The William Elliot Griffis Collection of Old and Rare Japanese Books, Olin Library, Cornell University

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1. Introduction: The Two Griffis Collections

The William Elliot Griffis Collection in the Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, New Jersey, is by now a well-known and well described collection. The 15,000 items it contains provide an invaluable resource for the study of numerous topics relating to early Meiji Japan, not the least of which is the role of foreigners, including Griffis himself, who were invited to Japan to teach at that time.

What has not been as well known, even to specialists, is the existence of another William Elliot Griffis collection, this one located in the Cornell University libraries in Ithaca, New York. The content of this collection is quite different in nature from the Rutgers one, which explains in large measure why it has not as yet received due recognition. The main distinguishing feature of these holdings is that they are almost exclusively Japanese-language works collected by or presented to Griffis, whereas the Rutgers collection, with occasional exceptions, consists of English-language documents, clippings, correspondence, manuscripts, monographs and articles of a more immediate and personalized nature. Moreover, while the latter focuses on contemporary Meiji Japanese politics, society and culture, the former, though numbering a modest 500 titles (1600 items), covers a wide range of old and rare Japanese editions (including maps) spanning several centuries and subject areas.

While the above gives an indication of the fundamentally different character of the two collections, and hence their appeal to presumably distinct groups of specialists, scholars of Griffis may be interested to learn of the presence of notes and letters among the pages, as well as numerous handwritten notations to be found in the margins of the Cornell volumes. The pencilled notes suggest that Griffis made every effort to know the content of these volumes by having students and friends describe their substance to him.

2. A Brief History

While Griffis' act of loyalty to Rutgers came through his umbilical ties to that University's class of 1869, Cornell owes the existence of its collection
to Griffis' decade (1893-1903) as minister of the First Congregational Church in Ithaca. The pre-Meiji and early Meiji (from 1868 to 1874) works were brought back by Griffis to the United States after his four years as a teacher in Japan (1870-1874). Another cluster of volumes is from the mid-Meiji period (1880-1895), sent to him on order in the United States. It was at the time of and subsequent to Griffis' move from Ithaca to New York that he donated these works to the Cornell libraries (most were received between 1898 and 1920). Presumably, Griffis had little need for the piles of unreadable books that occupied his floor space, and he was more than happy to deliver them to a safe and respectable haven. Half a century was to go by before a scholar took an interest in the Griffis bequest as a coherent entity. Frances Y. Helbig, a graduate student at the University of Rochester, investigated the Cornell collection in 1966 as part of her study of Griffis' intellectual contribution, and compiled a list based on the original accessions records. Her lack of knowledge of Japanese, however, prevented her from checking the accessions listings, all apparently approximate translations from Griffis' own hand, against the Japanese originals. Furthermore, the specific motivation for her investigation was to suggest the breadth of Griffis' knowledge of Japan, and hence peripheral to an evaluation of the volumes in their own right. Another twelve years then elapsed before Ishikawa Kazuo, Assistant Professor at Kuritachi Academy of Music, and visiting scholar at Cornell's Center for International Studies (1978-79), came across some of the rarer Griffis specimens while exploring Cornell's resources. Intrigued by the age and potential value of some of the volumes, he consulted with such Cornell Japan scholars as Robert J. Smith, Professor of Anthropology, who supported his proposed project to compile an exhaustive catalogue of the Griffis contribution. It should be stressed that Professor Ishikawa, while tangentially interested in the history of Meiji Japan-United States relations as a corollary to his field of international relations and political theory, was not a specialist in Meiji history or bibliography. His perseverance, however, in going through the early accessions lists, various Cornell card catalogues, and individual stack holdings, confirmed his suspicion that there was more to the collection than previously realized. For example, his investigation revealed the absence of some fifty-odd items, some of which Professor Smith, upon searching through his personal library, discovered among a group of books he had acquired many years previously from a dealer who had purchased the library of a deceased Cornell professor. The process of ferreting out misplaced items, verifying information, annotating, translating and editing, was continued, with limited funding, after Professor Ishikawa's return to Japan, and with additional research provided by him. The resulting catalogue will be published shortly in Cornell University's East Asia Papers Series. The project is being carried out under the auspices of the Wason Collection and its curator, Diane Perushek, with support from Cornell's China-Japan Program.

3. Description of the Collection

In order to suggest the potential interest of the Cornell Griffis Collection for scholars of Japan, this section provides a brief description of its contents in three sections: 1) a general overview; 2) major categories of items; and 3) an account of Professor Ishikawa's discovery of what may prove to be the "phantom hymnal" of 1873.
3.1. Overview

The large majority of the Collection's 500 titles are products of the late Edo and Early Meiji periods, thus straddling one of the most significant periods in Japanese history, symbolized by the Meiji Restoration of 1868. And, indeed, many of the volumes in this collection, in their diversity their content and even in the conditions of their production, do vividly reflect the turbulence of this period of transition from the restless seclusion of the late Edo to the vigorous confusion of the outward-looking young Meiji state.

Elements of the transition to a modern nation-state are apparent in the translations, from Dutch and English, of works of science, medicine, and geography, as well as in the introduction of new ideas and new literary forms in the volumes on philosophy, Christianity, ethics, etc.

The Griffis Collection includes numerous early and mid-Tokugawa works of literature, religion, science, and geography, many in beautifully illustrated editions. Not a few of these are now rare items, not only in the United States, but in Japan as well. A substantial number of works was published between 1870-74 (the period of Griffis' stay in Japan), and between 1880 and 1895, when Griffis continued to receive books from Japan at the rate of approximately five titles per year. The result, owing more to the nature of the times in Japan than anything else, is a group of volumes conveying the exhilarating tension of a new era. Not the least worthy of note is the light they shed on the critical transformation of the Japanese publishing world itself.

The difficulties of determining rarity for Japanese books are numerous. The presence of a fifteenth-century edition of the Zenrin kokuhōki (1477?) dealing with early Sino-Korean-Japanese relations, as well as of a number of other valuable editions, should be of interest to scholars. Included here are: a complete edition of the Gempei ikusa monogatari (1656), of which only two sets exist in Japan; an unillustrated wooden movable type (twelve line) edition of the Gikeiki from 1635, making this one of the select group of kokatsuji-ban or "Old Movable Type Imprints"; a predominantly hiragana version of the Heike monogatari (1656), of which only nine sets exist in Japan; and a Kitamura Shūgin annotation of Sei Shōnagon's Pillow Book, entitled Makura no sōshi haru wa akebono shō (1674). In addition, Cornell has copies of: the Miyako meishō hyakkei (undated) and Soshin manga (1858), of which only one copy each exists in Japan; an 1850 Kokin zufu (only two copies in Japan); and Sankairi (1825) and Hyaku Fuji (1771) (only three in Japan). Some other noteworthy items are: Azuma kagami (1626); Shimabara-ki (1640); Genkō shakusaho wage (1690); and a 1759 edition of Zōshi, a colorfully illustrated anatomy handbook by Yamawaki Tōyō.

Most of the post-Meiji items are first editions, including such works as Rai Sanyo's Nihon seiki and Nihon gaishi, both published in 1871, and several of Katsu Kaishū's works on Japanese history and diplomacy: Kaigun rekishi, 1889, Kaikoku kigen, 18(?) and Bakufu shimatsu, 1895.
3.2. Major subject categories

1. Geographical works

Griffis' interest in geography is attested to not only by the large number of maps he collected, but also by the many illustrated gazetteers and other types of geographical works in the collection. One of the most interesting is the Echizen kokumei sekikō, which was undoubtedly a gift to him from Echizen (present-day Fukui) han officials, if not from the daimyo himself. Extremely popular in their day, these illustrated gazetteers (meisho zue), whose vivid color maps and scenic illustrations are masterpieces in their own right, continue to be of interest to students of Japanese art and history as well as to geographers and anthropologists. Akizato Ritō compiled the vast minority of the fifty gazetteers published in late Edo. In addition to his Miyako meisho zue, the Griffis Collection includes such representative examples as Tōkaidō meisho zue and Edo meisho zue. A large number of both the gazetteers and maps is devoted to the city of Edo (modern Tokyo) and is thus extremely useful for those interested in the critical transformation being undergone by Japan's major metropolis at that time.

2. Literature

Literary works include a substantial number of the major representatives of the classical tradition, as well as the varied publication formats of the Tokugawa period. Major genres include the medieval gunki monogatari (military tales), ehon (picture books), the didactic yomihon (reading books), and the popular and varied lighter fiction of gesaku authors throughout the better part of the Tokugawa period.

The Collection's sixty gesaku titles span the middle to late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods, with examples of kibyōshi (yellow jacket booklets), gōkan (bound volumes), ninjōbon (love stories), and kokkeibon (humor books).

The Collection also contains twenty-four volumes of dodoitsu (Japanese limericks) with annotations and translation efforts by Griffis himself, suggesting that he may have studied the verse form with John Goble, translator of Christian works into Japanese, with the idea of using it to translate hymns in this style.

3. Periodicals

Most of the periodicals collected by Griffis were sent to him from Japan after his return to the United States. They cover a wide diversity of publications and include a number of valuable first issues of Meiroku zasshi, Rikugō zasshi, and Maru maru chimbun, all important for the study of Meiji intellectual and cultural history.

4. Translations into Japanese, including Christian works

The category of translations from the West is a major focus of interest among students of Japan, and the Griffis Collection includes such well-known titles of the day as Samuel Smile's Self-Help (Seikoku risshi han) and John Stuart Mill's
On Liberty (Jiyū no kotowari). It also features representative works of Japan's most famous modern teacher, Fukuzawa Yukichi: Seijō jijō, 1873; Kinmō kyūri zakai, 1871.

The category of translations includes an extensive selection of Japanese renditions of the Bible, Christian hymnals, catechisms, and sermons. In all, the Reverend Griffis brought back forty-six titles, including some of the most important works of the 1870s and an edition of what may be the earliest Protestant hymnal produced in Japan (see below). Of note here are such prayer books and catechisms as Yasokyō ryakkai, Byōshoku mondō, and a manuscript copy of Fukuindō kodomo mondō ryakkai.

It was in September 1872, at the first conference of Protestant ministers in Japan in Yokohama, that fourteen missionaries decided to undertake the translation and publication in Japanese of the entire New Testament. The products of this undertaking, all represented in the Collection, were the American Bible Society's translations of the individual gospels through the joint efforts of American missionaries such as S.R. Brown, J.S. Hepburn, and of Japanese converts to Christianity, Okuno Masatsuna, Matsuyama Kōkichi, Takahashi Gorō, et al. The first edition of the complete New Testament was published in 1879.

The Griffis Collection also includes one of only four existing copies of the first translation of a gospel, antedating the joint Japanese-American efforts. It is the Matai fukuinsho (Gospel according to St. Matthew), translated by Jonathan Goble in 1871. Also represented are the Ruka fukuinsho (Luke) and Shito gyōden (Apostles), published in Vienna, and translated by Bernard John Bettelheim, the first missionary to the Ryūkyū Islands.

3.3. The "phantom hymnal" of 1873

The Griffis Collection includes a selection of Christian hymnals, representing four of the known eight varieties of hymnals published in Japanese by various religious denominations soon after the ban on Christianity was lifted in 1874. All undated and bearing the title Sanbi no uta (Songs of Praise), these translations represent the collaboration of American missionaries and their Japanese converts.

One of the hymnals, a forty-one page fascicule containing sixteen hymns, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, whose existence has only been surmised from circumstantial evidence, may prove to be the earliest ever published in Japan.

In order to pursue his investigations further, Professor Ishikawa corresponded with the foremost expert on Christian hymnals in Japan, Professor Hara Megumi of Aoyama Gakuin College. Through a comparative examination across the Pacific (via photocopies) of the Cornell hymnals with the eight known types of 1874 hymnals, the two scholars were able to establish a close resemblance to the Nagasaki editions of late 1874. The existence of as many as fifty-five discrepancies, along with a conspicuously less polished style, however, suggested to them that the Cornell hymnal may in fact be the 1873 edition assumed to have served as model for the later 1874 versions.
The fact that the actual existence of this hymnal had never been substantiated led to its being referred to as a "phantom hymnal." The evidence for supposing its existence is a quote attributed to Henry Loomis, an American missionary in Yokohama at the time, to the effect that he had collaborated in the publication of a hymnal in 1873 containing sixteen hymns. According to Professor Hara, the identical number of sixteen hymns and the knowledge that Loomis, together with his Japanese collaborator, Okuno Masatsuna, were deeply involved in the publication of the 1874 edition, makes it not improbable that the same two missionaries cooperated on an 1873 volume as well.16

4. Conclusion: The New York State-Japan Connection

The project of compiling for publication a separate catalogue of these holdings has been undertaken with a view to encouraging investigation by American and Japanese specialists. While the Collection remains for the most part intact and in good condition (re-sewing, rebinding, and fumigation have been carried out, when necessary, as part of the cataloguing process), it was felt that further research could not be stimulated without first establishing the intrinsic value of the Griffis Collection as an integral historical unit. Given, moreover, the preponderance of bakumatsu (late Tokugawa) and early Meiji works at a time of increased scholarly interest in this crucial transitional period of Japanese development, it seemed an especially appropriate time to encourage an evaluation of the historical importance of these volumes, both individually and collectively, from a contemporary as well as a bi-cultural perspective.

The Griffis Collection at Cornell relates to the Rutgers Collection in a manner perhaps only recently given due appreciation, thanks to the developing field of transnational relations. Certain types of intercultural relations, involving private individuals and groups, or local level (municipal, state, religious) institutions, such as those between Griffis and Fukui han or those between Rutgers, Cornell, New York State, and Japanese students and individuals, are being looked at in a new theoretical light, one designed to illuminate areas which have often been relegated to oblique references in the pages of traditional national and diplomatic histories. Beyond representing an unusual concentration of old and valuable Japanese books, the Griffis Collection's early Meiji works may thus shed new light on a dark corner of Japanese-United States cultural relations.17

An example of the process involved here is the existence in the Collection of a second copy of John Goble's pioneer translation into Japanese of the "Gospel according to Saint Matthew." The fact that it lies, some one hundred years after its creation, in Ithaca, New York, close to Goble's native Steuben County, dramatizes the early contacts between New York State and Japan. In a sense, it was Goble himself who initiated those contacts in 1853 on his history-making voyage to Japan, and subsequently contributed to the development of the pre-Meiji version of foreign student exchange when he returned to Hamilton, New York, accompanied by a Japanese stowaway. Goble was but one of many New Yorkers who played a significant role in early Meiji education as teachers of English, doctors, consultants, and missionaries.18
Beyond the intellectual and ideological content of their teaching, however, we may want to consider the formal significance of their translations in the literary history of Japan. The high quality of the translations was inseparable from the innovative "biblical style" verse in which it was expressed. The resulting appeal of the hymn translations proved, along with translations of secular poetry, to be a concomitant source of the Shintaishi "new style" movement so seminal in the history of modern Japanese poetry. It is of interest to note here that one of the three authors of the pioneer Shintaishishō, Yatabe Ryōkichi, was also the first Japanese to graduate from Cornell University. Although his four years in Ithaca, from 1872 to 1876, were devoted to the study of botany and Darwinian evolution, he also found time to become acquainted with the fundamentals of Western music and poetry, and it was while a professor of botany at Tokyo University that he was to distinguish himself, not only as Japan's first advocate of evolution, but also as one of the founders of the New Style Poetry movement.

Griffis was also deeply interested in the activities of Japanese foreign students in the United States, and played an often key role in bringing students (including Mori Arinori and Yatabe Ryōkichi) to Rutgers, Cornell, and other universities, in 1868 and 1870. The presence of the Griffis volumes at Cornell attests to the importance he attached to these "people-to-people" activities, whose value as a means of disseminating knowledge to Japan he valued no less than his own writing about Japan for the American public.

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Notes:


3. The volumes are located for the most part in the East Asia section of the Wason Collection, Olin Library.

4. The exceptions are occasional memorabilia, dictionaries, and language texts.

5. Much of the historical information in this section is synthesized from Ishikawa Kazuo's introduction to the forthcoming catalogue of the Cornell Griffis Collection, to be published as part of the Cornell University East Asia Papers Series. See note 10.
6. A third recipient of Griffis' non-Japanese-language gifts was Hope College in Holland, Michigan.


8. The catalogue may be found in an appendix to the resulting Master's thesis, which is entitled "William Elliot Griffis: Entrepreneur of Ideas" (University of Rochester, 1966).

9. Searches of other Cornell libraries have since uncovered a majority of the other "lost" items.

10. Inquiries may be addressed to: China-Japan Program, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853.


13. Concise descriptions of these forms and genres are contained in Donald Keene, World Within Walls (Grove Press, 1976).

14. The issue has received the attention of both scholars and the press in Japan. See article in the Yomiuri Shinbun of May 8, 1979, entitled, a bit prematurely, "Maboroshi no sanbi kashū' hakken" (Discovery of "phantom hymnal").

15. For a recent overview of the field of hymnal history in Japan, see Fukkoku Meiji shoki sanbika; Kaisetsu (Tokyo: Shinkyō Shuppansha, 1978) published under the auspices of the Allchin Collection, Kobe Women's College Library.

16. Interview with Professor Hara Megumi in Tokyo in same Yomiuri edition (see previous note).

17. The information contained here is from an unpublished Japanese manuscript by Professor Ishikawa.

18. Some others were G. Verbaeck, Samuel R. Brown, James H. Ballagh, and M. Kidder.