

# Francis Brinkley: A Japanophile Englishman in Meiji Era

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**Abstract:** This paper describes how much Francis Brinkley contributed to Japan in the Meiji era. He had been in Japan for 47 years as a military advisor, teacher, journalist, author, historian, and translator. Brinkley's achievements have been underestimated because he was a Japanophile. But Brinkley published 6 books on Japanese history, culture and arts. These books are to reevaluate Francis Brinkley, as a contributor to introduce Japanese culture overseas, by clarifying his commitment to the Japanese arts and by evaluating his books on Japanese history and culture. Also, Francis's books on the English language were *Guide to English Self Taught* (1875) and *Japanese-English Dictionary* (1896). These two English books have contributed much to the English education of Japan. In conclusion, above these things make clear how much Francis's books contributed to Japan in Meiji era.

**Keywords:** Francis Brinkley   Employed foreigner   Historical of English studies in Japan

## **Preface**

Francis Brinkley (1841-1912) lived through, and actively participated in Japan's international history from 1867 to 1914. The Meiji era (1868 - 1912) was marked by Japan's opening to the West, to the new Western technology, as well as Western ideas of modernization. During this crucial time in the nation's history, few Westerners found themselves in a better position to observe firsthand the sweeping changes that were transforming Japanese society than Francis Brinkley. He was one of the very few foreigners who was in Japan at the opening of the Meiji era, and without once revisiting his native land he watched the progress of events throughout the whole of that memorable period. For the Japanese, the work he did will forever be remembered with gratitude. They quickly recognized his great ability as a journalist and the depth of his sympathy for their aspirations and difficulties. He, his newspaper, his books, and his learned contributions to encyclopedias played an

important part in the formation of the links of the chain that bind East to West. As an interpreter of Japanese thought, sentiment, tastes, and prejudices, he deserves to be remembered by all foreigners interested in the progress of modern Japan. However, despite making such a great contribution to the modernizing Japan in many ways, little attention has been paid to him thus far. The purpose of this paper is to show how significant a role he played in Japan.

## **Brinkley's family and his early life**

Francis Brinkley was born in Leinster, Ireland and was the thirteenth and youngest child of Richard Brinkley (1797-1855) J.P., of Parsons town, and his wife Harriet Graves (1800-1855). His paternal grandfather, John Brinkley, was a bishop and professor of astronomy at Dublin University, while his maternal grandfather, Richard Graves, was a Senior Fellow of Trinity College and the Dean of Ardagh. One of Brinkley's sisters, Jane (Brinkley) Vernon of Clontarf

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Castle, was the grandmother of Cyril Connolly. Another sister, Anna, became the Dowager Countess of Kingston after the death of her first husband, James King, 5th Earl of Kingston, and was the last person to live at Mitchelstown Castle. Through his mother's family, Brinkley was related to Richard Francis Burton, a distinguished linguist who shared Brinkley's passion for foreign culture.

Francis Brinkley studied at Dunganon and Trinity Colleges, where he received his highest marks in mathematics and classics. After graduating, he chose a military career and was subsequently accepted at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, became an artillery officer. In this capacity his cousin, Sir Richard Graves MacDonell the 6th Governor of Hong Kong, invited him out to the east to serve as his adjutant. He served in Hong Kong for three years as adjutant to the Hong Kong governor. Before beginning this appointment, Brinkley visited Nagasaki and witnessed the scene of a rare duel between two Japanese samurai warriors. Once the victor had slain his opponent, he immediately covered him in his haori (Japanese half coat) and knelt down with his hands clasped in prayer. It is said that Brinkley was so impressed by the conduct of Japanese warriors that it enticed him to live in Japan permanently.

### **Brinkley as an employed foreigner**

In 1867, the last year of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Francis came to Japan as a Royal Artillery officer attached to the British legation. He was so fascinated by things Japanese that he determined to fix his permanent abode in Japan. He mastered the Japanese language soon after his arrival, and both spoke and wrote it well. Then, he left the British Legation and was engaged by the Japanese Government to help the Japanese Navy in its inaugural

stage to solidify its foundation.

He was first attached to the Hyobusho (the Military Ministry), and then to the Navy Ministry when the Hyobusho was separated into the War Ministry and the Navy Ministry. It is likely that he owed his new post in the Japanese Government as an employed-foreigner to his genteel personality and the favor of Kaishu Katsu, the first Minister of the Navy, and Jungi Kawamura, the second Vice-Minister of the Navy Ministry. From October 1871, to October 1877, he taught gunnery, his favorite subject, to young students who would be future naval officers. While at the Hyobusho, he adopted the British Marine Corps system and drilled the students exclusively in artillery and musketry in a school created at his suggestion in July, 1872 at Zojoji temple.

When Brinkley was first employed by the Hyobusho, he was under a three-month contract with a monthly salary of 500 yen only for gunnery teaching. In a later document, however, "the commanding art," or "the science of command" in recent terms, was added to his teaching duties. The new course would be to aim at cultivating students' temperaments to be suitable for a commander in the fleet. Basil Hall Chamberlain, who was appointed to the post of English instructor at the Imperial Japanese Navy, chose Robert Southey's *Life of Nelson* as a textbook. This was because he knew that mere linguistic education was meaningless to future naval officers and intended through the textbook to teach discipline and English respect for duty, order and obedience as the basis of the naval officers' education.

After leaving the Imperial Japanese Navy, Francis worked for two and half years from July, 1878, as an instructor in mathematics at the Imperial College of Engineering, which later became part of Tokyo Imperial University. Later on, he taught economics in his private school. His profound scholarly

attainments and wide understanding of culture startled the world.

### **Brinkley's publications to introduce Japanese culture overseas**

Brinkley published several books, which can be classified into two large groups: those useful as an introduction to Japanese culture and those that contributed to the promotion of English education in Japan. The first group includes: *The History of the Empire of Japan* (Tokyo, 1893), *Japan: Described and Illustrated by Japanese*, written by Eminent Japanese Authorities and Scholars (Boston, 1897), *The Art of Japan* (Boston, 1901), *Oriental Series: Japan and china* (Boston, 1903), *A History of Japanese People : from the Earliest Times to the End of the Meiji Era* (London, 1915) and so on. The list is in order of their importance. The first and foremost was *Japan: Described and Illustrated* (Boston, 1897) which includes information and photos of people engaged in farming, trade and commerce, household activities and so on. *Japan: Described and Illustrated* is a guide to the Japanese and 19th century Japan in general. It is a complete and introspective overview of Japanese culture before the results of Western influence were manifest. Ever since the opening of Japan following many years of seclusion, Japanese culture drew intense interest amongst Western people. *Japan: Described and Illustrated* was published in response to this interest. The set was produced with assistance from the Japanese government at the time, as part of an effort to introduce Japan overseas. However, few Americans would have bought *Japan: Described and Illustrated* for its prose. Instead, they were more likely to have bought it for its art, its sheer opulence, the visual and tactile experience it provided. While the subjects of the book's images were themselves

exotic, the volumes also demonstrated the state of the art of photography at the turn of the twentieth century.

Considered by many to be one of the finest primary visual sources on Japan before her leap towards modernization, the set is a superb photographic essay and statement of what Japan looked like before modernization. It is a broad and wonderful view of traveling in both major and obscure areas, daily activities and photos of people engaged in trade, farming, commerce and household activities. Tenshin Okakura, who headed the Tokyo Art School (the present Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music), also contributed to this book.

*Japan: Described and Illustrated* won great popularity because of the author's earnest interest in and deep appreciation of Japanese art, especially ceramics, and skillful evaluations. There is an episode to add to the notability of the book. President Theodore Roosevelt, who roomed with Millet in his school days and was on friendly terms with Brinkley, was influenced by the book in framing U.S. diplomatic policy toward Japan. [1] This point deserves explicit emphasis. Brinkley published several more editions of his book in smaller format as well as a follow-up offering, a two-volume set titled *The Art of Japan*, which was published in 1901. It is probably the scarcest of the Brinkley publications.

Furthermore, it shows how interested Europeans and Americans were in Japan in those days as well as serving as an invaluable key to the image they had of Japan. For any collector interested in Japan during this critical period of the country's modern history, Brinkley's *Japan: Described and Illustrated* provides a rare and privileged glimpse into that time and place. Ultimately, Brinkley's work is, unavoidably, an example of the Western gaze peering at an "exotic" culture, but this is carefully balanced by Brinkley's own

unique perspective as a devoted life-long student of that culture, and also by his insistence on including Japanese voices and artists throughout the work, and allowing them to tell their own stories — a stirring combination that reflects the outward-turning Meiji-era policies and philosophies, and melds them into a fascinating book still much sought-after by collectors today. *Japan: Described and Illustrated* is again stirring interest among scholars and collectors of America fine art printing. While some sets can be found intact, others, sadly have been broken up so that the collotypes and photographs can only be sold individually now.

Next was *A History of Japanese People: from the Earliest Times to the End of the Meiji Era*, which was published after his death. It was a book published in collaboration, but it can be considered a laborious work by only Brinkley himself. It consists of 47 chapters, 784 pages, with 15 photos and 4 maps. From chapter 1 (entitled ‘The Historiographer’s Art in Old Japan’) on, he freely discussed Japan’s mythology, climate, customs, manners, politics, diplomacy, and religion. On the grounds that this book was written from the worldwide standpoint at that time, it should be more highly evaluated.

Lastly was *Oriental Series: Japan and China*. The set was expanded to 12 volumes to elaborate his views on the oriental arts, especially works of pottery. It is important to recognize that Brinkley had reliable aesthetic values on works of pottery. It has been proved that a part of his collection was included in the Iwasaki collection, and has been exhibited several times in recent years and has received high praise.

Brinkley’s achievements have been underestimated because he was a Japanophile. Based on our observation, however, there are good grounds for the view of reevaluating his contribution to introducing

Japanese culture overseas. I believe that Francis Brinkley should never be forgotten, together with a fellow foreigner Ernest Fenollosa, as an introducer of Japanese art. Francis wrote about Japanese history and fine arts in English. Brinkley’s books cashed in on the Japan craze and promoted the notion that non-western societies still existed in pre-modern conditions.

### **Francis’s books contributed to the English education of Japan**

Francis’s books on the English language were *Guide to English Self Taught* (1875) and *Japanese-English Dictionary* (1896). These books have contributed much to the English education of Japan. *Guide to English Self Taught* was for English beginners, which Shoyo Tsubouchi and Hirobumi Ito read with much interest. This book was adopted as a textbook in English schools throughout the country from the publication of its first edition. It was a very popular book, a voluminous work of 972 pages, filled with exhaustive and painstaking grammatical explanation. It also had some 5,000 exercises along with history, manners and customs, and current topics of those days. It is a rare book which describes the situation of Japan in the Meiji era, while also making it very interesting for Japanese learners of English. We should notice that *Guide to English Self Taught* was the first book enabling Japanese to acquire a knowledge of English from a work written in their own language. This instructive book for Japanese English students was later published as a new edition.

*Japanese-English Dictionary* was edited jointly with Fumio Nanjyo and Yukichika Iwasaki. It is said that since the publication of the dictionary the sales of James C. Hepburn’s *A Japanese English Dictionary with an English and Japanese Index*, known simply as

Hepburn's Dictionary, which ran into several editions since it had been first printed in 1867, came to a standstill. Not only Japanese scholars and students of English but also Englishmen and Americans found *Japanese-English Dictionary* useful. The book has 1,687 pages, consisting of two columns, with illustrations and detailed information regarding the history and structure of the Japanese language, various kinds of letters, pronunciation and grammatical explanations written in the preface in English. Therefore, originally this book was written for people like Hepburn, foreigners who were studying Japanese. These points make clear how much Brinkley's books contributed to the education of Japan in the Meiji era.

### **Role of Japan Mail in the Meiji era**

In the Meiji period there were three newspapers in Yokohama. One of them was *The Japan Weekly Mail* (which later was merged to form *the Japan Times*), the most influential English-language newspaper of the day. In 1881 Brinkley became the owner and the editor-in-chief of *The Japan Weekly Mail*, for which he had been writing as a top journalist. He was skilled in writing and quite capable of reading and understanding Japanese compositions written in both kana and Chinese characters. He was rather conservative in thought, but was generous and tolerant of other writers in letting them freely express their opinions in his newspaper. A well-known episode is that he offered a space in the paper for candid opinions even to Edward H. House, an American who believed in no religion or soul, quite different from Brinkley's standpoint. However, House always appreciated Francis's magnanimity. The commentary tone of *The Japan Weekly Mail* edited by Francis was pro-Japanese. [2] Brinkley had the ear of the Meiji government and

promoted a Japanese agenda overseas.

Brinkley's *Mail* defended "squeeze" among government officials and the sale of young girls into prostitution by their parents. Before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War the newspaper took an anti-war attitude, but always expressed goodwill and sympathy for the situation of Japan. Reports of Japanese atrocities in Korea were "iniquitous falsehoods" (*Japan Mail*, Dec 23, 1905). In return, Brinkley received ¥10,000 a year from both the Nippon Yusen Kaisha, Japan's largest shipping line, and the Japanese Foreign Ministry bought 500 copies of the *Japan Mail*. In other words, the *Japan Mail* newspaper received financial support from the Japanese government and consequently maintained a pro-Japanese stance. The newspaper was perhaps the most influential and widely-read English language newspaper in the Far East. After the First Sino-Japanese War, Brinkley became the Tokyo-based correspondent for *The London Times*, and gained fame for his dispatches during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. [3]

Brinkley's indiscriminate defense of Japan often drew the fire of Robert Young of *Japan Chronicle*, who primly maintained that "paid advocacy" is not a proper function of the Press. But Young was not Brinkley's only critic. In February 1881, a caricature in Charles Wirgman's *Japan Punch* depicted Brinkley as a spokesman for the "Japanese government, British legation," as much a criticism of Brinkley's advocacy as of the legation's spinelessness in promoting the interests of the British community. In 1894, a *North China Herald* commentator sniped "It is impossible to convince Captain Brinkley in a position antagonistic to the government. The training of long years will suffice to deliver him from an unenviable predicament."

Like most of Brinkley's opponents, Robert Young had little Japanese, and this in itself may have made

him a less mellow observer of Japan than he might have been. Brinkley's excellent command of the language and scholarship in Japanese art history not only brought him to the attention of Hirobumi Ito and the Meiji elites but probably helped bring Brinkley round to the Japanese perspective. Socially, Brinkley's comfortable Meath squirearchy, Dungannon and Trinity background and his position as a scion of the protestant ascendancy set him at ease among the oligarchs, just as Young's more ordinary background led him to the Japanese radicals peopling his inner circle in Kobe. It should also be added that, F.A. MacKenzie, a prominent English journalist, wrote:

Captain Brinkley's great knowledge of Japanese life and language is admitted and admired by all. His independence of judgment is, however, weakened by his close official connection with the Japanese Government and by his personal interest in Japanese industry. His journal is regarded generally as a government mouth-piece, and he has succeeded in making himself a more vigorous advocate of the Japanese claims than even the Japanese themselves. It can safely be forecasted that whenever a dispute arises between Japanese and British interests, Captain Brinkley and his journal will play the part, through thick and thin, of defenders of the Japanese. [4]

His military report, Japanese Bushido and General Maresuke Nogi met with universal acclaim. In 1912 Emperor Meiji passed away and General Maresuke Nogi committed seppuku (ritual suicide), together with his wife on the death of his Emperor. Brinkley's last report was General Maresuke Nogi for *The London*

*Times*, which he had written on his deathbed.

Brinkley, though suffering from palsy, unyieldingly continued to write for his newspaper. Brinkley's value to the Japanese government was related to two functions: his editorship of *The Japan Weekly Mail*, and correspondence for *The London Times*. He was a stringer from 1885 to 1897 but became the permanent correspondent thereafter until his death in 1912. Needless to say, the positions taken in Brinkley's dispatches from Tokyo to London were consistent with editorials in *The Japan Weekly Mail*. He was never sole *The London Times* correspondent, but it must be strongly emphasized that he did much behind the scenes for the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902.

### **Private life**

Brinkley married Yasuko Tanaka, a daughter of a former samurai from the Mito clan in 1878. Yasuko was a younger sister of the owner of a private school where Brinkley taught economics. Interracial marriages could be registered under Japanese law from 1873. Brinkley sought but was refused permission by the British Legation to register his marriage in order that his wife would have undisputed claim to British nationality (she forfeited her Japanese nationality by marrying him). He fought this refusal and eventually succeeded by appealing to the British judiciary, with the help of some influential friends. In March, 1886, he was able to legally marry Yasuko. Thus, Brinkley and Yasuko became the first official English-Japanese cross-culturally married couple. Brinkley's mastery of Japanese and good understanding of Japan and the Japanese owed much to the assistance of his Japanese wife. They had two sons and a daughter.

Brinkley had many hobbies which included gardening, collecting Japanese art and pottery, cricket,

tennis, horse riding and hunting. Part of his significant collection of art and pottery was donated to various museums around the world, but the majority of it was reduced to rubble and ash after the Great Tokyo earthquake and World War II.

## Conclusion

Brinkley was not a mere Japanophile, but was an objective journalist who reported facts as they were. At that time he was also a correspondent for *The London Times*. Later his factual war reports serialized in his newspaper during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 surprised the world, and he gained fame for his dispatches. Francis Brinkley told his son, Jack Ronald Brinkley an episode on his deathbed, immediately after Japan defeated Russia in Mukden during the Russo-Japanese War, the Chief of the General Staff Gentaro Kodama hurriedly returned home secretly and recommended the Japanese Government to conclude a treaty with Russia. At the time it was a hugely consequential secret and yet he confided this national secret to Brinkley, the foreign correspondent of *The London Times*, demonstrating the utmost confidence in which the Chief of the General Staff held Brinkley. Brinkley also wielded his pen in favor of Japan, as House did, against extraterritorial and unequal treaties. He was awarded the Order of the Sacred Treasure by Emperor Meiji for his contributions to the betterment of improving Anglo-Japanese relations.

However, he could not conquer his disease and his life of 71 years ended in October, 1912, at his residence in Hiroo, Tokyo. Throughout his 30 year-long newspaper career he carried out his original determination “to devote his life in Japan to reading and writing.” For the last forty-five years of his life,

Francis never again set eyes on his motherland. He did not even return home when he was to be honored with a LL.D. degree by his alma mater. Francis Brinkley had been in Japan for 47 years as a military advisor, teacher, author, historian, journalist and so on. He arrived in Japan as a British military personnel in 1867 and taught at the Naval Gunnery School in Japan. Later he published the English-language newspaper, *The Japan Weekly Mail*, and served as a correspondent for *the London Times*. In such capacities, Brinkley played a significant role in introducing Japanese culture overseas. *The Asahi Newspaper* says, as can be seen in the following quotation:

It is well known to the public that as editor of *Japan Mail*, Captain Brinkley introduced Japan to the world in a very sympathetic manner and it equally deserves our thanks that he contributed to the *London Times* as its correspondent perfectly correct information on the current topics in our country. His literary contributions to the stock of the world’s knowledge of Japan are too long to enumerate, but it may be mentioned that he rendered great help to Japanese students of the English language by his Gogaku Hitori Annai. He was one of those most memorable foreigners resident in Japan, ranking with Hearn, Baelts, Nicolai, and Chamberlain. [5]

Reflection on some of these will make clear how much Francis Brinkley contributed to Japan.

## Notes

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