

On Engelbert Kaempfer's "Ginkgo"

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Many authors have questioned why Kaempfer apparently misspelled the name of the ginkgo tree in his ground-breaking *Flora Japonica* (*Amoenitates Exoticae*, Fasc. V). Other misspellings in his writings are less important, but the name *Ginkgo* was introduced into Carl von Linné's botanical nomenclature and is therefore permanently established in the botanical literature. Like many others, I initially believed that it was a mistake by an anonymous typesetter in Meyer's printing shop (Meyersche Hof-Buchhandlung) in Lemgo, where the *Amoenitates Exoticae* was printed under Kaempfer's supervision in 1712. However, closer examination of the source materials reveal that Kaempfer was the one responsible.

Kaempfer's use of the *Kinmōzu'i*

During his two-year stay (1689–1691) at the Dutch trading post of Dejima (Nagasaki, Japan), Kaempfer obtained two copies of the *Kinmōzu'i*, a pictorial dictionary edited by Nakamura Tekisai (1629–1702)¹; both are now held in the Oriental Collections of the British Library. The *Kinmōzu'i* is a woodblock print that was used for educational purposes and had a marked influence on later similar publications. Some Western authors refer to it as an encyclopedia, but this is a gross exaggeration. The *Kinmōzu'i* does not address abstract ideas, famous persons or historical events. Rather, it describes 1484 plants, animals, the human body, selected tools and some clothes. Each page includes four frames containing simple illustrations depicting a particular item. The heading is carved in large Chinese characters, and a small amount of included text provides the Sino–Japanese and Japanese readings of these characters, and other colloquial names used in Japan.



Fig. 1a "GINKGO" in *Kinmōzu'i* (1666, private collection).



Fig. 1b "GINKGO" in *Kinmōzu'i* (1686, private collection).

Kaempfer's linguistic information about the ginkgo tree was taken from book 18 (fruits) of the second edition (1686). While the text in this edition was not changed, the illustrations show a slightly different arrangement (Fig. 1a/b). As Kaempfer could not read Japanese, he placed a reference number in each frame. Most of the botanical entries in his copies of the *Kinmōzu'i* have a second number, placed next to the heading (Fig. 2). These numbers also appear in notes he made during his stay in Japan. Many of the explanations concerning Japanese books were probably given to him by his "assistant" Imamura Gen'emon Eisei (1671–1736), although some notes show that the trading-post interpreters Bada Ichirōbei, Namura Gompachi and Narabayashi Shin'emon made important contributions to Kaempfer's botanical studies².

A handwritten note in cursive script. The text reads "34 Ch. Ginkgo. Ginnan". A red arrow points from the text "34 Ch." to the left margin.

Fig. 3 Kaempfer's note on ginkgo in his *Collectanea Japonica* (British Library, Sloane Collection 3062, fol. 256v).

Fortunately, the English physician and naturalist Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), one of the most eminent collectors of his day, retained many of Kaempfer's notes, which have survived to the present. In a manuscript volume titled *Collectanea Japonica* (British Library, Sloane Collection 3062), there are several pages listing the Chinese headings in the *Kinmōzu'i*³. The 34th heading is transliterated wrongly as "Ginkgo" instead of the more appropriate "Ginkjo" or "Ginkio" (fig. 2). This shows that the long-lasting consequences of the incorrect spelling in Kaempfer's *Flora Japonica* were not the result of a misprint or misunderstanding during the preparation of the publication, but rather a small mistake by Kaempfer himself.

A rectangular frame containing handwritten Japanese text. The text is arranged in two rows. The top row contains the characters "樹", "名", "銀", "名", "唐", "の", "俗" from left to right. The bottom row contains "う", "鴨", "杏", "白", "音", "本", "云" from left to right. Below the frame, the number "296" is written, with a red arrow pointing to it. To the right of the frame, the characters "銀杏" are written vertically, with a red arrow pointing to the character "杏".

Fig. 3 Reference numbers in Kaempfer's copy of the *Kinmōzu'i* (British Library, Oriental Collections, Or.75.ff.1).

The numbers in Kaempfer's notes appear again in one of his copies of the *Kinmōzu'i*. Here, the frame numbered 296 shows a twig of the ginkgo with an additional number (34) included adjacent

to the Chinese heading (Fig. 3). The readings of the two Chinese characters involved are given in Japanese as *ginkyō*, using the syllable characters *gi-n-ki-ya-u*, and alternatively as *ginan*⁴, which was written with the syllable characters *gi-n-a-n*⁵. The explanations are quite simple, providing further alternative names (fig.4)⁶. Thus there can be no doubt that Kaempfer's Japanese counterpart(s) knew how to read the two Chinese characters.

う 樹じういちや 一名おうきやく鴨脚 銀杏ぎんきやう樹 名白果はくくわ 唐音二 あん杏徒 俗云きんぎやうぎん 銀杏

Fig. 4 Japanese explanation of *ginkyō* in the *Kinmōzu'i* (cf. fig. 3)

Unfortunately, Kaempfer's manuscript of the *Amoenitates Exoticae* is preserved only in fragments (British Library, Sloane Collection 2907), and nothing remains of the *Flora Japonica* other than an early draft of 32 pages, entitled "Fasciculus V". This deals with most of the plants in the published version, but gives only very short descriptions (two or three lines) for each item. A vertical line crossing the text on each page indicates that Kaempfer had produced a revised version. In this draft, reference is made to "Itsjo noki" (*Ichō-no-ki*) followed by the Latin word "DESCRIPTIO", but no reference to other names or translations. Evidently the word *ginkgo* was included at an advanced stage when he decided to include the linguistic information provided by the *Kinmōzu'i*.

杏銀 *Ginkgo*, vel *Gín an*, vulgò *Itsjò*. Arbor
nucifera folio Adiantino.

Fig. 5 *Amoenitates Exoticae*, p. 811.

The letters *y* and *g* in Kaempfer's manuscripts

It could be argued that the letter *g* in Kaempfer's *Collectanea Japonica* (Fig. 3) was intended to be *y*, but in Kaempfer's handwriting each letter shows distinctive features (Fig. 6)⁷.

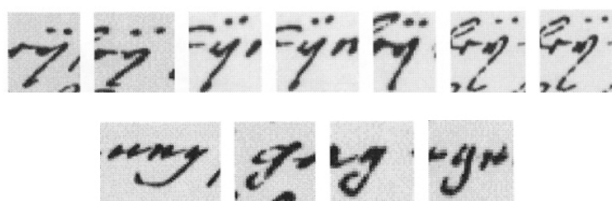


Fig. 6 The letters *y* (above) and *g* (below) in Kaempfer's manuscript *Heutiges Japan* (British Library, Sloane Collection 3060).

When Kaempfer wrote in Latin or used other foreign words, he used a different set of letters, following the custom of his era, but still added two dots above each *y*. Even when the dots were not present, the lower part of his letter *y* differed significantly from that in his letter *g* (Fig. 7).

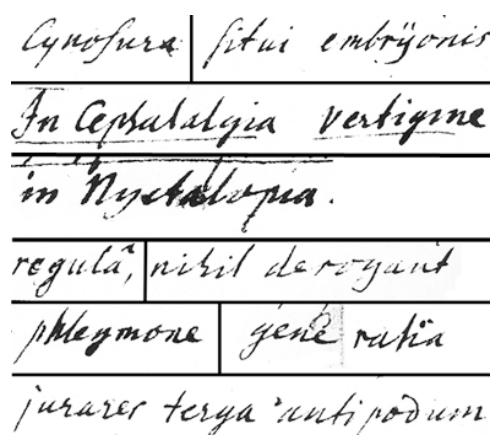


Fig. 7 The letters *y* and *g* in manuscript fragments of Kaempfer's *Amenitates Exoticae* (British Library, Sloane Collection 3907)⁸.

The Japanese syllables *kyo* or *kyō* in Kaempfer's manuscripts

Kaempfer's spelling of other Japanese words containing the syllable *kyo* or *kyō* (Fig. 8) also warrants examination.

Kaempfer's spelling	Modern transliteration (Chinese character)
Kiobas	Kyōbashi (京橋)
Tei Gjo	Teigyō (帝堯)
Gjo / Gio	Gyō (堯)
Gjogji	Gyōki (行基)
Gjosja	gyōja (行者)
Gjenno Gjosja	En-no-gyōja (役行者)
Nengjosi feja	nengyōji heya (年行司部屋)
Nengjosi	nengyōji (年行司)
Dsjo Kio	Jōkyō (貞享)
In Kjòo / In Kio	Ingyō (允恭)
Bugjo / Bugjos (pl.)	bugyō (奉行)
Dsi Sja bugjo	jishabugyō (寺社奉行)
Kjo kai	gyokai (魚貝, 魚介)
Kingjo	kingyo (金魚)
Nítzi Jósi / Nitz gjósi	nichigyōshi (日行使)
Dsjojosi	jōgyōji (常行司)
Kijo móri / Kio mori / Kijomóri	[Taira-no-]Kiyomori [平]清盛
Kiomids / Kiomitz / Kijomitz	Kiyomizu (清水)

Fig. 8 Kaempfer's spelling of Japanese words containing the syllables *kyo*, *gyo* and *ki-yo* in his manuscript *Heutiges Japan* (British Library, Sloane Collection 3060).

Kaempfer clearly had great difficulty in distinguishing Japanese syllables such as *ji* and *ja*, which

are not compatible with the German phoneme system. As with all Westerners at Dejima, Kaempfer tended to ignore certain phonemes or attributed them incorrectly to what he believed were similar ones in his native language. However, this was not the case for Japanese syllables such as *kyo* or *gyo*, which were quite consistently transliterated as *kio/kjo* and *gio/gjo*, respectively (Fig. 9). Occasionally Kaempfer was able to distinguish *kyo* from the syllable combination *ki-yo*, which is difficult even for advanced Western learners of the language.

Examination of the Japanese plant names printed in the *Amoenitates Exoticae* leads to the same conclusion, with the only odd exception being “Ginkgo”.

Kaempfer's spelling	Modern Transliteration (Chinese character)	<i>Amoenitates Exoticae</i>
Kikjo	kikyō (桔梗)	p. 823
Uikio	uikyō (茴香)	p. 825
Kjoo	kyō (薑)	p. 826
Kjo	kyo (苳)	p. 831
Kjókuso	gyokusho (玉黍)	p. 835
Kjo	kyō (蕎)	p. 835
Sokio	sōkyō (皂莢)	p. 841
Jen no gjosa	En-no-gyōja (役行者)	p. 463
Rengio	rengyō (連翹)	p. 907

Fig. 9 Kaempfer's spelling of Japanese words containing the syllables *kyo* and *gyo* in the *Amoenitates Exoticae*.

Conclusion

Kaempfer's representation of Japanese words was very inconsistent for certain phonemes. In addition, he was apparently careless about the significant difference between long and short vowels. However, a word such as *ginkyō* should not have been an issue for him. As the syllables *kyo* and *gyo* are written as “kio”/“kjo” and “gio”/“gjo” throughout his manuscripts, Kaempfer should have chosen “Ginkjo” or “Ginkio” rather than “Ginkgo”. As his notes show, this mistake occurred in Japan. Following his return to Lemgo there would have been no way for him to check the validity of his transliterations, and “Ginkgo” thus found its way into the *Amoenitates Exoticae*, and from there into Linné's nomenclature.

One wonders what might have led to such a simple mistake being made. Perhaps Kaempfer and his Japanese counterparts had been sipping the liqueur that he mentions in the preface to *The History of Japan*, or perhaps it was one of those many sticky days that occur in Kyushu between May and September, when life slows and tiny details lose their importance.

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- 1 Nakamura Tekisai: *Kinmōzu'i*. Kyōto: Yamagataya, 6th year of Kambun Era [= 1666] (中村惕斎『訓蒙図彙』[京都]: 山形屋、寛文六年).
- Nakamura Tekisai: *Kinmōzu'i*, Kyōto, 3rd year of Jōkyō Era [= 1686] (中村惕斎『訓蒙図彙』[京都]、貞享三年).
- 2 Especially the senior interpreter Narabayashi Shin'emon (1648–1711), also known as Chinzan (栖林鎮山), was well versed in medical and botanical matters. Wolfgang Michel: On the Background of Engelbert Kaempfer's Studies of Japanese Herbs and Drugs. *Journal of the Japan Society of Medical History*, Vol. 48 (2002), No. 4, pp. 692–720.
- 3 British Library, Sloane Collection, No. 3062 (*Collectanea Japonica*), fol. 256v–263v, 265v–280v.
- 4 唐音 (*tōin* or *tō-on*): Chinese readings introduced to Japan since the Kamakura period. This term is sometimes combined with later Muromachi-era translations, *sō-on* (宋音), to make *tōsō-on* (唐宋音). These unsystematic readings were brought to Japan by monks and traders. They are confined to certain words, including *futon* (蒲団, chin. *pútuán*), *andon* (行燈, chin. *xíngdēng*) and *min* (明, chin. *míng*).
- 5 The reading and writing of plant names in Chinese characters varies substantially depending on the century in which the particular Chinese name came to the archipelago. In the vastness of the Chinese empire, different characters (names) were sometimes used for the same plant. In other cases the same character was used for different plants. When such names arrived in Japan further misunderstandings occurred. Modern botanical publications prefer to use the botanical name and an established Japanese name in *kana* syllables.
- 6 Modern dictionaries read 銀杏 as *ginnan* (ぎんなん) and *ichō* (いちょう). The *Kinmōzu'i* also gives the Chinese name 'duck foot' (鴨脚, chin. *yāqiǎo*, jp. *ōkyaku*), which refers to the shape of the ginkgo leaves, and 'white fruit (tree)' (白果, chin. *báigǔo*, jp. *hakka*). However, it does not mention the old name 'grandfather–grandson tree' (公孫樹, chin. *gōngsūnshù*, jp. *kōsonju*), which is said to be a reference to the long time required until the nuts of ginkgo trees can be harvested.
- 7 For more on Kaempfer's transliteration of Japanese words, see Wolfgang Michel: Engelbert Kaempfers Beschäftigung mit der japanischen Sprache. In: Detlef Haberland (ed.): *Engelbert Kaempfer. Werk und Wirkung*. Stuttgart: Boethius, 1993, pp. 194–221.
- 8 For more on Kaempfer's handwriting, see Engelbert Kaempfer: *Heutiges Japan*. Kritische Edition. Herausgegeben von W. Michel und B. Terwiel, München: Iudicium, 2001, Vol. 1/2, 757 pp.