



# **A Diplomat in Japan: The Inner History of the Critical Years in the Evolution of Japan When the Ports Were Opened and the Monarchy Restored**

*Ernest Mason Satow*

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## **A Diplomat in Japan: The Inner History of the Critical Years in the Evolution of Japan When the Ports Were Opened and the Monarchy Restored** Ernest Mason Satow

Based on the author's detailed diary, personal encounters, and keen memory, this book is a record of the inner history of the critical years of social and political upheaval that accompanied Japan's first encounters with the West around the time of the Meiji Restoration.

**Sir Ernest Mason Satow** (1843–1929) was a member of the British legation in Tokyo for twenty-one years.

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## **From Reader Review A Diplomat in Japan: The Inner History of the Critical Years in the Evolution of Japan When the Ports Were Opened and the Monarchy Restored for online ebook**

### **Sam Schulman says**

Eminently put-downable - a great disappointment, because the subject is fascinating and Satow was the author of the great manuals of diplomatic practice. But it's a big bore.

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### **Darius says**

Satow was in Japan during the meiji restoration and was witness to some key events. The commentary is sympathetic and interesting. In some ways it throws light on the wider topic of colonialism and 19th century trade between the East and the West.

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### **Azri Alipah says**

This book is a true eyewitness account during the modernization of Japan, beginning soon after the signing of the Harris treaty in 1858 (indeed, he mentions that Townsend Harris was the top US representative when he first arrived). This book was also written during a time when not many knew too much about Japan's history prior to its involvement in international issues such as the Russo-Japanese War or the Sino-Japanese War. Despite being written in the 1920s, I found that Satow's summary of Japan's history very accurate, and barring some spellings that can be considered outdated, is probably one the best I've read.

Despite this, readers should read this book not as a historical book but as an eyewitness account. While any number of books nowadays deal with a more comprehensive coverage of the area, very few offer such a vivid description of life during the final days of the Shogunate, and I was in fact surprised that he found government officials corrupt and traders unreliable. His effort to give an accurate portrayal of life there, however, downplays his actual role in convincing several anti-shogunate leaders to overthrow the Shogunate (including the 'Last Samurai' Saigo Takamori).

While I wouldn't consider this essential reading for knowledge of Japanese history, it is a good book to those wanting to imagine life of both the elites and ordinary townsfolk in Japan in the last days of the Samurai , from the perspective of an outsider.

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### **Chris says**

Ernest Satow is now halfway legendary in certain circles. His book on the practise of diplomacy is synonymous with the art of international relations in much the same way that Roget is synonymous with the thesaurae or Webster is synonymous with dictionaries. But this book came much before all that.

Satow came to Japan as the first British diplomat to receive training in Japanese when he was in his late teens, in the mid 1850's. His main credential for this undertaking was that he had studied Chinese in college--which would be like Japan sending a guy to the U.S. because he spoke Greek. In spite of this, he managed to become a first-rate Japanese specialist, and participated in most of the events that shaped early Meiji-era Japan.

The book is a good read for its historical perspective, but also for Satow's bone-dry wit and spirit of adventure. It bogs down toward the end, when Satow becomes the main engine of diplomatic relations between England and Japan, rather than just the fly-on-the-wall translator, but this is a small price to pay for the first three hundred pages, which are about as fine a presentation of Japan at its opening as you are likely to find anywhere.

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### **Simon says**

First published in 1921 and in print ever since, "A Diplomat in Japan" is the best eyewitness account of the turmoil that engulfed Japan in the run-up to the 1868 Meiji Restoration. Satow's real strength is as an observer and participant in the history of Japan at the time; his superb language skills allowing him to meet and befriend many of the key players in this restoration drama. The book actually downplays his own importance in persuading his diplomatic superiors to throw Great Britain's covert support behind the pro-Imperial rebels, a diplomatic coup that left Satow's homeland in the box seat once the Imperialists took power. Satow's prose is smoothly functional, and in his sympathy for the dilemmas faced by the contemporary Japanese and his respect for the local culture Satow's humanity is clearly evident. There are even glimpses of an ultra-dry sense of humour behind the Victorian facade.

The downsides of "A Diplomat in Japan" relate to the poor quality of the editions available. Mine is the 2000 ICG/Tuttle version, which is littered with typos, has tiny font, uses the outdated spellings of Japanese names and places that Satow used but that are tough on the modern reader (e.g. Kioto and Ozaka for Kyoto and Osaka). Even the cover, with its stern picture of the late middle-aged Satow from his much later second posting to Japan, rather than the young diplomat that actually experienced these events, is poorly done. The book is also a little long for all but the dedicated historian: there is a gap in this admittedly small market for an abbreviated version aimed at the more general reader.

"A Diplomat in Japan" is not always the easiest of reads, but it remains obligatory for anyone with an interest in this period of history.

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### **Hadrian says**

Japan in the 1860s, as viewed by an astute student interpreter. It's astonishing he was able to grasp the language so quickly with so few teaching materials available, and he has a unique (though a bit chauvinistic) view of the immense social changes from the fall of the shogunate to the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

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