The British Library’s antiquarian Japanese collection has long been regarded as one of the finest outside Japan.¹ Its quality and quantity are such that the descriptive catalogue² compiled by my predecessor, the late Kenneth Gardner,³ had to be limited to pre-1700 printed books. Even then, it included 637 items of outstanding rarity.⁴ These range from the *Hyakumantō darani* 百萬塔陀羅尼 (Empress Shōtoku’s ‘One Million Pagoda Charms’) of AD 764–70; to books printed in medieval Buddhist monasteries (imprints known as *Kasuga-ban* 春日版, *Jōdōkyō-ban* 神道教版, *Kōya-ban* 高野版, etc., from the names of their associated temples or sects); Chinese classical works printed in Japan (especially *Gozan-ban* 戈山版); and the early movable-type editions (*Kokatsuji-ban* 古活字版), which include *Saga-bon* 嵯峨版 and those rarest of all Japanese books, volumes printed by the Jesuit Mission Press, the *Kirishitan-ban* キリシタン版. In the category of *Kokatsuji-ban*, the best yardstick with which to measure the comparative strength of fine antiquarian collections, the British Library has about 120, a holding comparable with those of such great Japanese libraries as Tenri Central Library in Nara, Daitōkyū Memorial Library and the Tōyō Bunko (Oriental Library) in Tokyo.

The early date and rarity of much of the Japanese collection in the British Library owes a good deal to the acquisitions made by the British Museum, through purchase and gift, from four inspired collectors. They were Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716),⁵ a German physician and traveller who worked at Deshima, the Dutch East India Company’s trading post in Nagasaki; Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866), Kaempfer’s compatriot and likewise a doctor at Deshima; Sir Ernest Satow (1843–1929), a distinguished British diplomat and bibliophile; and William Anderson (1842–1900), a Scottish surgeon. Both Kaempfer and Siebold were in Japan when the country was closed to all foreigners except for a few Dutch and Chinese traders, whereas Satow and Anderson saw one of the most astonishing transformations in world history, from feudal society to modern state, in the wake of the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This gave them unprecedented opportunities to acquire items of interest from their Japanese friends or at antiquarian book markets. The circumstances under which the four collectors operated were to have a profound bearing on the characteristics of their respective collections.

Kaempfer⁶ is credited with having brought back from Japan to Europe the first
purposefully assembled research library on a country still veiled in mystery. He is best known for his *Heutiges Japan* ("Today's Japan"), which sought to describe objectively conditions under the Shogunate's *Sakoku* seclusion policy. This posthumous work, published in 1727 as *The History of Japan* in English translation, fundamentally shaped the European view of Japan for two centuries. In it, he coined the phrase "the country that shut itself in" which, in its Japanese rendering *Sakoku*, has since entered Japanese historical etymology. His collection was assembled between 1690 and 1692, while he served as a doctor with the Dutch at Deshima, during which time he accompanied the head of the Dutch factory on two tribute missions to the Shogun at Edo (fig. 1).

However, it was not in Holland nor his native Germany that Kaempfer's personal papers and Japanese collections were to come to rest but in England, the country where his *The History of Japan* was first published. This was thanks to Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), the founding father of the British Museum. Insatiable curiosity and encyclopaedic tastes, combined with great wealth, were to make him one of the greatest collectors of all times. As a physician, he had treated Queen Anne, and initiated
inoculation against smallpox. He succeeded Sir Isaac Newton as the President of the Royal Society. He was also responsible for the popularization of milk chocolate, which he originally prescribed as a medicine for consumption.

Having read Kaempfer’s *Amenitatum Exoticarum* (1712), the only major work he published during his lifetime, Sloane sought to acquire the ‘natural and artificial curiosities’ Kaempfer proclaimed in the preface that he had amassed during his travels from Persia to Japan. After protracted negotiations through various intermediaries with Kaempfer’s nephew and sole heir in Lemgo, north-west of Hanover, Sloane managed to acquire the most important part of his collection in 1723–5 for the sum of some 750 thalers (about 140 pounds). This comprised not only his Japanese library, ethnological artefacts and natural specimens but also his personal papers including the autograph manuscript of *Heutiges Japan*. Sloane had this German text translated straightaway by his young Swiss librarian, Johannes G. Scheuchzer, and published in 1727 as *The History of Japan*, thus making Kaempfer’s name immortal as the first scientific interpreter of that country.

After Sloane’s death, Kaempfer’s material was among the 50,000 volumes of books and manuscripts plus 80,000 natural specimens and antiquities which formed the basis of the British Museum. Today his collection is held, in varying degrees of completeness, in four locations: the Departments of Japanese Antiquities and of Ethnography at the British Museum; the Natural History Museum; and the British Library. Some of the natural specimens have perished or disappeared but the written material survives almost intact in the British Library. His Japanese library has now been identified and consists
Fig. 3. Ukejō no koto. A guarantee of good conduct, which reveals the identity of Kaempfer’s student-servant, Imamura Gen’emon, alias Imamura Eisei (1671–1736). Or. 14480/2

of thirty-three printed books, ten maps, fifty meisho-e (paintings of celebrated scenic and historic sites), and seven archival documents. The meisho-e, together with his autograph manuscripts and study notes, are preserved in the Department of (Western) Manuscripts, whereas the Japanese maps, books and documents are held in the Oriental and India Office Collections (see fig. 2).

The documents were discovered during the course of my research for a touring exhibition in Japan to celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of Kaempfer’s arrival at Deshima. One entitled Ukejō no koto 諸情之事 has revealed at last the identity of the Japanese student-servant whom Kaempfer credited anonymously in the preface to The History of Japan with risking his own life to obtain material for Kaempfer’s study. It is an official guarantee of law-abiding conduct for his servant, Imamura Gen’emon 今村源衛門 (fig. 3). He later became a notable figure in the history of Rangaku 蘭学 (Dutch or Western learning), going by his official name of Imamura Eisei 今村英生 (1671–1736). After Kaempfer’s departure, he rose to the rank of Ōtsūji 大通辞 (highest-ranked interpreter) by passing the Dutch examinations with flying colours. He was to play a leading role in Japan’s understanding of the outside world. Incidentally, Imamura
Hideaki 今村英雄, his seventh-generation direct descendant, visited the British Library recently for an enthralled viewing of his ancestor’s legacy.

Kaempfer’s Japanese printed books do not seem remarkable in themselves, being mostly small in format and mass-produced for everyday use. There are seven dochuki 道中記 pocket travel guides; eight encyclopaedias or primers such as Nanatsu iroha 七色の; four samurai clan directories (bukan 武鑑); three chronologies; four works of fiction and poetry; six joruri 浅草和 and noh 能 plays; and one honsō 本草 materia medica. The ten maps include four of Japan; two of the capital city, Edo (modern Tokyo); one each of Kyoto and Osaka; one hand-coloured map of Nagasaki; and a route map from Edo to Nagasaki in two rolls. Most of these items are now extremely rare or even unique. Those few still to be found in Japan are usually in a poor state of preservation. In contrast, Kaempfer’s items are in pristine condition and often with their original title slips still attached. In many of them, there are annotations and marginal notes in Kaempfer’s neat and delicate hand. They shed fascinating light on his own preparatory work on the manuscript of Heutiges Japan. The collection as a whole also bears vivid witness to how Scheuchzer went about producing the translated version. The British Library has been a veritable mecca for Kaempfer studies and will continue to attract scholars from all over the world for many years to come.

The next opportunity for major acquisition came 135 years later and was afforded by Philipp Franz von Siebold (fig. 4).10 Siebold’s first stay at Deshima, 1823–9, ended with the famous ‘Siebold Incident’ in which he was arrested for attempting to smuggle out proscribed materials. Yet he managed to return to Europe with a huge collection of books, artefacts, and Ukiyo-e prints and paintings – most of it now in Leiden. The Library’s Siebold collection mainly comprises items amassed during his only other trip to Japan, between 1859 and 1862. The Shogunate was then on the brink of collapse so Siebold was free to collect more or less what he wanted. The library he amassed amounts to some 1,088 titles in 3,441 volumes, including forty-three titles in ninety-nine volumes from his first stay. They were acquired for £1,100 on 22 July 1868 from his son Alexander, then a Japanese interpreter in the British Legation in Edo. The date derives from the acquisition date stamp ‘22 JY 68’ impressed on almost all items. (Until recently, it was the only means of identification for Siebold materials.) This acquisition instantly elevated a hitherto small and uneven collection in the British Museum into a research library covering every field of Japanese studies.11

Even so, the Siebold collection is not rich in early or rare editions. Only sixty-six such works from it are listed in the Gardner catalogue. Its strength lies in some 125 manuscripts, about half of all the Japanese manuscripts acquired by the British Library to date. The coverage ranges from political events during the turbulent Bakumatsu eras to law books and dictionaries; castaways’ accounts of foreign lands; documents relating to the Dutch; religious surveys aimed at eradicating Christianity, serving also as local population censuses; Ainu and Ryūkyū ethnography, etc. Also well represented are more scientific themes such as botany (fig. 5), whaling, mining,12 and canal-building. Given his intense interest in Japanese geography (one third of his major work Nippon is devoted
Fig. 4. Portrait of Philipp Franz von Siebold by Charles Wirgman of the Illustrated London News. By courtesy of the Brandenstien-Zeppelin family.
Fig. 5. Siebold’s signed label pasted in *Taisei honzō meiso*, a Japanese synopsis of C. P. Thunberg’s *Flora Japonica* by Siebold’s pupil Itō Keisuke. Or. 910

to it), there is a fine collection of maps, both printed and manuscript. Notable among them are a painted route map from Edo to Nagasaki (in the tradition of Kaempfer’s route map listed above) and a set of some fifty manuscript maps of various provinces. Of seminal artistic importance, too, are a few *Nara-ehon* 奈良絵巻 illuminated manuscripts and *gajō* 画帖 picture albums. Four such items (*Ise monogatari ezu* 伊勢物語絵巻 ; *Yuriwaka daijin emaki* 百合若大臣絵巻 ; *Genji monogatari ekotoba* [gajō] 魏氏物語絵詞 [画帖]; and *Yamato-ejō* [Bokuyō kyōka gajō 倭画帖] 卜義狂歌画帖) were published in the Kōdansha survey of *Japanese Art: the Great European Collections*.13

The British Library’s third and most important source of antiquarian Japanese books was the diplomat, Sir Ernest Satow (fig. 6). His distinctive *ex libris* seal ‘Eikoku Sado zōsho’ 英國薩道藏書 has long been familiar to Japanese bibliographers (fig. 7). His collection of early printed books and movable-type editions was made during his first tour of duty in Japan, 1862–83, as Interpreter, rising to Secretary, in the British Consular service. He returned to Japan as Minister from 1895 to 1900 but does not seem to have done much collecting.

As implied above, Satow’s career as a book collector was favoured by the modernization drive by the new Meiji government, an era when traditional art treasures were being sold cheaply and abundantly. He was also fortunate in having the advice of such discerning bibliographers and dealers as Nishimura Kenebumi 西村兼文, Terada Bōnan 寺田陽南, Mori Tatsuyuki 森立之, and Darumaya Goichi 達摩屋五一. They often left their own *ex libris* seals impressed on his books. But Satow himself was a born book-lover. He is the only European collector to have avidly used the books acquired to make himself expert in Japanese historical bibliography.
Fig. 6. Sir Ernest Satow. By courtesy of the Yokohama Kaiko Shiryokan (Yokohama Archives of History). His signature is from his letter to Samuel Birch, 7 April 1868, presenting 大英会議局録 (ORB. 30/220)

Fig. 7. Satow's ex libris seal. Or.64.b.2
From his autobiographical *A Diplomat in Japan* (1921) and from his voluminous diary and correspondence, now preserved in the Public Record Office in London, we know Satow started collecting almost the moment he reached Yokohama. In 1868, as the first European to enter Kyoto for centuries, he made straight for the bookshops near Sanjōdōri 三条通り. It was probably during one of these early excursions that he acquired a copy of the Chinese-character dictionary, *Daikō eikai gyokuhen* 大広益会玉篇 (1604), which he then sent to the British Museum with a covering letter dated 7 April 1868 and addressed to Samuel Birch, Keeper of the then Department of Oriental Antiquities. This was a response to an earlier letter from Birch who, evidently unaware of the Kaempfer items, asserted that no Chinese or Japanese books in Europe ‘exceed a century in age’. Thus the first Satow book entered the British Museum.

Henceforward, Satow was addicted to old books, hunting for them in bookshops wherever he went. By 1882, he had spent some 700 Yen and had been told by a leading bookseller in Kyoto that ‘1,200 Yen would secure every rare edition in Japan’. The examples he collected were comprehensive enough for him to write a most erudite account of the early history of Japanese printing which was published in 1882.\(^\text{14}\) This was to be followed in 1888 by a pioneering study of the Jesuit Mission Press,\(^\text{16}\) the *Kirishitanban*, in which he made full use of the *Amakusa-ban Heike monogatari* 天草版平家物語 (the *Tale of Heike*, a medieval Japanese war classic on the rise and fall of the Heike clan, printed in roman letters by the Jesuit press at Amakusa in Kyushu, 1592/3). By then, this world-renowned unique copy and one of the British Library’s signal treasures had already been in the Museum for at least a century as part of the Sloane foundation collection.

The British Library’s Satow books represent the cream of his larger collection which is now scattered among several libraries in Japan and Britain. They came to the British Museum in two lots: the first, comprising 219 works in 938 volumes, was purchased for £300 in September 1884 (when he had already left Japan to take up a new appointment as Consul General in Bangkok); and the second, 106 works in 640 volumes, was donated by him in June 1885. It is noteworthy that forty-five early Korean books were included, a fact reflecting his awareness of the seminal influence of Korean printing on that of Japan. In this respect, too, he was ahead of his time.

The statistics of the Satow collection are staggering. There are forty-seven works printed before 1600 and no fewer than seventy-two movable-type editions printed between 1590 and 1640. All these items are rare, and some the only copies in existence. Thus the *Shōsan jōdo bushōju-kyō* 種室淨土佛攝受經, a principal sutra of the *Jōdo* sect printed in 1280, is the only copy known (fig. 8). There are two copies of *Shōhei-ban Rongo* 正平版論語, the Confucian Analects of 1364, the earliest surviving non-Buddhist work printed in Japan. Another example of secular literature, produced during the long era of Buddhist domination of the printing trade, can be seen in the two editions of a Chinese rhyming dictionary, *Shūban inryaku* 衆分韻略, printed in Ōei 19 (1412) and in Meiō 2 (1493) respectively. Other treasures include the sole extant copy of the monk Shinjo’s twelfth edition of the complete *Hoke-kyō* 法華経 (Lotus Sutra) in eight rolls printed
Fig. 8. Shōsan jōdo busshōju-kyō (‘Sutra in praise of Amida Buddha and the Pure Land’), the only surviving copy of this folding album printed from woodblock, 1280; from Satow’s collection. ORB. 30/83
Fig. 9. William Anderson, Chairman of the Council of the Japan Society.
By courtesy of the Japan Society

circa 1330, and another sole copy of an illustrated Kannon-gyo 觀音経 (Sutra of the Bodhisattva Kannon). This last was commissioned by a swordsmith in Mino province and dated Eishō 1 (1504). It is a remarkable early example of a provincial as well as private publication.

Among the rare movable-type editions, there are four chokuhan 動版 imperial editions: the second extant copy of the 1599 edition of the Confucian ‘Four Books’ (Shishō 四書 ), bound together with the Kōkyō 孝経 (Classic of Filial Piety); the Nihon shoki: jindai no maki 日本書紀・神代巻 (Chapters on the Age of the Gods) of the same date; and the encyclopaedia Kōchō jihō ruien 皇朝事実類苑, commissioned by Emperor Go-Mizunoōmon 後水尾 and printed from wooden type in 1621. Though not much concerned with the de luxe private Saga press books so coveted by other collectors, Satow did acquire an example of the earliest movable-type edition of the celebrated primer Mogyū 蒙求 of Bunroku 文禄 5 (1596). Then again, in Tsukihi no sōshi 月日のさうし (circa 1615–30), one sees the beginning of fiction written for the emergent reading public. This is the only known copy with that title, either in or outside Japan.

Dr William Anderson, the fourth benefactor in our survey, was not only a surgeon but an accomplished anatomical artist (fig. 9). He spent the years 1873–80 as Professor of Anatomy and Surgery at the newly founded Imperial Naval College in Tokyo. He was one of the early o-yatoi 求引i hired by the fledgling Meiji government to transform Japan into a western-style advanced nation. He lectured not only on anatomy and surgery but also physiology and medicine. Indeed, the foundations of naval medical practice he laid can still be seen today.

While in Japan he collected numerous prints and paintings as well as woodblock illustrated books (see Plate VII). These are in three formats: ehon 絵本 (picture books),
(a) Katsushika Hokusai, A *daimyō* and his retainers: the frontispiece of *Nishikizuri onna sanjū-rokkasen ezukushi* ('The thirty-six immortal poetesses in brocade prints'), 1801, from the Anderson collection. Or.65.a.62

(b) Chōbunsai Eishi, An immortal poetess, one of his illustrations in Or.65.a.62. The flowing script of her poem is a specimen of a young girl's calligraphy.
Opening lines of the text of Or 7377. Gold on white paper. Dimensions of one fold $32.5 \times 11$ cm. Front and back covers include precious blooms and a title cartouche on a lotus pedestal, all painted in gold on deep blue paper and surrounded by a silver arabesque design which has discoloured to light grey.
His appreciation of Japanese art was evidently informed by his early training as an anatomical draughtsman. After his return home, he served as a distinguished surgeon at St Thomas’s Hospital in London while writing several influential books on Japanese art, including *The Pictorial Arts of Japan* (1886). He was the first Chairman of the Council of the Japan Society of London, when it was constituted in 1892, a post he held until his death in 1900.

According to the acquisition records kept in the British Library, the Anderson collection, totalling over 2,000 volumes, was acquired in four stages: 311 volumes of illustrated books for £360 in July 1882; 1,280 for £250 in February 1894; 300 for £50 in March 1894; and finally, in 1900, an unspecified number for an undisclosed sum from the executors of his will. But one exceptionally fine *Nara-ehon* 奈良絵本 illuminated manuscript entitled *Gikeiki* 義絵記 (on the legendary deeds of the medieval warrior Minamoto no Yoshitsune) was acquired in 1881. It was among the first purchase from Anderson of 2,236 paintings, hand scrolls and albums by the British Museum for £3,000.16 The latter constitutes an important part of the foundation collections of the Museum’s present Department of Japanese Antiquities.17 Our *Gikeiki* was reproduced for the first time in the Kōdansha survey referred to above.

The Anderson collection includes seventeenth-century *ehon* 絵本 illustrated with woodcuts by Hishikawa Moronobu 荒川宣信 and other founding members of the *Ukiyo-e* 木 PAL school. Among them are the very rare *Kōshoku yamatoe no kongen* 好色大和絵のこんげん by Moronobu, *Koi no utakagami* 恋の歌がみ by the otherwise unknown Hishikawa Yanai 菅川彌内, and the (Saga-bon) *Ise monogatari* of Keicho 13 (1608). However, a number of important *kusazōshi* 草紙 and *ukiyo-zōshi* 浮世絵草子 novels (*Kōshoku gonin onna* 好色五人女 and *Kōshoku Ise monogatari*, for example) which were also acquired from him intriguingly bear Satow’s *ex libris* seals.

Likewise, there are several items bearing the seal of William George Aston (1841–1911), scholar and diplomat, which, according to the acquisition date-stamp, were actually acquired from Anderson. The 1610 block-printed *Ise monogatari* (Or.65.c.35) and *Hasshu gafu* 八種画譜, a multi-volume instructional manual of Chinese-style drawings for Japanese *Nanga* 南画 (literally ‘southern painting’) or literati art, are cases in point. Both are impressed with Aston’s *ex libris* seal though they were purchased from Anderson in 1882 and 1894 respectively. It has been proved that quite a number of Anderson’s illustrated books were either given by Satow directly or through Aston who had himself acquired them from Satow. Anderson and Aston (along with pioneer scholars, Basil Chamberlain and Frederick Dickins) were Satow’s contemporaries in Japan. Together they formed a band of dedicated Japanologists and were in the habit of exchanging interesting items they had come across. But it was Satow who was the most generous in lending books which might aid his colleagues’ research – for example, Anderson’s Japanese art and Aston’s literature and Shinto studies.

Along with the majority of the other historical Japanese collections, Anderson’s books are recorded in the two-volume catalogue of Japanese books and manuscripts compiled...
by Sir Robert Kennaway Douglas, the first Keeper of the Department of Oriental
Printed Books and Manuscripts, but especially in the supplementary volume of 1904. However, those primarily of pictorial, as opposed to textual, interest were transferred over the years to what is now the Department of Japanese Antiquities of the British Museum. Big movements of books between the two departments occurred whenever there was an organizational change, namely in 1906, 1915, during the 1930s and finally in 1973 when the British Library was formed as a separate institution. This resulted in the Library losing some ehon and gafu masterpieces to the Museum while gaining a good number of refined kyōka-bon poetry anthologies, with superb colour illustrations by such woodblock print masters as Utamaro and Hokusai. The two collections of illustrated books are being brought together in a comprehensive catalogue to be compiled by Yu-Ying Brown (at the instigation of the late art historian, Jack Hillier) which, when published in due course, will confirm that the two departments hold between them one of the best collections of illustrated books outside Japan.

After Douglas’s retirement from the Keepership in 1907, the Japanese collections were effectively dormant, for there was no specialist to buy or catalogue. Consequently, when in 1955 Kenneth B. Gardner was appointed as the first Japanese curator for nearly fifty years, there was much catching up to do. Fortunately, a modest increase in purchase funds during the 1960s and 1970s made it possible to seek out and buy antiquarian material. The aim was to build on existing strengths but also to fill the obvious gaps, especially in the fields of Nara-ehon, early fiction, and illustrated books of the seventeenth century. With a combination of foresight, luck and good relations with scholar-dealers in Japan, the British Library has been able to acquire, during the last few decades, many items of great bibliographical significance and interest. Foremost among them has been a monumental set of four standard and four variant texts of the Hyakumantō darani (formerly in the zaibatsu Yasuda’s library); the Jōyuishiki-ron jukki (from the collection of Frank Hawley, correspondent of The Times, and to date the Library’s earliest example of Heian-period printing, circa 1170–80); an extremely rare and fine example of an early Koya-ban imprint, the Kongochō yuga-kyō (1279); an exquisite Saga-bon set of eleven Kanze-school libretti of noh plays, printed with mica designs on covers and text pages and with the finest calligraphy; and the Kinō wa kyō no monogatari, a unique copy of a two-volume work of early seventeenth century popular fiction. In the area of book illustration, several landmark items have been acquired: for example, Chichi no on, which shows a tentative attempt at colour printing, and the Taigadō gafu, a sublime expression of Nanga in printed art. The fact that, of the 637 items described in the Gardner catalogue, as many as 237 have been acquired since the 1950s shows that the recent history of the British Library’s antiquarian Japanese collection is one of continuing growth and evolution.

Kawase Kazuma, Daiei Toshokan zo Nihon kohanbon mokuroku 大英図書館藏日本古版本録 (London and Nara, 1993).


A microfiche edition of all 637 books was produced in 1996 by the two Tokyo-based publishers, Kinokuniya Shoten 紀伊国屋書店 and Ho-no-Tomo Sha 本の友社 in association with the British Library, under the title Daiei Toshokan za Nihon kohanbon shi'isei 大英図書館藏日本古版本集成.


