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Japan in Early Photographs

The Aimé Humbert Collection at
the Museum of Ethnography, Neuchâtel



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- The Humbert Collection, containing approximately 140 vintage photographs collected between 1863/64 in Japan, is an invaluable account of the Edo-to-Meiji period transition, which shaped the West's image of this insular nation
- Contains some of the earliest photographs by Felice Beato and Shimooka Renjō
- Infrared photographs - a new form of research undertaken by Tokyo University - allow us to read hitherto hidden metadata on the back of the prints
 - Remarkably vivid and well-preserved photographs of nineteenth-century Japan
 - Presented to the public for the first time
 - Introduced by Swiss and Japanese scholars in the context of early photographic history

Photographs taken in Japan between the late Edo period and early Meiji periods found their way overseas, and played a major role in forming Westerners' image of Japan. Among these collections, the pictures gathered by the Swiss diplomat Aimé Humbert (1819-1900) in the 1860s were crucial in building lasting representations of the island nation: many of these, mainly collected in 1863/64 during a sojourn in Yokohama and Edo, were used as sources for the well-known and largely distributed engravings of his famous book *Le Japon illustré*, published in Paris in 1870. Belonging to the collection of the MEN, these beautiful and well-preserved photographs are published here for the first time. Presented by Japanese and Swiss scholars before the narrative backdrop of their acquisition and application by foreigners, they offer a striking view of a lost world.

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