

THE JAPAN MAGAZINE

**ADVERTISING
IN JAPAN**

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BEFORE the introduction of the printing press into Japan advertising was confined to the ordinary display of articles for sale, the setting up of signboards, the carrying of a banner about the street, the use of showcases, and writing on curtains at shop doors. After printing came into use commercial advertisements began to appear in the newspapers just as in western countries, as well as by sending around circulars or announcements, the elaboration of shop windows and by electric signs.

The earliest printing in Japan was by wooden types, and was introduced by Buddhism. The oldest example of the early printer's art now extant in this country is a scrap of ancient paper about two inches wide called "Dharani," which was evidently printed from a wooden block after the manner of the ordinary woodcut. It had been kept under seal in the Tower of a Million books of scripture for many centuries, the leaf having been distributed by order of the Emperess Koken to various temples to be kept in safe custody for all time, as an expiatory offering. This relic dates from the year 1430. After that time many Buddhist scriptures were printed in the same manner. When the use of movable type was inaugurated printing in colours was also made possible, and colored prints were used in advertising. Most of the advertising, however, was from woodcuts, giving the engraver's art an opportunity for practice.

In March, 1864, the first newspaper was published, by one Ginko Kishida, and the field for press advertising was opened to commerce. The influence of western customs was powerful in this direction.

The earliest centers of advertisement in old Japan were the market places. To the people of ancient times the products of the soil were all important. Under the Emperor Sujin in the 12th century markets were established in various centers, and ships were ordered to engage in carrying agricultural products to these centers along the coast, and some ships even brought articles for sale abroad. There was considerable activity in exchange of goods at these market places. In order to attract notice to these possibilities various forms of advertisement were used. In many cases it was bartering more than buying or selling.

Of course the use of signboards in advertising is as old as commerce; more often than not pictures of the chief articles for sale were painted on the sign; and later words were used as well. To distinguish genuine articles from mere imitations the makers of excellent goods began to print or engrave their names on the articles for sale. Sometimes articles for sale were attached to the signboards of the shops. Some merchants adopted the method of having some one carry



1. PAINTING OF ANCIENT MARKET IN JAPAN FOR ADVERTISING GOODS
IN FIFTEEN CENTURY



2. FLOWER SELLERS
3. MEDICINE BAG ADVERTISEMENT
4. FAN ADVERTISEMENT



6. FLY LEAF ADVERTISEMENTS INSERTED IN BOOKS IN EIGHTEEN CENTURY 5. NOREN OR SHOP CURTAIN ADVERTISEMENT

around signs advertising their goods. Some of these were colporteurs of Buddhist scriptures. It is an ancient European custom for ships, on arriving from abroad with a cargo of goods for sale, to send criers around the city calling attention to the sale of goods on the ship. In Japan a similar method was introduced.

Very early in the development of trade in Japan the custom of showing what was in the shop by keeping a wide open front was adopted ; and even today the passerby can look into a Japanese shop without actually going inside, and he can see just what the shop has for sale. Perhaps the very earliest form of shop was the bazaar, or street fair, which still exists in Japan, pedestrians being able to see all the goods as they pass along. Some shops adopted the custom of making their goods in public view, so as to attract attention from the public. Shops that put up screens or curtains to keep the dust off their goods, used to write on them advertisements. Advertising on shop curtains reached a high state of development and art during the Tokugawa period, merchants vying with each other in sumptuousness of design.

The custom of going out to seek customers also reached great development in the Tokugawa era, almost every sort of merchant resorting to it. Runners in gay liveries went about the streets calling attention to the business of their masters. In their hands they had two pieces of wood which they clapped together at intervals to attract attention, when they informed all who would deign to listen that their shops sold certain valuable goods. Some of them carried banners with devices to the same effect, and these reached great development as typography came into use. For the same reason the use of handbills began to be used in advertising, and continue even to this day. The dry goods stores had two great days in each year, in spring and autumn to like American bargain day or opening sale; and circulars were issued announcing these days. Literary men and skilled artists were often asked to

compose the sentences to be printed on these trade announcements. Some of the greatest novelists and artists of the day were not above making an extra penny in this way. The pictorial artist also was utilized in painting signboards.

The study of signboards in Japan would in itself make an interesting subject, as the variety is infinite, and in many cases unique as compared with those in western countries. Every merchant tries to display some special talent in the invention of a sign to suit his ideas of his trade. The most common, of course, are those depicting the article for sale; and so as one passes along the street of a Japanese city the eye is constantly attracted to footwear, headwear, toilet articles, tobacco, stationery and musical instruments, to say nothing of a thousand other things. Some things are literally depicted that would never find public representation in occidental shop signs. But the Japanese have no false modesty. Nature is Nature, and nature's necessities are nothing to be ashamed of. In matters of daily necessity they call a spade a spade, and so paint it. Many of the shop signs are merely banners with the appropriate devices painted on them. Some signs are a puzzle to the uninitiated but every Japanese understands them, such as those for pawnbrokers, midwives and bath houses.

As time went on and the development of printing attained considerable progress advertisements began to appear not only in newspapers but also on the margins of books and fly leaves. Many novelists and artists, in the Tokugawa era, even, admitted advertisements in their literary works, and sometimes published with a special view to obtaining advertisements. The craze for coloured prints in that day lent impetus to their use in advertising. From those days to the modern very elaborate system of press advertising in Japan seems a long distance, but the spirit is the same. Japan now has the same roller presses as are to be seen in her countries and her newspapers carry even greater advertising space than western papers. There are some 170 great printing establishments, and the aggregate columns of advertising annually amount to 87,994,831. In magazines too there is extensive advertising, especially in trade magazines. Some companies issue a trade journal of their own, setting forth their merits, as, for instance the *Mitsukoshi Times* issued by the famous department store of that name.

With the introduction of plate glass windows the elaboration of window advertising in Japan was marked. The dressing of shop windows is now the same art in this country that it is in the West. Some of the window displays are very striking and unique, especially in cherry blossom time and at the New Year. The Mitsukoshi department store and the Shirokiya establishment were the leaders in this art of having great plate glass fronts for goods display.

The use of electric signs for advertising is fast increasing too in this country, greatly facilitating display at night. The first use of electricity for advertisement was when the Murai Company of Osaka placed a big searchlight on its shop in 1901, and soon electricity came into use on the outlines of shop structures. Some of the electric signs are very imposing, such as the rising sun flag on the top of the Electric Company of Kyoto, 65 feet above the street, in which 180 bulbs are used.