



From White to Yellow: The Japanese in European Racial Thought, 1300-1735 (McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Ideas)

Rotem Kowner

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When Europeans first landed in Japan they encountered people they perceived as white-skinned and highly civilized, but these impressions did not endure. Gradually the Europeans' positive impressions faded away and Japanese were seen as yellow-skinned and relatively inferior.

Accounting for this dramatic transformation, *From White to Yellow* is a groundbreaking study of the evolution of European interpretations of the Japanese and the emergence of discourses about race in early modern Europe. Transcending the conventional focus on Africans and Jews within the rise of modern racism, Rotem Kowner demonstrates that the invention of race did not emerge in a vacuum in eighteenth-century Europe, but rather was a direct product of earlier discourses of the "Other." This compelling study indicates that the racial discourse on the Japanese, alongside the Chinese, played a major role in the rise of the modern concept of race. While challenging Europe's self-possession and sense of centrality, the discourse delayed the eventual consolidation of a hierarchical worldview in which Europeans stood immutably at the apex.

Drawing from a vast array of primary sources, *From White to Yellow* traces the racial roots of the modern clash between Japan and the West.



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