



Engelbert Kaempfer *The history of Japan* London, 1727-1728

Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), born in Germany, was a physician and naturalist. After being appointed ship's doctor for the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC), he came to Japan in 1690 as the physician for the head of the VOC trading post in Nagasaki. During his stay until October 1692, he twice accompanied the head of the trading post on visits to greet the Shogun in Edo, and observed and documented the history, society, politics, and religion, as well as the local flora and fauna of Japan. He also made sketches for the illustrations in his book. He then returned to his native country and, besides working as a physician, devoted much of his time to his literary endeavors.

After Kaempfer's death, his manuscript for *The history of Japan* was acquired by British physician and collector Sir Hans Sloane, translated into English by Sir Sloane's librarian, a Swiss doctor Johann Caspar Scheuchzer, and published in 1727. A further edition was released the next year, followed by translations in French and Dutch published in 1729. The German edition was a shorter version translated from the French.

The history of Japan, starting from a record of Kaempfer's travels from Batavia (now Indonesia) to Siam (now Thailand), consists of detailed accounts of Japanese politics, religion and social systems, as well as plants and animals along with illustrations. He also gave exhaustive descriptions of Nagasaki, the Edo shogunate, and townscapes in general. *The history of Japan* was the first accurate account of Japan introducing the country to Europeans, unlike those before which had depicted the country as an imaginary world, and is now considered to be one of the most significant works of Japanese studies.

The JFIC Library owns its English editions (1727-1728), as well as German (1779), Dutch (1729, 1733), and French (1733) translations.