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The Gest Library and the Study of Early Modern Japan: a Room with a View

CHARLES L. YATES

Saigō Takamori was a low-ranking samurai from the domain of Satsuma in southern Kyushu who played a key role in Japan's turbulent events of 1853 to 1877. Although he died leading a famous rebellion by discontented samurai against the very government he had helped to create, Saigō nevertheless is the most widely known and revered of Japan's popular heroes. He is acknowledged as one of the leaders of the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and an early architect of modern Japan.

One would think that a researcher in a Western library, choosing to write a large work on Saigō, would eventually either abandon the topic or abandon the West for the libraries and archives of Japan. Serious scholars of Japan, however, know that there are good libraries around the world. Serious patrons of those libraries gain an inside knowledge of the views they offer. I chose the Saigō topic and became a connoisseur of an unusual research room with a clear vantage of a complex terrain. I did not have to abandon a thing.

My first few strolls through the Gest Library's Japanese collection early in my project (in 1980) showed that Princeton did indeed hold a great many titles in Japanese history. At one point I remarked to my advisor, Professor Marius Jansen, that the holdings in my particular areas of interest seemed to be so numerous that I had the feeling someone had built the collection with precisely my own research needs in mind. The remark was only half in jest.

The more familiar I became with the Gest, the more impressed I was with the number of key titles it contained.

Even though to work in archives and libraries in Japan remains something like an article of faith for modern historians, and although no research library outside of Japan, no matter how well equipped, could possibly have everything or produce all the unexpected finds, I can say that the Gest Library is so well equipped in some areas that one can complete a research project without the need to go to Japan merely to learn the extent and types of materials.

The Meiji Restoration era, Saigō's time, is conceived narrowly as having begun with the arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry in Japan in 1853, and ending with the announcement of the restoration of direct imperial rule in 1868. Few scholars, however, would dispute the claim that the time of transition which brought Japan out of the quasi-feudal institutional pattern of its early modern rulers and into modern times lasted from roughly the 1830s until well into the 1890s: almost an entire century of rapid and pervasive change. In choosing to study Saigō and his native region, I seemed to have stepped into a historical, as well as historiographical, whirlwind. The subjects were central to a scholarly controversy that has raged in Japan for more than a hundred years; and they had been ignored almost completely by Western scholars.

In my first seminar with Professor Jansen, I set myself the task of drawing up an annotated bibliography of the Gest holdings on the domain of Satsuma, a territory roughly equivalent to what is today Kagoshima Prefecture. Already familiar by then with the scope of Gest's holdings, I was nevertheless surprised at the size of the finished product. Although I confined myself almost exclusively to materials on Satsuma and Kagoshima, the finished bibliography was more than a hundred pages long, and contained a high percentage of the total number of extant published items on the subject.

Central to the list was the official history of Kagoshima, the *Kagoshima kenshi*, in five volumes. This is one of the earliest of the Japanese prefectural histories, and remains one of the finest in terms of the detail of its coverage and the completeness of its annotations and citations of primary documents. In 1980 Gest had one copy of this work, a used one in rather sad condition. Recently the library acquired a copy of the most recent reprint, comprising eight volumes of updated material. Kagoshima is not the only prefecture so

represented among Gest's holdings; most of the standard prefectural and urban histories considered basic to a Japanese research collection are to be found on the shelves.

Unlike most of the official local histories now in print, the *Kagoshima kenshi* does not include a set of documentary volumes. Both the earlier five-volume set and the new eight-volume one contain nothing but narrative, annotations, and supplemental volumes of tables and charts. However, Kagoshima Prefecture has not been idle. Both the prefectural library and the archives of the prefectural university have cooperated in the ongoing publication of primary documents in a series called *Kagoshima ken shiryō*, which to date consists of some thirty large volumes of documents. It contains everything known to exist, and is arranged chronologically according to the reigns of Satsuma's more than thirty successive rulers, from 1185 down to the end of the 1870s. Gest Library owns all of these volumes, many of which are now out of print. And this formidable documentary resource is supplemented by a number of earlier collections, most notably *Sappan sōsho* and *Shin Sappan sōsho*, totaling seven volumes, and most of the individual volumes of the collection, *Sappan shiryō shū*.

In Japan, the largest collections of original documents relating to Satsuma and Kagoshima are to be found in three places: the prefectural library, the prefectural university, and the Historiographical Institute of Tokyo University (Shiryō Hensanjo). In these collections, in addition to reams of official government orders, legislation, and other procedural and institutional materials, there are large numbers of diaries and personal letters. Much of this latter material has yet to be published, and can be studied only in its original form at these archives. However, unless one is concerned with the career of a specific institution or individual not represented in other published sources, one can find all the documentary evidence he needs in the *Kagoshima ken shiryō* and the other collections I mentioned above. In other words, for almost any sort of research in institutional, legal, or economic history related to Satsuma or Kagoshima, one never need leave Gest Library.

Needless to say, one cannot study a locality without to some extent placing it in its regional or national context. As any specialist can attest, the published materials for nineteenth-century Japan, particularly for its political, social, diplomatic, and economic history, are dauntingly numerous. To cite only the most fundamental, these include the more than one hundred vol-

umes of *Nihon shiseki kyōkai sōsho* and the almost equally large *Zoku Nihon shiseki kyōkai sōsho*. Including government documents, diaries, letters, and other materials, many of which are immediately pertinent to the study of Kagoshima, these sets are concerned entirely with nineteenth-century political history. Both sets are to be found in Gest, together with every other major documentary collection on the nineteenth century.

Incidentally, no less is true of the other basic documentary collections for other periods of Japanese history. Such venerable classics as the massive *Dai Nihon shiryō* line Gest's shelves alongside comprehensive ancient and medieval sets like *Heian ibun* and *Kamakura ibun*. These are further supplemented by such modern sources as the diplomatic collection, *Nihon gaikō shiryō*, and full reproductions of all of Japan's major newspapers, from the first edition to the most recent.

Few Western historians have been able to find their way through the plethora of primary documents on Japanese history without the help of their Japanese colleagues, and have relied repeatedly on the enormous secondary literature. Basic in this sense are such extended historiographical works as the twenty-three volumes of *Taikei Nihonshi sōsho*, which present the general wisdom of Japan's historians topically, and also such multi-volume narratives as the works titled *Nihon no rekishi*, published by Chūō Kōron Sha and Shōgakkan. The source of first reference for Japanese scholarly consensus is, of course, the collection of individual articles on key topics known as *Iwanami kōza: Nihon rekishi*. Three successive editions of this collection have appeared, in 1938, 1963, and 1976. Gest Library owns all three, as well as all of the series named above.

On the Meiji Restoration, for which the documentary sets named earlier provide the primary evidence, the standard narrative is the government-sponsored six-volume *Ishinshi* of 1940, reprinted with corrections in 1978. Gest owns both editions, together with the ten-volume *Ishin shiryō kōyō*. This latter work is in effect a chronological table of contents to the more than 4,000 manuscript volumes of *Dai Nihon ishin shiryō kōhon*. This latter work exists only in the Historiographical Institute at Tokyo University, where it occupies an entire floor. However, every entry in it is noted in *Ishin shiryō kōyō*, next to the specific event it substantiates, and the narrative of the *Ishinshi* documents follows the same written accounts chronologically. Thus, for those who need to visit the Institute in Tokyo to complete their research, it is possible to survey the entire 4,180 volumes of manuscript

there and plan a course of reading, in the process saving untold hours of work, simply by visiting Gest Library and consulting *Ishinshi* and *Ishin shiryō kōyō*. Additionally, a substantial percentage of the material in *Dai Nihon ishin shiryō kōhon* has been published in various collections, including *Nihon shiseki kyōkai sōsho* and other sets mentioned above, all in Gest.

For this entire first step, gaining familiarity with the scope and content of the documentary and narrative sources for nineteenth-century Japan and particularly the Meiji Restoration, it was never necessary for me to go anywhere other than to the shelves of Gest Library. I think it no exaggeration to state that practically anyone concerned with topics in any way similar to mine would be able to say the same thing. I can imagine few topics in Japanese history, either of the nineteenth or any other century, for which all of the basic research and planning could not be done entirely in Gest Library.

The second step in my research led naturally to the collected writings of my subject, Saigō. The earliest collection, *Dai Saigō zenshū*, appeared in three voumes in 1923. The most recent, *Saigō Takamori zenshū* in six volumes, came out in 1977 on the one hundredth anniversary of his death. Both collections, as well as several other less complete sets that have appeared in between, are in Gest Library. The same applies to the collected writings of many of the other people who were pivotal in Saigō's life, such as his close friend Ōkubo Toshimichi, and his domanial lord, Shimazu Nariakira. Such standard biographies as *Saigō Takamori den, Ōkubo Toshimichi den, Shimazu Nariakira genkōroku*, and others of his circle, are also held by Gest, together with the collected writings of many of the same men.

In the sixth volume of *Saigō Takamori zenshū* there is a bibliography of works on Saigō and the events of his life, chiefly the rebellion he led in 1877. It contains close to 1,500 entries, ranging from short newspaper articles to full-length monographs, children's books, collections of photographs and prints, and novels. New writings on Saigō have appeared at the rate of about one a month throughout the 110 years since his death. Given this steady flow of material, it would be difficult for a single scholar to master the literature on Saigō, even over the course of many decades. Likewise, it would be impossible, and largely pointless, for any library to hold more than a small representative sampling of it. Gest Library owns a fraction of the total, including most of what is truly important. There are titles whose acquisition would strengthen the Gest collection on Saigō, but because of the large holdings in related subjects, their absence does not significantly

weaken it. As a general Japanese research library, Gest holds as representative a group of titles on Saigō as any other library outside of Japan.

Perhaps more to the point, Gest owns a number of bibliographic works on Saigō, his contemporaries, and his times, that more than make up for any lack of specific titles on the man himself. In addition to the bibliography in *Saigō Takamori zenshū*, which went to press in 1980, there is *Saigō Takamori kankei bunken kadai mokuroku kō*, compiled and kept up to date by the remarkable Saigō specialist, Nonaka Keigō. Like the bibliography in the *zenshū*, this contains close to 1,500 entries and is copiously annotated. For Kagoshima Prefecture, Gest owns *Kagoshima ken kyōdō shiryō sōgō mokuroku*, published in 1978 by the Kagoshima Prefectural Library, and its 1984 supplement, *Kyōdō shiryō zōka mokuroku*. With these works in hand, the scholar can learn practically anything he needs to know about the literature on Saigō and his locale.

Gest Library also holds most of the standard research bibliographies on other aspects of Japanese history, in both Japanese and English. It has a Japanese Union Catalog, listing holdings in Japanese in all the major research libraries in the United States, and complete, bound xerographic reproductions of the entire East Asian card catalogs of many of the other university libraries in this country where substantial collections of Japanese materials are held. Recently, Gest Library became a member of the Research Libraries Group. When the cataloging to reflect this change is complete, it will be possible to survey the Japanese collections of such major research libraries as Harvard, Yale, and Columbia at computer terminals within Gest itself. With the interlibrary loan arrangements, this will streamline the process of borrowing books from libraries other than Gest. Needless to say, it will make Gest's own impressive collection accessible as well to researchers at other universities.

When I think back on my research at Gest between 1980 and 1987, it is difficult not to resort to superlatives, even though Gest is not the largest Japanese research library in the United States. The number of volumes a library owns is not as good a measure of its quality as is the acquisition policy. In this regard, Gest Library's Ms. Soo-won Kim is distinguished not only by the attention she gives to her work, but especially by her willingness to listen to the people using the library, and whenever possible to acquire their needed titles. One consequence of this is that Gest probably has the largest periodical collection in the country on the history of the domain of Tosa,

present-day Kōchi Prefecture. Another consequence is that the collection on Kagoshima, already impressively complete when I first arrived in Princeton, is now close to twice that size.

Why, if Gest's collection is so good, is there any reason to go to Japan for research? Part of the answer is that, in spite of the thousands of published materials on Japanese history, printed material is only a fraction of the number of extant manuscripts. The day may come when everything that now exists in documentary form will have been published. But until then it will be necessary to go to Japan to examine unpublished materials. In the same way, it will always be prudent, if not entirely necessary, for the researcher to spend some time working in close proximity to Japanese specialists.

All of my research on Saigō Takamori could have been done in Gest Library. But I also needed long discussions with historians in Tokyo, in Kagoshima, and elsewhere. I needed to visit personally the places that figured in the life of Saigō. Perhaps one can write of institutions or of the economy without actually going to the places themselves. To write biography without seeing where one's subject lived, struggled, and died, is chancy at best, and foolhardy at worst.

By the same token, however, having seen those places with my own eyes and met the people who live there, and having met those who studied Saigō and his times, I could return to Gest to complete my work with a more mature understanding of the materials. And when I returned to Gest from my stay in Japan, I was only slightly surprised to find that everything I needed in the way of both primary and secondary materials was there waiting for me on the shelves.

Glossary

Dai Nihon ishin shiryō kōhon	大日本維新史料稿本
Dai Nihon shiryō	大日本史料
Dai Saigō zenshū	大西郷全集
Heian ibun	平安遺文
Ishin shiryō kōyō	維新史料綱要
Ishinshi	維新史

Iwanami kōza: Nihon rekishi	岩波講座 日本歴史
Kagoshima ken kyōdō shiryō mokuroku	鹿児島県郷土資料目録
Kagoshima kenshi	鹿児島県史
Kagoshima ken shiryō	鹿児島県史料
Kamakura ibun	鎌倉遺文
Kyōdō shiryō zōka mokuroku	郷土史料増加目録
Nihon gaikō shiryō	日本外交史料
Nihon no rekishi	日本の歴史
Nihon shiseki kyōkai sōsho	日本史籍協会叢書
Nonaka Keigō	野中敬吾
Ōkubo Toshimichi	大久保利通
Ōkubo Toshimichi den	大久保利通伝
Saigō Takamori	西郷隆盛
Saigō Takamori den	西郷隆盛伝
Saigō Takamori kankei bunken kadai mokuroku kō	西郷隆盛関係文献分類題目録稿
Saigō Takamori zenshū	西郷隆盛全集
Sappan shiryō shū	薩藩史料集
Sappan sōsho	薩藩叢書
Shimazu Nariakira	島津斉彬
Shimazu Nariakira genkōroku	島津斉彬言行録
Shin Sappan sōsho	新薩藩叢書
Shiryō Hensanjo	史料編さん所
Taikei Nihonshi sōsho	体系日本史叢書
Zoku Nihon shiseki kyōkai sōsho	続日本史籍協会叢書