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Book Review of Japan Encounters the Barbarian: Japanese Travellers in America and Europe by W.G. Beasley

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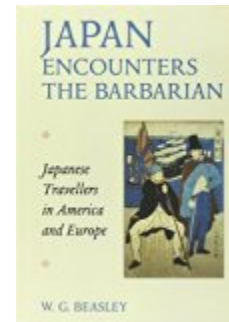
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W. G. Beasley. *Japan Encounters the Barbarian: Japanese Travellers in America and Europe*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1995. xi + 252 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-06324-0.

Reviewed by Susanna Fessler (University at Albany)
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The Japanese Abroad

This work is an historical survey of the Japanese abroad, with particular focus on those Japanese who travelled to America and Europe during the period 1860-1873. It is primarily concerned with short term travellers, i.e., it does not deal with Japanese emigrants. The chapter titles convey the scope of the work: "Prologue: Japan and China," "Barbarian Books," "Unequal Treaties," "The Mission to America, 1860," "The Mission to Europe, 1862," "Envoys and Industry, 1865-1867," "The First Japanese Students Overseas, 1862-1868," "From Tokugawa to Meiji," "The Iwakura Embassy, 1871-1873," "The Fruits of Experience: I. Later Careers" and "The Fruits of Experience: II. Policies and Ideas."

The author has compiled much information in a small space, and concentrates on an objective presentation of historical events. Consequently, although there is nothing new in the book as such, there is much to be gleaned from this volume in the way of names, dates, events, and the like. It is written for a general audience, and assumes little prior knowledge of Japan. This may please some readers and not others—in order to set the stage for his discussion of *bakumatsu* overseas travel, Beasley begins with prehistoric Japan, discussing the history of travel between Japan and the mainland. To do justice to this topic he must dedicate an entire chapter to it and the reader who first took interest in the book by dint of the title may feel restless.

The second chapter offers no respite: it covers Japan's encounter with the West from the sixteenth through the

mid-nineteenth century, an encounter that took place entirely on domestic soil because of the Tokugawa shogunate's ban on overseas travel. Although not addressed here, there were (particularly near the end of the Tokugawa period) a handful of men, mostly shipwrecked sailors, who had travelled abroad and returned to Japan to tell about it.[1] Alas, Beasley discusses not these Japanese abroad, but rather Japanese interest in the Western world as they saw it through the few Westerners who were permitted into Japan. Section titles in the second chapter include "Rejection of Christianity" and "Dutch Studies." The scholarship is sound, but there is little here that has not been treated quite adequately elsewhere.[2]

Chapter Three sets the stage for foreign travel, but still does not take us there. Its section titles are "The Foreign Policy Debate" and "Western Studies and Military Reform." Neither section goes into the detail one might hope for; this cursory treatment (pp. 37-55) of the diplomatic events of the *bakumatsu* appears in countless other works on modern Japan history.

The next three chapters focus on the six diplomatic missions sent to the West by the Tokugawa shogunate between 1860 and 1868. The first mission was sent overseas by the shogunate in 1860 and its travels were limited to the United States, where mission members exchanged letters of ratification for a U.S.-Japan treaty. The second, headed by the commissioner of foreign affairs, Take-nouchi Yasunori (1806-?), went in 1862; this group went to Russia, France, England, Portugal, Holland, and Prus-

sia and was charged with assorted duties, particularly observing Western technological advancements with the aim of adapting them on Japanese soil. Beasley describes these two missions in Chapters Four and Five respectively. In his book *As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to the United States* (New York: Kodansha, 1979) Masao Miyoshi dealt with the 1860 mission in greater detail than Beasley does here, and paid more attention to cultural observances of the mission members. The 1862 mission has been given piecemeal attention in other sources, such as the *Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Eiichi Kiyooka, trans. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966). There are a number of works in Japanese on this mission also, but for an English summary, Beasley's chapter, albeit terse, may be the best choice.[3]

Chapter Six, entitled "Envoys and Industry, 1865-1867," discusses the remaining four shogunal missions. The third mission went to France in 1864; headed by Ikeda Nagaoki (1837-1879), its purpose was to settle a number of disputes between Japan and France, including the Japanese proposal to close the port of Yokohama in order to protect the silk trade. The fourth mission, headed by Shibata Takenaka (1823-1877), went to France and England from 1865-1866 with the objective of gaining the knowledge and connections necessary to open a steel mill in Japan. The fifth mission in 1866, headed by Koide Hidezane, went to Russia in order to consult with the government on issues of national borders. The sixth and final shogunal mission, headed by Prince Akitake (1853-1910) and of which Shibusawa Eiichi (1840-1931) was a member, traveled to Europe in 1867. Primary sources on these missions are scarcer than on the first two missions, and Beasley's treatment reflects that. Still, he lucidly describes the events and actors in a fashion never done before in English. Beasley prefers to paraphrase the records of these missions rather than to quote them. The reader is thus spared irrelevant detail but pays the price of being separated from the source by an interpretive layer.

Chapter Seven concerns the students sponsored by the shogunate and various *han* in 1862-1868 whose objective it was to study abroad and bring back Western technology and culture to their homeland. Beasley tells us that there were approximately 128 shogunal students who went to the West during this period; he chooses to focus on the most prominent, cursorily describing where and what they studied. He treats the *han* sponsored students likewise, and includes a discussion of the selection process in Japan of students slated for overseas study. For these students, going abroad often meant assuming a pseudonym and risking the wrath of xenophobic com-

patriots after returning home. Beasley captures the air of the time nicely, providing anecdotal evidence where helpful.

Chapter Eight is a catch-all for the transition from Tokugawa to Meiji. It covers workers, students and diplomats who travelled to the West during this period. Much of what is found here can also be gleaned from Ardath W. Burks' *The Modernizers: Overseas Students, Foreign Employees, and Meiji Japan* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), although Beasley does a nice job of organizing the information (*The Modernizers* is a collection of essays by disparate authors). Beasley also moves back and forth between the topic of Japanese in the West and that of Westerners in Japan; this is an effective way of describing international relations, but the result is a dilution of the purported content of the book, one that sorely needs attention. Materials on this topic in Japanese are readily available in print, and indeed Beasley notes them in the bibliography, yet his treatment is disappointingly brief.[4]

The ninth chapter is dedicated to the well-known Iwakura Mission of 1871-1873 to the United States and Europe. This mission was chronicled by Kume Kunitake (1839-1931) in *Bei-O kairan jikki*, the voluminous official record of the journey. Beasley uses this account plus a few others to give the intent of the mission, describe the journey itself and cover the effect of the mission upon return to Japan. But Beasley's treatment is a summarization, as it could only be given that the chapter covers twenty pages whereas *Bei-O kairan jikki* alone runs over 2,000 pages in its *bunko-bon* edition. A casual reader will learn something, but the scholar may be disappointed.

Chapter Ten, "The Fruits of Experience: I. Later Careers" provides an epilogue to the many individual stories of travellers presented in the earlier chapters. Beasley recounts what happened to these intrepid souls upon repatriation, showing that success in the Meiji government was most often achieved by either travellers of lowly rank before the Restoration or of higher rank after the Restoration. Most of the information Beasley gives is readily available (as he tells us in the bibliography) in "standard biographical dictionaries and reference works" (p. 240); there is nothing ground-breaking here, but the information is presented clearly and for the non-Japanese reader it provides a unique source.[5]

Chapter Eleven discusses the "Policies and Ideas" which resulted partly from the influence of government officials who had experience overseas. It is a general survey of both political and social trends of the Meiji period;

when appropriate, the contributions of travellers are included. The opinions and influences of non-travellers are also included to provide a contrast. For example, Sakatani Shiroshi and Nishimura Shigeki, both Confucian scholars and contributors to *Meiroku zasshi*, are given attention to provide a contrast to the ideas of Nakamura Masanao and Fukuzawa Yukichi. However, the scope of the chapter is limited and presents not new material but rather old material in a new format.

What is the author's conclusion? That the dramatic changes in government and industry in the Meiji period can, in part, be attributed to the influence of those who travelled abroad. That these foreign influences underwent mutations once on Japanese soil, as had countless other foreign influences in Japan's past; and that "cultural borrowing has remained a feature of Japanese life" (p. 223). To his credit, Beasley does give specific examples to illustrate his points, and it is those that make this book worth reading.

One thing that I expected this book to do (given the title) was examine the numerous travellers who were not students or diplomats sent abroad by the shogunate or the Meiji government. There were not a few of them, and there are historical records of many of their experiences. But Beasley stays focused on those with government ties, which is not bad per se, but leads me to think that the title of this book would perhaps best be: *A History of Japanese Foreign Policy, as influenced by Japanese Who Traveled Abroad*.

My biggest single complaint with this book is the bibliography, which has been presented in prose as a suggested reading list. If the endnotes had been copious this style would be fine, but given that most chapters have less than a scant twenty endnotes apiece, it leaves something to be desired. Of course, this is a scholar's complaint and the lay reader may not mind whatsoever.

Although I had numerous quibbles with the book on finer points, I believe it provides the general audience—in particular those who do not read Japanese—with a fine survey of the topic. Sadly, Yale has not offered it in pa-

perback, the form most likely to be purchased by such a lay audience.

Notes:

[1]. See *Kinsei hyoryu kishu* Arakawa Hidetoshi, comp. (Tokyo: Hosei daigaku shuppan, 1969); Ayuzawa Shintaro. *Hyoryu: Sakoku jidai no kaigai hatten*. Tokyo: Shibundo, 1956; Bernard, Donald R. *The Life and Times of John Manjiro*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992); and Hamada Hikoza (aka Joseph Heco). *Floating on the Pacific Ocean* (Los Angeles: Glen Dawson, 1955).

[2]. See *The Japanese Discovery of Europe 1720-1830* by Donald Keene (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969) or *Deus Destroyed; the Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* by George Elison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.) Both of these works are noted in Beasley's bibliography.

[3]. For a record of the English leg of this mission, see Fukuda Sakutarō, *Eikoku tansaku in Seiyō kenbun shu*, Numata Jiro & Matsuzawa Hiroaki, eds. Vol. 66 of *Nihon shiso taikai* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1974) pp. 477-548. Other records of this journey include Fuchibe Tokuzō's *Okō nikki* and Mashizu Shunjiro's *Okōki*, both of which are in Kengai shisetsu nikki sanshu 3, in *Nihon shiseki kyokai soshō*, vol. 98 (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1930), and Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Seikōki in Fukuzawa Yukichi zenshu*, vol. 19 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1964).

[4]. In addition to Burks, see Ishizuki Minoru, *Kindai Nihon no kaigai ryugaku shi* (Tokyo: Chuo koron sha, 1992).

[5]. Although Beasley does not mention any biographical dictionaries by name, the following titles may be those to which he refers: Tomita Hitoshi, ed. *Umi o koeta Nihonjinmei jiten* (Tokyo: Nichigai asoshieetsu, 1985) and Tezuka Hikaru, ed. *Bakumatsu Meiji kaigai tokosha soran* (Tokyo: Kashiwa shobo, 1992).

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