

From Matsue to the Monash University Library – A journey of Japanese rare books: an article by Captain L.K. Shepherd

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Background

The Japanese Collection of Monash University Library holds the Suetsugu Collection, donated by the Royal Australian Air Force (R.A.A.F) School of Languages in 2000. The Suetsugu Collection consists of approximately one thousand volumes of Chinese and Japanese classical books, which were once owned by the Suetsugu Family in Matsue, Japan. The recipient of these books was Captain L.K. Shepherd at the Australian Defense Force (ADF) School of Languages. I reported about the Collection in 2000 to EARLGA, along with the reason these books were donated to Monash University Library (Sakaguchi, 2000). The following article by Captain L.K. Shepherd should have been published together with the report, however, only a cover letter 1) appeared with the report for some reason. I am grateful to have this opportunity to bring forward the full article written by Captain Shepherd.

Article by Captain Shepherd

I first made the acquaintance of Suetsugu-san in 1954 when I was head of the Security Section, H.Q. B.C.F.K., in Kure. At the time I was searching for a translator capable of handling confidential/sensitive material to replace the translator I had had until then. This translator had retired because of serious illness. As luck would have it, about two weeks into my search I received a telephone call from a friend of mine in the U.S. forces at Iwakuni who strongly recommended a certain Susumu Suetsugu who had been working with him but whose position had recently become redundant. I arranged for him to come to Kure for an interview and immediately knew that I had found the ideal person for the position I had vacant. He was not only a very competent translator but was very interesting to me on a personal level when I learnt that his permanent domicile was in Matsue., In 1948 during the Occupation Era, I had had the immense good fortune to spend some time in Matsue and surrounds and had immediately fallen in love with the place. I found the whole area to be practically untouched by western influences and steeped in the atmosphere of old Japan. Needless to say, Matsue was and remains my favourite city in the whole of Japan. In addition it was the home of Lafcadio Hearn (Koizumi Yagumo) and the scene of many of his wonderful stories.

I soon learnt that Suetsugu-san shared my admiration for Hearn and enjoyed his stories as much as I did. This made Suetsugu-san an even more interesting person to me. During his period of employment with me, Suetsugu-san lived in lodgings in Kure, but returned to his home in Matsue once or twice a month. On many occasions he invited my wife and me to accompany him, which invitations we accepted with pleasure. In Matsue Suetsugu-san took us around to the locales of many of Hearn's stories and provided us with many details not commonly known about these locales and about Hearn himself. He was, in fact, a mine of information about all

things to do with Matsue and I found out from neighbours and other acquaintances that the Suetsugu family had been a somewhat illustrious family in Matsue for a long, long time. I must emphasize that Suetsugu-san himself never mentioned anything about the streets and other areas in Matsue bearing the Suetsugu name. He was a very modest person. I never knew anything about his collection of books at this time, either. That came later. The relationship between Suetsugu-san and myself at this time was a rather strange one, in as much as it was one of employer and employee on the one hand, and one of deep friendship and mutual respect on the other. I was still only a young man at this time and I often got the impression that Suetsugu-san looked upon me as a son.

After I left Japan and returned to Australia the contact between Suetsugu-san and myself was limited to a yearly exchange of Xmas cards. I studied Mandarin Chinese at the R.A.A.F. School of Languages in 1958 and upon graduation was posted to the British Land Forces, Hong Kong, for continuation training and general intelligence duties. During 1959 I took leave from my duties in Hong Kong for one month and went to Japan where I contacted Suetsugu-san and spent 10 days with him in Matsue. It was at this time that I first heard in any detail about his collection of books and he seemed to be hinting that, with my now having knowledge of both Japanese and Chinese, I may be a worthy recipient of his collection in the absence of any expression of interest from members of his family. Nothing happened at that time, however, and I returned to Australia in 1960 from my posting in Hong Kong, where I took up a position of Lecturer (Chinese) at the R.A.A.F. School of Languages. Japanese was not being taught at this time. When the Japanese Department was reactivated in 1969 I was appointed Lecturer-in-Charge and when I was looking for more staff in the early 1970's Suetsugu-san was my first choice.

I contacted him and offered him a position but he turned me down on the grounds that he was suffering from senile dementia. He still seemed to be able to handle written material, however, and it was not long after this that he wrote and offered me his collection of books. I had no intention, of course, of letting such an opportunity go begging, but on the other hand could see no value in taking personal possession of the collection. I consulted with the then C.O. of the School of Languages, Wing Commander Bram Lang, and we eventually decided that the School should ask the Australian Embassy in Tokyo to arrange for the books to be collected, packed and sent to the R.A.A.F. School of Languages. This was done and I requested that the school keep the books in their packing crates until some appropriate disposal could be arranged. That was the last I heard from Suetsugu-san and several letters I sent to Matsue went unanswered.

(Captain L.K. Shepherd)

Monash University Library as a final home

“The Rare Books Collection comprises materials considered rare because of age, uniqueness or physical beauty” reads the Monash Library Rarebooks Collection homepage ²⁾.

The Suetsugu Collection books are rare and unique, especially in Australia. In addition, I believe that it adds important value because:

The collection represents the original collection contents as Mr. Suetsugu intended, as he packed and shipped the contents and presumably made no de-selection before the shipping;

These books were passed from generation to generation within the Suetsugu Family, and were essential during the Edo period to maintain the level of education and culture expected of such an old respectable family; and

Consequently it reflects on a Japanese regional family's (whatever class they belonged to) intellectual space, time and thoughts.

I suspect that the Suetsugu family books may have been scattered and lost if they stayed in Matsue, because some or many books could be considered duplicated holdings if they were donated to an academic institution or library. If the collection had been scattered, one of the important characteristics which formed a Japanese regional intellectual class may have been lost forever.

After their brief reunion in 1958, Mr. Suetsugu suggested his intention of passing this important family collection to Captain Shepherd. The actual transfer to the R.A.A.F. School of Languages took place in the 1970's and it needed further 25 years for the Collection to arrive at its final home at Monash University Library. Thanks to the efforts of the Library, these books are now all catalogued and are available to search online, <http://monash.edu/library/>. As Captain Shepherd wrote in his letter "after all this time that the collection has at last found a suitable home" and I wish to add that the collection has found a home forever.

Note:

- 1) The cover letter by Captain Shepherd:

9th July 2000
 Ms. Eiko Sakaguchi
 Main Library, Monash University
 Clayton. 3168

I received a request from Hiroshi Honda last week to write to you about the Suetsugu collection for an article you wish to include in your next newsletter.

I hope the following notes will meet your needs.

A little background information concerning myself may be of use also:

After studying Japanese at the R.A.A.F. School of Languages at Point Cook in 1947, I was posted to Japan in November 1947 as an Intelligence Linguist with British Commonwealth Occupation Force (B.C.O.F.) and later with British Commonwealth Forces Korea (B.C.F.K.). I remained in Japan until December 1956.

I retired from the Army in 1974 and from my Civilian position with the R.A.A.F. School of languages in 1986.

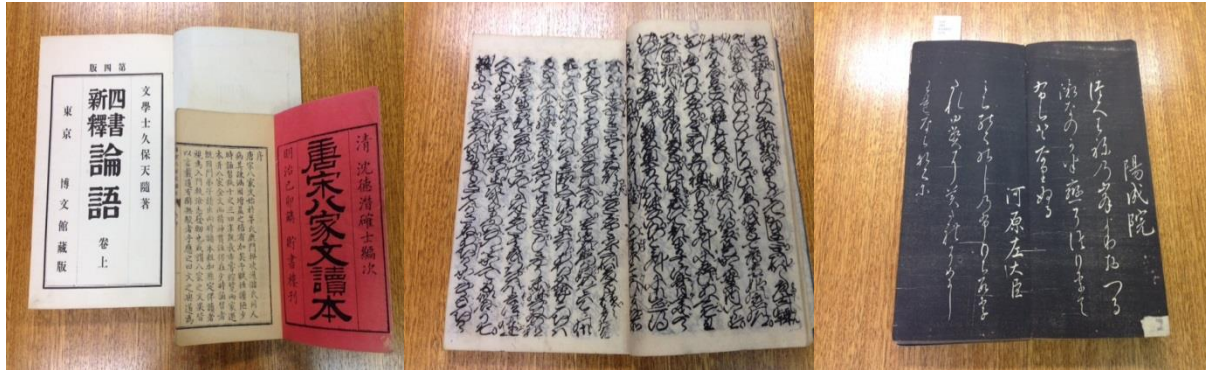
I am glad after all this time that the collection has at last found a suitable home.

Captain L.K. Sheperd (Retd.)

2) <http://monash.edu/library/collections/special/rare/index.html>

Reference:

Sakaguchi, Eiko, "The Suetsugu-ADF School of Language Collection at Monash University Library," EALRGA Newsletter No. 42 (2000): 31-35
http://www.ealrga.org.au/newsletter_26-50.html



From the left, “四書新釈論語” (1905); “唐宋八家文讀本” (1879); “時代世話新うすゆき物語” (1741) “小倉百人一首” (date unknown) from Suetsugu collection at Monash University Library