

Some Early Publications of Ernest Mason Satow: A Founding Father of Modern Japanology

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Ernest Mason Satow was the third son of Hans David Christopher Satow, a Swedish merchant who had migrated from Riga to England in 1825 and become a British national in 1846. His mother, Margaret Mason, was English. Her maiden name became his middle name. Ernest was born at Clapton, in northeast London, on June 30, 1843. After a strict Nonconformist upbringing and early education at Mill Hill School, he was admitted to University College, London, at the age of sixteen. Bright and studious, he received his B.A. degree two years later in the autumn of 1861.

Satow first became interested in Japan when one of his brothers brought home Oliphant's *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's Mission to Japan*. His interest was deepened by an account of Perry's expedition. He then came across a notice in the college library announcing a competition for student-interpreterships in the Consular Service in China and Japan. He entered, and was placed first on the list. Given his choice of country Satow selected Japan, and shortly after graduation at the age of eighteen he departed for the Far East. He arrived in Japan in September 1862 and stayed there, except for two home leaves, for a period of twenty years.

The bulk of his published writing on Japan stems from this early period of his life, although his acclaimed work *The Jesuit Mission Press in Japan, 1591-1610* was not published until 1888. The early work may be divided into four categories: Japanese language texts, translated works, scholarly articles on Japanese matters, and other works. This paper aims to describe some of these

publications and assess their significance.

Japanese Language Texts

Satow was the first student interpreter in the British Legation, and one of the first Westerners, to acquire an understanding of the written Japanese language. His skill was quickly noticed by the Minister Sir Rutherford Alcock, and in a short time he was in a position to publish language texts to help his fellow student interpreters, notably W. G. Aston who arrived in Japan in 1864.

Satow's first published text was *The Various Styles of Japanese Writing*, a two-page article in the *Chinese and Japanese Repository* No. XX, March 1865. He examines four examples of Japanese writing: a specimen of Chinese characters with *katakana*; Chinese characters and *hiragana*; *Giusho* (semi-cursive Chinese characters) and *hiragana*, with the latter written sometimes beside the characters (i.e. *furigana*); and a specimen of a well-educated woman's letter in *hiragana*. In each case a *romaji* transcription is provided, and an English translation. Some grammatical notes are also given. Satow's intention in publishing this work was to "throw much light on a very difficult subject, and serve as a guide to some who are commencing the study of this language." His explanation of the Japanese particle *wa* is incorrect in that he says it indicates the subject, rather than the topic. Here his thinking was influenced by his knowledge of Latin and Greek. Yet James Summers, the editor of the *Repository*,¹ was no doubt delighted to receive this work.

The next Japanese language text which Satow authored was a text book in three volumes called *Kuaiwa Hen or Twenty-Five Exercises in the Yedo Colloquial*. It was published in Yokohama in 1873, though it was first prepared for Algernon Mitford who arrived in Japan in October 1866 to be the Second Secretary of the Legation. Satow seems to have begun the work in 1867, lending it to several keen students before deciding to have it printed. The text consists

of sentences in romanised Japanese accompanied by a separate volume of commentary and a third volume of Japanese text in two parts. By the time of publication Aston had become proficient in Japanese. Satow acknowledged his debt to Aston for his *Short Grammar of the Spoken Language* and adopted his system of transliteration. *Kuaiwa Hen* contains some rather comical scenes between Japanese menservants and their British masters, especially one regarding dismissal of servants “for various reasons”. The following is an extract from the dialogue of Exercise XIV, written in *romaji* and English:

1. Danna sama, shosho o negai moshitai koto ga gozaimasu.
2. Nan'da?
3. Oyaji ga kiubio da to moshite inaka kara tegami ga mairimashita. Dozo shi go nichu o hima wo itadakitai gozaimasu.
4. Temae no oyaji wa yoku tabitabi wadzuro na. Mata uso wo itte asobi ni demo iku n' d' aro.

1. Please sir, may I ask a favour?
2. What is it?
3. A letter has come from the country saying that my father is dangerously ill. May I have leave for four or five days?
4. Your father is always getting something the matter with him. You're telling a lie. The real reason is you want to go and amuse yourself.

Satow himself sometimes had trouble with his Japanese servants, so he must have felt that this was a useful section to include in what was effectively a phrase book. All three volumes of *Kuaiwa Hen* were also translated into French.

Translated Works

In 1865 Satow published a serialized *Translation of the Diary of a member of the Japanese Embassy to Europe in 1862-3* (*Chinese and Japanese Repository*, Nos. XXIV to XXIX, July to December 1865; *Japan Times*, Sep. 15, 1865-Mar.

9, 1866). This is subtitled “A confused account of a trip to Europe, like a fly on a horse’s tail”. The comparison is intended to express the humility of the Japanese author. Satow translated the account of three Imperial envoys and their retinue (who were sent to six European countries “to renew the ancient treaties”) for Sir Rutherford Alcock, then British Minister in Japan, who was duly impressed with his linguistic ability.

Although the author did not learn the “crab movement” method of horizontal writing or the “shrike-tongued languages” of Westerners, he had various interesting observations which Satow faithfully translated. Travelling by way of Hongkong, Singapore and Cairo he recorded his first trip in a train or “steam carriage”. In Marseilles he first tasted French cuisine which was extremely good, and he marvelled at the woven productions of Lyon. The Louvre astonished and the Paris Opera dazzled him. Zoos, factories, and Versailles were all fascinating. On arrival in England he was welcomed with a rousing “Peyapeppe hore!” (Hip hip hooray), of which he wrote that the meaning was not clear, but it seemed to be a congratulatory expression. London was the capital of the world. He saw the Exhibition, Regent’s Park, the railway tunnel under the Thames and the new Armstrong gun. There were endless rounds of factory visits. The “Universal things house” (British Museum) with its ghoulish Egyptian mummies was extraordinary. In Newcastle the party went down a coal-mine, in Liverpool they inspected a warship and in Birmingham they toured a glass factory.

Satow’s next translation was published in *The Phoenix* (No. 17) in November 1871, edited by James Summers. This time his topic was an episode in Japanese history. It was an extract from a book entitled *The History of Taikosama*. Taikosama was an alias for Hideyoshi. The book extended to 84 volumes, published between 1797 and 1802. Satow’s extract, which covers only two pages, is entitled *The Armies of Mikadsuki and Motowori Unite to Attack Danidaizen’s Fort*.

Two years later in 1873 Satow published translations of two major historical

texts in Yokohama. The first was *Japan 1853-64*, a history of Japan beginning with Commodore Matthew Perry's visit in 1853. The original Japanese text was *Kaikoku Shidan* (The Tale of the Opening of the Country) and subtitled *Genji Yume Monogatari* (The Tale of the Dream of Genji). It was written by Baba Bunyei for the "elegant prince" Nakamura Tekkei of Chikuzen in 1864. Baba had been asked by Nakamura to explain the disturbances that year in Kyoto which had amounted to civil war between the Choshu clan and other clans loyal to the Emperor. The disturbances were just the tip of the iceberg, or "but one hair to those of nine oxen" and Baba felt that he must begin the story at the beginning, namely when the foreigners first arrived in 1853. *Kaikoku Shidan* was republished by the Naigai Shuppan Kyokai in 1905 as *Japan 1853-64* translated by Sir Ernest Satow. A photograph of a handwritten letter from Satow (by then Minister in Peking) was included in which Satow expressed his willing consent to publication and asked the publisher to correct any mistakes he found in the translation. A few corrections were made as a result (e.g. "Kunishi" for "Kokushi") but nothing of importance was altered.

The second translated history in 1873 was *Kinse Shiriaku* (A History of Modern Times from 1853 to 1869). This history ends with the capture of Hakodate by the Emperor's forces in 1869. It first appeared as a serialized translation in the *Japan Times*. The Naigai Shuppan Kyokai republished it with some revisions in 1906.

Scholarly Articles on Japanese Matters

Satow did not begin to publish scholarly articles until 1870. We may suppose that he was too busy with interpreting and translating duties during his early years in Japan to study Japanese culture in any depth. Sir Harry Parkes, British Minister in Japan from 1865 to 1883, drove his staff hard. However, he also encouraged them to research into all kinds of Japanese topics because he thought such information gathering was a vital part of the Legation's work in Japan.

In July of 1870 Satow published a two-page article in the first edition of *The Phoenix* entitled *The Ainos of Yezo*. (Yezo was the old name for Hokkaido). Satow had first visited Hokkaido in 1864. At that time he wrote in his diary that the women were extremely ugly, with tattoos around the mouth so that it looked four times its real size. The men were handsome, or at least striking to people who liked beards and moustaches. In the article he described the location of Ainu villages, the dress and appearance of Ainu men and women, their diet and some Ainu words.

On October 30, 1872 Satow read a paper before the first meeting of the Asiatic Society of Japan, of which he was a founder member, and much later President (1895-1900). The paper was called Notes on Loochoo. It became the opening article in the first volume of the journal of the Society called *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* (hereafter *Transactions*). The history and geography of Okinawa, "called Liukiu by the Chinese and Riukiu by the Japanese", were described. Accounts of the customs, temperament and language of the Okinawan people as well as some fine lithographs of costumes and scenery were included. Another article by Satow in the same volume was entitled *The Geography of Japan*. It was read before the Society on March 22, 1873. It sought to correct certain basic errors in a school text book regarding the geography of Japan. It introduced the names of the old provinces (but not the new prefectures as they had not been finalised at the time), rivers and mountains.

1874 saw the publication of Satow's first work related to religion, *The Shinto Temples of Ise*. It was read before the Asiatic Society of Japan on February 18. A detailed description of the shrines is given for the Western visitor, including precise measurements and etymologies, as well as the legend of Izanagi and Izanami. This article was followed in 1875 by a closer investigation into the nature of the Shinto religion entitled *The Revival of Pure Shintau* which was entered as an appendix to the third volume of the *Transactions* and revised by the author in 1882. By "pure" Shinto Satow meant the religious belief of the Japanese before the introduction of Buddhism and Confucian philosophy

into Japan. Satow described the attempt of a school of contemporary writers to present Shinto in its original form. The founder of the “modern” school was Kada Adzuma-marō (1669-1736). He was followed by Mabuchi (1697-1769), a voluminous writer of poetry, who in turn was succeeded by Motowori Norinaga (1730-1801). The fourth scholar was Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843).

In 1877 Satow read a paper before the Asiatic Society on November 10. The title was *The Introduction of Tobacco into Japan*. It was published in Volume VI of *Transactions*, as were the next three papers. Satow discussed the date for the introduction of tobacco, concluding that it was first cultivated in Japan at the beginning of the seventeenth century, but that it was imported commercially twenty years earlier. Unsuccessful attempts were made to ban the dangerous weed from 1612 to 1629. The etymology of various Japanese words connected with smoking is discussed. Satow discounted the notion that the Japanese word for pipe (*kiseru*) was of European origin. Woodcuts of Japanese pipes are provided to enliven the text. Merits and demerits of smoking are quoted from the *Ensauki*. Japanese medical sources are consulted.

1878 was a particularly active year during which Satow read five separate papers to the Asiatic Society. The first was entitled *The Korean Potters in Satsuma*, and it was read on February 23. Satow began by explaining that pottery was one of the arts brought to Japan from Korea about five centuries previously. The Japanese who were “always ready to learn from others” had at various times invited Korean artisans to settle in Japan and found schools of pottery at Kyoto, Buzen and Hagi. Also Satow mentioned a village in Satsuma called Tsuboya which was entirely inhabited by potters of Korean origin. They were descendants of Koreans brought to Japan at the time of the Japanese withdrawal from Korea in 1598. In February 1877 Satow had visited the village on his way back from leave in England. He gave detailed descriptions of the kind of pottery produced and techniques, including the “norigama” kilns which are still in use throughout Japan today.

On March 9, 1878 Satow read a very short paper to the Society on the use

of the fire drill in Japan. This was a tool used to kindle fire. It was followed by *Notes of a Visit to Hachijo* on June 22. It was written with the Yokohama lawyer F. V. Dickins, a noted amateur botanist and later with Stanley Lane-Poole, one of the biographers of Sir Harry Parkes.

The island of Hachijo (now part of Tokyo Metropolitan Prefecture) lies almost due south of the Izu peninsula. Satow began by quoting Kaempfer's account of the island which he said contained many incorrect statements and read "like a passage from the Arabian Nights". He then located the island precisely and gave its dimensions, with great detail about the topography and terrain. The people were mainly farmers, and the Satsuma potato was the staple food. Alcohol was available in the form of potato brandy and "nigori-zake" brewed from rice. Fishing was difficult, and was only possible in calm weather. The main manufacture of the island was silk-weaving: raw silk was imported from Honshu, dyed and woven, and exported as Hachijo silk. Salt was obtained from sea water "in an extremely wasteful and primitive manner".

Satow met several exiles banished to the island. One had originally been a monk of Honganji temple in Kyoto, but had left holy orders to serve a retainer of the *daimyo* of Tosa. In Edo he had wounded a comrade in a quarrel for which he had been banished. On Hachijo he had returned to his original profession, and had been promised a pardon for his good conduct. A second exile had murdered half a dozen innocent people, but had become an authority on the history of the island. A third had been the head priest of a temple in Edo, but had been caught in a brothel in Yoshiwara and exiled.

Satow's fourth paper in 1878 was entitled *Ancient Japanese Rituals: No. 1, Praying for Harvest*. It was read to the Asiatic Society of Japan on a date between June 22 and November 27, and published in the seventh volume of the *Transactions*. The second part of this paper was read on June 30, 1879.

The fifth paper was read on November 27, 1878 and also published in Volume VII of the *Transactions*. It was entitled *Vicissitudes of the Church at Yamaguchi from 1550 to 1586*. Here for the first time Satow embraced a Christian theme.

He traced the story of Christianity in Japan from the founding of the Jesuit Mission at Yamaguchi by Saint Francis Xavier in 1550. Xavier had spent a year in Kagoshima where he had made more than 100 converts and studied the language. From there he went to Hirado where many were converted, but in Kyoto he found a state of armed anarchy so he had returned to Yamaguchi. There he presented letters of credence and presents to the ruler Ohochi Yoshitaka from the Portuguese Viceroy of India and the Bishop of Goa. In return he received an empty Buddhist monastery from which he was allowed to preach Christianity. Although 500 converts were made in a couple of months there was still a great deal of anti-Christian feeling stirred up by warring Japanese factions.

After the remarkably productive “annus mirabilis” of 1878, Satow continued to write throughout the following four years before his return to England in 1883. In 1879 he wrote a paper on *The Translation of the Japanese Syllabary* which was published in Volume VII of the *Transactions*. This paper began with a discussion of how the ancient Japanese began to adopt Chinese characters by first learning nouns, and referred to the earliest attempts to form Japanese dictionaries. Satow could not say with certainty when the Chinese system of writing was introduced into Japan by way of Korea, but felt that it was not much earlier than the middle of the sixth century A.D. He discussed the introduction of Chinese literature into Japan, the idea of using Chinese characters to spell Japanese words, and the development of *kana*.

On January 13, 1880 Satow read *A Reply to Dr. Edkins on Chi and Tsu* before the Asiatic Society. In his previous paper on the transliteration of the syllabary Satow had said that there was no evidence that ㄝ and *ti* were ever identical. This was challenged by Edkins but briefly refuted by Satow in a scholarly manner.

On April 13 Satow read another paper entitled *Ancient Sepulchral Mounds in Kozuke* to the Asiatic Society. It was published in Volume VIII of the *Transactions* and included 41 illustrations and descriptions of pottery found in the burial mounds near Maebashi in Gunma Prefecture. The paper included

a discussion of the ancient Japanese custom of burying human beings and horses at the tombs of chieftains, for which clay figures were later substituted.

Ernest Satow's last two papers published by the Asiatic Society of Japan before his return to England in 1883 were *On the Early History of Printing in Japan* (read on December 15, 1881) and a follow-up entitled *Further Notes on Movable Types in Korea and Early Printed Japanese Books* (read on June 21, 1882). Both papers were published in Volume X of the *Transactions*. The former traces the history of block printing from 175 A.D. in China through its introduction in eighth century Japan up to the seventeenth century. Printing with movable types of clay may have begun in the middle of the eleventh century in China, but Satow could find no evidence to corroborate this. He dated the introduction of movable types into Japan to the end of the sixteenth century when one of Hideyoshi's generals brought back a large quantity of movable type books from Korea.

Other Works

In March, April and May 1866 Satow published an original commentary on the political situation in three parts in the *Japan Times* edited by Charles Rickerby. He wrote anonymously because as a member of the British legation he was not supposed to make his private views known. The articles were later translated into Japanese and given the title *Eikoku Sakuron* (British Policy). They were taken to be the official British line, and sold as one pamphlet in Osaka and Kyoto, with Satow's name appended. Satow openly advocated a confederation of *daimyos* under the supremacy of the Emperor to replace the Shogun whose power he sensed was fading and who was himself no more than a major *daimyo*. The document was widely read and influential in bringing about the Meiji Restoration, though to what extent it is hard to measure.

In 1875 Satow wrote *A Guide Book to Nikko* which was published at the Japan Mail Office. It was a detailed guide with historical background similar

in scope to his work on the temples of Ise one year previously. The first edition of *A Handbook for Travellers in Central and Northern Japan* was published in 1881. The handbook was authored jointly by Satow and Lieutenant A. G. S. Hawes of the Royal Marines. Many friends contributed their specialist knowledge, including B. H. Chamberlain, W. G. Aston (Pictorial and Glyptic Arts), F. V. Dickins (Zoology and Botany) and J. J. Rein² (Geography and Climate). Satow himself wrote the sections on Shinto and Buddhism. The book was divided into the introduction which contained the specialist articles, and routes in the Tokyo and Nagasaki areas. Maps and plans were included. This handbook was the first of its kind.

In 1876 Satow published an *English-Japanese Dictionary of the Spoken Language* with M. Ishibashi, a member of the Japanese Foreign Ministry. This dictionary underwent a number of revisions over the years and was still in use during the Second World War, albeit in a much expanded and altered form.

Concluding Remarks

Ernest Satow did not confine himself to writing about Japan. In his retirement he wrote extensively about diplomacy and international law. The publications cited above therefore represent only about half of his total output. No mention has been made of his best known book *A Diplomat in Japan* which comprises his personal memoirs of the years 1862–9. It lies outside the scope of this paper both chronologically (it was published in 1921) and thematically. Finally Sir George Sansom's assessment should be noted:

Satow was perhaps a rather dry scholar, but he was a prodigious worker. Besides being a most valuable member of the British Legation in Japan at a crucial period, he added to his understanding of Japanese politics a remarkable command of the Japanese language and a scholar's interest in Japanese history and literature. (*Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, August 1965, p. 566.)

Even if Satow's *oeuvre* is now substantially superseded and thus of antiquarian interest only, his greatness as a pioneer in the field of Japanese studies remains unchallenged.

Thanks

I wish to record my gratitude to the librarians of Kyushu Institute of Technology for their diligence in obtaining copies of all of Satow's papers mentioned above (except for *A Guide Book to Nikko* which I found in the British Library in July 1994), and to Mr. Shozo Nagaoka for his most helpful advice.

Notes

- 1 The *Chinese and Japanese Repository* was a short-lived journal edited by James Summers (1828-91). Summers was born the only son of a sculptor, Edward Summers in Lichfield, Kent, England. A self-taught scholar of Japanese and Chinese, he is credited with giving the first ever lectures on English literature (Shakespeare) in Japan. Remarkably, despite his youth and lack of a university education, one year after his return to England from China in 1852 he was appointed Professor of Chinese at King's College, London University. Satow was one of his pupils in 1860. Summers came to Japan in 1873 to teach at the *Kaisei Gakko*, the forerunner of Tokyo University, on the invitation of the Iwakura Mission. He later taught in Niigata, Osaka and Sapporo (at the agricultural school).
- 2 J. J. Rein (1835-1918) was a professor of geography at Bonn University. There is a memorial inscribed to his memory in Shiramine, Ishikawa Prefecture which records his collecting of plant fossils there in July 1874 as well as his contribution to the education of Japanese students during his tenure at Bonn from 1883 to 1910. Since 1981 the Rein Hakase Kensho Kai has met annually in Shiramine to commemorate Rein. Lectures are published in the Rein Sai. (See *Beitraege zur Geschichte der Geographie an der Universitaet Bonn*, Colloquium Geographicum Bd. 21, Bonn 1991, pp. 196-205: Johann Justus Rein by Gerhard Aymans).

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