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Staff Research

Project on the Beauty of Japanese Woodcut Prints and Print Blocks

Ryo Akama (Professor, Graduate School of Core Ethics and Frontier Science, Ritsumeikan University / Leader of the Japanese Culture Research Group)

The present project advances research in Edo period publishing and print culture. The concrete objects of research naturally include the ukiyo-e prints and the illustrated printed books that have so far been given eager attention, and extend to the carved woodblock matrix itself and to the kappazuri print; a coloring technique that was commonly used in Kyôto and Ôsaka. It is characteristic of this project that it does not merely subject these objects to conventional humanist methods, it also proceeds in implementing digital archiving techniques, and for this reason it participates in the Digital Humanities (DH) project. However, our notion of digital archiving techniques does not imply technical development. It stresses use of tested hardware and software so as to efficiently create digital copies and process diverse digital files in order to register, sort and arrange them; and it utilises the know-how we cultivated in the large-scale research project that preceded the current Global COE project.

In this connection I here wish to draw attention to the ukiyo-e archive. As for ukiyo-e it is well known that prints continue to be exported from Japan to other countries, and often it is rather the foreign collections that excel in both quality and quantum. I write these words in New York by the end of February 2008, and in the heart of Manhattan an exhibition titled Designed for Pleasure at the Asia Society and Museum shows works collected from early to late Edo period. At the same time and even in walking distance from this venue a certain gallery advertises Early images from the Floating World as it displays a body of important early ukiyo-e works for sale that were previously owned by a famous Japanese collector. It is 50 years since this collection was known to the world, and with these legendary works appearing right before my very eyes in New York my shock was considerable. What is intriguing about it is that, when this collection circulated the market last year in June-July, it had already become a hot topic in Japan, and the present Center, The Art Research Center, managed to purchase several volumes. But in the gallery owner's words, these were not in a very good condition, and therefore he did not think there would be a demand for them if he brought them back from Japan to America. This anecdote gives us an understanding of the multitude of great pieces that are channelled abroad.

The purpose of my stay has been to conduct a survey of prints owned by a certain collector who resides in New York, and I have borrowed a room in his house as I did so. On the last day of the exhibition other collectors were invited and joined in. Despite that they cannot read Japanese they are producing exquisite catalogues of their own collections. How might that be possible? The truth is that not only have the foreign researchers, the dealers and the collectors themselves seen more works than most Japanese, they possess all the scholarly works and the illustrated books and catalogues. Of course, there are many researchers who can read Japanese, but the existing environment is sufficient to know what a particular print is called and what its approximate value is without being able to read Japanese.

Up till now it has been difficult to share this environment from a position in Japan. What has now made it possible is digital archiving technique. Today, all humanities researchers carries an SLR digital camera when on field work, and we see them take pictures of their material, but the method of this project is fundamentally different in that it captures a complete replication in high resolution of the entirety of a collection and archives it; —i.e. it is found that instead of memorizing what the naked eye has registered the replicated image is far more advantageous. When valuators and dealers, curators and researchers make it their first priority to carry out digital archiving, the results earned will show a big difference in comparison with not making use of this method. And such publications as exhibition catalogues and precursory advertisements (whether on paper or the Web) will be easy to produce. I shall refrain from mentioning the details of my present survey, but I believe that a surprise awaits the world in the course of 2009. Through application of digital archiving techniques research will improve dramatically, and I strongly feel that the expectations we meet from all over the world are a great asset for the Global COE Center

Illustration: Okumura Masanobu urushi-e lacker print from ca. 1727 (Ritsumeikan ARC Collection).

The Purpose of Geographic Informatics in Digital Humanities

Dr. Manabu Inoue (Center Post-Doctoral fellow/ History and Geography Research Group)

The characteristic of the History and Geography Information Research Group I am affiliated with is that it produces maps from 'spatio-temporal information' contained in pictures and texts and uses these as a basis for interpretation. Spatio-temporal information is the when and where in historical source material. I here wish to introduce my research to exemplify the digitalization of spatio-temporal information and its purpose at the Digital Humanities Center.

(1) What can be observed in Digitalized maps of Kyôto acreage from Taishô 1 (1912).

This acreage map is construed from an appendix register in which maps, lot numbers, owner names and property grades are listed on 375 sheets of paper (Figures 1 & 2). For digitalization the maps were captured with a scanner and from the digitalized images the boundaries between lots were traced. Using GIS software it is possible to hold the boundaries between lots up against modern digital maps. Thereby it became possible to compare the paper maps of lots and boundaries in Kyoto in Taishô 1 with boundaries on modern digital maps. As for the content listed in the register it was all filed in Excel

With GIS it is also possible to enter information for each pen stroke on the paper map that has been traced (here corresponding to lot numbers). Through this work the lot number information in the appendix register entered in the excel spreadsheet is transferred to the digitalized map. It is thus possible to transfer the information in the appendix register on to the digitalized map. Figure 3 is an example of this. It shows the information on property grades in the appendix register (the taller and redder the areas the more expensive the lot category). We see that on this time the property grades around Senbon Imadegawa and the Shinkyôgoku areas were equally expensive. This is the completed digitalization of the acreage map for Kyoto in Taishô 1, but it is possible to add data for the years before and after Taishô 1 on the basis of the data in this digital map. I am presently working on digitalizing the phone book from Shôwa 12 (1937). When read onto the digital map numbers and addresses, names and occupations will allow us to reconstruct the distribution of occupation and shops. Thus, digitalization of maps from the past allows us to add various kinds of other data.

(2) Efficiency of Fieldwork—PDA Method of Survey

We are not only working with computers, we also collect data through fieldwork, surveying Kyôto machiya townhouses and landmarks etc. However, the workload and the time needed to do field work are considerable, and erroneous data entry is a recurrent problem. We are therefore working on implementing a method of survey that makes use of portable devices known as Personal Digital Assistant (PDA, also rendered as Personal Data Assistance). As a result of this we are seeking to develop collaboration with researchers, who are informed in the area of machiya town houses and landmarks. If we were to compare digital humanities to the world of food, we might say that the spatio-temporal information is the material needed for making the utensils and the map is the utensil needed to serve the food. The PDA method of survey, then, is the efficient way to make utensils. By adding multifarious information to the map we move on to serve the food, and from this field conscious of spatio-temporal information we are expecting to be able to serve the food that the world is craving for.
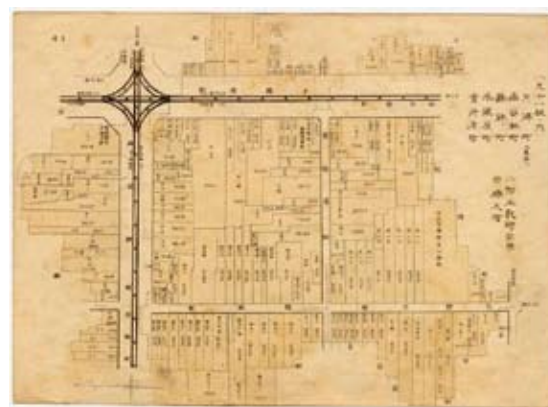

Figure 1: Map of Kyôto Acreage from Taishô 1 (map)

Figure 2: Register Attached to Map of Kyôto Acreage from Taishô 1

Figure 3: 3D Display of Lot Categories in Accordance with Map of Kyôto Acreage from Taishô 1

R | Record of Events and GCOE Seminars

RITSUMEIKAN

DH-JAC

January-March 2008

Events

■ Exhibition: The Makino Picture Stroy—The Locus of Makino Film, Jan 8~Mar 30 2008, The National Film Center

■ Exhibition: Ceramic Landmine—Shigaraki Pottery from the End of the Pacific War, Jan 9~Jan 30 2008, Kyoto Museum for World Peace,Ritsumeikan University

■ Lecture Series: [Ritsumeikan Saturday Feature Lecture Course] The Challenge of a New Human Science—Japanese Culture and Digital Humanities (3 Sessions), The Suekawa Memorial Hall,Ritsumeikan University

Jan 12 2008, Touyama Hideo: The World of Research in Letters made Accessible by Digital Methods—How Do We Write 'Gion'？From the Perspective of Signboard Letters

Jan19 2008, Kurahashi Masae: The Status of Research on Ukiyo-e Abroad—Activities at Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Significance of Digitalization

Jan 26 2008, Kawasumi Tatsunori: Ancient Capitals Seen in 3D Digital Maps—The Construction of Virtual Nagaokakyô and Heiankyô

■ Exhibition: The World of Movie Programs—The Bustle of Kinugasa and Nishijin in Movies, Feb 1~Mar 16 2008, Kyoto Museum for World Peace,Ritsumeikan University

■ International Symposium: Japanese and Korean Pre-historic Settlements—The Possibility of GIS, Feb 17 2008, Academia Ritsumei 21, Ritsumeikan University

■ International Symposium: The Possibilities of Digital Humanities—From the Position of Research in Modern Japanese Literature and Culture, Feb 17 2008, The Suekawa Memorial Hall,Ritsumeikan University

■ Symposium: Kyoto vs. Edo—Deciphering Depictions of Kyôto and Edo, Mar 1-2 2008, Art Reserch center,Ritsumeikan University

■ Exhibition: Attempts of Experimental and Anthropological Archaeology —Reconstruction of the Kenzan Kiln and Anthropological Survey of Gojôsaka, Mar 10~Apr 11 2008, Art Reserch center,Ritsumeikan University

■ Symposioum: What were Kenzan's Aims？Approached from Examinations of Kiln and Technique, Mar 23 2008, The Museum of Kyoto

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GCOE Seminars

Place: [Kinugasa Campus] Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University

[Biwako Kusatsu Campus] Information Studies Meeting Room, Faculty of Information Science and Engineering, Ritsumeikan University

■ Session 13: Jan 15 2008

Hamada Yuji: Preservation of Traditional Culture in Digital Images—Workflow and the Future Developments of the High-Definition Image

Sekiguchi Hiroyuki: Digital Archiving of Medical Data and Diagnosis Methods in the FCAD(Future Computer Assisted Diagnosis) project

■ Session 14: Jan 22 2008

Saitô Shinya: Research of Japanese Cultural Digital Archives through the Collaboration on Archiving of Narratives

Obana Takashi: Research of Video Game Music- Framework and Development

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