

Utilizing the Internet to search for manuscripts of early Japanese books:
Using documents relating to *Yama no Sachi* as an example

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● 1. Introduction

At the National Diet Library (NDL), materials regarded as particularly important for the study of history, society, culture, or other specialized fields due to their rarity are designated rare books or semi-rare books,¹ and are handled with special care, both in terms of preservation and use, in order to ensure their survival as cultural assets for future generations.

Designation as a rare book requires thorough assessment of a material's value, so each candidate material is assigned to a staff member for preliminary assessment, which includes searching for variants (manuscripts and published versions of a work which contains discrepancies due to modifications and errors) at other institutions. After reviewing the results of such an assessment, the Committee on Designation of Rare Books decides whether or not the material in question should be designated a rare, semi-rare, or otherwise notable material.

This article explains the preliminary assessment performed by the NDL staff, taking as an example the book *Yama no Sachi*, which was designated a semi-rare book of the NDL in February 2015.



<<Yama no Sachi>>

2. Searching for extant materials

The first step during the preliminary assessment is searching for extant materials. The greater the number of extant materials studied, the better we can assess the value of the candidate material. For instance, a candidate material might be removed from consideration if it is confirmed to be a later printing compared to other extant versions. Therefore it is essential to examine as many variants as possible.

The NDL owns another copy of *Yama no Sachi*,² which was designated a semi-rare book in 2011. The investigation at that time confirmed five other extant variants in Japan: one at the Tohoku University Library (Kano Collection), one at the University of Tokyo Library System (Chiju Bunko), one at the Library of the Tokyo University of the Arts, and two others, owned by individuals.

Additionally, the seventh volume of the *Kokusho So Mokuroku* (Union Catalog of Early Japanese Books, revised edition, Iwanami Shoten, 1990) indicates that two 1765 editions, owned by AIMI Kou and MURANO Tokiya, as well as a 1778 edition, owned by the descendants of the Naito clan, lord of the Nobeoka domain from 1747 to 1871, are also extant, although the locations of these three items were unknown in 2011.

Fortunately, the variants owned by Tohoku University and Tokyo University of the Arts have been digitized, and the images are available on the Internet. Also, the one owned by the University of Tokyo is published in monochrome microfiche (NDL Call No. [YD5-11](#)), so an assessment was made using these copies.

In the course of the research, we became curious about the three missing copies referred in *Kokusho So Mokuroku*. They might have been lost during the war or could have been passed on to a different owner. And it is always possible that there are other variants still waiting to be discovered.

3. Discovery of an unknown copy

We first searched a database at the Kyushu University Library, which holds the Aimi Collection, comprising materials previously owned by Aimi Kou. During the 2011 assessment, we had been told that the Aimi Collection did not hold a copy of *Yama no Sachi*. Nevertheless, the Library's database did contain [an entry for *Yama no Sachi*](#)! The copy was, in fact, not a part of the Aimi Collection, but of the Gazoku Collection. The Kyushu University Library website explains that the Gazoku Collection is "collection comprising what are primarily Japanese-style books from the Edo period collected by NAKANO Mitsutoshi (b. 1935), professor emeritus at Kyushu University." Upon inquiring, we learned that it had not been digitized but was available for reading, and successfully reviewed this variant at a later date.

4. Finding images of the copy owned by Aimi

Next, we looked for previously unknown variants of *Yama no Sachi*.

Many libraries and museums now release catalogs of holdings and databases on the Internet, so it is much easier to review the holdings of other institutions than it was in the past, when we would have had to look through individual book catalogs. Nonetheless, searching the databases of numerous libraries and museums separately is not only time consuming, it is likely to result in omissions. So we began search using search engines, and obtained numerous results, including images, by searching on keywords such as "Yamanosachi," "Yama and Sachi" and "Katsuma Ryosui" on non-Japanese websites as well as "山幸 (Yama Sachi)," "山の幸 (Yama no Sachi)" and "勝間龍水(Katsuma Ryosui)" on Japanese websites. More than a few of these items appeared on online auction websites. So it seems that there are other copies owned by individuals in addition to those found during this investigation.

Reviewing search results from the websites of libraries, museums, and research institutions around the world, we found some copies of the book at institutions outside Japan. One of them was at the [Getty Research Institute](#),³ which released [digital images of a copy with the ownership stamp of Aimi Kou](#)! One of the three missing copies was finally located.

In addition to search engines, we also relied on the experiences and intuition of our reference librarians as we searched reference literature from catalogs and conducted pinpoint search by repeatedly asking ourselves, for example, "If the British Library holds the book, how about at the Bibliothèque nationale de France?" We found six institutions that owned copies of the book: the New York Public Library (Spencer Collection); Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Denman Waldo Ross Collection); British Museum (previously owned by Jack Hillier); Bibliothèque nationale de France; Humanities and Social Sciences Library at the University of Oslo (only the first volume), as well as the Getty Research Institute.

It was disappointing not to find the copies owned by MURANO Tokiya and the Naito clan among the three copies referred in *Kokusho So Mokuroku*. But the ability to search via the Internet increased the potential to discover several other extant variants which were not included in *Kokusho So Mokuroku*.⁴ Thus, the number of extant variants doubled from six to twelve, including the one already held by the NDL before the investigation.

5. Studying variants via the Internet

This investigation gave us a real appreciation of the usefulness of the Internet when searching for extant books and, moreover, for the progress of digitization, which enabled us to view the materials from a PC. In addition to digitized materials at Japanese institutions and the Getty Research Institute, digital images of books held by many institutions are open to the public, enabling us to review the content remotely (two exceptions in this assessment were the Bibliothèque nationale de France⁵ and New York Public Library).

Thanks to these digital images, we were able to confirm the present condition of the extant copies, check for missing pages, and review differences in illustrations or coloring, even though there is a limit to the kinds of research possible in distinguishing subtle differences of color. In the past, even if we confirmed ownership of an extant variant, many times we had no means of actually going to review it, especially if it were in a distant country. The ability to study digital copies remotely greatly enhances the accuracy of our preparations for designating rare books.

6. New questions

An interesting fact came up as a result of investigating digital images via the Internet as well as original copies owned by the University of Tokyo Library Systems and Kyushu University Library. Most of the extant variants of *Yama no Sachi* have significant differences in illustrations and printing, and the printed surfaces differ from variant to variant. (See the article "[Yama no sachi: Material designated as a semi-rare book](#)" in this issue for details) In particular, the second volume of each extant variant appeared to have different printing. Each variant that we reviewed had the same contents and kanki (details of publication). But it was difficult to evaluate the age of the variants relative to each other from their appearance alone. In fact, we really cannot establish an accurate timeline for the printing of the extant variants, since the pages in any given variant might have been printed at different times.

How were these copies of *Yama no Sachi* produced? This is a question that will require serious academic research to answer, and is far beyond the scope of what we can do, even in the context of an in-depth study as preparation for designating rare books. We do hope, however, that the results of our comparison of extant variants will prompt further research into how these beautiful multicolored woodblock prints were created.

A key point in designating a book as semi-rare is that all extant variants reveal significant variations during review. The variant held by the NDL proved to be rare, as it contains pictures of which there are particularly few copies, including some that are not contained in any other copies in Japan.

7. Conclusion

We benefited significantly in the course of our preparations from the spread of the Internet and global advances in digitization of rare materials. What if we were to have made this study a mere 10 or 20 years ago? Though we can search for extant books by carefully examining the printed catalogs of collections, it would have been very difficult to review any

books located outside Japan. Given a considerable number of extant variants and lacking sufficient knowledge of the discrepancies between them, we might have hesitated to recommend designation as a semi-rare book. It is fair to say that the resources available to us at this time were instrumental in the designation as a semi-rare book.

In this way, we benefited from digitization at libraries and museums worldwide. Likewise the NDL is continuing the digitization of its library collections. Our experience during this investigation gave us positive expectations that other people around the world might be using the NDL's digitized materials for things that we have yet to imagine.

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- ¹ The designation is based on National Diet Library Rare Books Designation Criteria (<http://www.ndl.go.jp/jp/aboutus/laws/pdf/a4116.pdf>) and National Diet Library Semi-Rare Books Designation Criteria (<http://www.ndl.go.jp/jp/aboutus/laws/pdf/a4117.pdf>) (both in Japanese).
- ² Only the second volume. It is bound together with the second volume of *Umi no Sachi*. [NDL Call no.: WB1-22] (<http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/2542740?lang=en>)
- ³ The Getty Research Institute (GRI) is a research institution in art located in Los Angeles. It is a part of the Getty Center founded by bequest of a millionaire J. Paul Getty (1892-1976), and in addition to the GRI, the Center has the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Conservation Institute, Getty Foundation, and others.
- ⁴ It was only the one held by the New York Public Library that we confirmed the holding by book catalogs, not by online catalogs, as we found it using literature information.
- ⁵ We would like to express deep gratitude to Ms. Véronique BÉRANGER, specialist in Japanese materials at the Bibliothèque nationale de France for the generous support in investigating a part of content of the one owned by the BnF.