

# Ex Libris Seals and Labels in the Daisō Rental Books

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This study provides an introductory examination of ex libris seals and labels in books that formerly circulated through the Daisō lending library of Nagoya (1767-1899), the largest commercial lending library in Japan during the Edo period. Based on close archival research into hundreds of books that were catalogued in the fourth volume of the Daisō inventory by Mizutani Futō 水谷不倒 (1858-1943) and others in the 1890s, this study will demonstrate the usefulness of these seals and labels for reconstructing the bibliographic reference system that the lender employed throughout most of its history. Moreover, this study proposes that these seals and labels can also provide us with some sense of how the collection changed over time. Internal evidence suggests that one system of classification, comprised of subsets designated by kana letters in *iroha* order, preceded the reference system described in Mizutani's catalogue, in which the subsets are re-arranged in a different order. This reconstitution of the system, I argue, was undertaken in an effort to accommodate the Daisō's ever-expanding collection—and moreover, the uneven growth of certain subsets relative to others—within a limited storage capacity of three devoted storehouses and two walled chambers. While some of the Daisō practices followed industry standards, practical management of an enormous and ever-expanding inventory appears to have forced the lender to break with convention in some cases and experiment with ways of refining its bibliographic idiom. Thus, close examination of the Daisō's practices can reveal something of the bibliographic standards of the time, but also of the difficulties that the lender faced in managing a commercial library of unprecedented scale.

## Background History on the Daisō

During the peak years of its operation, the Daisō 大惣 lending library (1767-

1899) of Nagoya was the largest purveyor of rental books (*kashihon* 貸本) in Japan, boasting an inventory of 16,734 titles and 26,768 individual volumes, including duplicates.<sup>1</sup> The origins of the Daisō library may be traced back to the early eighteenth century, when Eguchi Shinroku 江口新六 (d. 1741), who originally hailed from Ōno, a small village on the Chita Peninsula, southeast of Nagoya, moved his family to the bustling merchant district of Funairi-chō. There he opened up a sake shop along the eastern banks of the Horikawa Canal, the principal artery of transport linking Nagoya Castle and its surrounding samurai district with Miya station of the Tōkaido. It was a fortuitous location for selling wine, not least because the lively Misono entertainment district was located on the opposite bank of the canal, but also because the waters were regularly thronged with skiffs ferrying wealthy samurai down to the sprawling complex of tea houses around Atsuta Shrine and Miya Station. It was in this environment that the family business thrived, so much so that Shinroku was able to save up enough money to invest in a personal library—no modest luxury during this time—which he then, in turn, circulated among literate friends and customers.

Just as the shop was about to change hands from father to son, however, disaster struck. After nearly a decade of deficit spending by the seventh Owari domain daimyō, Tokugawa Muneharu 徳川宗春 (1696-1764; r. 1730-1739), the entire city of Nagoya was plunged into bankruptcy. Some of the worst extravagances had been committed in direct defiance of the fiscal directives of the Kyōhō Reforms 享保改革, initiated by the eighth shogun, Tokugawa Yoshimune 徳川吉宗 (1684-1751; r. 1716-1745). The shōgun removed Muneharu from power, but not before many independent shops in the commercial district—as distinct from enterprises that operated according to the feudal system of selective patronage, or *goyōtatsu* 御用達—succumbed to the economic fallout. By the time of Shinroku's death in Kanpo 1 (1741), the damage to the Eguchi business had already been done. Family records indicate a series of relocations away from the hustle and bustle of the main commercial district to more remote areas of the city—first to the north side of the Taruya-chō district in Hōreki 4 (1754), and then to west side of Biwa Shimasaka-chō in Hōreki 8 (1758). In Meiwa 3 (1766), Shinroku's eldest son Eguchi Kihee 江口喜兵衛 left Nagoya altogether and moved to Gifu, the epicenter of the early modern paper recycling industry, where he very quickly established himself as a successful paper wholesaler. However, a very different fate awaited his younger brother Eguchi Tojirō 江口富次郎 (1728-1811), who no sooner after taking the helm of the family business managed to ride it right

onto the shoals of financial disaster. His repeated attempts at establishing a retail medicine firm met with failure at every turn, resulting in bankruptcy of the business and the near destitution of the entire household. Fortunately, Kihee stepped in at the most opportune moment and forwarded his younger brother a generous quantity of cash, enabling the family to rent a house in Nagashima-chō, a mere fifteen minutes' walk from the main gate to the second enceinte of Nagoya Castle, in the heart of the commercial district. Abandoning all further ambitions of being a medicine dealer, Tojirō redirected the remaining infusion of cash towards the purchase of several hundred volumes of books, which when added to the existing holdings of the family library, made for a sizable inventory.

In Meiwa 4 (1767), Tojirō established the Daisō lending library as a full-fledged commercial enterprise, operating according to prescribed lending periods and fees. From its inception, the library operated under two separate names—Daisō 大惣, an acronym combining the first character of the family shop name Ōnoya 大野屋 with the first character of the hereditary handle Sōhachi 惣八; and Kogetsudō 胡月堂 (“Lake Moon Hall”), its auxiliary shop designation. His decision to open a commercial lending library was a curious one for many reasons, not least because it represented a departure from the main family business, and hence carried great potential risk, but also because the commercial book trade in Nagoya was still in the early stages of its development. While there were a few firms who retailed in books imported from the main markets of Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo, no booksellers were yet permitted to publish independently. It was only after the opening of the Meirindō 明倫堂 (“Hall of Enlightened Virtue”) domainal academy sixteen years later, in Tenmei 3 (1783), that Nagoya booksellers successfully petitioned for permission to form their own publishing guild, and subsequently, to print books in the castle town. Thus Eguchi was betting on the profitability of a secondary market for rental books before a publishing industry had even taken root in Nagoya, and also before big bookselling firms—like the Fūgetsudō 風月堂, founded by Fūgetsu Magosuke 風月孫助 around Meiwa 5 (1768), and the Eirakuya 永楽屋, founded by Eirakuya Tōshirō 永楽屋東四郎 (1741-1795) in An'ei 5 (1776)—had emerged to test the viability of the primary market for book sales. It was a risky bet, but one that paid off, in part because the Eguchi family was able to keep rental fees low and hedge against losses by diversifying their trade and retailing in medicines, cosmetics, hair dyes, sake, tools, and other products.

In characterizing the key role that the Daisō lending library played in providing

residents of Nagoya with books, we might propose an amended version of Richard Darnton's concept of the communication circuit.<sup>ii</sup> Whereas in Darnton's conceptualization, there is a cycle of communication joining authors, publishers, printers, shippers, booksellers, and readers, there is no assigned place for the purveyor of rental books. In many ways, Darnton's concept presumes a model of print consumption in which readers purchase, not borrow, the books they read. Envisioning the book lender as an intermediary between booksellers (cum publishers) and readers provides us with a model that is better suited to the realities of print consumption in early modern Japan—especially since, as print historian Nagatomo Chiyoji notes, most readers in early modern Japan read books on loan, not books they purchased. Anderson and Barker's model of book history, which shifts the focus from human agents to the books themselves, and introduces more nuanced conditions for considering the distribution, reception, and survival of books, is in many ways better suited to a study of rental book reception—their cultural afterlife, as it were, after point of publication. An examination of booklender *ex libris* seals, stamps, labels and other apparatuses of classification, such as is undertaken in this study, represents an attempt to apply Anderson and Barker's model to thousands of books in a commercial lending library, and with a bibliographic rigor that has not yet been attempted in the case of the *Daisō*.

### **Sealmarks in *Daisō* Rental Books**

One of the most striking features of the *Daisō* rental books is their variety of *ex libris* seal imprints. Whereas most commercial lenders during the Edo period used a single seal, and a select few used a pair, the *Daisō* used no less than twenty-three different seals over the course of its history. A gratuitous predilection for dressing their wares may have been one reason for the preponderance of seals, as too may have been a desire to project a consistent brand identity. Certainly the unparalleled longevity of the firm was a factor, as new seals were needed whenever there was a change of address. Prominently stamped on the front covers, title labels, or front matter of nearly every book in the *Daisō* inventory, these seals served to identify the lender and, in some cases, provide specific address information. For the first hundred years or so of its operation, the *Daisō* employed seals stamped in black ink; by the early Meiji period, however, it had begun to use red ink for some of its seals.

One of the earliest and by far most commonly used seal was the square lozenge, consisting of a large character dai 大 circumscribed within a black circle, and set within a square border rounded at the corners (see figure 1). This is the same trademark which appears on many extant material effects associated with the shop, including the Daisō winter and summer *noren* 暖簾, or shop curtains. Several variations of this particular trademark exist, including a slightly smaller seal in negative relief (see figure 2). It also appears as an inset to larger seals (see figure 3), and less commonly, on pasted book plates.



Figure 1. Daisō square lozenge seal (19 mm × 19 mm)



Figure 2. Daisō square lozenge seal (17 mm × 17 mm)



Figure 3. Rectangular seal with Nagashima-chō 5 chōme address, used 1802-1869 (26 mm × 38 mm)

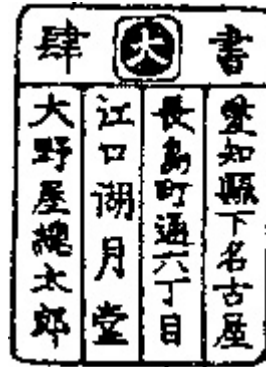


Figure 4. Rectangular seal with Nagashima-chō 6 chōme address, used 1872-1898 (26 mm × 38 mm)

The next most common series of seals identify the trade and address of the firm. Unlike the majority of book lenders in operation during the Edo period, the Daisō did not employ runners to deliver its wares directly to borrowers; rather, it was incumbent upon the borrower—or a proxy—to visit the shop once to borrow the book and a second time to return it. This practice is reflected in the address information provided in the seals. Rather than simply indicate the domain, the city, and the district, as was the common practice among large scale lenders in other cities, the Daisō also

included its block location, so that any customer could locate it with precision. The presence of the square lozenge trademark in these seals also warrants mention, since it represents a sort of imagistic mnemonic, or a guide, to the Daisō storefront. The same Daisō trademark was emblazoned on the shop curtain, so by matching up the two images any customer, even a functionally illiterate child who had been sent by his mother to return her books, could confirm the location.

Quite beyond their original intended function, these address seals also provide a general guide for dating the acquisition and circulation life of books. According to Eguchi family records, the shop changed locations twice during the Edo period. After opening at the corner of Nagashima-chō and Motoshige-chō in 1767, it moved to Denma-chō 6 chōme in Kansei 12 (1800) and Nagashima-chō 5 chōme just two years later, in Kyōwa 2 (1802). There it remained until the second year of the Meiji period (1869). Based on this documentary information, we can conclude that the Nagashima-chō 5 chōme seal was used for new or used books acquired by the Daisō between 1802 and 1869. Obviously, this is a broad range, but the publication date of the book in question can help narrow down the period of circulation in the case of books acquired new, as can the presence of seals by other booksellers, lenders, or individuals when trying to date books that were acquired second, third, or even fourth-hand.

## Inventory Seals

Most titles from the Daisō inventory include at least one round, numbered seal on the *daisen* label of the first volume, the first page of the first volume, or both. In general, these seals are used in two different types of formations—individually and in clusters. Individual seals, numbering one through five indicate the number of copies of a given title in the Daisō collection. A seal stamp with the number three, for example, indicates that there were three copies of the book in the collection. The numbers in these seals correspond to the title-by-title inventory numbers provided in the 1890s catalogue. Incidentally, a number of books also include hand drawn stripes on the top of the page ream; these stripes correspond in number to the number indicated in the inventory seals, thus serving as an additional, outward shorthand for locating the book's storehouse.

While there are no extant shop catalogues to confirm the precise year when this

practice began, a large batch of stamped books published around the An'ei period (1772-1780), all of which were acquired first hand, points to an initiation of the practice sometime during the first ten years of the Daisō's operation. The circular stamps used during this early period of inventorying were rather large, measuring 15 mm in diameter, and included no stamped numbers—in every case the number is handwritten in red or black ink. Some of the earliest identifiable examples include the seals from the preface page of *Yūshi hōgen* 遊子方言 (*A Playboy's Dialect*, 1770) (see figure 5). The same manner of marking inventory, with the same basic stamps, continued for over thirty years, well into the first years of the Bunka period (1804-1818). The same type of stamp appears, for example, in a copy of Shikitei Sanba's 式亭三馬 (1776-1822), *Sendō shinwa* 船頭深話 (*Deep in Conversation with the Ferryman*, 1805) (see figure 6), the long-awaited sequel to his debut work, *Tatsumi fugen* 辰巳婦言 (*Women's Talk*, 1798).

One year after it acquired and inventoried new copies of Sanba's *Sendō shinwa*, which is to say in Bunka 3 (1806), the Daisō appears to have begun using a different set of seals for marking its inventory. Unlike the early seals, these seals were smaller in diameter, measuring 11 mm, and were specially carved with the numbers inset. A

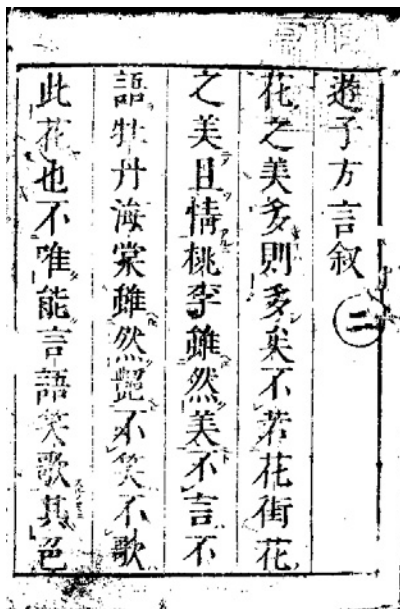


Figure 5. Preface page of *A Playboy's Dialect* (1770)

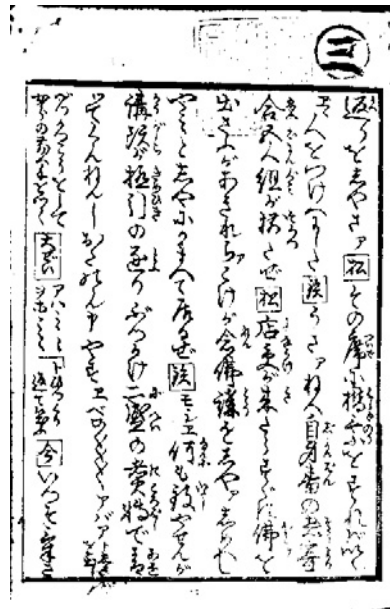


Figure 6. First page of *Deep in Conversation with the Ferryman* (1805)



copy of the Bunka 4 (1807) edition of Kyoto gesaku writer Morita Ojio's 盛田小塩 (act. ca. 1804-1830) *sharebon Teike no hana* 窃潜妻 (*A Thieving Wife*), for example, includes the new numerical seal on its daisen label and first page (see figure). Aside from the different dimensions and page placements of these seals, it is also evident that they were used for different inventory operations.

## Inventory Labels

The front cover of nearly every extant Daisō book—or in the case of a multi-volume set, the cover of the first volume—bears a small label inscribed with a call number, or else evidence of one having been pasted there and lost. On most books, this label is pasted to the immediate right of the *daisen* title label, in the top left quadrant of the cover; however, there are isolated cases in which the label is pasted directly in the center of the cover. The labels themselves are slips of *washi* paper cut by hand, into more or less uniform dimensions of 22 mm vertically and 12 mm horizontally, and inscribed with call numbers consisting of a kana letter followed by a number ranging between one and four digits. The kana letters refer to subsets of books that were categorized first according to size and second according to genre or subject matter. The fifteen-volume Daisō inventory compiled by Mizutani Futō in the late 1890s, on the eve of the collection's sale, identifies each of these subsets and the size and genre of books that they contained. As useful as this data is for reconstructing the subsets that comprised the collection, it leaves a number of unanswered questions about the overall organization. For one, only 33 of the 47 kana letters in the early modern syllabary are represented. More pressingly, his catalogue does not present these letters in *iroha* order—the conventional order used throughout the early modern period and into the Meiji.

Assuming that Mizutani proceeded in an orderly fashion when conducting his inventory of the Daisō collection—moving from stack to adjoining stack, the first floor of a storehouse to the second, and then one storehouse to the next—then this would suggest that the kana-designated subsets were not located in the storehouses according to an intuitive, *iroha* order. Considering the difficulty that Daisō clerks sometimes encountered when trying to find books, as recounted by Meiji-era patrons like Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遥 (1859-1935), it is possible that confinements of space, exacerbated by the unending expansion of the collection, forced the Daisō to



relocate certain subsets as they grew too large for their designated locations—thus putting some of the subsets out of order. I would offer the possibility that it was not always this way, and that in fact a more logical and consistent system of categorization emerges when we rearrange the subsets listed according to *iroha* order. When we do this, we find that the order of the subsets proceeds with remarkable consistency according to size—from smallest to largest. As detailed in the reconstituted inventory list below, there are two subsets of books in *kohon* 小本 (14-15cm × 10-11cm) format, seven subsets of *chūbon* 中本 (18cm × 13cm), eleven subsets of *hanshibon* 半紙本 (22cm × 15cm), eight subsets of *chokushihon* 直紙本 (44cm × 30cm), followed four more subsets of books in *hanshibon* format. I provide a full list of the subsets below, in *iroha* order, with descriptions of their contents and the number of books they included.

- ほ (643 titles, 2 duplicate copies) *kohon*  
 Books on cosmology, medicine, military history, waka poetry, haikai and kyōka poetry, mae-ku verse capping, kyōshi poetry, senryū, miscellany, shōgi
- へ (605 titles, 15 duplicate copies)  
 Hyōbanki, enpon, rakugo
- と (128 titles, 44 duplicate copies)  
 Sharebon and books about the Yoshiwara
- ち (763 titles, 16 duplicate copies) *chūkeihon*  
 Books on Shintō, Buddhism, cosmology, medicine, waka poetry, kyōka poetry, haikai linked poetry, hokku poems, maeku poems, kyōshi poetry, miscellany, books on cuisine, Hachimojiya books, travelogues, monogatari
- り (558 titles, 248 duplicate copies) *chūkeihon*  
 kibyōshi, kusazōshi, bound volumes
- ぬ (675 titles, 489 duplicate copies)  
 kusazoshi
- る (2,211 titles, 2,381 duplicate copies) *chūkeihon*  
 kusazōshi, serialized works, first installments of *Inaka Genji*
- を (735 titles, 0 duplicate copies) *chūkeihon*  
 novels
- わ (1, 335 titles, 850 duplicate copies) *chūkeihon*  
 ninjōbon
- か (630 titles, 303 duplicate copies) *chūkeihon*

Hizakurige travel fiction

- よ (514 titles, 21 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
Books on Confucianism, Shintō, Buddhism, Daoism, cosmology
- た (523 titles, 21 duplicate copies)  
books on medicine, shingaku, tales of filial piety, military studies, tales of revenge, hand-copied military tales
- れ (511 titles, 8 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
waka poetry, renga poetry, wabun prose, monogatari tales, kyōka and haikai verse, hokku verse
- そ (491 titles, 9 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
tea, flowers, zuihitsu essays, miscellany
- つ (598 titles, 19 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
books on geography, countries of the world, tales of the strange, biographies of eccentrics, didactic tales, gesaku, katagi-mono collections of character vignettes, books on the pleasure quarters, books of humorous anecdotes
- な (573 titles, 677 duplicate copies)  
joruri puppet play scripts
- ら (328 titles, 614 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
true accounts, novels
- う (515 titles, 41 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
picture books
- み (965 titles, 0 duplicate copies) out of order *hanshikei*  
novels
- の (339 titles, 240 duplicate copies) out of order *hanshikei*  
kusazōshi
- や (504 titles, 0 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
Buddhist scriptures, Shinto scriptures, history, genealogical records, records of court pageantry
- ま (848 titles, 12 duplicate copies) *chokushikei*  
Buddhist texts
- け (267 titles, 12 duplicate copies) *chokushikei*  
Daoism, cosmology, almanacs, directional divination, medical books, health and longevity, shingaku, didactic tales, histories of wise women
- ふ (499 titles, 1 duplicate copies) *chokushikei*  
wagaku philology, travel records, diaries, monogatari tales, kyōka and haikai

- verse, renga poetry, kyōbun prose, haibun prose, Tsurezuregusa
- こ (458 titles, 17 duplicate copies) *chokushikei*  
 zuihitsu essays, biographies, books on tea, flowers, swordsmanship, old coins, miscellany
- て (410 titles, 43 duplicate copies) *chokushikei*  
 books on military strategy, accounts of battles, vulgate editions of historical tales, books about foreign countries, tales of revenge
- あ (286 titles, 1 duplicate copies) *chokushikei*  
 enpon erotic books, hachimojiya books, katagi-mono collections of character vignettes, lessons for the pleasure quarters, miscellany
- さ (543 titles, 76 duplicate copies) *chokushikei*  
 records of famous places, illustrated guides to famous places, guides to seasonal and annual observances, illustrated military tales, picture books, schematic books
- き (72 titles, 1 duplicate copy) *chokushikei*  
 miscellaneous hand-copied books
- ゆ (438 titles, 84 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
 military tales, books about Owari domain, stories about Prince Nintoku, collections of anecdotes, genealogical records
- め (367 titles, 23 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
 zuihitsu essays, miscellany, hyōryūki narratives of overseas adventures
- み (405 titles, 79 duplicate copies) *hanshikei*  
 records of judgments by Ooku Echizen, tales of strife in warrior families
- せ (384 titles, 204 duplicate copies)  
 hand-copied books of theatrical dialogues

## Conclusion

In the absence of extant records detailing the acquisition, classification, and circulation of books in the collection of the Daisō lending library, recuperative research must focus on material evidence in the extant books themselves. Here, inventory labels provide us with enough evidence to reconstruct the classificatory subsets of the library, which were determined first according to the size of the book in question and second according to its genre or subject matter. Reorganizing the subsets listed in Mizutani Futō's catalogue according to *iroha* order produces an

intuitive arrangement of the collection with respect to size and genre; however, as the catalogue makes clear, this order was not retained near the end of the firm's operation, perhaps because of the expansion of the collection and uneven growth among subsets. The Daisō used dozens of ex libris stamps to identify their wares and various types of inventory stamps to identify their locations of their books in three curtilage storehouses and two walled storage areas. As close examination of these marks reveals, differences in size, shape, and content enables us to make broad distinctions between periods of acquisition. A future study will take up the problem of how to make finer distinctions between periods of acquisition and circulation with respect to differences in the type and location of ex libris and inventory stamps.

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<sup>i</sup> Shibata Mitsuhiko, *Daisō zōsho mokuroku to kenkyū: Kashihon'ya Ōnoya Sōhachi kyūzōshomoku* (Tokyo: Seishōdō shoten, 1983): 67-70.

<sup>ii</sup> Richard Darnton, "What is the History of Books?" *Daedalus*, Vol. 111, No. 3, Representations and Realities (Summer, 1982), pp. 67-69.