

Toppan Printing Co., Ltd. (now TOPPAN Holdings Inc.)

Printing Museum, Tokyo (1): Activities Thinking about the future of printing through its history

[Printing Museum, Tokyo](#) was established in 2000 as part of a project commemorating the 100th anniversary of [Toppan Printing Co., Ltd.](#) (In October 2023, the company has changed its name to TOPPAN Holdings Inc.) Since its opening, the museum has worked to raise people's awareness about the roles and the significance of printing that has contributed to the development of society and culture, holding this as its mission, and has continued activities contributing to collecting, studying, exhibiting and providing materials related to printing as well as experiencing and spreading such materials. Despite being located within the head office building of TOPPAN, instead of featuring the company's products as its collections, the museum has continued to maintain its attitude of genuinely pursuing the expansion and possibility of printing.

The museum is run by employees who have gained work experience in other departments, are attached to the printing business, and are familiar with printing technology and its history. Ms. Yoko Shiki, who showed me around the museum this time, is one of the employees who have been certified as curators; she was transferred to the museum from another department a few years ago.



Ms. Yoko Shiki, a curator of the Printing Museum, Tokyo, who showed me around the museum

In 2020, the twentieth year of Printing Museum, Tokyo, its exhibition rooms were significantly revamped. For visitors to experience the flow of printing history more fully, a theme-based exhibition was redesigned as a history-based exhibition planned in such a way that visitors can trace and experience the transition of printing culture from past to present along the two lines of the “History of Printing in Japan” and “History of Printing Worldwide” by following the route. The “Printing and Technology” section, which is not on display during temporary exhibitions, features exhibits related to printing technology.

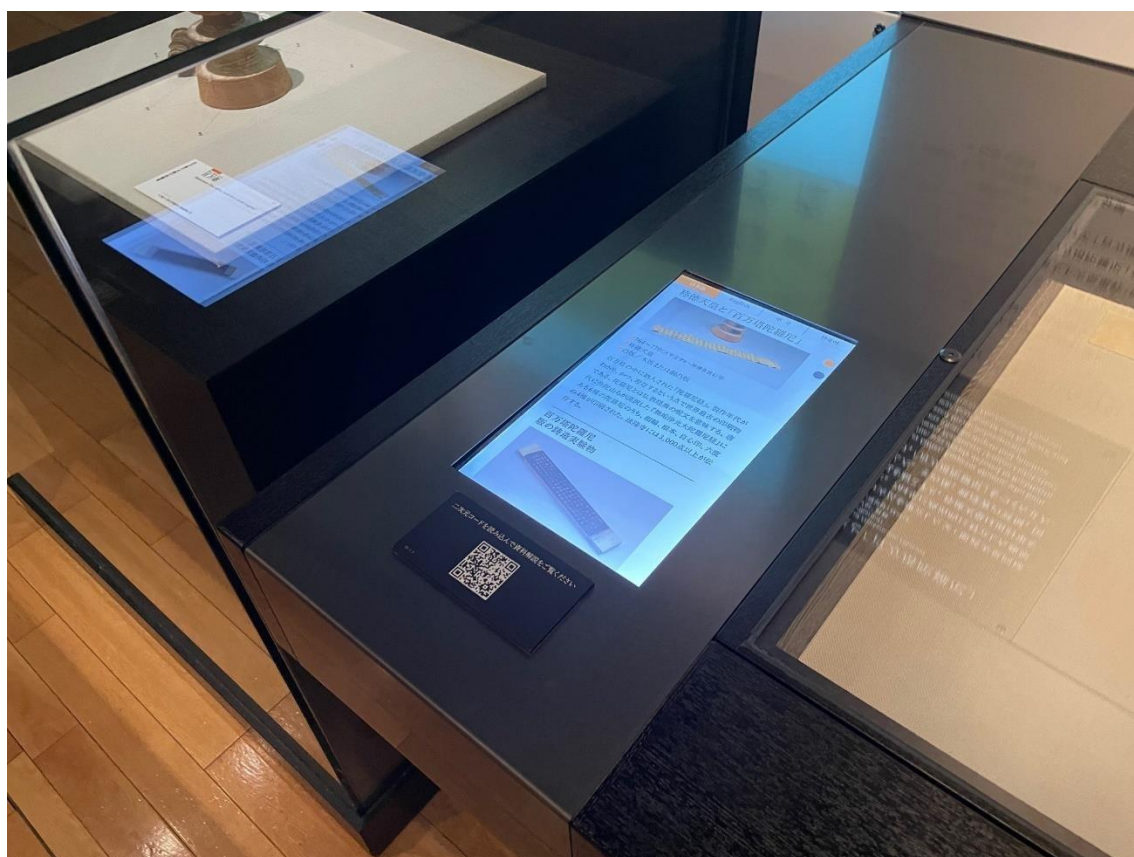


A huge chronological chart on the wall shows the roles played by printing and how printing technology has changed with the changes in society

New ideas have been introduced in the display methods. Instead of displaying exhibits mainly on exhibition stands, a combination of wall displays and object displays has been employed, which allows visitors to enjoy the texture of exhibited objects by actually touching and moving them while visually tracing the flow of technological revolution. The museum has also introduced a new service to provide commentaries that visitors can enjoy simply by operating a touch panel with a QR code. This new service introduced at the time of the renovation is available in multiple languages, and has helped visitors to appreciate exhibited objects and experience events during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Display combining wall displays and object displays



Visitors can read commentaries by scanning a QR code with a smartphone camera

Outreach activity to spread the fascination of printing outside the museum

The activities of Printing Museum, Tokyo are not limited to within the museum. Museum staff visit schools and other cultural facilities to conduct special classes and on-site workshops on SDGs, making efforts to kindle people's interest in printing. They have enjoyed exchanges with nearby elementary schools for many years; it is customary for students in the higher grades to visit [the Printing House](#) to create message cards for first grade elementary students every year. Genial warmth expressed through experiencing printing technology has been handed down with memories and tradition. Knowing that the museum started to provide on-site courses at colleges during the COVID-19 pandemic, a special support school the staff were regularly visiting requested them to provide on-site classes. The museum staff not only use their creativity to attract visitors but also spare no effort to pay visits, which gives a great impression of their enthusiasm.

Taking a journey through the history of communication from past to present and into the future

As the present society in which we live exists as an extension of the long succession of events in history, looking at the history of printing leads to ideas about the future of printing. Furthermore, thinking about printing means thinking about communication. As long as humans live, the conveyance of information and communication through it are practices that continue on a constant basis. In modern society as it undergoes rapid digitalization, Printing Museum, Tokyo will address the questions of how printing will continue to be involved in our lives and how it will affect our society, while reconsidering the significance and roles of printing as the basics of communication.

One major strength of Printing Museum is that it continues to collect new information and actively work while involving many people from within and outside the museum in what the museum is doing without losing the initiative. It is an active body that takes on various challenges as a platform that constantly updates itself and reconsiders the modality of printing in response to social change.



Entrance to Printing Museum, Tokyo

After the interview

Although not high-profile, small but attractive specialized museums are scattered across the Tokyo metropolitan area. Printing Museum, Tokyo is one of those museums. Despite being situated within the company building, it has an open atmosphere and is full of warmth that makes people feel welcomed. Visiting the museum, I felt somewhat nostalgic, which might be because of my memory of visiting here with my mother and younger brother in the summer vacation when I was in third grade at elementary school. Tracing the vestiges of the museum prior to its renovation, I wander through the museum from room to room with a fresh view guided by Ms. Shiki's commentaries. Since it has been open for more than 20 years, I believe I'm not the only one who has come back to this place, seeking a nostalgic yet fresh experience with childhood experience in mind. Creating various touch points with people such as experience-based events, temporary exhibitions held in the museum and outreach activities will eventually lead people who have experienced such events to share a heartfelt interest in printing culture.

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