

Creation of metallic movable types of Japanese KANJI/KANA by the Jesuits

Jesuit Mission Press in Japan (late 16th to the early 17th centuries) published books in Latin,

Jun Shirai

Shinshu University
jshira@shinshu-u.ac.jp

Masayuki Toyoshima

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
mtoyo@joao-roiz.jp

Japanese and Portuguese in Japan using mostly metallic, but in some exceptional cases wooden, movable types. The metallic movable types were punched, casted, and composed in a western way. However, the naive assumption that one matrix produced several movable types does not seem to hold here: according to our database of all the typefaces of Japanese KANJI/KANA of the Jesuit Mission Press, typefaces have minute variations that are not supposed to be produced by one metal matrix, but several, perhaps of much erosive materials, such as clay or sand. Creating a set of movable types of KANJI/KANA which is considerably (more than ten times) larger than the ordinary Latin alphabet, should have called for a different technical approach, which is closely related to a fundamentally different view of characters and variants.

The emphasis is not on the technical analysis, but on the consideration of the general relationship between the repertoire of typefaces and the repertoire of characters (of an open-ended character set such as KANJI/KANA).

The main resource of discussion will be "Symbolo da Fee" (1611, Nagasaki), which has a lot of mixture of metallic and wood typefaces.