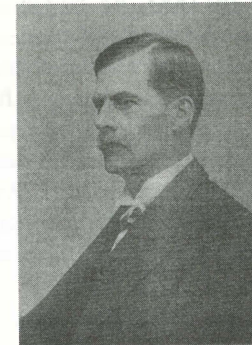


Sir Ernest Satow (1843–1929) in Tokyo, 1895–1900

IAN RUXTON



Sir Ernest Satow

SIR ERNEST SATOW (1843–1929) is generally regarded as the best-qualified official and the most outstanding scholar of Japanese to have been appointed head of the British Mission in Japan. He would have liked to be the first British Ambassador to Japan but was transferred in 1900 to Peking, then regarded as a more important post than Tokyo, in succession to Sir Claude MacDonald who needed a transfer following the Boxer rebellion. In the event, Sir Claude became the first British Ambassador to Japan when the legations were raised to the status of embassies following the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902. The mission in Peking remained a legation throughout Satow's service there. Sadly, therefore, he never became an 'ambassador', although he became a Privy Councillor and was awarded the GCMG. The status of ambassador was more important at that time than it is these days when every mission is called an 'embassy' – however unimportant the country involved. Brilliant but

seemingly aloof, the best way to arrive at an understanding of Satow is through his voluminous personal diaries and other papers kept in the Public Record Office. This brief essay introduces the man and his chief concerns during the above period, based mainly on his diaries.¹

Satow arrived back in London at the end of May 1895 following his brief posting as Minister in Morocco where he had been since September 1893. He was almost 52. He had received a telegram from the Foreign Secretary Lord Kimberley (1826–1902) on 2 May offering him the legation at Tokyo, and another confirming the appointment on 17 May.² This was the post for which Satow was the ideal candidate, having spent almost twenty years in Japan (September 1862 – December 1882 with only two home leaves) successively as student interpreter, interpreter and Japanese Secretary to the legation.

Since leaving Japan in 1882 he had been British Consul-General in Bangkok where, early in 1885, he had been promoted from the Consular to the Diplomatic Service and made Minister to Siam.³ But he did not care for the climate or official corruption there.⁴ Bouts of malarial fever rendered him ineffective, so that from June 1887 to October 1888 when he was offered his next post in Uruguay, he was on sick leave in England.⁵ Uruguay was ‘an earthly paradise in which he found nothing to do’.⁶ Early in June 1893 he was transferred to Morocco where his task was to promote gradual internal reform through tact and patience. His success there led to his receiving the KCMG.

NEW JAPAN: THE BACKGROUND

The Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation had been signed in London on 16 July 1894, providing for the abolition of extra-territoriality with regard to British subjects with effect from 17 July 1899, and the immediate introduction of an *ad valorem* tariff. This revision of the first of the ‘unequal treaties’ was an important turning point, both in Japanese history and in Britain’s attitude towards Japan.⁷ The First Sino-Japanese War had been won by Japan, leading to the Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed on 17 April 1895, but it had to be drastically modified after pressure in the form of ‘friendly advice’ from Russia, France and Germany (the so-called Triple Intervention). Japan was thereby forced to give up the newly ceded territory of the Liaotung peninsula in the southern tip of Manchuria, which included Port Arthur and Talienwan, in exchange for an increased indemnity from China.⁸

SATOW IN ENGLAND (MAY–JUNE 1895)

The Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Thomas Sanderson, briefed Satow at the Foreign Office. They discussed the compensation that Japan would receive for withdrawing from Liaotung; the apparent rejection of Japanese reforms in Korea; and the Japanese annexation of Formosa, where the Chinese seemed to be supplying arms secretly to the anti-Japanese guerrillas, the ‘semi-savage Hakkas’.⁹ Sanderson told Satow that he should leave as soon as possible for Japan. The Chargé d’Affaires, Gerald A. Lowther, was doing well enough, but without Japanese language skills he was dependent on the legation interpreters, John H. Gubbins (who was then Japanese Secretary, and thus chief interpreter) and the Second Secretary, Ralph S. Paget.

Satow also had meetings with Lord Kimberley who described Japan as ‘our natural ally, as against Russia’¹⁰ and stated that he regarded China as both ‘unreliable and useless’. Britain should remain friendly to her, but not rely on her as a counterweight to Russia. Kimberley also remarked that he thought the English newspapers at Yokohama did a lot of harm to Anglo-Japanese relations. Japanese vanity should be humoured, and their goodwill cultivated. In an oblique reference to Sir Harry Parkes, British Minister in Japan, 1865–83, he added: ‘It was no longer possible to treat them as semi-civilized and to bully them; they must be treated on a footing of equality ...’

Following the change of government from Liberal to a Conservative–Unionist coalition in June 1895, Lord Salisbury took over as both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. He was more sceptical about Japan’s capability and reliability than Kimberley had been. When Satow wrote to him from Tokyo asking for instructions on 15 August, Salisbury in his reply of 3 October doubted whether the Japanese were capable of preventing Russia from obtaining an ice-free port on her eastern seaboard, which she could easily take by marching overland from Siberia. Satow was told instead to concentrate on the promotion of trade in the face of German commercial rivalry.¹¹

Before his departure from England for Japan Satow was summoned to dinner at Windsor Castle on 25 June 1895 where Queen Victoria invested him with the accolade of a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG), but apparently little was said. A more significant meeting took place on 11 August 1897 at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight during Satow’s leave from Japan to attend the Queen’s diamond jubilee. After dinner they privately discussed Siam and Japan:

Then she said the Japanese prince [Arisugawa, in England for the Jubilee] was nice but not handsome, and I said Japanese thought him good looking. Japanese women she thought were not so either. I said that travellers coming to Japan were shocked to find the men so ugly.

She asked if Japan were not a very difficult post. I replied that fortunately the three Powers [Russia, Germany, France] had made it very easy, and that being able to talk Japanese was a great help. She was much surprised at this, and asked if it were not a very difficult language. I said it was because one could not learn it by living in a Japanese family as one would do in Europe.

ARRIVAL IN TOKYO

Satow left Liverpool on 29 June 1895, arriving in Japan on 28 July via New York and Vancouver. The business community and the legation staff greeted him at Yokohama. The next day he called on Saionji Kinmochi, the acting Foreign Minister. On 1 August he met Itō Hirobumi of Chōshū, his old friend of Bakumatsu days, now Prime Minister. Satow congratulated him on Japan's beating China and discovered the conditions on which Japan would give up Liaotung. They also discussed Korea, Formosa and treaty revision.

On 9 August at 10.00 am Satow had an audience with the Emperor and Empress, at which his credentials were presented. He was fetched in an Imperial horse-drawn carriage 20 minutes before. In the reception room Satow following the prescribed protocol, bowed three times and read his speech in English. The Emperor replied in Japanese, later translated thus: 'We are exceedingly gratified to think that a greater cordiality in the friendly relations existing between our respective countries will be facilitated by the fact of your many years' residence in Our country and by your thorough knowledge of our national affairs.' Then Satow saw the Empress, who expressed pleasure at seeing him after so many years, echoed the Emperor's words on Anglo-Japanese friendship being enhanced and referred to Satow's being a 'great scholar in Japanese things'. Satow replied humbly before taking his leave.

MAIN POLITICAL ISSUES

The main problem with China from American, British and Japanese viewpoints was how to prevent her partition among the land-grabbing European powers and preserve the 'Open Door' to free trade. Satow wrote to Sir Nicholas O'Connor, then Minister in Peking, on

3 September 1895 that he supposed Salisbury's views would be the same as Kimberley's 'that China has shown she can never be of any use to us as an ally'¹² and agreed in a conversation with Admiral Buller later that month 'that China is hopeless in the matter of reform'. Her government system was 'thoroughly rotten'.¹³

When Satow saw Itō on 26 September he was told that Japan had tried desperately to come to an agreement with China over a sound system of government for Korea, but she had refused to cooperate, leading to the Sino-Japanese War. Satow himself told Count Inoue Kaoru of Chōshū (1836–1915), the former Foreign Minister (1879–87) and Minister to Korea (October 1894–September 1895) on 4 October that he thought Japan was a much better country than China to lead Korea's modernization. On the same day Foreign Minister Count Ōkuma Shigenobu denied that Japan had tried to pick a quarrel with China; the Japanese had been anxious about the Chinese navy with its powerful ships and foreign officers, but the Chinese army was poorly trained and led. Itō had told Satow that beating China had been easy.¹⁴

In 1899 two Chinese commissioners visited Japan. On 27 July Satow mentioned them in a private letter to Salisbury, commenting that they were unlikely to achieve anything significant:

Japan does not wish to be tied to a corpse, nor to undertake the defence of China against Russia. Her chief care is for the maintenance of her position in Corea, and nothing but a Russian attempt to swallow up the Peninsula will in my opinion turn her aside from her present policy of lying low till her armaments are completed in 1903.¹⁵

After the commissioners left Satow reported again to Salisbury on 5 October that the Foreign Minister Aoki Shūzō¹⁶ had talked to him 'in a very aggrieved tone' about their behaviour:

By the way in which they went on they had made it impossible to have any serious negotiations with them. He added of course there had been no question of an alliance [between Japan and China], but only of a friendly understanding, which was frustrated by their conduct here.¹⁷

KOREA

Korea had for centuries been a vassal of China within the Confucian hierarchy, and attempts by Japan to displace the latter were in general much resented in Korea and China. Korean hatred of the Japanese could also be traced back to the invasions by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in

1592 and 1597, and more recently to the unequal Treaty of Kanghwa forced on Korea by Japan in 1876.

When Satow saw Itō for the first time on 1 August he was asked if Britain had any interest in Korea. Discounting commercial considerations, Satow stated that like Japan, Britain wished to prevent Russian annexation. Satow asked Itō if Russia was planning to extend the trans-Siberian railway down to a port in Korea. Itō replied that they aimed at ‘something much greater’. He read a memo from the Russian Minister stating that Russia expected Japan ‘to conform her acts to her declarations as to the independence of Corea’. Itō and Satow agreed that neutralization of Korea guaranteed by several Powers would be better than independence, which would allow Russia to deal directly with Korea and ‘obtain her aims more easily’.

On 25 August Satow reported to Salisbury that Viscount Miura Goro had been appointed Japanese Minister in Korea. Satow believed he was a moderate in favour of gradual reform, but events soon proved him wrong. On 26 September Satow reported that Miura had refused a request by the Korean government for Japanese troops to subdue an armed rebellion. It was Satow’s view that Korea was ‘quite incapable of reform from within’. Itō himself believed that Korea could not survive as an independent state, but Japan could not prevent Russian annexation at this stage, because her navy, though increasing in size, was still too weak.

On 8 October 1895 a *coup d’état* occurred in Seoul. It was engineered by Miura Goro, and the Korean Queen Min Bi was assassinated: as Satow discovered on 14 October, she had been beheaded. On the following day Satow observed in a letter to his friend F.V. Dickins that Korea would be ‘another Morocco, a rotten fruit which no one may touch, and which will be carefully propped up lest it should fall into some one’s hands of whom the others would be jealous to the point of fighting’.

On 13 February 1896 Satow received a visit from a Korean fugitive from Seoul, where the King had taken refuge in the Russian Legation. He appealed strongly for British help for Korea, but Satow was unable to assist. In May he wrote to Salisbury that the Japanese viewed Korea as ‘their Alsace-Lorraine’. On 4 June he told Kokugaku scholar Viscount Fukuba Bisei¹⁸ that Inoue Kaoru had been ‘in too great a hurry’ in trying to reform Korea along European lines.

On 18 February 1897 the new Foreign Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu suggested to Satow that Britain might establish a legation in Korea, but Satow replied: ‘It would probably excite umbrage in the minds of the Russians if we suddenly without any apparent reason converted our consulate general into a legation.’¹⁹

While on leave in England, Satow discussed Korea with Salisbury

on 6 October. When Salisbury said the Russians wanted a port in Northeast Asia, Satow replied that a Korean port would be of no use, but that Port Lazareff (Wonsan on the east coast of Korea) in Russian hands would ‘cause great popular commotion’ in Japan.

Again on 2 March 1898 Satow received a well known Korean exile, Pak Yong Hyo, who asked if Britain would take a more active role in Korea. Satow said that Britain ‘had no direct interests there. Only Russia and Japan had. But the latter neither spoke nor acted. Coreans must be patient for a few years.’

On 30 March 1899 Satow spoke with Aoki Shūzō, then Foreign Minister, who said:

If Russia has Corea Japan cannot sleep in peace. Unfortunately the interests of England there are not sufficient to make it worth her while to support Japanese policy. But if Russia gets command of the peninsula she will have a great and damaging position as regards commercial nations. I observed that Japan would not be ready [for war] till 1903. He replied that she might be obliged to act before.²⁰

Satow and Aoki talked again on 12 October about Russian moves on Masanpho as a coaling station and naval base for policing the Straits of Tsushima, which had been frustrated by Japanese land purchases.

Satow saw Itō for the last time on 2 May 1900 before returning to England. When Satow observed that all seemed quiet in the Far East, Itō replied that no one could tell how long it would last. Satow replied:

As to war, I said no one could suppose it was to the advantage of Japan to fight Russia. Yet many people talked about it. Japan and Russia as to Corea like England and France as to Siam, a pretty woman with two suitors; no need however to come to blows. One thing however seemed clear, Russia regarded Japan as the only obstacle to her designs in the Far East.²¹

FORMOSA

Kimberley told Satow on 31 May 1895 that the government ‘saw no reason for interfering about Formosa, though of course would rather they [Japan] had not taken it’. It was therefore not a political issue, but rather a commercial one for Satow, who had to preside over new consulates on the island as the Japan consular service was extended. In particular, he had to negotiate with the Japanese government over the camphor trade. Anglo-Chinese regulations of 1867 allowed foreigners

to enter Formosa, buy and export camphor, but they were forbidden to manufacture it. In spite of this five or six British and German firms were, in fact, allowed to do so. When the Japanese took over in October 1895 they tried to enforce the regulations: several Chinese acting for the foreign firms were imprisoned. After protests by Satow and the German minister Gutschmid, the camphor trade was conceded to foreign firms until the new treaties came into effect in 1899.

Opium was another matter. On 13 September 1895 Satow and Saionji discussed it. Saionji asked if it would be safe to take a permissive line, to which Satow replied that the British Opium Commission had said it was less harmful than alcohol, and that opium was frequently smoked outdoors by Chinese labourers.

ISSUES IN JAPAN

With a new treaty only just negotiated and not yet in force, there were bound to be many issues which arose. The Yokohama branch of the China Association were against it as an 'undue sacrifice' of British (i.e. their) interests, as they told Satow in a memorandum.²² They saw no benefit in further opening the country, unlike home-based British firms looking for new markets.

Leases caused problems, especially in Kobe. The Japanese tried to put a time limit on perpetual leases and effectively prevent foreign ownership of land altogether. Satow discussed the issue with Foreign Minister Nishi Tokujiro on 3 March 1898. Nishi thought there would be no objection. Satow replied that 'under the new Treaties foreigners would have the same rights as the law gave to Japanese and hence no need for fixing a limit. As to Kōbe I would wait till he got his information, but hoped he would eventually see that the Governor ought not to have fixed a limit on his own account when the agreement between the Japanese government and foreign ministers left everything to be arranged between the owner and the lessee.' He added that only Itō and he understood the situation in Kobe, as they had been present when the settlement was established.

Prison conditions and the access of Consuls to arrested foreigners were discussed on numerous occasions, as were certificates of origin for imported goods, taxes on land, and press laws. But the most sensational case was that of Mrs Carew, accused of poisoning her husband with arsenic in October 1896. This was tried in the British consular court at Yokohama, under the old extraterritorial system. Satow found a way of avoiding having Edith Carew hanged and accordingly her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.²³

SATOW'S PERSONAL LIFE IN TOKYO

Satow would have been pleased to return to Tokyo, not only for professional but also personal reasons. It would give him the opportunity to spend time with his Japanese 'wife', Takeda Kane, whom he could not marry as a diplomat, and their two sons, Eitarō and Hisayoshi (also referred to as Hisakichi, and sometimes in the diaries as 'Cha-chan', an affectionate term used only in the Kantō region). Eitarō had been born in 1880, and Hisayoshi in 1883. They were therefore fifteen and twelve years old respectively when Satow returned in 1895. Lightly coded references to Satow's Japanese family are interspersed throughout his diaries, using other languages such as Latin, Italian and Spanish. For example on 26 March 1898 Satow wrote: 'Dined at Totsuka [Shinjuku ward, near the present JR Takatanobaba station] with tutti e tre.' The three here were Takeda Kane, Eitarō and Hisayoshi. Another frequent entry is "Dined at Gembei [Totsuka] con los muchachos."²⁴ Yet there are usually few details given. An exception is 30 December 1895:

Started at 10 with the boys for Shidzuura near Numadzu, a brilliant day, on foot and to the top of the pass by 11.20 reaching Karuizawa at 12.15. Started again at 1.5 and walked to Hirai where we rested half an hour, and off again on foot at 2.55. Here Saburō [Satow's manservant] and Hisakichi took *kuruma*, while we continued on foot thro' Daiba and Yamashita, crossing a low pass just behind the village of Tōgo, and getting into the main road at Yamakiwa arr. at the Hōyōkan in Shidzuura at 5.15, standing betw. Saigō's villa and the Kai-hin-In a hospital. This is a new and elegant house. I gave a chadai [tip, *pourboire*] of 5 yen and we were well treated in consequence. There is a fine grove of pine-trees on the sandy shore, and the position is a beautiful one. Temperature much warmer than Atami.

There were also old friends, foreign as well as Japanese, with whom to renew acquaintance. Professor Basil Hall Chamberlain, in Japan since 1873, was still there. And among diplomatic colleagues Satow would have been pleased to find Albert d'Anethan, the Belgian minister, who had first been in Japan 1873–75 and his English wife E. Mary Haggard, sister of the novelist Sir Henry Rider Haggard, author of *King Solomon's Mines*, and of the diplomat Sir William Haggard. Other 'old Japan hands' included J. H. Gubbins who had taken over from Satow as English Secretary to the treaty revision conference in 1883. Henry W. Denison, an American, had acted for the Japanese foreign office as a legal adviser for many years, and the Englishman William H. Stone had advised on telegraphy since 1872.

Satow decided that he liked Lake Chuzenji near Nikkō better than Hakone as a retreat from Tokyo, especially in the hot summer months.²⁵ To F.V. Dickins on 21 August 1895 he wrote:

Yesterday I came here, to a small house on the bank of the lake which I have taken till the end of September. I forget whether you know the place. It is very small and quiet. The only other foreigners who have houses here are Gutschmid, the Lowthers, the Kirkwoods and a German savant name unknown.

And on 17 September he wrote in his diary that he 'rowed Gutschmid's boat in 12 min. over to Tozawa, where my house is to be built.' The villa which he had built is still used today by the British Ambassador. On 30 May 1896 Satow went with architect Josiah Conder to the building site and decided where the boathouse would be. Later, he ordered a sculling boat for 70 dollars from A. Teck, probably to replace a leaky boat.²⁶

Freiherr von Gutschmid did not remain long as German minister, being the author of several gaffes. The first was when he sent a telegram to Itō congratulating him on the Treaty of Shimonoseki, and then two days later joined in the protest about Liaotung.²⁷ The second was when he wrote a 'foolish note' to Saionji²⁸ and on 30 December 1896 he allegedly struck a student²⁹ with his whip. He was replaced by Graf von Leyden.

Asaina Kansui was employed as Satow's spy from 2 December 1895, in the days before MI6. He was from a 'hatamoto' family, and his father had been Governor of Nagasaki. Asaina was also Governor from 1864–66 though he did not serve there. In March 1867 he was appointed Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, and in January 1868 Commissioner for Financial Affairs. Thereafter his career is unknown. Asaina appears in the official despatches as 'a confidential source' and gave Satow such materials as the shorthand notes of the financial committee of the Lower House. Sometimes Satow asked for specific information: on 12 March 1898 he 'told him to try and find out whether the Russians have informed his government of their desire to lease Port Arthur and Talienwan'. Asaina was paid regularly, usually in dollars or yen, but it is not clear how useful he was to Satow, and on 19 February 1896 Satow thought Asaina was trying to 'pump' him.³⁰

On 11 December 1895 Satow was made President of The Asiatic Society of Japan, of which he had been a founder member in 1872, and to which he had frequently read papers in the 1870s. At one point on 30 November 1897 he discussed with Chamberlain a proposal for winding it up because there were too many 'twaddly papers'; fortunately, it continues to this day. Satow lectured to the ASJ

on 'The Jesuit Mission Press in Japan' on 29 March 1899³¹ and on 21 June at the Legation on 'The Cultivation of Bamboos in Japan.'³²

Satow retained a scholarly interest in other languages, including Greek and Latin. He read Virgil with Mrs Kirkwood, wife of the legal adviser to the Japanese government William M. Kirkwood (1850–1926).³³ He discussed Jesuit scholarship with a Catholic priest, Père Evrard. He frequently attended concerts and amateur dramatics, and was a keen member of a glee club, for which he persuaded Mrs Blakiston (widow of Captain Blakiston³⁴) to continue to play. He played whist regularly and was chairman of the Nippon Race Club in Yokohama, receiving the Meiji Emperor at the races on 29 October 1896. Other social engagements included dinners of Japanese Cambridge graduates on 24 January 1896 and 12 May 1898, and another of British and Japanese barristers at the Metropole Hotel, Tsukiji on 4 February 1899 to celebrate the founding of the Anglo-Japanese Inns of Court Association on that day.

FAREWELL TO JAPAN

On 29 March 1900 a telegram from Lord Salisbury indicated that he wanted to send Satow to Peking, and that MacDonald would 'not improbably take your place'. Satow replied that he was '[g]reatly pleased at this mark of Your Lordship's confidence' and accepted the transfer gladly, being better paid (£5000 rather than £4,000 pa) as well as being more prestigious.³⁵ Several high-ranking Japanese regretted his departure, including Itō and Imperial Household Minister Tanaka Mitsuaki, to whom Satow said on 3 May that he 'was only the faithful representative of the friendly feeling of England, and whether I came back or not would make no difference'. His final audience with the Emperor and Empress was on 24 April and he sailed from Yokohama on 4 May.³⁶