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Nara Ehon Illustrated Books

Introduction to a Genre

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A presentation of the genre of illustrated books and scrolls from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, using examples from the work of Isome Tsuna and discussion of the iconography of Mount Penglai and of the Paradise Bird.

Outline:

- Who's afraid of *nara ehon*?
- Content
- Formats
- Chronology
- Study Case 1: Isome Tsuna, a late 17th c. female painter
- Study Case 2: the auspiciousness of Mount Penglai
- Connections to other genres: the iconography of the Paradise Bird

Illustrated manuscript stitched books (*fukurotoji*) and scrolls produced from end of 16th c. to beginning of 18th c.

Aesthetics derived from the *yamato-e* style of the Tosa school, but with simplified elements and a focus on character interaction, due to the interrelationship with the text.

The term *nara ehon* was coined in 1909 due to stylistical similarities with images made by monks in Nara. **But** almost certainly made in Kyoto.

Content: *otogi zōshi* (companion tales), *monogatari* (classical court tales), medieval war tales, Noh theater plays, kowakamai dance librettos, Buddhist sermons.

Formats:

<i>Ōbon</i> (large size upright)	28 cm high, 20 cm wide
<i>Hanshibon</i> or <i>chubon</i> (medium size upright)	23.5 cm high, 16.5 cm wide
<i>Yokohon</i> (oblong)	16 cm high, 22 cm wide

Chronology:

I Dawn period – up to Tenshō era (up to 1595)

II Dazzling period – Keichō era (1595-1625)

III Production period - Kan'ei era (1625-1655)

IV Apex period – Kanbun era (1655 – 1685)

V Terminal period – Genroku era (1685 – 1715)

VI Offspring period – Kyōhō era onward (1715 -)

Function: *Nara ehon* were often produced and purchased for auspicious occasions, they functioned as dowry items and as New Year's gifts.

Connections to other genres: *Nara ehon* is an eclectic genre, its iconography and subject matter is shared with contemporaneous genres such as *tanrokubon*, *fuzoku-ga* (genre scenes), *ukiyo zōshi* (tales of the floating world), *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world).

Questions received:

- Were the calligrapher and the illustrator separate?
- Do images from nara-ehon appear on 3D objects? Ceramics, lacquer
- Do single sheet ukiyo-e prints appear only in Edo? What about Kyoto? The ukiyo-e prints seem more dynamic.
- If not monks in Nara, then who made them? Machi-eshi in Kyoto – economic historians looked at the location.
- More on Isome Tsuna? How come we know her name and story?
- Would the nara ehon be displayed in the home? Yes, in the *tokonoma*, but we don't know exactly how they were used.