



The Japanese Discovery of Victorian Britain: Early Travel Encounters in the Far West (Meiji Series, 5)

Andrew Cobbing

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The investigations undertaken in the pursuit of knowledge by the first overseas Japanese travellers during the 1860s and 70s have left a unique record of life in the then unknown west. Leaving behind a homeland culturally isolated for more than 200 years, these samurai travellers were especially fascinated by the extent of British political and commercial influence they observed during their travels, and therefore paid particularly close attention to the Victorian world and recorded all they saw in minute detail. Their diaries and 'travelogues' comprise the single largest body of material on Victorian society to be recorded in any non-European language. This book examines the nature of these travellers' experiences and their perceptions of Victorian Britain. A deeper understanding of this rich source material is important because, although entirely unknown to British readers, the documents reveal one of the most spectacular culture shocks ever recorded in World History. They are also important because the images of Victorian and other western societies that they portrayed to the Japanese reading public in the late nineteenth century still underpin Japanese understanding of the outside world more than a hundred years later.

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