

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-08106-1 - A History of Japanese Literature  
W.G. Aston  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION

*Books of enduring scholarly value*

### Literary Studies

This series provides a high-quality selection of early printings of literary works, textual editions, anthologies and literary criticism which are of lasting scholarly interest. Ranging from Old English to Shakespeare to early twentieth-century work from around the world, these books offer a valuable resource for scholars in reception history, textual editing, and literary studies.

### A History of Japanese Literature

The diplomat and Japanese and Korean scholar William George Aston (1841–1911) wrote several highly regarded publications, particularly on the Japanese language. This work is a chronological survey of Japanese literature from its early songs to the European-influenced works of the nineteenth century. It covers lyrics, poetry, prose and children's stories, and charts the major themes in the history of Japanese learning. At the time of publication in 1899, Japanese literature was little known to European readers, and Aston is careful to assume no prior knowledge of the subject, focusing instead on the most important works and writers, and providing contextual political and religious detail where necessary. His treatment of contemporary literature, and of works not typically discussed for their literary merit, was groundbreaking. The book as a whole remained unsurpassed for eighty years. Aston's introductory survey of traditional Japanese religion, *Shinto* (1907), is also reissued in this series.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-08106-1 - A History of Japanese Literature  
W.G. Aston  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library and other partner libraries, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection brings back to life books of enduring scholarly value (including out-of-copyright works originally issued by other publishers) across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-08106-1 - A History of Japanese Literature  
W.G. Aston  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

# A History of Japanese Literature

W.G. ASTON



Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-08106-1 - A History of Japanese Literature  
W.G. Aston  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.  
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108081061](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108081061)

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2015

This edition first published 1899

This digitally printed version 2015

ISBN 978-1-108-08106-1 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect  
the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press wishes to make clear that the book, unless originally published  
by Cambridge, is not being republished by, in association or collaboration with,  
or with the endorsement or approval of, the original publisher or its successors in title.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08106-1 - A History of Japanese Literature

W.G. Aston

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Short Histories of  
the Literatures of  
the World : VI.

Edited by Edmund Gosse

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08106-1 - A History of Japanese Literature

W.G. Aston

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-08106-1 - A History of Japanese Literature  
W.G. Aston  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

A History of  
JAPANESE LITERATURE

BY

W. G. ASTON, C.M.G., D.LIT.  
LATE JAPANESE SECRETARY TO H.M. LEGATION, TOKIO



London  
WILLIAM HEINEMANN  
MDCCCXCIX

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-08106-1 - A History of Japanese Literature  
W.G. Aston  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

*This Edition enjoys copyright in all countries  
signatory to the Berne Treaty, and is  
not to be imported into the United States  
of America.*



## P R E F A C E

THE Japanese have a voluminous literature, extending over twelve centuries, which to this day has been very imperfectly explored by European students. Forty years ago no Englishman had read a page of a Japanese book, and although some Continental scholars had a useful acquaintance with the language, their contributions to our knowledge are unimportant. Much has been done in the interval, by writers of grammars and dictionaries, to facilitate the acquirement of this most difficult language, and translations by Sir E. Satow, Messrs. Mitford, Chamberlain, Dickins, and others, have given us interesting glimpses of certain phases of the literature. But the wider field has hitherto remained untouched. Beyond a few brief detached notices, there is no body of critical opinion on Japanese books in any European language, and although the Japanese themselves have done more in this direction, their labours are for various reasons in a great measure unserviceable.

The historian of their literature is therefore thrown mainly upon his own resources, and must do his best, by a direct examination of those works which the verdict of posterity has marked out as most worthy of notice, to ascertain their character and place in literature, and to grasp as far as possible the ideas which inspired them. In the following pages comparatively little space has

been devoted to what is necessarily a record of personal impressions and opinions, the outcome of rough pioneer work, and having little claim to be considered as mature literary criticism. It seemed preferable, especially in the case of a literature so little known to the English public as that of Japan, to allot ample room to translated extracts, and to such biographical notices as are necessary to show what manner of men the authors were.

The general plan, however, of this series has not been lost sight of. Important writers have been treated at comparatively greater length, to the neglect of many lesser notabilities, and an attempt has been made, in so far as the state of our knowledge permits, to follow the movement of the literature, and to trace the causes which determined its character at particular periods.

Writers on European literatures are entitled to take for granted, on the part of their readers, a previous acquaintance with the leading facts of the political and religious history of the country with which they are dealing. In the case of Japan, however, it has been thought not superfluous to add a few data of this kind, without a knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the course of the literary development.

In justice to Japanese literature, it is right to draw attention to some obstacles which prevent any translations from giving an adequate idea of its merits. The Italian adage is particularly applicable to translators from the Japanese. Even when they have a competent knowledge of the language they cannot possibly reproduce all the metaphors, allusions, quotations, and illustrations which form the stock of the Japanese author, and which are in great part unintelligible without a profusion of explanatory notes intolerable to the reader.

## PREFACE

vii

Another difficulty arises from the fact that a Japanese word frequently covers a meaning which is only approximately the same as that of the corresponding English term, or calls up quite different associations. The *karasu*, for example, is not exactly a crow, but a *corvus Japonensis*, a larger bird than our species, with different cries and habits. The cherry is, in Japan, the queen of flowers, and is not valued for its fruit, while the rose is regarded as a mere thorny bush. Valerian, which to us is suggestive principally of cats, takes the place of the rosebud as the recognised metaphor for the early bloom of womanhood. And what is the translator to do with the names of flowers as familiar to the Japanese as daisy or daffodil to ourselves, but for which he can offer no better equivalents than such clumsy inventions as *Lespedeza*, *Platycodon grandiflorum*, and *Deutzia scabra*?

In the world of thought and sentiment, the differences, though less tangible, are even more important. Take the Japanese word for conscience, namely, *honshin*. It means "original heart," and implies a theory that man's heart is originally good, and that conscience is its voice speaking within him. The words for justice, virtue, chastity, honour, love, and many more ideas of this class, although meaning substantially the same as with ourselves, must yet be taken with differences which are necessarily lost in a translation.

When to these are added the ordinary difficulties which beset the task of rendering thought from one language into another, and which are incomparably greater in the case of an idiom so different from our own, it will be seen that it is not possible to do justice to Japanese literature by translation. In the present volume it has often been necessary to pass over the best and most charac-

teristic passages of an author in favour of others which lent themselves more readily to presentation in an English form.

With one or two stated exceptions the translations are my own.

My best thanks are due to Sir Ernest Satow, Her Majesty's Minister to Japan, for lending me most of his extensive library of Japanese books, and also for supplying me from time to time with recent native publications, which have been of much service to me.

I cordially associate myself with previous contributors to this series of histories, by acknowledging the benefit which the present volume has derived from the editorial care of Mr. Edmund Gosse.

Japanese words and proper names have been introduced as sparingly as possible. The system of spelling adopted is that of the Royal Geographical Society. It may be described briefly as "Consonants as in English, vowels as in Italian ; no silent letters."

W. G. ASTON.

## CONTENTS

### *BOOK THE FIRST—ARCHAIC PERIOD (BEFORE A.D. 700)*

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY—SONGS—SHINTO RITUALS . . . . .	3

### *BOOK THE SECOND—NARA PERIOD (EIGHTH CENTURY) (POETRY CULTIVATED)*

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTORY—PROSE — “KOJIKI” — “IDZUMO FUDOKI”— IMPERIAL EDICTS . . . . .	17
II. JAPANESE POETRY GENERALLY—THE “MANYŌSHIU”—WORKS IN CHINESE . . . . .	24

### *BOOK THE THIRD—HEIAN OR CLASSICAL PERIOD (800–1186)*

I. INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	53
II. POETRY—THE “KOKINSHIU” . . . . .	58
III. PROSE—“KOKINSHIU” PREFACE, “TOSA NIKKI,” “TAKETORI MONOGATARI,” “ISE” AND OTHER MINOR MONOGATARI . . . . .	63
IV. “GENJI MONOGATARI” . . . . .	92
V. “MAKURA ZŌSHI” . . . . .	104
VI. SOME MINOR WORKS . . . . .	118
VII. “YEIGWA MONOGATARI”—“Ō-KAGAMI”—WORKS IN CHINESE. . . . .	122

*BOOK THE FOURTH—KAMAKURA PERIOD (1186–1332)*  
 (DECLINE OF LEARNING)

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	131
II. HISTORICAL WORKS—"GEMPEI SEISUIKI," "HEIKE MONOGATARI," "MIDZU-KAGAMI," "HÖGEN MONOGATARI," "HEIJI MONOGATARI" . . . . .	134
III. CHŌMEI AND THE "HÖJŌKI"—"IZAYOI NO KI"—POETRY—WORKS IN CHINESE . . . . .	145

*BOOK THE FIFTH—NAMBOKU-CHŌ AND MUROMACHI PERIODS (1332–1603)*  
 (DARK AGE)

I. INTRODUCTORY—"JINKŌSHŌTŌKI"—"TAIHEIKI" . . . . .	163
II. KENKŌ AND THE "TSURE-DZURE-GUSA" . . . . .	184
III. POETRY—THE NŌ OR LYRICAL DRAMA—KIŌGEN OR FARCE . . . . .	197

*BOOK THE SIXTH—YEDO PERIOD (1603–1867)*  
 (REVIVAL OF LEARNING)

I. INTRODUCTORY—"TAIKŌKI" . . . . .	217
II. SEVENTEENTH CENTURY—KANGAKUSHA (CHINESE SCHOLARS)—SEIKWA AND THE CHU-HI PHILOSOPHY, YEKKEN, HAKUSEKI, KIUSŌ . . . . .	224
III. SEVENTEENTH CENTURY—POPULAR LITERATURE—SAIKAKU, CHILDREN'S STORIES—CHIKAMATSU AND THE POPULAR DRAMA . . . . .	267
IV. SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY POETRY—HAIKAI, HAIBUN, KIŌKA . . . . .	289
V. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY—KANGAKUSHA—FICTION—JISHŌ AND KISEKI—JITSUROKU-MONO—WASŌBIŌYE—POPULAR DRAMA . . . . .	300

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-108-08106-1 - A History of Japanese Literature  
 W.G. Aston  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## CONTENTS

xi

CHAPTER	PAGE
VI. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY—THE WAGAKUSHA (STUDENTS OF JAPANESE ANTIQUITY)—KEICHU, KADA, MABUCHI, MO-TOÖRI . . . . .	315
VII. NINETEENTH CENTURY—HIRATA—SHINGAKU SERMONS . . . . .	334
VIII. NINETEENTH-CENTURY FICTION—ROMANTIC SCHOOL—KIÖ-DEN, BAKIN, TANEHIKO. HUMOURISTS—SAMBA, IKKU. SENTIMENTAL NOVELS (NINJÖBON)—SHUNSUI. WORKS IN CHINESE . . . . .	345
 <i>BOOK THE SEVENTH—TOKIO PERIOD (1867–1898)</i> 	
SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS UNDER EUROPEAN INFLUENCE . . . . .	383
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE . . . . .	400
LIST OF DICTIONARIES, &c. . . . .	403
INDEX . . . . .	405

## ERRATA

Page 113, near bottom, *read* ‘the birth of a succession of female children.’

Page 144, *for* ‘carriage,’ &c., *read* ‘people who ride in a creaking carriage. Such people must be deaf and are very detestable. When you ride in such a carriage yourself it is the owner who is detestable.’