

THE KOMOTO
(FORMERLY HIRSCHBERG)
LIBRARY IN JAPAN

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The collection known as the *Komoto Library* is now owned by the Central Library of the University of Tokyo and contains some 20,000 items related to ophthalmology. They formed the library collected by *Julius Hirschberg* (1843–1925), professor of ophthalmology of Berlin University from 1879 to 1909 and author of Vols. 12–15 of the *Graefe-Saemisch's Handbuch der gesamten Augenheilkunde* (Graefe-Saemisch Handbook of Comprehensive Ophthalmology). His four-volume contribution is in itself an independent and detailed work of history.

Determining at an early age to write the history of ophthalmology, Hirschberg spent years collecting related materials, an activity which took him and his wife on a trip around the world in 1892. In the fall of that year, he spent two months in Japan. In those days following the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Japan was deeply engaged in a drive for modernization, which in medicine meant doing away with traditional Chinese medicine and adopting modern practices based on the medical profession in Germany. As part of this great reform, which had only begun 20 years before, German physicians had been invited to come as teachers to Japan, but this was the first visit by a university professor of Hirschberg's caliber. Given a resounding welcome, even his slightest movement was reported in the newspapers.

He wrote about his travel experiences in the book *Um die Erde* (Around the World), in which quite a number of pages were devoted to his visit to Japan. In the chapter “Germany in Japan” we find the following. After having journeyed across the North American continent, he had crossed the Pacific to Japan. Having heard his native German Language hardly at all throughout his trip, he was suddenly surprised to hear it spoken everywhere. Every physician who had risen to the level of university professor spoke competent German; others who were not teachers but at a comparable level in their profession could often speak or at the least understand it. Furthermore, anyone who had the good fortune to follow up graduation from a university with a study trip to Germany was the envy of his fellows. This envy of things German both surprised and pleased him. Meeting with a warm welcome wherever he went, he left Japan with a very favorable impression which doubtless affected his later decision to send his extensive library to Japan.

Cataloging the Collection

In 1900 Hirschberg published a catalog of the materials he had been collecting for 30 years under the title *Katalog der Bücher-Sammlung* (Catalog of the Library). The purpose of the catalog, according to the introduction,¹ was to systematically classify the library items under separate headings to aid in preparations for his future project of writing the history of optics, ophthalmology and medical treatment. His intention then was to donate the total collection to the Medical Society of Berlin (fig. 1).

According to his classification, the first section was on the history of medical treatment, the second on ophthalmology, and the third on optics (mathematical and physical approaches). The first section on history was presented in chronological order and included the history of ophthalmology. Medical classics from ancient times and the middle ages were entered by region and era.

In part two, works including classical texts on ophthalmology were classified anatomically by the part of the eye they concerned, and these were further subdivided by the type of work, e.g. textbooks, journal articles, and so forth. Part three, optics, was the smallest section of the three and was divided more simply by the orientation of each work – mathematics, physics, etc.

¹ “Von den Büchern, die ich seit mehr als 30 Jahren gesammelt, möchte ich diejenigen, welche zur Augenheilkunde und Optik sowie zur Geschichte der Heilkunde gehören, in dem folgenden Katalog verzeichnen, zugleich als Vorarbeit einer systematischen Bibliographie der Augenheilkunde, die ich später zu veröffentlichen gedenke. Der einzige Katalog einer augenärztlichen Büchersammlung, den ich kenne (Catalogue of the library of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom, London 1899, 96 S.), ist nur nach dem Alphabet der Verfasser-Namen geordnet.

Die Büchersammlung ist, nach Meldung, den Fachgenossen zugänglich und soll dereinst durch Schenkung in den Besitz der Berliner med. Gesellsch. übergehen. Juni 1901. J. H.”

With the publication of this catalog, Hirschberg's library became famous overnight. It was common knowledge that it contained the most complete collection of works on ophthalmology in the world, with those on history in particular being materials anyone with an interest in the field would covet. When Jujiro Komoto, professor of ophthalmology at the University of Tokyo, visited Germany, he too went to see Prof. Hirschberg and asked to be shown the collection.

Jujiro Komoto (1859–1938)

In the year 1883 Jujiro Komoto became the fifth graduate of the University of Tokyo School of Medicine, and upon graduation immediately entered the department of surgery as assistant to Prof. Julius Scriba (IWASAKI, 1943). In the same year, the first graduate, Kinnojo Ume, returned from a four year postgraduate study in Germany to become lecturer in ophthalmology at his university. Up till that time, ophthalmology had been covered by Julius Carl Scriba (1848–1905) who had come from Germany to teach surgery, taking over from his predecessor, Emil A.W. Schultze. Scriba arrived in 1881, devoted the next 20 years to teaching, and died in Japan in 1905 (OGAWA and ISHIBASHI, 1969). It was he who showed Prof. Hirschberg around the university during his 1892 visit.

Ume was the first to hold the separate chair of ophthalmology but due to overwork was unable to continue, requiring a hurried search for a successor. In 1885 Jujiro Komoto was tapped for the post and in preparation was sent to Germany to begin research in the field. This illustrates how the first prerequisite for becoming a professor at the university was graduate study in Germany.

Komoto's first 14 months of study were at the University of Freiburg under Prof. Wilhelm Manz. Thereafter he spent about four months in Würzburg learning funduscopy and other procedures from Prof. Julius von Michel. From there he proceeded to Berlin to study ophthalmology at the university under J. Hirschberg and J.S.C. Schweigger, attending lectures and observing operations. At the same time he heard R. Virchow lecture on pathology, H. Oppenheim on neurology, and A. Hirsch on the history of medicine. No doubt his own later interest in medical history was stimulated by this experience. He spent about six months in Berlin, then paid visits to all the ophthalmological facilities around Europe, finally heading home in 1889.

Back in Japan, Komoto became professor of ophthalmology at Tokyo Imperial University (later renamed the University of Tokyo). From that time until 1921 he held this post, and throughout the period was considered the highest authority on ophthalmology in Japan. His policy was to attend the university in the morning, maintaining a private practice at his residence in the afternoon which he used as an opportunity to train would-be specialists in ophthalmology who had no oppor-

tunity to attend the university. In other words he sought to raise the level of knowledge of the ordinary physician to whom the path of university study taken by the especially gifted was closed.

Busy as he was with his teaching and private practice, Komoto also authored numerous works on ophthalmology and medical history. In addition, he served from 1907 as one of the editors of *Klinische Monatsblätter für Augenheilkunde und ihre Grenzgebiete* (Clinical Monthly on Ophthalmology and Related Fields). In the same journal he contributed 15 articles up to 1914 beginning with "Über ein Verfahren zur Besserung der Sehschärfe albinotischer Augen" (On a method of Improving Visual Acuity in Albinos) (XLV, Vol. 1). And finally he translated summaries of articles appearing in Japanese ophthalmological journals into German for publication abroad to inform the medical world of developments in Japan.

The Hirschberg Library Comes to Japan

In 1921, over 30 years after Jujiro Komoto conducted his extensive research activities abroad and made the acquaintance of Julius Hirschberg, a letter² came from the latter asking if Komoto wished to buy his library (cf. KIRISAWA, 1977). Previously, it had been Hirschberg's original intention to donate the collection to the Medical Society of Berlin, and he had even stated this in the preface to his catalog. He changed his mind due to the destitution ensuing from the Germany's defeat in the First World War. The tremendous fall in the value of the mark and the rampant inflation of that era are a part of history.

² Hirschberg's letter to J. Komoto (see fig. 2):

d. 2. Dez. 1920

"Hochgeehrter Herr Kollege!

In der Hoffnung, daß dieses Schreiben Sie bei dem besten Wohlsein antreffen möge, möchte ich Ihnen einen Vorschlag unterbreiten, der, wie mir scheint, Ihrem Vaterland zu großem Nutzen gereichen kann. In dankbarer Erinnerung an den freundlichen Empfang, den ich vor 28 Jahren in Japan gefunden, und in gerechter Würdigung der freundlichen Worte, welche in der letzten Zeit japanische Gelehrte den Deutschen gewidmet, möchte ich Ihnen meine ophthalmologische Bibliothek zum Ankauf anbieten.

Meine ophthalmologische Bibliothek (Augenärztliche und optische Büchersammlung) ist ja anerkanntermaßen die vollständigste der Welt und ganz ohnegleichen. Sie umfaßt 3 200 Bücher, beziehungsweise Bände, und 12 500 Abhandlungen (Sonderabzüge u. Broschüren) und enthält das für den Augenarzt Wichtige und Interessante von den ältesten Zeiten bis zu unseren Tagen. Sie vermag Ihren Landesgenossen für Jahrhunderte Stoff zu Studien zu bieten.

Ich würde 40,000 Yen fordern, in 4 Jahresraten zu je 10,000 Yen.

Sie haben wohl den gedruckten Katalog meiner Büchersammlung vom Jahre 1901 zu Ihrer Verfügung. Die bedeutsamen Hinzufügungen der letzten 20 Jahre sind in einem Exemplar dieses gedruckten Katalogs eingezeichnet; dasselbe könnte Ihnen zugesandt werden.

Es könnte auch einer Ihrer Herren Landsleute, die in Berlin weilen, bei mir die Bibliothek besichtigen: Einer freundlichen Antwort entgegengehend, verbleibe ich mit kollegialer Hochachtung.

Ihr ergebener
Julius Hirschberg"

During this period not only the Hirschberg library but the Fürst von Hannover collection of Göttingen University, the library of the famous anatomist Waldeyer and that of Hugo Ribbert, the pathologist, were bought one after another and brought to Japan. The Göttingen University library, now in the possession of the Institute for the Science of Labor, contains copies of the better part of the medical texts of the 16th – 18th centuries and is an invaluable treasure to today's Japan. The other two collections belong to the University of Tokyo School of Medicine.

In Hirschberg's letter dated December 2, 1921, he recalled his favorable impression of Japan on his trip there 28 years before and mentioned the kind words regarding Germany of contemporary Japanese scholars.³

That is why he desired to sell his library for ¥ 40,000 to Japan. In today's terms that would be the sum of ¥ 100 million or more. Payment was to be made in four yearly installments. Such a large sum of money was involved that before deciding Komoto called a consultation meeting of his friends and relatives, the consensus being that the chance to buy the collection should not be allowed to slip by. Mrs. Komoto was given the final word, and with her agreement the decision was made.

Just at that time, Komoto's son-in-law, Atsushiro Mitamura, later professor of pathology at the University of Tokyo, happened to be in Germany, and he met with Hirschberg to discuss the terms of the contract which was concluded in 1922. As agreed with Mitamura, those books given in section 1 of the Catalog (the history of medical treatment) which did not concern ophthalmology were excluded from the sale. Truth to tell, among these were extremely valuable works by Hippocrates, Galenus, Celsus, Rufus, etc., from Greek and Roman times – classics which would be the overwhelming interest of any scholar of medical history: Having no particular interest in medical history himself and not fully understanding the value of that part of the collection, Mitamura judged that acquiring the works concerned with ophthalmology was sufficient.

When the payments spread over four years were completed, the collection was to be delivered to Japan. During this period the value of the yen fell and calculation of the payments was changed to British pounds, making the final sum ¥ 42,000. The last installment of ¥ 6,000 was sent in January 1925, but before it could be received, Prof. Hirschberg died. As his wife had died before him and they had no children, Komoto and Hirschberg's heirs discussed the completion of arrangements, but a misunderstanding arose which for a time appeared to place the transfer of the library in doubt.

³ Refers to the events of April 1920 in which resolutions were passed at all the annual general meetings of the various medical societies of Japan to resume friendly relations with Germany which had been severed since the First World War.

Having gathered such a huge sum and completed all the payments only to see the final transfer threatened over a misunderstanding, Komoto was in a state of great anxiety. In March of the same year (1925), he telegraphed his pupil in Germany to make arrangements to take possession of the library and have it shipped to Japan. As a result, toward the end of the year it was finally sent on its way, arriving in January of the new year. Crating and other shipping charges added close to another ¥ 10,000 to the final cost.

The Safekeeping and Organization of the Library

As soon as the books arrived, they were presented to the Central Library of the University of Tokyo. This was because before signing the contract of sale, Hirschberg had specified that in earthquake- and fire-prone Japan his library should be housed in a secure place. Considering this immediate donation of the collection to the university, it is evident that despite buying it at his own expense, Komoto never intended to keep it as a private possession. It is very interesting to consider the probable motives behind this purchase made at such great personal sacrifice. Two, in particular, come to mind.

First of all, there was the code of conduct of the times. In the role of student to Germany, the teacher, Japan by 1920 had studied medicine till the overall level had risen quite high. By long tradition in Japanese teacher–pupil relations, the pupil was expected to uphold his mentor's teachings without question. At that time the Confucian ethic on which this was based remained strong. Turning down Hirschberg's offer to sell the collection would very likely have appeared to Komoto rather like trampling on his duty to his teacher, sure cause for a guilty conscience. In fact, in regard to their former teachers, Japanese physicians felt a personal guilt over their country's aligning itself with Germany's World War I enemies and sharing in their victory. This is brought out by one example where a group of former students who studied in Germany gathered contributions to send to their old teachers now in financial distress following the war.

In November 1920 a group of nine doctors, professors at Tokyo and other universities, founded the Doitsu-Ostoria Ika Imonkai (the German-Austrian Physicians' Benefit Society) for doctors who had gone on medical observation or study trips to those two countries. Its purpose was to give a helping hand to physicians there in financial distress following World War I. The members each contributed ¥ 10 or more which was delivered to the Japanese ambassador in Germany to be sent to the various medical schools in the two countries. Hirschberg expressed appreciation for this in his Dec. 1920 letter.

We can safely assume that Komoto did not commit himself to this difficult purchase out of knowledge of the library's monetary value and a desire to possess it, but rather under the influence of the spirit described above.

A second motivation factor was surely recognition of the library's intangible worth. Komoto himself may have had no plans to make use of the contents, but he certainly concurred with Hirschberg's own view, stated in his letter, that the collection would be of use to Japan. To be sure, books on Western medicine prior to the 1868 Meiji Restoration were almost nonexistent in Japan. The acquisition of the Hirschberg library would be of incalculable value.

After arrival at the university library, the collection, still in its boxes, was placed in a basement storeroom where it remained for several years. Its vast content was beyond the ability of the librarians of the day, and so it remained untouched. In 1930, however, Prof. Theodor Axenfeld of Freiburg University arrived in Japan. Hearing that the Hirschberg library was now at the University of Tokyo, he expressed the greatest surprise, as its whereabouts were apparently a mystery at home. Reportedly, he was greatly pleased to find the collection now in Japan, and his interest stirred others from their indifference till enthusiastic voices were raised to put the library in order and make it available for general use. However, this proved easier said than done and the project bogged down.

Then in 1936 a celebration was held in honor of Prof. Komoto's 77th birthday. On that occasion everyone present made a contribution toward cataloging the collection, deciding this time to entrust the task to professional librarians. The sum collected proved insufficient, however, and an additional ¥ 6,000 was requested which Komoto paid himself. More than two years of work followed, and in October 1939, the year after Komoto's death, the compilation of the new catalog was completed, and it was published under the title *Komoto Bunko Mokuroku – Kyu Hirschberg Bunko* (Catalog of the Komoto Library – Formerly the Hirschberg Library).

A glance at the new catalog reveals a surprising development. In the section on the history of medical treatment, the original agreement was that only those works on the history of ophthalmology would be included but these would be sent in toto. However it turns out that few works of any importance on ophthalmological history are included. On the other hand, a large number of specially printed theses not found in the original catalog are present. For example, there are a great number of monographs on the lives of eminent ophthalmologists. Although the total number of items included in the library exceeds 20,000, as several score are bound together, the total number of volumes is only 1,586.

Despite the missing volumes, quite a collection of smaller works such as dissertations is included. In addition journal offprints, etc., are classified and arranged to be quickly locatable. Features like this help to make the library unique, and we cannot help applauding the decision of Jujiro Komoto which brought it to Japan.

As to the discrepancy between Hirschberg's original catalog and the works which actually arrived in Japan, one would naturally prefer to conclude that this is not the result of his own intention but rather of the action of his heirs. Further, the man asked to oversee the shipping of the books at that time did not really have the qualifications to judge the value of rare works; he could do little more than silently accept what was proffered. The majority of Japanese, in fact, were then in such a hurry to raise their medical standards to Western levels that they had little time for considering the past. In the resulting process of uncritical absorption, there were without doubt cases where they were taken in. If we consider Jujiro Komoto, paying a fortune for a pig in a poke, a bigger victim than most, we'll be chagrined, but we can just as well take it as one of the necessary hardships on the road of experience for the rising Japan.

What became of all the books that disappeared? If they met with destruction in the Second World War, it can truly be said that an irreplaceable part of our cultural heritage met its end through petty selfishness.

Summary

The collection of ophthalmic literature at the Central Library of the University of Tokyo is called the Komoto Library. The collection consists of over 3000 books and over 10,000 reprints collected over 30 years by Prof. Julius Hirschberg (1843–1925), in order to write the history of ophthalmology for the Graefe-Saemisch handbook of Ophthalmology. Dr. Jujiro Komoto (1858–1938), Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Tokyo from 1890 to 1920, bought the collection for 40,000 Yen between 1921 and 1925, and donated it to the University of Tokyo. This article describes the life history of Prof. Komoto and his relationship with Prof. Hirschberg who visited Japan in 1892 and became fond of this country. The article also tells why the library, formerly intended to be donated to the Medical Society of Berlin, was brought to Tokyo to become the Komoto Library. Part of the Hirschberg Library valuable but not directly related to ophthalmology was dropped from the list of books that were to be sold to Prof. Komoto, partly because of the death of Prof. Hirschberg in 1925. In spite of this, the collection contains precious textbooks, reprints and biographies of eminent ophthalmologists and is an invaluable treasure of the history of modern ophthalmology.

References

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**SAKAI, S. und NAKAJIMA, A. – Die Komoto-Bibliothek
(frühere Hirschberg-Bibliothek) in Japan**

Zusammenfassung

Die Sammlung ophthalmologischer Werke in der Zentralbibliothek der Universität Tokio wird „Bibliothek Komoto“ genannt. Sie enthält mehr als 3.000 Werke und mehr als 10.000 Sonderdrucke, die in 30 Jahren von Prof. J. Hirschberg (1843–1925) gesammelt und zusammengestellt wurden, um die Geschichte der Ophthalmologie für das Handbuch von Graefe-Saemisch zu schreiben. Dr. Jujiro Komoto (1858–1938), Professor der Augenheilkunde an der Universität Tokio von 1890–1920, kaufte die Sammlung für 40.000 Yen zwischen 1921 und 1925 und stiftete sie der Universität Tokio. Dieser Artikel beschreibt das Leben von Prof. Komoto und seine Beziehungen zu Prof. Hirschberg, der Japan im Jahre 1892 besuchte und sich in Japan verliebte. Der Artikel stellt gleichermaßen dar, wie die Bibliothek, die zunächst an die Medizinische Gesellschaft in Berlin gehen sollte, nach Tokio gebracht wurde, um die Bibliothek Komoto zu werden. Der Teil der Bibliothek Hirschbergs, der sich nicht direkt mit der Augenheilkunde befaßte, ist teilweise 1925 beim Tode Hirschbergs abgetrennt worden. Trotzdem enthält die Sammlung wertvolle Abhandlungen, Sonderdrucke und Biographien hervorragender Ophthalmologen, die für die Geschichte der modernen Augenheilkunde von großem Interesse sind.

**SAKAI, S. and NAKAJIMA, A. – La Komoto (anciennement Hirschberg) librairie
au Japon**

Resumé

La collection des livres ophtalmologiques à la Bibliothèque Centrale de l'Université de Tokyo est appelée "Librairie Komoto". Elle comprend plus de 3.000 livres et plus de 10.000 tirés à part collectionnés en 30 ans par le Prof. J. Hirschberg (1843–1925), qui les avait réunis pour écrire l'histoire de l'ophtalmologie dans le traité de Graefe-Saemisch. Le Dr. Jujiro Komoto (1858–1938), professeur d'ophtalmologie à l'Université de Tokyo de 1890 à 1920, acheta la collection pour 40.000 yen entre 1921 et 1925 et la donna à l'Université de Tokyo. Cet article décrit la vie du Prof. Komoto et ses rapports avec le Prof. Hirschberg, qui visita le Japon en 1892 et en devint amoureux. L'article dit également comment la librairie, qui devait d'abord être donnée à la Société Médicale de Berlin, fut apportée à Tokyo pour devenir la bibliothèque Komoto. La partie de la librairie de Hirschberg, qui ne concernait pas directement l'ophtalmologie, a été enlevée en partie à cause de la mort de Hirschberg en 1925. Malgré cela la collection comprend des traités précieux, des tirés à part et des biographies d'ophtalmologistes éminents, qui sont d'un grand intérêt pour l'histoire de l'ophtalmologie moderne.

**SAKAI S. y NAKAJIMA A. – La librería Komoto (formada por Hirschberg)
en el Japón**

Resumen

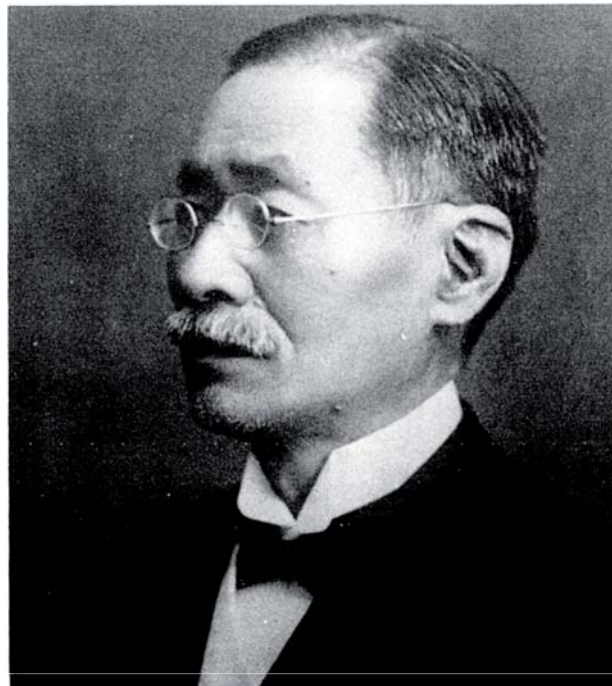
La colección de libros oftalmológicos de la Biblioteca Central de la Universidad de Tokio es llamada “Librería Komoto”. Comprende más de 3.000 libros y más de 10.000 separatas coleccionadas en 30 años por el Profesor J. Hirschberg (1843–1925), que los había reunido para escribir sobre la historia de la oftalmología en el Tratado de Graefe-Saemisch. El Doctor Jujiro Komoto (1858–1938), Profesor de Oftalmología en la Universidad de Tokio de 1890 a 1920, compra la colección por 40.000 Yens entre 1921 y 1925 y la dona a la Universidad de Tokio. Este artículo describe la vida del Prof. Komoto y su relación con el Prof. Hirschberg, quién visita Japón en 1892 y queda maravillado. El artículo habla también de como la biblioteca, que en principio debía ser dada a la Sociedad Médica de Berlín, fue llevada a Tokio para volverse la “Librería Komoto”. La parte de la biblioteca de Hirschberg, que no concernía directamente a la oftalmología, desapareció al fallecer Hirschberg en 1925. A pesar de esto la colección comprende: valiosos tratados, separatas y biografías de eminentes oftalmólogos, que son de un grand interés para la historia de la oftalmología moderna.

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Hirschberg



Komoto