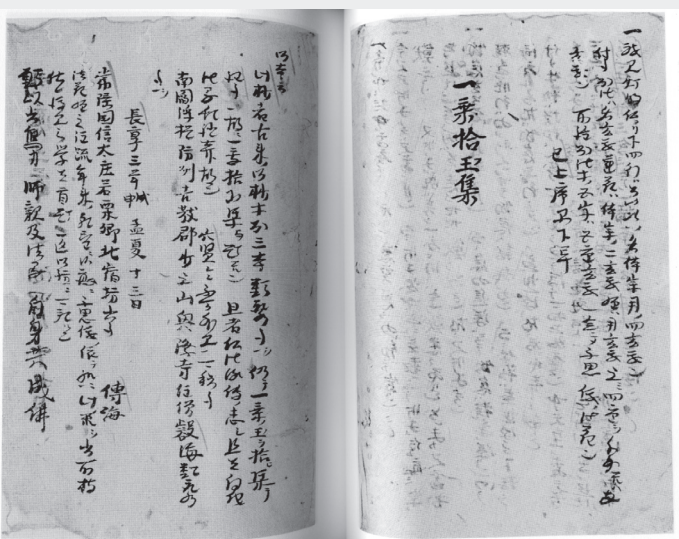
This sub-project focuses on paratexts in Buddhist manuscripts from the Japanese medieval period (12th-16th century) which are being analysed in terms of their codicological relevance. The study is based on the observation that the cultural and intellectual history of Japan at the time was frequently shaped by restrictive access to knowledge in key areas such as politics, religion, literature and art. The non-oral media that was used to hand down this type of knowledge reflects the situation. Although woodblock printing was already a well-known medium, other methods of transmission also developed which remained bound to the manuscript as a written means of imparting knowledge. These were based predominantly on 'esoteric' Buddhism, which was the dominant paradigm at the time. The project systematically analyses paratexts, i.e. the elements of a manuscript that contain meta-information on how it was received and interpreted and that are crucial to understanding the context described above. There are two main ways in which paratexts can provide information: firstly, about the processes of compiling and transmitting a manuscript from a material-based perspective and about the motivation and other factors behind the production; secondly, in so far as the use of the manuscript reveals specific strategies concerning the management of knowledge, particularly regarding the aspects of controlling and structuring it.

Objectives

Investigating the above correlation will lead to a systematic understanding of the interaction between knowledge-transfer strategies and medieval manuscript culture in all its historical depth. The focus on paratexts represents an innovative approach to general manuscript research which has been largely neglected up until now. In this respect, the project will also make a significant general contribution to the methodology used across this field of research.

Manuscript Culture in Japan

In what was a lengthy process, Japanese culture gradually adopted the notion of writing developed on the mainland as well as the cultural techniques that were associated with it. The predominant materials used from the end of the 7th century till the late 17th century were brush, ink and paper. Various attempts at word/image combinations are also of interest, particularly narrative picture scrolls (*emakimono*). Likewise taken over from the continent, woodblock printing was used from the 11th century onwards, especially in temple workshops. At the end of the 16th century, various sides started experimenting with movable type printing. These attempts (known as *kokatsujiban*) were soon abandoned, however. With the emergence of an urban middle class in the middle of the Edo period (17th-19th century) came one of the biggest printing booms of the modern age thanks to the relatively affordable and more flexible technique of woodblock printing. Even during this period, however, it was still common for manuscripts to be written, compiled and copied by hand. It was not until the start of modernisation in the middle of the 19th century, when Japan opened up to the West and rapidly discovered Western technology, that the 1,200-year history of the manuscript as the main means of recording and imparting knowledge came to an end in Japan.



Colophon from *Ichijō shūgyokushō* (Eizan bunko Tenkaizō)