

Education in the Heian Period: an Emphasis on Calligraphy

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Abstract. In this essay, we discuss the history of calligraphy and handwriting, notable female calligraphers, the value of handwriting in both women's and men's education, and the handwriting learning process.

Key words: Education, culture, calligraphy, handwriting, Heian period, daigakuryo, kana, hiragana.

Introduction

Sho or *tenarai* that means calligraphy, handwriting was an important subject for women's education throughout the Heian period. The researcher wants to examine calligraphy and the history of calligraphy instruction in this piece. This is so that we can examine the true situation of women's calligraphic education in stories, such as *The Tale of Genji*, the masterwork of Japanese literature from that era, if we understand calligraphic education during the Heian period.

Literature Analysis

Research on the history of Japanese calligraphy frequently mentions Heian period calligraphy and handwriting. Yoshizawa Yoshinori's *Japan Calligraphy Essay* (Izumisha, 1943) is the oldest study. Additionally, Shigemi Komatsu, a researcher who fully utilized the techniques of ancient calligraphy and promoted a new field known as "paleography," authored *Perspective: History of Japan Calligraphy* (Chuokoronsha, 1986), which is especially significant. In addition to the aforementioned, the researcher frequently cited studies by Haruna Yoshishige for books *History of Calligraphy in the Heian Period* (Shibunkaku Publishing, 1993), *Studies on Calligraphy in the Heian Period* (Geijitsu shinbunsha, 1999), including *New History of Japan Calligraphy* (Tankosha, 2001).

Overview and findings

Originally, calligraphy referred to a division inside the *Daigakuryo*, an educational institution under the *Ritsuryo* system. *Shohakase*, a member of the *Daigakuryo* staff, taught calligraphy to students. However, there were no students specializing in this field, and the *Shohakase* taught the *Myogyodo* and *Kidendo* students how to write kanji. *Kidendo* taught history with an emphasis on Chinese history, whereas *Myogyodo*'s departments studied and taught Confucianism.

During the Heian period, calligraphy was an indispensable part of daily life and was respected as necessary. Those who are good at writing, that is, those who are called *Nosho*, the master of calligraphy, are mostly men, and there are few women who are known as *Nosho*. *Nosho* means a person who is good at kanji, and Haruna Yoshishige states that people who are good at kana characters were not called *Nosho* [1].

At the beginning of the Heian period, Emperor Saga (786-842), Kukai (774-835) and Tachibana no Hayanari (?-842) were the best *Nosho* and were called the *Sanpitsu*, that means three excellent calligraphers.

Other three excellent *Nosho* Ono no Michikaze (894-966), Fujiwara no Sukemasa (944-998) and Fujiwara no Yukinari (972-1028) were called the *Sanseki*, three great calligraphers, also *Sanken*. Among them, Ono no Michikaze is the first *Nosho*, serving the three emperors Daigo, Suzaku and Murakami.

As a skilled poet and calligrapher, Emperor Saga is thought to have fostered interest in and contributed to the flowering of calligraphy through his passion for Chinese poetry and calligraphy. Kukai purchased numerous well-known handwritings when he arrived in Tang and gave them to Emperor Saga. Interest in Japan's original national culture grew even more after the Kentoshi system—a Japanese envoy to the Tang Dynasty in China—was abolished. As a result, Japanese kana characters, in addition to Chinese characters, gained popularity in calligraphy. This period also saw a shift in the style of Chinese characters from Chinese to Japanese. The *Santai Hakushi Shikan*, *Shorakuri Kankyoshi* of Ono no Michikaze, *Gosagainbon Hakushikan*, *Honnojigire* of Fujiwara no Yukinari, *Kinujigire* and *Ayajigire* attributed to Ono no Michikaze and Fujiwara no Sukemasa, and *Shichitokumai* attributed to Minamoto no Toshifusa are a few examples of the calligraphy handwritings of the Heian period's aristocracy.

During the Heian dynasty, books were given as gifts because calligraphy thrived and handwriting was appreciated. Haruna Yoshishige claims that throughout the Fujiwara period, numerous documents bearing the handwritings of Emperors Saga and Daigo, as well as Ono no Michikaze, Prince Kaneakira, and Fujiwara no Yukinari, were frequently presented as gifts.

Children were taught calligraphy (handwriting) from a young age because it was considered significant in both culture and education. Additionally, gifts were utilized as examples and materials for calligraphy. Gifts of calligraphy (handwriting) would act as models or examples for teaching calligraphy to kids. Books were useful and served as calligraphy models. They were valued as artistic creations as well.

It is believed that the original handwriting of Wang Xizhi was used to learn calligraphy in the early Heian period. However, since it is difficult for anyone to obtain it, it seems that the calligraphy products of *Nosho* calligraphers of the time were used as a model. It is known that the first *Nosho* at that time was Ono no Tsuneda, and that those who studied calligraphy used Tsuneda's handwriting as a model. It is stated that during the Fujiwara period, they often used the handwriting of Japanese style after Ono no Michikaze. The basis of the calligraphy was to look at the model (example) and write by imitation. Skillful handwriting, suitable for the model, both the letters and the draft poems were used as a model. The invention of *kana* characters and the rise of *waka* poetry led to the popularity of *kana* calligraphy. The *kana* calligraphy was the most important thing for women. Whether writing *waka* poems or sending letters, calligraphy was necessary for everyday socializing, and the most important thing in women's education was handwriting.

According to Haruna Yoshishige, the *kana* calligraphy was first modeled around *Ametsuchi* (*) phrases. They were able to memorize every sound because it includes all 48 of the Japanese language's sounds [1]. According to the *Kokin Wakashū*'s *kana* introduction, *Asakayama* and *Naniwadzu* "These two poems serve as the poems' father and mother, and they can also be used as a starting point for handwriting exercises." [6; 19] Since these two poems do not contain all of the sounds of the Japanese language, Haruna Yoshishige notes that they used these *Asakayama* and *Naniwadzu* poems as examples to learn how to write without spaces between characters after practicing calligraphy using *Ametsuchi* words [1]. The following are the two poems:

安積山かげさへ見ゆる山の井の浅くは人を思もふものかは

難波津に咲くや木の花冬こもり今は春べと咲くや木の花 [6;19-20]

According to Yoshizawa Yoshinori, there were two kinds of models and two phases to the learning of *kana* handwriting. He says:

かやうに集められた手本は、その目的から大別して二種になる、当時の習字も今日と同じく二段に為されてゐたからである。

一、国語を写すに必要な仮名の字形と運筆とを一字々に習得すること、

二、さて歌を写し文を草するための文字のつづけざまを習得すること、

従つて手本にも二種あつて、一の目的に應ずるには、国語を写すに必要な仮名の全部を包含してゐなければならぬ筈で、是には天地の詞いろは歌などがあり、二の目的に應ずるには、難波津浅香山の歌古今集萬葉集朗詠集等があつたのである[4].

According to Yoshizawa Yoshinori, *Iroha Uta* (**), which has been cited as an example of handwriting, was established at a later period. According to Yoshizawa Yoshinori, who talks about the process of learning *kana* calligraphy, students start with *katakana* characters and then move on to the first step of writing *hiragana* characters. After finishing *hiragana*, they practice writing the second step of writing without spaces between characters. If they are able to master these two styles of handwriting, they will have finished all the steps involved in learning *kana* calligraphy [4].

The following are listed by Haruna Yoshishige as female *Nosho* calligraphers: Princess Uchiko was a poet and the daughter of Emperor Saga; Princess Ito, daughter of Emperor Kammu; Fujiwara no Koshi, woman of Emperor Seiwa; Ise, female poet of *Sanju Rokkasen* (thirty-six great poets); Princess Kinshi, daughter of Emperor Daigo; Sei Shonagon and Murasaki Shikibu; daughter of Fujiwara no Sukemasa; Fujiwara no Teishi (Sadako), Fujiwara no Shoshi (Akiko), Fujiwara no Ishi (Takeko); Sanno-kimi, daughter of Fujiwara no Yukinari, daughter of Fujiwara no Yukinari (daughter who married Minamoto no Akimoto); Fujiwara no Seishi (Nariko); Fujiwara no Kanshi; Minamoto no Reishi; Fujiwara no Michiko; Minamoto no Shishi; Kenreimonin; Taira Kiyomori's eighth daughter is mentioned. Most of the female *Nosho* calligraphers are the Imperial princesses, the daughters of the Fujiwara clan and Nyobo, women of the court. The princesses were probably required to be highly educated in accordance with their status, and the Fujiwara clan of the *Sekkan-ke*—line of regents and advisers—also placed importance on the education and culture of their daughters. Seishonagon and Murasaki Shikibu and other women of the court were also required to have specialized knowledge, and in some cases they were entrusted with the work of copying within the imperial court, so they must have acquired sufficient knowledge of calligraphy. It can be assumed that the daughters of Sukemasa and Yukinari were taught by their father, and naturally refined their calligraphy culture by appreciating their father's handwriting [1].

According to Komatsu Shigemi, the majority of the first female calligraphy handwriting in history dated from the early modern age, and the women *Nosho* named above and their handwriting are only found in literature. In actuality, no handwriting remains. According to Komatsu Shigemi, "women do not write their own names as givers, as well as the date or the name of the other party, the receiver," which is one of the reasons why so few women's handwritings have survived [3].

We talked about how calligraphy instruction began with *katakana* and progressed to *hiragana*. There were two phases to the *hiragana* practice: the first involved learning the character shapes and writing style, and the second involved learning how to write without spaces between characters. Women appear to have mastered the use of *otokode* (men's hands), which is character equivalent to *kaisho* (square or printed) and *gyosho* (semicursive) the Chinese writing styles .

Conclusion

This study has so far looked at calligraphy, *kana* culture, and calligraphy instruction throughout the Heian period. In addition to the emergence of new national cultures like *kana*, a new character, and *waka* poetry, this was the period that saw the creation of international literature like *The Tale of Genji*. Because handwriting conveys personality and writing is essential in both private and daily life, the Heian period's nobles placed a high priority on calligraphy instruction from an early age. It is clear from *The Tale of Genji*, which was written at the time, that calligraphy and handwriting were symbolic of the personality, education, beauty, and breeding of the calligrapher or letter sender. I'll talk about

the importance of calligraphy and handwriting in women's education in Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* in a different post.

* あめ (天)、つち (地)、ほし (星)、そら (空)、やま (山)、かは (河)、みね (峯)、たに (谷)、くも (雲)、きり (霧)、むろ (室)、こけ (苔)、ひと (人)、いぬ (犬)、うえ (上)、すゑ (末)、ゆわ (流黄)、さる (猿)、おふせよ (生ふせよ)、えのえを (榎の枝を)、なれゐて (馴れ居て)。

** 色は匂へど散りぬるを

わが世たれぞ常ならむ

有為の奥山けふこえて

浅き夢みじ酔ひもせず

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