

De-aestheticizing the Artist's Brush. Calligraphy Manuals and the Pragmatics of Calligraphic Writing

Helen Magowan

Abstract. Before the twentieth century, Japan had a highly developed publishing culture using woodblock print technology to produce books that maintained the appearance of a handwritten original text. This paper explores the making of meaning in pre-typographic Japanese through close reading of 18th century printed books. Focusing on manuals published for women teaching a particular script form called *nyobitsu*, I problematise the term “calligraphy” in its privileging of visual aesthetics, and argue that writing’s formal properties had pragmatic functions which operated to discursively construct social relationships. *Nyobitsu*’s distinctive graphic qualities demonstrate a complex indexicality, recasting the calligraphy brush as a tool for sophisticated modulation of the social effects of text in a manner which is unavailable to typography.

1. Print and Manuscript in Edo Japan

The Edo period in Japan (1603-1867) was characterised by a flourishing book market serving an eager public with extensive levels of literacy and a voracious appetite for books of all kinds. (Kornicki, 1998, pp. 37–38; Moretti, 2020, p. 48) This was a marketplace where woodblock technology dominated, offering complete flexibility for layout, images and script forms, since pages were effectively facsimile reproductions of handwritten text. This only changed at the end of the 19th century, when mass adoption of typography was one of many other wholesale reforms which constituted Japan’s precipitate adjustment to western modernity. (Kornicki, 1998, p. 165) Movable type was not an innovative western technology: metal type had been in use in Korea by the early 13th century, and in Japan books were being printed using wooden movable type at the end of the 16th century. (ibid., pp. 128, 130) However this early experiment did not lead to typographic domination; rather it seems to have reconfirmed the advantages of woodblock technology, since by 1650 movable type had been largely dropped, indi-

Helen Magowan  0000-0002-9571-6225
E-mail: hlm65@cam.ac.uk

Y. Haralambous (Ed.), *Grapholinguistics in the 21st Century 2022. Proceedings*
Grapholinguistics and Its Applications (ISSN: 2681-8566, e-ISSN: 2534-5192), Vol. 10.
Fluxus Editions, Brest, 2024, pp. 653–670. <https://doi.org/10.36824/2022-graf-mago>
ISBN: 978-2-487055-06-3, e-ISBN: 978-2-487055-07-0

cating the high cultural value invested in handwritten aspects of text. (Chance and Davis, 2016, p. 106)

Woodblock's facility for representing handwriting is illustrated by *Wakamidori* (若みと里 "Young Green"), first published in 1707 (Fig. 1).¹ Authorship was not valorised in the modern way and is not always recorded, but there is no reason to think that the writer, Hasegawa Myōtei, a woman famous in her time as a calligrapher, was not the composer as well as the inscriber of the text.² *Wakamidori* contains a description of Kyoto, the capital at that time, using a lyrical, poetic diction. Figure 1 shows the opening four pages, which say:

This capital was begun in the time of Emperor Kammu, on land blessed by gods of the four directions. Under the august reign of our Lord, when the barrier gates are open one ought to survey the city.³

The text continues with a list in elegant prose of the important sites of the city, primarily shrines and temples, starting with the sacred mountain Higashiyama.

The printed page here is not a vehicle for text content, but emphasises the brush stroke, with its weight and line, that makes up the letterforms. The script is highly cursive, rounded and abbreviated, with vertical extension and a fluid and connected line which even extends to an upwards trail from the bottom of one column of text to the top of the next, progressing from right to left along the vertical lines of Japanese writing.

These stylistic qualities are particularly evident when contrasted with another book which uses the same linguistic text, but presents it in a different calligraphic style (Fig. 2).⁴ This later version is much more information-dense, with just a few lines corresponding to four whole pages of the first example, but the script difference is also clear, with far more angular letterforms, less connection and little vertical movement.

1. Premodern Japanese book titles were highly variable, leading to the modern bibliographic convention of "unified title". Here I use a short form of the unified title, *Nyobitsu wakamidori*. Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books ID no. 1045745. (Hasegawa, 1707)

2. The figure of the author emerged in popular prose in the late 17th century. Moretti (2020, p. 85)

3. Early modern Japanese text presents a palaeographic challenge, and *nyobitsu* even more so. I am deeply grateful to Professor Takahiro Sasaki, Keio Institute of Oriental Classics, Keio University, Tokyo, for his help in deciphering the writing of Hasegawa Myōtei. As well as title variations, editions of early modern Japanese books can vary, for example with the addition or removal of frontispieces. Here I give page references for a copy held in a private collection, Suzuran Bunko (Cambridge) and generously shared with me by the owner. (Hasegawa, 1707, f.1r-f.2v)

4. (都往来并国尽 [*Miyako Ōrai Narabini Kunizukushi/A Description of the Capital with a List of Provinces*] n.d.)

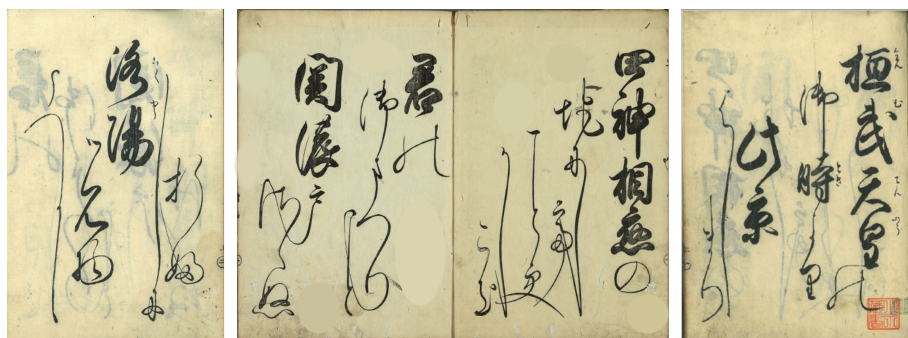


FIGURE 1. *Wakamidori* ('Young Green'), Hasegawa Myōtei, 1707. Vol. 1 f.1v-2r. Image courtesy of Suzuran Bunko (Cambridge)

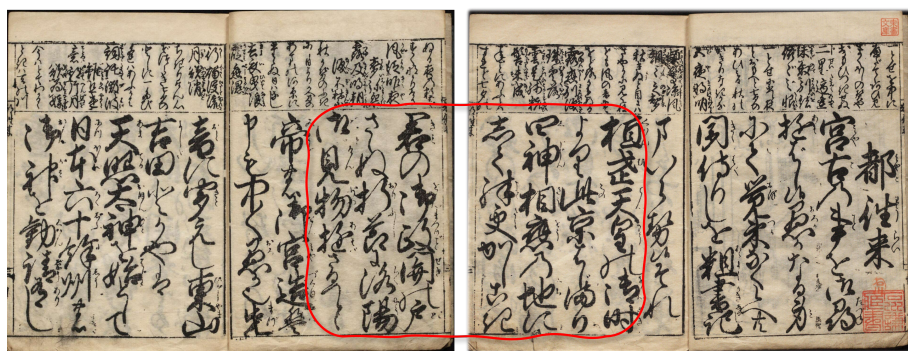


FIGURE 2. *Miyako ōrai narabini kunizukushi* ('A Tour of the Capital with List of Provinces'), anon., 1799. f.1v-3r. Image shows equivalent text section to 1 highlighted at f.2r-2v. Image Tōsho Bunko under CC.

2. The Problem of "Calligraphy"

The first book, *Wakamidori*, was written in *nyobitsu* (女筆, lit. "woman's brush"), a calligraphic style which was particularly in vogue from the mid-17th to mid-18th centuries. (Koizumi, 1999, p. 36) *Wakamidori* is understood to be a calligraphy manual for *nyobitsu*, a text which one could copy out in order to learn *nyobitsu* and improve one's brush skills. Calligraphy copybooks more often took the form of letters, in books constituting a "publishing genre" called *ōraimono* (往来物, literally, "things coming and going").⁵ This was an expansive category which used letters for the transmission of all kinds of knowledge, alongside the written register

5. Unlike "genre" in the modern book industry, there is no evidence of authors writing into preexisting publishing categories, and 'boundaries of publishing genres

appropriate for different kinds of correspondence. These could function explicitly or implicitly as *tebon* (手本), copybooks for calligraphy.⁶ *Nyobitsu* copybooks usually took this form, as it was a calligraphy style particularly associated with letter-writing.

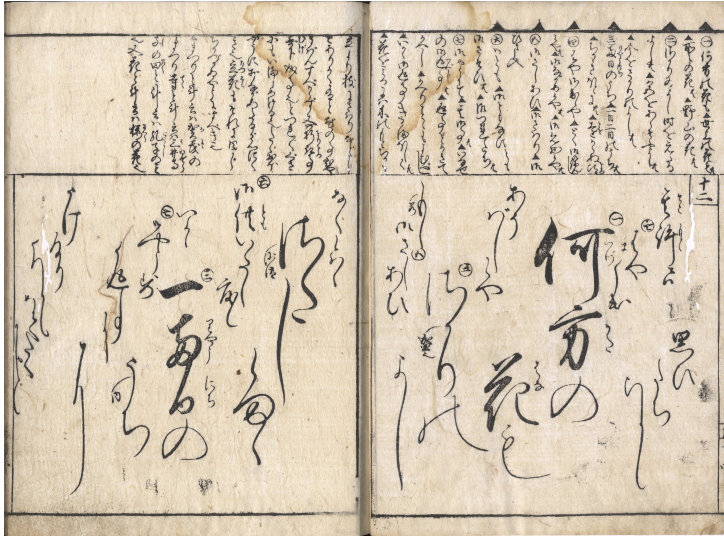


FIGURE 3. *Onna shokan shogakushō* ('A Beginners Guide to Correspondence for Women'), Isome Tsuna, 1690. Vol. 1 f.14v-15r. Image courtesy of Koizumi Yoshinaga.

Figure 3 shows an example of a *nyobitsu* book. The page has a large lower section with a main text, and a narrow upper register containing parallel or secondary information, a layout typical of educational books of the Edo period. The lower register contains a sample letter in *nyobitsu* calligraphy, while the upper register uses a different form to discuss metatextual points regarding the letter below. It is the calligraphed letter in the lower register which draws focus. First however, consider the upper register. This is in an unremarkable form, but though it is unmarked, in terms of method of production it was brushed, and even by the same hand, as the lower register—a professional print-industry calligrapher. “Calligraphy” tends to mean writing produced by hand with attention to aesthetics, but this is an environment where there is no

were often porous, with titles travelling from one category to another over time.’. See Moretti (2020, pp. 86–87).

6. See Moretti (ibid., p. 179) on the seventeenth century publishing genre of *ōrai-mono* and *tebon*.

epistemological separation between the handwritten and print. (Chance and Davis, 2016, p. 92) Handwriting for reproduction necessarily implies a degree of attention to aesthetics: calligraphy for woodblock print was professional work albeit executed with varying levels of expertise, perhaps depending on the publisher's budget. We also see on the pages of these books a wide variation in script styles and forms. The term "calligraphy" not only falls short for the purpose of describing adequately what we see on the page: in positioning writing as a visual artform, a further epistemological separation is engendered between language and the visual, disconnecting linguistic analysis from the eye. Nevertheless, the term remains convenient and not inaccurate; books demonstrating script forms were a specific commodity, and among these, *nyobitsu* was visually highly distinctive.

3. Stylistics of *Nyobitsu*

Nyobitsu was not purely a graphic form, but worked in relationship to the language it carried, preferring 'native' Japanese language and expression. This is within the *wakan* dialectic (*wa* 和 Japanese, *kan* 漢 "Chinese") which underpinned much Japanese thinking, where that which was Japanese was placed in apposition to that which was Sino-Japanese. In writing, the *hiragana* syllabary was *wa*, while *kanji* graphs were considered *kan*. *Nyobitsu's* strongly *wa* character tended to thus prefer *hiragana* syllables to overmuch *kanji*, and words from the *wa* lexicon over *kan* lexical choices. This is somewhat analogous to choices in English between words of Germanic and Latin origin, in particular with reference to the more intellectual flavour of Latin.

Visually, the script form here has the characteristics described above in regard to *Wakamidori* in Fig. 1, albeit in a more restrained and less flamboyant hand. That is to say, in Fig. 3 we see *nyobitsu's* fluidity, extension, connection and abbreviation, with dynamic changes in size, weight, and line. This letter also demonstrates one of *nyobitsu's* unusual ways of articulating lines of text. Vertical columns could be arranged with equal line heights in the ordinary way (Fig. 4, left). However columns could also be disarranged, with differing lengths, aligned neither at top nor bottom, in a manner called "scattered writing" (*chirashigaki* 散らし書き) (Fig. 4, right).

A more complex articulation than scattered writing involved text doubling back on itself, a manner called "returning writing" (*kaesbigaki* 返し書き) (Fig. 5). Here the larger characters signify the starting point and initial reading path. Reading the large characters only, the reader proceeds vertically right to left; at the end of the page the reader returns to the beginning to read the smaller, often interlinear writing. While confusing to modern eyes, and like scattered writing somewhat resistant to

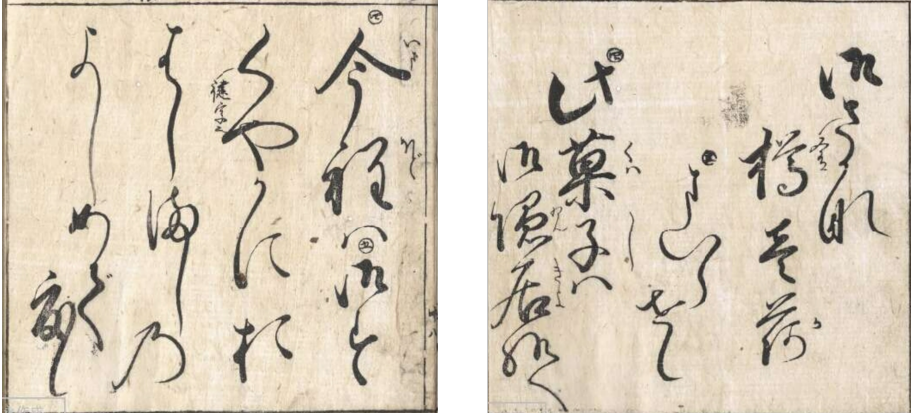


FIGURE 4. Left: aligned text (*narabegaki*). Right: scattered text (*chirashigaki*). Details from *Onna sbokan sbogakusbō*, Isome Tsuna, 1690. Vol. 2 ff.8v and 14v. Original images courtesy of Koizumi Yoshinaga.

typographic transcription, two or three returns were conventional for contemporary readers. Late examples can be found with up to nine returns, but this appears to have been an ostentation, and had an impact on comprehensibility. (Koizumi, 1999, p. 43)

4. Pragmatics of *Nyobitsu*

What did it mean to choose more or less complex articulations of text, or to write with exaggerated connection and fluid extension? The received view is that *nyobitsu* was a feminine accomplishment like embroidery or music, and was a way for women to write polite, refined notes to each other. However *nyobitsu* was not the only style of writing available to women, and furthermore despite the name both men and women wrote in this style. Close reading of metadiscourse reveals a far more complex system than simply elegant feminine handwriting; rather, a writer's choices, both linguistic, calligraphic, and of line articulation, had interactional, pragmatic functions.

The page shown above in Fig. 3 is from *Onna sbokan sbogakusbo* (女書翰初学抄 “A Beginner’s Guide to Women’s Correspondence”), written, again in terms of both composition and inscription, by a woman called Isome Tsuna.⁷ This book was highly influential, being republished several times under different titles, and operates as both a letter manual

7. (Isome, 1690) Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books ID no. 299536.

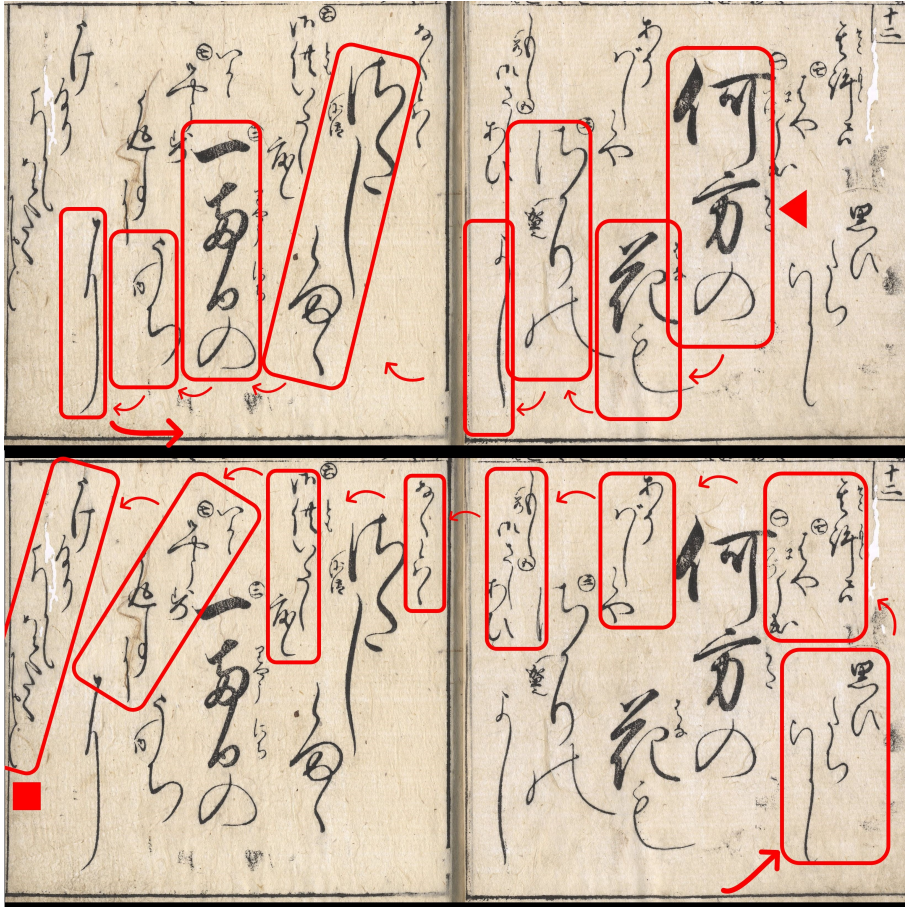


FIGURE 5. Returning text (*kaeshigaki*). Top: first pass, starting at triangular mark. Below: returning for the second pass, ending at square mark. *Onna shokan sbogakushō*, Isome Tsuna, 1690. Vol. 1 f.14v (detail). Original image courtesy of Koizumi Yoshinaga

and calligraphy copybook.⁸ It has model letters in *nyobitsu* which would probably be copied out by would-be letter-writers, and the upper register contains metatextual and other useful information in an unmarked script.

8. Namely: *Onna yōbunshō taisei* 女用文章大成 (1698 “Attaining Success in Useful Letters”); *Tōryū nyobitsu taizen* 当流女筆大全 (1699 “The Complete Woman’s Brush”); *Onna bunko takamakie* 女文庫高蔭絵 (1721 “A Library for Women in Embossed Gilt Lacquer”); *Onna bunrin takarabukuro* 女文林宝袋 (1738 “A Treasure Bag of the Forest of Women’s Letters”).

The letter in Fig. 3, the 12th of the first volume reads:

I would like to let you know that everywhere the cherry blossoms are at their peak, so I plan to go within the next day or two. I think that you may soon go, and if it were not to be a hindrance, I would like to go together. Please let me know how that would be. Kind regards.

The upper register offers the following suggestions for varying the letter text:

Everywhere the cherry blossom—or the cherry blossom all around—or the cherry blossom here and there—or the cherry blossom in the hills and fields

At their peak, so—or at the perfect moment, so—or are competing in their colours, so—or now are at their peak

Her previous book pointed out words and phrases which were vulgar, amending them to more polished and acceptable ones. (Isome, 1994) Here she gives elegant variations, expanding the vocabulary of the reader and giving them the tools to compose their own letters.

These are the kinds of letters polite ladies might send to maintain and cultivate their social relationships, and the book was probably valuable to women seeking the social capital projected by accomplished letter-writing. In fact Tsuna's book is concerned not with brush skills or letter-writing per se, but with elegance and refinement of the social person in general. She offers advice about etiquette and deportment such as:

When viewing flowers, do not do things like going near the bottom of the tree and touching the branches, saying this and that in appreciation of the flowers. Also ... it is poor form to break them off and take them. It is refined to simply gaze at them placidly.

Tsuna informs the user about refined, polite sociality in language and deportment, particularly as enacted through writing letters.

It is only at the end of the third volume that Tsuna touches on practices of writing in a short prose passage. Alongside metadiscourse from other sources, this provides an account of some of the pragmatic aspects of *nyobitsu*. In her previous book she had explained that *nyobitsu* is not appropriate for people of higher status than oneself.⁹ In her second work on this subject she drills down further, saying:

When you add ink to your brush, it is very respectful to write darker, but it is vulgar if the ink is too dark.

9. 'In writings where one is respecting one's superiors, though a woman it is acceptable to say 'I humbly send this brief note'.' This phrase, 一筆申し上げ候 *ippitsu mōshiage sōrō* typically appears in 'men's' (or rather, unmarked) letter-writing models, indicating *nyobitsu* is marked and appropriate for closer or more equal relationships. The question of gender is further touched on briefly below.

and:

In trying to write the shapes of words elegantly, if by all kinds of scattering it becomes difficult to read this is extremely rude. Therefore do not write long *ten biki sute bane* [terms for different calligraphic strokes].¹⁰

Ink colour demonstrates a writer's personal qualities, whether of vulgarity or refinement, and constructs their social relationship with the addressee as one of distance or intimacy, while graphic execution of strokes is discussed in terms of manners and politeness. Clearly, paralinguistic features of written language can have social effects, both desirable and undesirable, with ink colour and calligraphic stroke contributing to discursive constructions of oneself and one's relationships with others.

The complex articulations of *nyobitsu* are also a factor in the discursive construction of social relations. Scattered writing and returning writing emerged in the Heian period (8th to 12th centuries), a "golden age" of literary and artistic production among courtiers and aristocrats. Scattering one's lines became associated with personal letters and poetry, evoking the idea of a writer too overcome with emotion to align their writing carefully. (Carpenter, 2019, p. 33; Kaya, 2013, p. 140) In the early modern period then, scattered writing may carry some of the refined literary resonances of its antecedents, but Tsuna's discourse explicitly positions the returns of *kaeshigaki* in relation to affect:

It is most important that marriage congratulations should have *nengoro* returning writing.¹¹

Nengoro (懇ろ) can be understood as a kind of warm friendliness which is kind and sincere, easy but polite. She also says:

Letters of condolence should be written with thin ink, without returning writing.¹²

Complexity of articulation projects the emotional warmth and sincerity of *nengoro*, whereas if more emotional reserve is called for, a more straightforward articulation is appropriate. Other manuals propose the same differentiation regarding not returns but scattered writing. (Koizumi, 1999, pp. 44–45, 54) Apparently amongst *nyobitsu* choices, a more involved *mise-en-page* changes the affective stance of a letter.

This discretionary line articulation is also subject to discourses of gender, in that some sources suggest men should avoid using scattered writing. (ibid., pp. 44–45) However, it is clear from contemporaneous

10. All transcriptions and translations my own. (Isome, 1690, vol. 3 f. 22^v, 24^r)

11. ibid., vol. 3 f. 23^r.

12. ibid.

sources that men did use this—for example letter manuals instructing men in how best to succeed in the game of love sometimes use scattered writing for their model letters.¹³ Since it is not clear that men used such line articulation in their male homosocial correspondence, it seems that the affective quality of scattered writing made it appropriate for men when they wished to express sincerity and unmediated emotionality towards women.

Tsuna has a longer discussion of the quality of *nengoro* which sheds light on this issue:

It is better to write *nengoro* phrases; rather than speaking face-to-face, it is better to let the brush speak, so everyone ought to be able to write. However, it should be to the degree that one would usually address a person. Being more intimate [*mutsumajiki* 睦まじき] in letters than in one's usual addresses exposes falseness, and the shabbiness of your inner feelings comes across like a courtesan. One should be careful.¹⁴

The matter of the courtesan is key here, since courtesans used *nyobitsu* in their profession, writing convincing love letters to their patrons. Overdoing the warm friendliness of *nengoro* could turn one from a sincere person into an insincere one; a letter intended to express friendly intimacy could be misconstrued, positioning one in an undesirable way. Being 'friendly to the degree that one would usually address a person' shows *nyobitsu* constructing a relationship as intimate, whether socially or sexually. *Nyobitsu* could project a sincere and warm affection; but Tsuna also warns against negative or undesirable effects, and we see the potential for accidental overfamiliarity, vulgarity, disrespect or indifference.

5. Indexicality of *Nyobitsu*

Evidently *nyobitsu* had pragmatic functions in the written construction of social relationships; however other *nyobitsu* books demonstrate that the complex mesh of features made for a rich resource. With linguistic, calligraphic, and mise-en-page features, sophisticated modulations were possible. This can be considered as *nyobitsu*'s indexical field of potential meanings, which Penelope Eckert describes as a 'constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable'. (Eckert, 2008, p. 454)

13. Key love letter manuals include *Fumi no bayashi* (文の林 'A Forest of Letters'), a title which labels several different texts, *Fumi no sbiori* (文の枝折 'A Guidebook to Letters' and *Fumi no yukikabi* (文のゆきかひ 'A To-and-fro of Letters'. See for example Noriko Itasaka (2015-09-18).

14. Isome Tsuna, *Onna sbokan sbogakushō*, 1690, vol.3 f.23v

To what purposes such meanings might be invoked, and how activated, is illustrated in a second calligraphy manual by Hasegawa Myōtei. *Sazareishi* (佐々礼石 “A Rock of Pebbles”), first printed in 1713, consisted of three volumes of letters, of which the four letters of volume one will be examined here.¹⁵ There is no metalinguistic text as Fig. 6 shows. Furthermore, the letters are not useful as examples of practical letter writing skills as are Tsuna’s above; nor are they apparently systematised. This book tends to be thought of as almost purely a calligraphy manual: not actually useful, but an at least linguistically pleasing text for women to copy in order to practice their feminine brush skills. In fact attention to *nyobitsu*’s indexicality problematizes that view, and I argue that it should instead be understood as an epistolary romance.



FIGURE 6. *Sazareishi* (‘A Rock of Pebbles’), Hasegawa Myōtei, 1713. Vol. 1, divided into four letters arranged consecutively top to bottom (pages are read right to left). Images courtesy of Ebi Bunko.

Since *nyobitsu* has distinctive graphic qualities, an initial visual examination of the letters is instructive. Figure 7 compares the articulation of the first and second letters, and based on the stylistic and pragmatic principles outlined above, it might be supposed that the first, aligned letter could be to a less intimate addressee, affectively either cool or respectful. The second letter might be more personal, friendly or emotional, or perhaps addressed to a close friend.

Going on to read the text, the first letter is elegant and polite, reading as follows:

15. (Hasegawa, 1713) Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books ID no. 1150089

Thinking to seek your pine sapling on this New Year's Day of the Rat, the path is uncertain in the deep snow. The mountainous drift before you is a jewelled mansion; see it as an image of a thousand years, and you can look forward to depending on its promise.



FIGURE 7. *Sazareishi*, Hasegawa Myōtei, 1713. Vol. 1, letters one and two. Images courtesy of Ebi Bunko.

With its references to snowy paths, this new year's greeting might be to a friend who is in the remote countryside. There is intertextuality with poems from classical Heian period literature which could be read as elevated diction, such as the “jewelled mansion”. However this is an image of lovers divided.¹⁶

The second letter's scattered writing suggests a less reserved affective stance, and the text fulfils this expectation:

16. *Tama no utena* 玉の台 can be found for example in *Taketori monogatari* (late 9th or early 10th century) むぐらはふ下にも年はへぬる身の何かは玉のうてなをも見む *Mugura bau sbita nimo toshi wa benuru mi no iduka wa tama no utena wo mimu*. How should I, who have lived in a weed covered hut, even look upon a jewelled palace?; *Shūiwakashū* (early 11th century) poem 110 けふ見れば玉のうてなもなかりけりあやめの草のいほりのみして *Kyō mireba tama no utena mo nakarikeri ayameno kusa no iori nomi sbite* When I looked today there was no splendid mansion, only a hut of iris leaves; *Ise monogatari* (late 9th or 10th century) episode iii 思ひあらば葎の宿に寝もしなむひじきものには袖をしつゝも *Omoi araba mugura no yado ni mo ne mo sbinamu bijiki mono niwa sode o sbitsutsu mo* If you cared for me, we would sleep in a weed-grown hut, and spread our sleeves for a bed (all my translations).

So overgrown is the garden that no drop of moonlight intrudes. Beneath the trees bloom irises, but with no-one to see them they scatter in the pond like so much rubbish. How pitiful I think them.

The writer complains of loneliness, and that nobody visits them in their overgrown garden. There continue to be intertextual references to classical Heian poetry, and in that context, a woman alone viewing her garden is an image of a woman waiting for her lover, fearing he will never come.¹⁷ Classically irises signify the fifth month of the year, indicating that although the two letters have apparently no connection, the rules of seasonality are obeyed in the ordering of the volume.

The third letter (Fig. 8) fills 11 pages with scattered writing, and since it has a return, the full length is passed twice. This letter continues to use imagery and linguistic devices from classical literature. It's a highly emotional, even overwrought letter:

Though 10,000 miles of mountains and rivers separate us, this heart will not change, you said as you left. Those words proved empty, and now not even a messenger do you send. Oh, I grow bitter! You are far away beyond clouds, like them your desire ever-shifting – just as the wise man of old said, you should take care. What did I expect, I ask myself, crying out for a friend to accompany me in this time of grief. This world, its people, like the kudzu leaf I should turn my back, but cannot. It must be some sin of my own I am repaying, and I think back, like a catalpa bow foolishly unstrung. Birds nestle in flowers, and tears nestle in sleeves. So it goes, the hollow promises of this world of pain.

The image is of a woman in classical literature who, having given herself over to a man who had professed his undying love, finds that his feelings have now cooled. Her overflowing despair at his desertion is expressed not only linguistically but through the articulation of scattered returning lines.

Letter three provides the tools to appropriately index features of all three letters. There is no reason other than the book's presumed female readership (and traditional expectations of calligraphy manuals) to assume all the letters are between women. The aligned writing of the first letter could indeed indicate coolness or detachment between women, but it might also, via the contested discourses around men and line articulation, point to a male writer avoiding scattered writing. The jewelled mansion, instead of being strange, then suggests a man writing to a woman, telling her that she can be certain of him, as his love will

17. See for example Izumi Shikibu's poem (late 10th century), no. 158 in *Shiki-wakashū*: まつ人のいまもきたらばいかかせんふままくをしき庭の雪かな *Matsu bito no ima mo kitaraba ikaga sen fumamaku osiki niwa no yuki kana* If the person I am waiting for comes now, what to do? How sad if the snow in the garden is trodden. (My translation)



FIGURE 8. *Sazareishi*, Hasegawa Myōtei, 1713. Vol. 1, letter three. Images courtesy of Ebi Bunko.

last for a thousand years, even though snow prevents their seeing each other.

The second letter's complaint of unseen irises in an unvisited garden can now be read in light of the first: someone who finds her summer flowers wretched instead of charming might be the woman addressed in the previous letter, months after his promises in the spring. The third letter then generates in the reader's mind an image of the same woman, now distraught at his faithlessness: her distress is described both linguistically and formally, in her scattered writing with long return.

The final letter is scattered and has two returns, while the linguistic tone is soft and calm (Fig. 9):

With your compassionate heart, pity people above insects and beasts and spare a drop of mercy. As the willow sways in the wind, soften, and repair your suspicious heart. Please keep this in mind. I will come soon, and I will tell you the details when I see you.

Surely this is someone telling the distraught woman to compose herself. Be less suspicious. They intend to visit her to talk in person. Who is it who is attempting to comfort her? The lexical item "willow" offers a clue. The text uses *yōryū* (楊柳), a Sino-Japanese, *kan* word, where in *nyōbitsu* linguistic style the "wa" term *yanagi* (柳) would be expected. This invokes the *wakan* dialectic, pointing to the intellectual and erudite, and is therefore masculine-coded. While the lexical choice then indexes a male writer, the two returns suggest a soothing warmth and sincerity. The letter reads in a man's voice, perhaps authoritative, but also gentle, heartfelt and soft.



FIGURE 9. *Sazareishi*, Hasegawa Myōtei, 1713. Vol. 1, letter four. Images courtesy of Ebi Bunko.

This series of four letters form a romantic narrative, but one that a purely linguistic analysis obscures. It is the paralinguistic information in the calligraphy, and its indexicality, that enables a more satisfactory, narrative reading of the slim volume: there are characters, an evolving situation, and a fragment of a plot.

6. Conclusion

Returning then to the very first text examined above, *Wakamidori's* description of the capital is linguistically almost identical to the later version, but it uses very different calligraphy.

... Higashiyama, of which many have heard. It may have been Yoshida who, starting with the goddess Amaterasu, brought here the gods of the more than sixty provinces of this land from where the sun rises: it is a sacred place.¹⁸

This is a potentially colourless list of sites, but uses a lyrical diction which is difficult to express in English translation. This linguistic expression is further heightened by the script form, an effect which is impossible to reproduce typographically.

On the left the high mountain is Hieizan, unrivalled in Yamato, where, through the founding by Dengyō Daishi, [the teachings of] Mount Tendai were brought from China.¹⁹

18. (Hasegawa, 1707, f. 44-5^r)... 東山吉田とかやはあまてらす御神を始として日の本六十餘州の御神を勧請ありし霊地なり

19. (ibid., f. 5^r-6^r) 弓手に高き御山は和国無双の比叡山伝教大師の開基にてもろこしの天台山をうつされたり

The two texts may relate to each other textually, and typographically presented as above are indistinguishable. As literature however, they operate very differently. *Wakamidori* draws on the refined elegance of *nyobitsu*, its warmth and sense of intimate direct address balancing the dryness of content. The later iteration *Miyako ōrai narabini kunizukushi* does not impart this kind of a reading.



FIGURE 10. First pages of various descriptions of the capital. L-R: *Wakamidori*, Hasegawa Myōtei, 1707. *Miyako ōrai narabini kunizukushi*, anon., 1779. *O-ie edo meisbo hōgaku rakuyō ōrai*, Rinsendō, 1818. *Rakuyō ōrai narabini bunsbō*, Rinsendō Yōshō, 1846. Untitled, Helen Magowan, 2022. Images: *Wakamidori* from Suzuran Bunko, remaining from Tōsho Bunko under CC except author's own.

In fact, *Wakamidori* had many iterations, and continues to generate new ones when I transcribe it in order to analyse it for my research, or format it for presentation (Fig. 10). The transposition of the handwritten into typography—a process of re-mediation—is often necessary, but the losses entailed tend to be treated (if considered at all) as minor collateral damage. In the case of *nyobitsu*, apparently superfluous aesthetic qualities of text are in fact fundamental to a text's meaning. The dominance of typography has served to obscure practices of meaning-making using non-typographic technologies of writing: attention to the brush as an instrument not only of art but of writing reveals not only a *nyobitsu* text's meanings but also typography's limitations.

Primary Sources

- 御家江戸名所方角洛陽往来 [O-ie Edo meisbo hōgaku rakuyō ōrai]. 林泉堂 Rinsendō. Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books ID: work no. 1824062. Images from object no. 100263367.
- 洛陽往来并文章 [Miyako ōrai narabini bunsbō]. 林泉堂陽嶂 Rinsendō Yōshō. Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books ID: work no. 1027243. Images from object no. 100263739.

- 都往来并国尽 [*Miyako ōrai narabini kunizukushi*]. Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books ID: work no. 301677. Images from object no. 100263740.
- 女筆若みと里 [*Nyobitsu wakamidori*]. 長谷川妙躰 Hasegawa Myōtei. Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books ID: work no. 1045745. Images from Suzuran Bunko (Cambridge).
- 佐々礼石 [*Sazareishi*]. 長谷川妙躰 Hasegawa Myōtei. Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books ID: work no. 1150089. Images from Ebi Collection courtesy of Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University, object ID no. Ebi1707.
- 女文章鑑 [*Onna bunshō kagami*]. 居初津奈 Isome Tsuna. Not listed. Original housed in the personal collection of Mori Shiro.
- 女書翰初学抄 [*Onna sbokan sbogakushō*]. 居初津奈 Isome Tsuna. Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books ID: work no. 299536. Images from object no. 100289481

References

- Carpenter, John T. (2019). “Learning the Women’s Hand in Heian Japan: Kana Calligraphy and the Tale of Genji.” In: *The Tale of Genji: A Japanese Classic Illuminated*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2019.
- Chance, Linda H. and Julie Nelson Davis (2016). “The Handwritten and the Printed: Issues of Format and Medium in Japanese Premodern Books.” In: *Manuscript Studies: A Journal of the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies* 1.1, pp. 90–114.
- Chartier, Roger (1994). *The Order Of Books: Readers, Authors, And Libraries In Europe Between The Fourteenth And Eighteenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (1997). “Secrétaires for the People?” In: *Correspondence: Models of Letter-writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. by Alain Boureau, Roger Chartier, and Cécile Dauphin. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Eckert, Penelope (2008). “Variation and the Indexical Field.” In: *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12.4, pp. 453–476.
- Hasegawa, Myōtei 長谷川妙躰 (1707). 女筆若みと里 [*Nyobitsu wakamidori/Nyobitsu Young Green*]. Vol. 1. 3 vols. 江戸 Edo: 御簾屋又右衛門ほか Misuya Mataemon et.al.
- (1713). 佐々礼石 [*Sazareishi/A Rock of Pebbles*]. Vol. 1. 3 vols. 京都 Kyoto: 岡本半七ほか Okamoto Hanshichi et al.
- Isome, Tsuna 居初津奈 (1690). 女書翰初学抄 [*Onna sbokan sbogakushō/A Beginner’s Guide to Women’s Correspondence*]. 3 vols. 京都 Kyoto: 小作治半右衛門 Kosaji Han’emon.
- (1994). 女文章鑑 [*Onna bunshō kagami/A Mirror for Women’s Writing*]. Facsimile Edition in Edo jidai josei bunko 86. Tokyo: Ōzorasha.

- Itasaka, Noriko 板坂則子 (2015-09-18). “一九『文しなん』と陽起山人『文のはやし』(附 往来部分翻刻) [Ikku ‘Fumi shinan’ to Yōki Sanjin ‘Fumi no hayashi’ (fu fu ōrai bubun honkoku)/Ikkyū’s ‘Fumi shinan’ and Yōkisanjin’s ‘Fumi no hayashi’ (with transcription of educational section)].” In: 専修国文 *Senshū kokubun* 97, pp. 1–56.
- Kaya, Noriko (2013). “The Aesthetic Characteristics of Kana Seen in Chirashi-gaki.” In: *Buchstaben Der Welt—Welt Der Buchstaben*. Ed. by Martin Roussel and Ryosuke Ohashi. Wilhelm Fink.
- Koizumi, Yoshinaga 小泉吉永 (1999). “近世の女筆手本 - 女文をめぐる諸問題 [Early Modern Nyohitsu Copybooks: Various Problems Concerning Women’s Letters].” PhD thesis. Kanazawa University.
- Kornicki, Peter F. (1998). *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*. Handbuch Der Orientalistik Abt. 5: Japan. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Moretti, Laura (2020). *Pleasure in Profit: Popular Prose in Seventeenth-Century Japan*. Columbia University Press.
- Rinsendō, Yōshō 林泉堂 (n.d.[a]). 御家江戸名所方洛陽往来 [O-ie Edo Meisbo Hōgaku Rakuyō Ōrai/A Guide to Edo Famous Places, Description of the Capital]. 江戸 Edo: 英屋大助 Hanabusaya Daisuke.
- (n.d.[b]). 洛陽往来并文章 [Miyako Ōrai Narabini Bunsbō/A Description of the Capital with Texts]. 東都 Edo: 山崎屋清七 Yamazakiya Seishichi.
- 都往来并国尽 [Miyako Ōrai Narabini Kunizukushi/A Description of the Capital with a List of Provinces] (n.d.). 尾陽 [Biyō]: 風月堂 孫助 [Fūgetsudō Mago-suke].