Fifty Selected Treasures from
Toyo Bunko
A Journey Through the History of the Orient
Foreword

This book contains 50 selections from Toyo Bunko’s collection of historical treasures. We have chosen works with familiar themes and added explanations regarding their various characteristics. From the beginning, we set out to make this a book that would be easy to read. We asked our young researchers and curators to be contributors and endeavored to make the explanations simple and to the point while limiting the use of technical terms.

The “Toyo” in Toyo Bunko refers to “the Orient” and we hope that this book will provide you with many insights into the history and culture of the Orient, including Japan. The Orient is characterized by its great diversity. Therefore, it is important to understand how each selection in this book relates to events in the course of world history. In order to convey this, we have organized the selections chronologically.

It is also our pleasure to introduce two of our latest acquisitions in this book, namely East India Navigation Journal, which records the Dutch advance into Asia, and Coastal Map of China, donated by the late Dr. G. William Skinner, who was a leading American scholar of Chinese studies.

We hope you enjoy the book. In the future, we intend to introduce new acquisitions as well as other historical treasures from our collection, so please look forward to further events and exhibitions from Toyo Bunko.

SHIBA Yoshinobu
Executive Librarian
Toyo Bunko (The Oriental Library)
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Inscribed Oracle Bones

The oldest treasure of Toyo Bunko.

Oracle bones refer to animal bones and turtle shells mainly used for fortune-telling during the Yin (Shang) period (approximately 17th–11th centuries BC), which is archaeologically known as the oldest dynasty in Chinese history.

First questions were carved on the surface of the bones; the bones were then heated to the point of cracking, upon which the patterns of the cracks were divined. They used glyphs called "oracle bone script", which are thought to have eventually become the prototype of modern Chinese characters.

These artifacts are part of Toyo Bunko’s collection of 614 bone fragments, most of which were collected by Dr. Taisuke Hayashi in 1918 at Anyang in northern Henan province, the confirmed site of the Yin dynasty’s capital. A great part of the scripts on the bone fragments have been deciphered and there is no doubt that they are the oldest form of written language among the million historical materials held by Toyo Bunko.

Keywords: oracle bones, Yin, Chinese characters

MAKINO Motonori

Description: Inscribed Oracle Bones (part of 614 pieces) from the Yin period (17th–11th centuries BC).
Searching for the roots of the Japanese language through “wokoto-ten”

_Maoshi_ is an alternative title of _Shijing_, the oldest collection of songs in Chinese compiled by Confucius approximately 2,500 years ago. _Shijing_ (The Book of Songs) is included among the “Four Books and Five Classics”, the authoritative books of Confucianism. The book became known as _Maoshi_ due to the role that Mao Heng, a scholar of the Western Han period, played in transmitting the work. The scroll at Toyo Bunko is a fragment of the _Guo Feng_ (the first part of the _Shijing_, composed of folksongs), beginning with _Xi Shua_ (The Crickets) and ending with _Bao Yu_ (The Great Bustard).

The end of the first line tells us that it was annotated by Zheng Xuan (127–200), a scholar of the Eastern Han period. The splendid calligraphy tells us that it was transcribed during the early Tang period.

After the scroll made its way to Japan during the Heian period, a form of diagnostic marks called “wokoto-ten” were added in the margins in vermilion. _Wokoto-ten_ indicate specific syllables or grammatical elements depending on their position around Chinese characters, thereby facilitating the reading of Chinese texts by Japanese people. Eventually, _wokoto-ten_ evolved into _kana_ characters and punctuation marks that are used in Japanese writing today.

When we study the scroll of _Maoshi_ at Toyo Bunko, we are able to trace how the Japanese language developed from ancient times to the present day. Born in China and nurtured in Japan, the scroll represents a magnificent fusion of two rich cultures. Highly acclaimed as a valuable transcription of a Chinese classic as well as an important record of _wokoto-ten_, this scroll was designated a national treasure by the Japanese government in 1931.

Keywords: Confucianism, Chinese text, wokoto-ten
Essential reading for all fans of ancient Chinese history

Shiji is a historical book written by Sima Qian, a renowned writer and historian during the Han period (around 1st century BC). Sima Qian recounts 2,500 years of Chinese history from the time of the legendary Yellow Emperor (around 25th century BC) to the age of Emperor Wu of Han (156–87 BC).

The texts are classified into five categories: Benji (Imperial Biographies), Biao (Timelines of Events), Shu (Treatises), Shiji (Biographies of Feudal Houses and Eminent Persons), and Liezhuan (Biographies and Collective Biographies). The book was originally titled Taishigong Shu (The Writings of Sima Tan and Sima Qian) but through the course of time, it became known as Shiji.

Pei Yin, a scholar of the Southern Song dynasty (420–479), collected various annotations of Shiji and compiled Shiji Jijie. The scrolls of Xia Benji and Qin Benji at Toyo Bunko are manuscripts of Shiji Jijie, dating back to 1145 (the late Heian period).

Both scrolls bear the vermilion stamp of Kyoto's Kozanji Temple at the beginning and both texts are glossed with Japanese kana script and wakoto-ten. It is clear that the scroll of Qin Benji is marked with three different handwritings.

Shiji has been handed down from generation to generation even in Japan. The book includes vivid depictions of Ying Zheng, the first emperor of China, Xiang Yu, king of Western Chu and Liu Bang, Emperor Gaozu of Han. These figures have captured the imaginations of many generations of readers and they live on today as the focus of various novels and comics. Many names of Japanese eras, such as Heisei, have been taken from the text of Shiji.

Highly recognized as having great value in Japanese cultural history, the scrolls of Shiji held by Toyo Bunko were designated a national treasure by the Japanese government in 1952.

Keywords: Sima Qian, Han, wakoto-ten

MAKINO Motoomi
The greatest miracle revealed by Muḥammad

The Qurʾān (al-Qurʾān) is the holy book of the Islām, containing the words of the one and only God, Allāh, as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad.

Written in rhythmic and beautiful Arabic, it is considered the greatest miracle ever revealed by Muḥammad. The word “qurʾān” is a verbal noun of the Arabic verb “qara’a,” meaning “to read” or “to recite,” and the Muslims are encouraged to recite it aloud in their everyday life.

The text of al-Qurʾān consists of 114 chapters. The lengths of the chapters vary from short ones with just a few verses to long ones with over 200 verses.

Shown on the right is a copy of al-Qurʾān at Toyo Bunko. It is a manuscript, presumed to be an edition copied in Syria, dating back to AH773 (1371–1372).

Note the open page on the right. The title of each chapter or “sūra” is written in gold. Each gold placard leaf design indicates the beginning of a new verse. The vermilion glosses are voice inflection marks to facilitate accurate recitation. This manuscript is carefully scripted word for word in an Arabic calligraphic style called Naskhī.
Admonition to the Imperial family

*Waiqi Shijian* is a work that recounts various deeds by ministers appointed from among the relatives of successive generations of empresses. It was compiled by the Xuande Emperor (reign: 1425–35), the fifth emperor of the Ming dynasty. According to an account in *Da Ming Shi-lu* (The Veritable Records of the Ming dynasty), it is said to have been compiled along with *Lidai Chenjian Sanshiqi Juan* (Successive Vassals in 37 Volumes), a collection of deeds by vassals across multiple generations. The “jian” in “Shijian” is defined as “example” or “to warn” in English.

On the right is one of the two volumes of *Waiqi Shijian* at Toyo Bunko. When you look at the front cover, you will notice a strip of yellow paper bearing the book’s title, *Yuzhi Waiqi Shijian*. Yellow is a symbolic color of the Chinese emperor and the word “Yuzhi” means “exclusively written or compiled by the emperor himself.” It is said that the Xuande Emperor gave a copy of this book to each member of the Imperial family.

The book deals with the deeds of 79 ministers starting from the Han dynasty and continuing up to the Yuan dynasty. First, an episode about each figure is introduced, followed by a colorful illustration depicting the story. The concept of the book was to make the readers learn from the acts of past figures by commending the good deeds and admonishing the evil ones.

For example, Wei Qing (7–106 BC) and Huo Qubing (ca. 140–117 BC), who distinguished themselves in battles against Xiongnu, are described as men of good conduct. On the other hand, Wang Mang (45 BC–AD 23), nephew of Empress Wang Zhengjun (empress of the Yuan Emperor of the Western Han dynasty, commonly known as Grand Empress Dowager Wang), is described as an evil man. He killed the Ping Emperor with poison to seize the throne from the Liu family and founded the Xin dynasty.

Since ancient times, empresses’ families and eunuchs were considered the two major sources of internal turmoil that jeopardized the foundations of dynasties. Around the time of this book’s compilation, the Xuande Emperor was in the midst of a dispute with his uncle Zhi Gaozu (1380–7, the Prince of Han), who was plotting to usurp the throne. The distress brought on by his imperial relatives may have motivated the Xuande Emperor to write this book as a warning to them.

The passages are hand-written and the illustrations are hand-drawn. Compiled within the court of the Ming dynasty, these books are considered priceless. The richly colored illustrations remind us of “Nara Ehon” (Nara Picture Books), a genre of illustrated books produced in Japan from around the 15th century up through the early 17th century.

SHINOZAKI Yoko
Europeans’ longing for “Cipangu”

_Il Milione_ refers to the accounts of the travels of Marco Polo (1254–1324). This particular version is the first Latin translation published in 1485 in Antwerp (present-day Antwerp in Northern Belgium).

Marco Polo was a Venetian-born merchant. In 1271, he set out for the East by land with his father and uncle who were traders. In 1275, they reached the capital of the Yuan dynasty, Khanbaliq (city of the khans) in China (present-day Beijing), founded by Khubilai Khan. A year prior to their arrival, Yuan troops had allied with Korean troops from the Korean Peninsula to attack Japan, an event known as the Mongol Invasion of Japan. However, the attempt had failed due to a typhoon.

Arriving in Khanbaliq, Marco met Khubilai Khan (reign: 1260–94) and soon gained his trust. While serving at Khubilai’s court, Marco travelled to various parts of China until he left for home by sea in 1295. Upon his return, Venice was at war with Genoa and Marco was taken prisoner after Venice was defeated the next year. He spent his days of imprisonment dictating the experiences of his travels to another inmate, a writer named Rustichello da Pisa, who compiled the stories into the book we know as _Il Milione_.

Originally the book was entitled _La Description du Monde_ (Descriptions of the World), but at the time many readers apparently found it difficult to accept the stories as non-fiction. Despite some inaccuracies, Japan was introduced to the Europeans for the first time, described as “Cipangu, a land of gold”. Fascinated by the unknown country, the Europeans started longing for and dreaming of the Far East. Later in the 16th century, _Il Milione_ had a great influence on the dawning of the Age of Discovery. “Cipangu” became an incentive for Christopher Columbus (1446/51–1506) to seek a route to the East, which led him to discover the “New World.”

_Il Milione_ was passed down in handwritten manuscripts until the invention of letterpress printing; thereafter, it was published in various countries. Besides the edition shown on the right, Toyo Bunko has a collection of 77 editions, 54 of which were painstakingly amassed by George Earnest Morrison (1862–1920) during his residency in Beijing as a special correspondent for the _London Times_.

SHINOZAKI Yoko