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Japan on a Glass Plate

The Adventure of Photography in Yokohama and Beyond, 1853–1912

Sebastian Dobson

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- Unique glimpse into a pivotal moment in Japanese cultural history and the history of photography
- Unique selection of 19th-century photographs of Japan, many of which are shown here for the first time
- Lavishly illustrated, with an extensive introduction on the historical context

Between the twilight years of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867) and the end of the Meiji Era (1868–1912) that followed it, photography offered a unique insight into the rapid transformation of Japan from an isolated, feudal society to a modern, industrialized state. In the four decades that followed the opening of the country in 1853, the camera evolved from an imported novelty to a familiar witness of Japanese daily life. Operating from the Treaty Ports of Yokohama and elsewhere, early practitioners of photography plied an often precarious trade in images of Japan and laid the foundations of what would soon become a highly competitive industry with a global reach. Whether cherished as souvenirs of an exotic land of fond imagination or curated as visual documents of a fast-changing society, these images by foreign and Japanese photographers, often packaged in exquisitely produced albums, enjoyed a wide circulation abroad and played an important role in influencing perceptions of Japan in the West well into the early 20th century.
Drawing from an extensive private collection assembled over many years, this book presents a unique selection of 19th century photographs of Japan, many of which are published here for the first time.

A UK-based independent scholar, **Sebastian Dobson** graduated in Modern History from Durham University and pursued his postgraduate study at Cambridge University before being awarded a Monbushō Research Scholarship in 1989 to study in Japan. He has written extensively on the history of photography and other aspects of visual culture in Japan during the Bakumatsu and Meiji eras, and his works include the monograph *Under Eagle Eyes: Lithographs, Drawings and Photographs from the Prussian Expedition to Japan, 1860-61* (2012, co-authored with Sven Saaler), articles, reviews, and contributions to *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph* (2005) and *The Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* (2007). Dobson has also collaborated on exhibitions held at institutions in the UK, the US and Japan. His most recent publications are *A Carte Album attributed to Shimooka Renjō* and *Japan 1900: A Portrait in Color*, both of which were published in 2021.

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