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## Japanese Agriculture



No. 6

## *The Japanese Wax Tree & Its Products*

1. OKURA, Nagatsune. *Nokaeki* [or] *Noka eki* [For the Farmer's Benefit]. Numerous woodcut illus. in the text. 24; 27; 23 folding leaves. Three vols. 8vo, orig. patterned wrappers (cover of Vol. II a little stained), orig. block-printed title labels on upper covers, new stitching. Osaka, Kyoto, & Edo: Prefaces & Afterword dated 1802.

[with]:

- . *Nokaeki kohen* [Sequel to For the Farmer's Benefit]. Numerous woodcut illus. in the text. 30; 35 folding leaves. Two vols. 8vo, orig. patterned wrappers (bindings a little soiled), orig. block-printed title labels on upper covers, new stitching. Osaka, Kyoto, & Edo: Prefaces dated 1810 & Afterword dated 1802.

[with]:

- . *Nokaeki zokuhon* [A Second Sequel to For the Farmer's Benefit]. Numerous woodcut illus. in the text. 28; 25 folding leaves. Two vols. 8vo, orig. patterned wrappers, orig. block-printed title labels on upper covers, new stitching. Osaka & other cities: Preface dated 1818, colophon dated 1854. \$8500.00

First edition and a complete set of the author's first book. Okura (1768-1856?), was one of the three most eminent agriculturalists of the Edo period. A reformer, he wrote more than twenty books on all aspects of agricultural improvement and technology; they were amongst the best of their period in range and clarity of explanation of the new methods. Okura was devoted to the development of farm production centered around the three aspects of technological improvement, cultivation of commercial products, and the processing of farm products.

This work is devoted to the cultivation and products of the Japanese wax tree (*Toxicodendron succedaneum*), a plant from which is produced lacquer, a traditional candle wax that had the great advantage of being resistant to wind and producing little soot, and a pomade for hair. This plant was a subject that interested Okura his entire professional life.

The numerous and quite attractive woodcut illustrations depict different varieties of the plant, the cultivation of the plant, farmers tending the grown trees in beautiful landscapes, the tree in various seasons, training and pruning techniques, grafting methods, harvesting the fruits of the tree, rendering the oil, the many steps in processing the oil, pricing of the various products, packing them for transportation, marketing ("bringing it to Osaka is best"), sample letters for negotiations and contracts, images of merchants buying from the farmers, storefronts of pomade and candle shops, etc.

The wrappers of all the volumes are very attractively embossed with images of the leaves of the wax tree.

A fine set and very rare when complete.

• There is a most wonderful YouTube program on the making of traditional Japanese candles using the wax from this plant at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aU\\_l8gZr3I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aU_l8gZr3I).

## *Locust Prevention & Drying Rice*

2. OKURA, Nagatsune. [From the title-page & label:] *Hokaroku* [List of Ways to Increase the Farmers' Earnings]; [from the "pillar":] *Nokaeki* [For the Farmers' Benefit]. Four full-page woodcut illus. & two woodcuts in the text. 26 folding leaves. 8vo, orig. patterned wrappers,

orig. block-printed title label on upper cover, new stitching. Osaka: Aiwaen, 1810.

\$4500.00

First edition and rare; we find no copy of this first edition in WorldCat. Okura (1768-1856?), was one of the three most eminent agronomists of the Edo period. A reformer and advisor to several *daimyo*, he wrote more than 20 books on all aspects of agricultural improvement and technology; they were amongst the best of their period in range and clarity of explanation of the new methods. Okura was devoted to the development of farm production centered around the three aspects of technological improvement, cultivation of commercial products, and the processing of farm products.

The first part of this book is concerned with the problem of controlling locust swarms, which caused extensive damage to crops. Okura recommends using whale oil as a pesticide. The second describes improved methods of drying bundles of rice before threshing.

The woodcuts are most appealing. The first full-page woodcut depicts the celebration following the departure of the locusts. One of the text illustrations shows the tools used to spread whale oil over the rice fields, with a full-page picture showing the farmers distributing the oil in the fields. Two of the other full-page illustrations depict various racks to hold the bundles of rice for drying.

A very nice copy. Minor worming.

### *Cotton: A Major Cash Crop*

3. OKURA, Nagatsune. *Menpo yomu [The Essentials of Cotton Cultivation]*. Many full-page & double woodcut illus. 33; 33 pp. Two vols. 8vo, orig. pale blue wrappers (rubbed, lower wrapper of first vol. rather wormed), later title labels in manuscript on upper covers, new stitching. Edo & Osaka: Chojiya hebei et al., colophon dated 1833. \$7500.00

First edition and very rare; WorldCat does not list a copy. Okura (1768-1856?), was one of the three most eminent agriculturalists of the Edo period. A reformer, he wrote more than twenty books on all aspects of agricultural improvement and technology; they were among the best of their period for range and clarity of explaining the new methods.

By the end of the 17th century, cotton had become a major cash crop in Japan, far more profitable than rice, as it had become the standard fabric for commoners. Okura wrote this work to increase the revenue of farmers by instructing them how to grow and process the cotton crop more efficiently.

In the first volume, Okura describes in great detail the cotton plant and its varieties, where it is cultivated best, how to plant the seeds, and methods of fertilization of the soil and harvesting. The fine woodcuts — executed by the well-known artists Akatsuki no Kanenari and Settei Hasegawa — depict the plant and its parts including microscopic views of the flowers and fruits, seed selection, preparing the fields and planting, enriching the soil, tools, and tending the fields.

In Vol. II, Okura describes the regions where cotton is best grown, the types of cotton best used for certain products, and how to harvest. He provides many statistics about cotton production throughout Japan. The woodcuts in this volume depict the harvested crop being graded, landscapes of various cotton fields near Nara, preparation of the fields, etc. One of the woodcuts depicts a man at a spinning wheel and another shows bales of cotton being traded by wholesalers at Osaka.

Very good copy. Some minor worming and small faint dampstain at foot of Vol. I.

• For Akatsuki no Kanenari, see Brown, *Block Printing & Book Illustration in Japan*, p. 79, and Hillier, *The Art of the Japanese Book*, p. 861.

## *A Summary of His Life's Work*

4. OKURA, Nagatsune. *Koeki kokusanko* [Essay on Furthering the Nation's Industries]. Many full-page & double woodcut illus. Eight vols. 8vo, orig. blue patterned wrappers (somewhat discolored), orig. block-printed title labels on upper covers, new stitching. Osaka, Kyoto, Edo: Kawachiya Mohei et al., 1859. \$7500.00

First edition of a very scarce book, completed in 1844 but published 15 years later. This work is a summary of the author's agricultural and technological writings over a 55-year period. Okura (1768-1856?), was one of the three most eminent agriculturalists of the Edo period. A reformer, he wrote more than 20 books on all aspects of agricultural improvement and technology; they were among the best of their period for range and clarity of explaining the new methods.

"Okura's writings emphasized ways to make farming more efficient and productive: timely cultivation, better seeds, better equipment, supplementary crops, and the care of and culture of silkworms."—Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, p. 209. In this work, Okura discusses improved methods of papermaking, seed storage, sugar production, making beeswax and honey, growing cotton and producing textiles, making starch from fiddle ferns, dyeing, oil production from seeds, management of orchards, growing tea leaves, sericulture, rice production, harvesting seaweed, manufacturing soy sauce, producing *igusa* to make tatami mats, jute production, etc., etc. There is a significant section on treating forests as a crop (especially concentrating on growing Japanese cypress and pine trees).

Okura strongly encouraged the fiefdom lords to educate and encourage their local farmers to choose the right crops, appropriate for the region, thereby increasing the fiefdoms' wealth. The author also discusses the market for certain crops and products and how to maximize profits.

This work is also richly illustrated with numerous woodcuts of improved agricultural and forestry techniques, methods of transportation, agricultural tools, footwear appropriate for working in wet fields, marketplaces in Osaka, papermaking (with a list of the varieties and qualities of papers), the manufacturing of bitter fermented persimmon juice, which served as an insect repellant (oftentimes used on book covers) and a waterproofing agent, rendering of rape-seed oil, making of soy sauce, *kuzu* starch, cotton growing, a cotton warehouse, complex weaving machines, etc., etc.

In fine condition. Vols. I and VI have unimportant marginal worming. Vol. III has minor worming in the gutter. The fourth volume has worming touching the text of six leaves. Vol. VII has minor marginal dampstaining.

## *"Mizuho no kuni"; "The Country of Lush Ears of Rice"*

5. RICE CULTIVATION THROUGH THE FOUR SEASONS: Two Scrolls. Two fine & luxuriously painted scrolls (260 x 4900 mm.; 260 x 4930 mm.) on mica paper, gold-flaked on verso, with gold endpapers at each end of both scrolls, endpapers backed with orig. silk brocade at beginning of each scroll. [Japan: early mid-Edo]. \$35,000.00

The theme of the four seasons of rice cultivation has had an extensive presence within Japanese art and literature. These two luxury festive scrolls beautifully depict the year-long

cycle of rice growing in Japan, along with the ancillary activities that took place during the year in the countryside, including falconry, growing vegetables and fruits, seasonal festivals, ways of relaxation, and the annual tribute of rice to the fiefdom lord. The activities shown on these scrolls have much in common with Brueghel paintings, and vividly depict country life.

We learn from the labels and handwriting on the original box protecting these two scrolls that they were once owned by two prominent women, members of the famous Nabeshima family. The first owner was Teiju in (1699-1752), wife of Muneshige Nabeshima (1687-1755), fifth lord of the Hizen Kashima han (Hizen Kashima fiefdom). The later owner was Tokusei in (or Kashioka, 1798-1877), widow of Naonori Nabeshima (1793-1826), ninth lord of the same fiefdom. Tokusei in was particularly interested in the development of agriculture of the fiefdom and invented the form of brocading known as *Saga nishiki*. An educated woman, she was also a book collector, and her library is now kept intact in the Yutoku Inari Shrine in Kashima City in Saga Prefecture. Written on one of the old labels on the box is: "Shiki no kosaku" ("Rice Cultivation through the Four Seasons").

This type of scroll was oftentimes produced as part of a wealthy bride's dowry as a symbol of a good harvest and therefore good fortune to the new couple. Another label on the original box states (in trans.): "scroll of images of our territory."

The scrolls are very richly painted with copious clouds of gold flakes at top and bottom throughout. On both scrolls, the actual images of the ground and background have gold-heightened effects (*kinsunago* or "golden sand") or have been painted with gold. The folds and borders of the figures' clothes are heightened with gold and silver, giving extra nuance. The coloring and detail of each person's face and clothing is quite refined and subtle, with very delicate and highly detailed tiny brush strokes. We also note that the crowns of the trees have been carefully painted to depict every individual leaf. Clearly, the artist was highly accomplished and went to great lengths to create these scrolls.



SCROLL ONE: The first scroll covers all aspects of spring and summer activities. The first scene is clearly early spring, with the plum trees in blossom. The farmers are preparing the unhulled grains of "seed rice" from last year's harvest to germinate in preparation for planting this year's crop. Everyone, from the very young to old, is participating. Many animals, including horses and cows, are in evidence. The next scene shows farmers "waking up" the dry paddies by tilling the soil. The following scene, later in the spring, with cherry blossoms in full bloom, shows the farmers removing the weeds from the dry field and, in an adjacent flooded paddy, planting the rice seeds in the now-prepared seed beds. In the magnificent landscape shown behind, we see a waterfall, demonstrating the freshness of the water soon to flood the fields. Next, we see the farmers planting the seedlings in another paddy, now flooded. The farmers are supported by a band of musicians, who are standing in the adjacent paddy, celebrating the all-important transplantation ritual.

During the summer, water must be continually added to the fields. In the next, extended scene, we see a farmer using a hand-cranked hydraulic device to lift water to the paddies and other farmers tending and weeding the fields during a wind-driven rainstorm.

The way the artist subtly depicts the rain reveals his great skills.

The following scene shows a number of farmers and locals celebrating the summer growing period by dancing and playing musical instruments in front of a shrine. They have offered *mochi* to the shrine, praying for rain and hoping for a good harvest.

The next several scenes show the farmers growing and harvesting vegetables and beans, and picking fruit from large orchards. We see a samurai passing through with his entourage, en route to visit the fiefdom lords.



SCROLL TWO: The second scroll begins by showing more of country life. Farmers are shown delivering vegetables, and a group of samurai are engaged in falconry, accompanied by a considerable entourage. Geese, attracted by the now harvested fields, fly by, clearly intended as the prey of the falcons. There are several farmers fishing by the river, and another group is resting after the day's work, drinking water. We can sense they are all waiting for the crucial rice harvest.

Now the autumnal harvest season arrives, with a wonderful and complex scene of farmers cutting the rice stalks in the drained fields with sickles. The gathered stalks are bundled into tight sheaves and hung upside-down to dry. Now we see the dried sheaves loaded onto boats for transport. The now-empty paddies are filled with birds picking at the remaining rice kernels. We also see two fishermen catching fish in the river.

In the next scene, the sheaves are stacked before being transported by horse, human, and oxen to another area where the sheaves are further dried. In the following scene, quite complex, we see the rice stalks being processed to separate the rice grains from the shells and then dehusked. The next scene shows the grains of rice laid out on mats to dry. Samurai and farmers are having their own separate picnics, celebrating the harvest. We also see a blind musician being escorted by two friends, a fish monger, and a firewood merchant going to the celebration shown next.

The next scene depicts an elaborate harvest festival, with farmers proceeding to a shrine to give thanks. They are observed by many spectators. The maple trees have turned color to brilliant reds and oranges. Finally, we see farmers carrying their share of taxable rice to the warehouse, where they will present the rice to the heads of the village, who are recording the farmers' annual tributes in a ledger book. Many rice bales are in evidence.

In fine and fresh condition. There is a minor loss of image at the end of the second scroll where two sheets of paper are joined. Occasional minor worming and discoloration.

### *Large Paper Set*

6. SO, Senshun et al., compilers & eds. *Seikei zusetsu* [An Illustrated Book of Agricultural Things]. 33 double-page & 181 full-page woodcuts, of which 122 are splendidly block-printed in color. 30 vols. Large 8vo, orig. yellow wrappers (wrappers wormed & repaired), Vols. 1-20 embossed with a wood-grain pattern, Vols. 21-30 use a different pattern, orig. block-printed title labels on upper covers, new stitching. From the colophon in Vol. 30 (in trans.): "Woodblocks owned by the Kagoshima fiefdom and distributed by Aiya Kyubei &

Iyoya Zenbei in Osaka," Preface in Vol. I dated "1804."

\$95,000.00

First edition of this great agricultural and botanical work which is wonderfully illustrated; it is an encyclopedic survey of all the agricultural products and practices of Japan. It is accompanied by a splendid series of woodcut illustrations, many of which are finely color-printed. Our set of the first 20 volumes is part of the large-paper edition (272 x 188 mm.); whereas the regular-paper copies are 266 x 184 mm. in size. There were no large-paper copies of Vols. 21-30.

This book is today a valuable repository of traditional Japanese knowledge of crops, including vegetables, herbs, and trees; agricultural practices; and food-processing methods. The authors focus on the properties and characteristics of crops, their utility for humans, and the best systems to cultivate them. Less than half of the crop species described in this work are still grown in substantial quantities as commercial products in Japan. Much of our description is based on the remarkable article (they approach this book in such a fascinating way) by Shantonu Abe Chatterjee & Tinde van Andel, "Lost Grains and Forgotten Vegetables from Japan: the Seikei Zusetsu Agricultural Catalog (1793–1804)" in *Economic Botany*, Vol. 73 (2019), pp. 375-89, and Federico Marcon's *The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan* (University of Chicago), pp. 285-90.



This encyclopedia of agriculture was commissioned in 1793 by Shigehide Shimazu (1745-1833), the highly cultured ruler of the Satsuma domain in southern Japan. The purpose of the work was to provide a complete source of information for improving agricultural production in the region by expansion, diversification, and maximization using improved agricultural methods. For the preparation of the book, Shimazu recruited the doctor and botanist Senshun So (1758-1834), the nativist scholar Kunihashira Shirao (1762-1821), the Confucian scholar Tomoaki Mukai, and the Rangaku scholar Monjuro Hori to

gather and edit the field notes Shimazu had made over the years. The works of Dodoens and Kaempfer were also consulted. The illustration blocks were carved by Doryu Yoshiyuki Taniyama (d. 1811).

The splendid illustrations show a large number of crop varieties, planting and harvesting methods, irrigation techniques, flood controls, farm tools, pest controls, agricultural ceremonies, and festivals.

One hundred volumes were planned, but only 30 were printed, as the woodblocks for the remaining unpublished volumes were destroyed in fires in 1806 and 1829. The first 14 volumes are devoted to agricultural matters in general, with descriptions of land use practices, agricultural tools, food preparations, financial transactions, market places, and ceremonies. Vols. 15-20 deal with grains of all types. The remaining volumes are concerned with vegetables of every sort.

There are three issues of this work. The most basic sets did not have color-printing; the plates remained in black and white (see the University of Michigan copy). Our set is the "superior" issue, which has the plates in Vols. 1-20 splendidly block-printed with color while Vols. 21-30 contain uncolored plates. There were a very few "luxury" sets (*saishiki tokusei bon*; specially made colored book [or] edition) of Vols. 21-30, which have been hand-colored for presentation to aristocrats and fiefdom lords. Von Siebold's copy at the University of Leiden is such as example; it was probably presented to him by Hoshū Katsuragawa (1736-1809), a prominent *rangaku* scholar who was part of the team that produced the *Kaitai shinsho*.

The coloring of the plates in the first 20 volumes is fine and delicate, demonstrating all of the most sophisticated methods used in Japan: graduated coloration, metallic colors including gold and silver, multiple layering of colors through numerous runs through the press, etc. It is important to note that there were regular copies with all the illustrations printed entirely in black and white.

Remarkably, many of the summaries and plant names have been translated into Dutch using *katakana*.

A small-paper copy of this work, but colored like ours, was present in the Donald and Mary Hyde collection and was sold in 1988 for \$44,000.

In fine and fresh condition, with the coloring of the plates bright and fresh. Preserved in three *chitsu*. Our set has some worming, very expertly repaired in each volume, touching some text and images, but we do not find it disturbing at all.