

Astronomy in Edo Period

江戸時代の天文学

■Purpose of Exhibition

Under the national isolation policy of Edo era, Yoshimune TOKUGAWA, the eighth Shogun, wanted to make an accurate calendar based on Western astronomy, and loosened the restriction on foreign book imports. As a result, a variety of science books were brought to Japan through the Dutch trading post in Dejima. People were amazed and greatly stimulated by the advanced scientific knowledge of the West. Textbooks for the general public were also published, and Western science became widespread among ordinary people as well. Even the novel and unusual Western view of the Universe was accepted without any hesitation.

This exhibit introduces how modern astronomy has taken root in Japan, through books, hanging scrolls, and telescopes of the Edo period.



■Additional Knowledge

[Hanging Scrolls of Celestial Drawing Handed Down in the Tayasu Tokugawa Family] (Replica)

These are a set of three scrolls painted on silk in ink and colors: "Chikyunai Suikamyaku no Zu," "Taiin no Zu" and "Taiyou no Zu." It is said that they were handed down to the Tayasu Tokugawa family, established by Munetake TOKUGAWA, the second son of the eighth Shogun Yoshimune TOKUGAWA. All the objects depicted are remarkably similar to copperplate illustrations in "Mundus Subterraneus" (Athanasius Kircher, first published in Latin, Amsterdam, 1665; in Dutch, 1682); so, it is believed that a professional limner precisely reproduced those pictures, probably of the Dutch version imported during the Edo period.

Shiba Kokan and Naka Isaburo also left copperplate copies of those illustrations, but according to the research by Ms. KATSUMORI Noriko, Curator of Kobe City Museum, this heirloom of Tayasu family is more precise and detailed than those copies; she has pointed out that the extremely thin lines and dots of the original copperplate print are transcribed with almost complete accuracy. Latin characters as well. Although the author and the year of creation are unknown, it is probably the work of a leading painter.

This triad of three hanging scrolls was formerly owned by the late Mr. YOKOYAMA Shigeru, a scholar of Japanese literature known as a distinguished collector of old and rare books and documents, and around 1980, passed along to the late Mr. YAMADA Tatsuo, who lived in Inuyama City, Aichi Prefecture. Replicas are on display to preserve the original works: Celestial drawings are duplicated, and newly mounted on hanging scrolls.

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