

An Analysis of Medicine and Cosmetics Advertisements in Early Modern Lending Library Books from Nagoya

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This paper examines medicine and cosmetics advertisements found in books that circulated through lending libraries in early modern Nagoya, with a focus on the Daisō lending library. Building upon previous research that establishes the importance of branded medicines and cosmetics to the economic systems of authorship and lending libraries in early modern Edo, this paper considers how the model was adapted in Nagoya. Additionally, it offers the possibility of viewing advertisements as indicators of local literacy, and compares Nagoya advertisements with examples produced in Edo.

Keywords: print culture, media materiality, early modern Japan, Nagoya, lending library, advertisements

Hair dyes, whitening creams, joint pain salves and hemorrhoid ointments were but a few of the cosmetic and medicinal products advertised in the front and back matter of rental books that circulated through the Daisō lending library of Nagoya (1767–1899), the largest purveyor of rental books in early modern Japan. On the surface, these advertisements give evidence of how closely communal reading in the Nagoya market was subtended by marketing discourse, even in the cases of products that, like the Daisō line of peptic pills, had little discernable relevance to the consumption of popular literature. At the same time, they provide important clues for understanding how the Daisō plied side ventures to remain in operation and how it targeted particular genres, authors and works to different constituencies of readers.

This paper introduces the most common varieties of advertisements found in the Daisō's collection, and highlights patterns in their placement. A close examination reveals that the Daisō basically employed the same strategies as Edo publishers to maximize exposure of its product lines—capitalizing, most saliently, on the circulation of serialized *gōkan* to sell its wares to readers. Yet at the same time, we find stark differences in the orthographic content of these ads, with the Daisō handbills containing far fewer kanji and phonetic variants than we find in those produced by Edo booksellers. This register of written language challenges us to think very broadly about the literacy spectrum of the Nagoya rental book market, while also compelling us to explore the applications of Maeda Ai's notion of a “latent readership” (*senzaiteki na dokusha*).

Background

At first glance, the business of renting books may seem unrelated to the retailing of medicines

and cosmetics; but in early modern Nagoya, as in most major print markets of Japan, certain marketing and distribution efficiencies made for a practical marriage between the two industries. For one, the medium of print afforded a burgeoning industry of retail medicine—which, when measured in terms of medicine shops, increased nearly tenfold in the city of Edo between 1687 and 1804—with a powerful tool for informing potential customers about its products. According to print historian Masuda Tajirō, handbills for medicines alone accounted for more than half of all promotional material printed in early modern Japan, far more than for any other retail product.¹ Some of these handbills found their way into the back matter of books that circulated through commercial lending libraries; but increasingly by the late eighteenth century, publishers also began to print full-page advertisements and bind them interfolio. Printed books had been repurposed into marketing tools.

As Edo eclipsed other markets in print production, it also positioned itself strategically within an increasing expansive and multilateral distribution network that traversed land and sea. Japanese book historian Suzuki Toshiyuki notes that books were commonly shipped along with medicines, cosmetics, tobacco, toiletries and other articles, to be retailed together in book shops and lending libraries throughout the country.² When we consider that many so-called lending libraries, or *kashihon'ya*, consisting of porters with trunks on their backs who literally walked door to door hawking their wares, the scope and reach of this distribution network is staggering.

It should come as no surprise, then, that many publishers and booksellers, realizing the potential of their medium to market auxiliary products to a national audience, sought to make a profit in the medicine market themselves. The prospects were so enticing that a number of authors even began to lend their names to certain products, if not also to work closely on production and retail. For years, Santō Kyōden famously marketed his own brand of “Reading Pills” (*dokushogan*), which if the product descriptions are to be believed, had the effects of restoring vitality, sustaining endurance during long journeys, and enhancing sexual performance. Other Edo “glitterati” followed suite, with Kyokutei Bakin, Shikitei Sanba, and Jippensha Ikku also turning handsome profits in the medicine trade—presumably far more than could ever be made in the humble business of writing. One factor that set the stage for this cottage industry of author-branded medicine was the *aiban* system of print production, whereby a consortium of publishers (and increasingly, lending libraries) financed the publication of printed books and shared the rights to retail them in various urban and castle town markets. Besides the obvious marketing and distribution benefits, this also created a system in which readers increasingly came to see authorial personas as both “brand names” and bearers of cultural capital, which could be trusted upon to vouchsafe the efficacy of pills or ointments by virtue of their literary reputations. If the brand name “Santō Kyōden” could guarantee a certain level of literary quality on the print market, why not also on the medicine market? Medical expertise, in other words, hardly appears to have been a serious consideration.

Marketing Medicines and Cosmetics in Nagoya

Some of the medicines just alluded to were available for purchase in the castle town market of Nagoya, primarily through the two publishing houses that associated most closely with booksellers

in Edo—Eirakuya Toshirō and Fūgetsudō Magosuke. However, around the first decade of the nineteenth century, both began purveying in their own brands of medicine, in imitation of their Edo peers. Entering the market somewhat later was the commercial lending library of Onoya Sōhachi (more commonly known as the Daisō, for short), which had operated in the downtown commercial district of Nagoya since 1767. The second proprietor of the firm, Eguchi Seijiro (Onoya Sohachi II) made the decision to parlay the Daisō's reputation as a booklender to sales of medicine after over 150 years in the business. Shop records offer no inkling of the rationale behind the decision, but it is reasonable to assume that profit potential and market competition played a role.

The earliest advertisements for Daisō brand medicinal and cosmetic products, which bear evidence of having been printed in house, began appearing in *gōkan* that circulated around the late Bunsei Period (1818–1830). Within about fifteen years, by the end of the Tempō Period (1830–1844), the Daisō had produced eleven different types of advertisements, promoting a full line of seven unique products. Unlike publishing booksellers, who bound their ads into their printed books interfolio, the Daisō printed small leaflets which were then pasted into the back inner covers (*uramigaeshi*) of its most heavily circulating titles. Through systematic dating of decorative covers that the Daisō fitted their *gōkan* with to protect them from damage during circulation, we can track the use of promotional leaflets over a period of nearly twenty years, ending shortly after the death of Eguchi Seijiro in 1847. This was not, in other words, a short-lived venture.

Daiso Ads for Medicinal and Cosmetic Products

At its height, the Daisō line of medicinal products included four offerings. The two most frequently promoted were ointments branded as “All-Purpose Balm” (*Bannōkō*) and “Finger Liniment” (*Yubi kusuri*). Both were packaged in small seashell cases and sold for twelve copper *mon* per dose, or roughly 190 to 240 yen in today's currency.

Finger Liniment

For fingers and nails. Apply this where you've been pricked with needles, nails, etc., to soothe pain and stop pussing. A wonder cure for finger ailments.

Its remaining offerings included a topical hemostatic medicine, “Blood Stopping Salve” (*Chidome kizu kusuri*) and a painkiller, “Women's Palliative” (*Tōfusan*), which were packaged in pouches and sold for eight copper *mon* per dose, or roughly 130 to 160 yen.

Blood Stopping Salve

Apply to bruises, sprains, stiff shoulders, cuts and scabs, corns, welts, or anywhere you feel weak or lethargic. A wonder cure.

As might be expected, the Daisō's line of three cosmetic products commanded higher prices than its medicines. And as was the case with the two brands of ointment, the cosmetics the firm marketed most aggressively also happened to be its most expensive. The Daisō “Opulent Fragrance” (*Bienkō*), a cleanser that reputedly restored color and luster to one's complexion, sold for twenty-four copper *mon*, or about 380 to 480 yen a pouch.

Opulent Fragrance—Onoya Sohachi, Nagashima 5 chome

Use this cleanser regularly to whiten your complexion and soften your skin. Great for washing away oil and grime. Sweat, pimples, hair, and freckles wash away like magic. Rinse after applying to blemishes to remove scaly shark skin and make your skin soft and fine. To use, place a small dab of ointment in the palm of your hand, dilute with water, and rub onto your face. Rinse after two applications. This medicine restores luster to your skin. Use this regularly, and no matter how much you age, the years will never bring new wrinkles. It is even good for applying to chafed skin between your thighs. 24 mon.

Marketed at the same price was the “Medicinal Cleanser,” a whitening foundation that covered scars, freckles, and other blemishes. Based on similarities in its product description, there is reason to suspect that it may have been a forerunner to the “Opulent Fragrance” just described.

Medicinal Cleanser

It's said that ladies are generally fair in complexion. And yet only a few women are brilliantly white, while there are others who have unseemly, dark skin. Listen to this. The reason is because women are negligent when it comes to their skin. Apply this cleanser to discolored and rough areas on your face, and even ladies with the darkest of complexions will see whiter skin. It removes oil and grime, and cures sweat, pimples, and freckles. It is even good for chafed skin between your thighs.

Often appearing on the same leaflet as the “Medicinal Cleanser” was the slightly less expensive “Hair Dying Oil” (*Kamisome abura*), which sold for sixteen copper *mon*. Even today, one can find traces of this hair dye, oily and russet brown, staining the pages of two or three dozen titles in the Daisō's extant collection.

Hair Dyeing Oil—Onoya Sohachi, Nagashima 5 chome

Apply this oil to white hair, brown hair, or hair otherwise badly discolored and watch as it instantly restores the color to a rich black. A wonder cure.

While it is impossible to speak to the quality of these Daisō products, since so few traces of them still exist, the very fact that the firm continued to promote them for almost twenty years says something about their commitment to the venture, if not also about the level of demand for these products among the Daisō's readers. Surely price had something to with it. Comparative analysis of advertisements included in books printed by the Eirakuya and Fugetusdō reveals that the Daisō tended to underprice its local competitors by four to eight copper *mon* for seemingly similar products. When compared with products advertised in the back matter of books published by Edo booksellers, the difference is marginally greater. Considering that the Daisō enjoyed a reputation for its reasonable lending fees, at least until the Meiji period, it should come as no surprise that its medical and cosmetic products were relatively affordable as well.

Prices Comparative to Rental Fees

In his study of the firm, Asakura Haruhiko claims that the fee for borrowing ten volumes of *kuzazōshi* from the Daisō for a period of ten days ranged between one-half and eight-tenths of a

silver monme, or about 530 to 1060 yen in today's currency. Taken at face value, that would mean that even the most expensive cosmetic products would cost less than the rental fee for the books that bore their advertisements, perhaps even as little as half. However, there is ample reason to be circumspect about this schedule of loan fees, especially during the 1830s and 1840s, when *gōkan* appear to have circulated most heavily among the library's readers. For one, internal evidence suggests that new titles were not bundled into multi-fascicle sets until they after had circulated for a year or more. And the diary of Nagoya physician Hirade Jun'eki, an avid reader who kept detailed records of over 400 books he borrowed from the Daisō throughout the Tempō Period (1830–1844), clearly indicates that new titles could only be borrowed one volume at a time. In other words, it is difficult to provide a firm assessment of the cost of Daisō brand medicines and cosmetic relative to its loan fees.

Placement of Advertisements

The deployment of advertising material in the Daisō rental books, insofar as it can be observed in the extant collection, presents us with two key issues that warrant examination. The first pertains to the types of books in which the handbills were most commonly pasted. Here a broad sampling of every genre in the collection reveals that the handbills appear in only four genres of popular fiction—the *gōkan*, the *ninjobon*, the *yomihon*, and a handful of *jōruri* playscripts. Of these four, they appear with the most regularity in the *gōkan*. Compared with a small sample of only eleven handbills found in three-hundred sixty-three works of *yomihon* (or 3.0% of the extant collection) and thirty-one handbills in four hundred and eighty works of *ninjobon* (6.5%), sixty-seven handbills can be found in the seven-hundred twenty-two works of *gōkan* (9.3%).

The second issue relates to the physical placement of handbills with books. Of the 112 (three in *jōruri*) handbills identified in this survey, 106 are placed in exactly the same way. We often find the back matter in the first volume of multi-volume sets dedicated to ads for cosmetics and medicines. The strategy behind this placement should be obvious—the circulation rate for the first volume was always the highest in any set, meaning that ads posted here stood to receive maximum exposure. Even if a work flopped, failing to sustain the interest of readers beyond the first volume or two, the advertising message would have already been relayed successfully.

Advertisements and Readers

Based on the content and placement of the advertisements just described, it is reasonable to conclude that the Daisō marketed its products primarily to women readers. Moreover, the very presence of this material lends credence to Nagatomo Chiyoji's assertion that women formed the core readership of *gōkan* and *ninjobon* in the Nagoya rental book market. However, one issue that has not yet been raised in previous studies on this subject is how the orthographic content of these advertisements reflects certain assumptions, on the part of the Daisō, about the literacy of its target readership. This is a key issue because it reminds us of the limitations of the implied reader model for theorizing reader reception—at least when confined to the main text. When we situate the main text vis-à-vis the peritextual material of advertisements, we find stark differences in orthographical

complexity—that is to say, in the number and variety of kanji and phonetic script variants (*jibo*). These differences, I argue, should compel us to think of the Daisō readers as consuming books within a very broad spectrum of literacy—from “readers” who enjoyed books primarily for their illustrations and other material effects or else enjoyed listening to stories read in a communal context, to those who could engage with a printed text on a complex level of understanding.

While not a perfect index, the dramatic proliferation of *terakoya* writing schools in Nagoya during the early nineteenth century, the heyday of the *gōkan* and *ninjōbon*’s popularity, can provide us with some basis for assessing advances in literacy and the growth of female readership. Between the Kyōwa (1801–1803) and Bunsei Periods (1818–1830), the number of *terakoya* in Owari domain nearly doubled from around 60 schools to 109. By the Tempō Period (1830–1844), there was another twofold increase to 260, and by the Ansei Period (1854–1860) yet another to 514. During this same sixty-year period, the commoner population of Nagoya is estimated to have grown from about 50,000 to 70,000, meaning that the increase in the number of schools far outpaced population growth.

Children in Nagoya generally entered *terakoya* between the ages of seven and nine, and remained enrolled for an average of three to four years. It is estimated that roughly two in ten students were girls. Depending on the school, the curriculum might have included subjects like mathematics and classical Chinese philology (*kangaku*), but more often than not, the curriculum was confined to basic reading and writing. This was particularly true in all girls schools, where, as Umemura Kayo has argued in her survey of *ōraimono* and *tenarai-hon* writing primers, girls could expect to learn how to write around two-hundred kanji and read between seven hundred and one thousand.

Turning to the Daisō advertisements, we find that among the total of eleven handbills for eight different medicinal and cosmetic products, only 43 different kanji are used. When we narrow our focus to the product descriptions, the number of kanji is reduced to 25. Another indication of simple register of language used in these advertisements is the number of phonetic characters—54, which includes the 47 characters of the iroha syllabary plus seven variants. Given the limited number of kanji and *jibo* in these product descriptions, we can reasonably argue that they were written for readers with a very limited grasp of the written language. Compared with advertisements for medicinal and cosmetic products by the Edo-based publishers of *gōkan* and *ninjōbon*, which include a far greater variety of kanji characters and in some cases are even written in *kanbun*, the Daisō ads are notable for their simplicity of language.

This is not to say that all or even most of the Daisō’s readers struggled with the prose of *gōkan* and *ninjōbon*. Rather, it is to suggest that in pitching its products to the widest possible readership, the Daisō presumed a very low level of literacy in the wording of its ads. This register of language enables us to plot a starting point, I would argue, on a very broad literacy spectrum. In this context, we might recall Maeda Ai’s notion of a “latent readership” (*senzaiteki na dokusha*):

The appeal of the prose narrative form called *gesaku* (playful prose narrative forms) that circulated widely through the book rental outlets during the late Tokugawa era extended beyond the literate class (*shikijisha*) and began to create a new, latent readership (*senzaiteki dokusha*).³

Conclusion

The Daisō presents us with a compelling case study for examining early modern reading practices within a commercialized and communal context, where consumption of literature and auxiliary product lines appear to have been closely intertwined. Based on an ongoing archival survey of nearly 5,000 extant Daisō books, this study has introduced the most common varieties of advertisements found in the Daisō's collection, and described how patterns in the placement of the ads reflect strategies to maximize exposure of its product lines. Moreover, through comparison with similar advertisements placed in books published in Edo, we find differences in diction, orthography and the number of kanji characters and phonetic script variants that seem to indicate a literacy gap between the target readership envisioned by Edo publishers and the demographics of readers who frequented Nagoya lending libraries like the Daisō. Further research will be needed to quantify these differences and investigate the relative levels of literacy between early modern readerships in Edo and Nagoya.

Notes

- 1 Masuda 1981, p. 198.
- 2 Suzuki 2012, p. 101.
- 3 Maeda 1998, p. 42.

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