

CROSS-CURRENTS



EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

Restoring Historicity and Multiplicity to Sino-Japanese Relations

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Joshua A. Fogel. *Maiden Voyage: The Senzaimaru and the Creation of Modern Sino-Japanese Relations*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014. 320 pp. \$60 (cloth/ebook).

Eric C. Han. *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown: Yokohama, 1894–1972*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. 266 pp. \$40 (cloth).

China and Japan have a charged relationship, one that has run the gamut from friend to foe and back again. That relationship is at least as important for the safety and stability of East Asia today as it was in the mid-1800s, when, after a three-century suspension of official contact, the Japanese government sent a fact-finding delegation to China. Since that time, the two countries have crossed some very fraught terrain to become vital trade partners and leading powers, each in their own right, on the world stage. Yet political tensions pulling from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries remain. Since these tensions are partly rooted in competing narratives of their shared past, uncovering a more comprehensive history of interaction between these two peoples is critical.

Marius Jansen, a pioneer in English-language studies on Sino-Japanese relations, stated in 1992 that, “despite the importance of the subject for Chinese and Japanese history, writings in Western languages on the relations between Japan and China are surprisingly few” (Jansen 2000, 123).¹ Since that time, however, this body of work has grown to include publications aimed at understanding wartime diplomacy (Howland 2008; Paine 2003); the framework of imperialism that governed relations among China, Japan, and the Western powers (Cassel 2012); national discourse on military activities (Middleton 2007); and moments of mutual cooperation (Harrell 2012). Especially prominent among such research endeavors have been the abundant

contributions by Joshua Fogel on topics ranging from historiography and travel to art and exchange.²

Joshua Fogel and Eric Han have now offered two more fine contributions to this expanding literature. Han's ambitious book aims to reveal the complexities of national identity formation within the local Yokohama Chinese community in Japan. By contrast, Fogel's meticulous re-creation of the *Senzaimaru's* officially sanctioned journey to Shanghai in 1862 details its Japanese members' encounters with the city and its people.

Beyond addressing the subjects of China and Japan within treaty port settings, the two books appear on the surface to have little in common. They examine quite disparate spans of time. Fogel concentrates his attention on a two-month period while Han considers a century and a half. These time frames also help dictate what kinds of sources the two authors engage. Fogel focuses on uncovering anything and everything that might elucidate this voyage, its passengers, and the people they encounter. He even reproduces some of his primary source findings, especially travel diaries and official reports, which he cross-references with existing historiography. Han's source base ranges more widely, encompassing national, prefectural, and city archives, as well as the records of local institutions, a large variety of newspapers and periodicals, memoirs, and oral histories. Han casts a wider net in order to capture the most significant elements of this community's history. These two scholars' methodologies also differ. Fogel's masterful scholarship provides insight into the historian's craft as he tracks evidence, openly interrogates documents, and asks questions that may not be directly answerable but can be puzzled out. Han's book is driven by the question of what it means to live as Chinese people in a Japanese city. Because he concentrates on identity formation, his interests have a strong theoretical dimension. After looking more closely at these two works, however, we will need to consider that their aims and results may not end up so far apart.

Chapter by chapter, Fogel reproduces the details of the *Senzaimaru's* voyage. The first four of nine short chapters begin with an examination of the vessel itself and its acquisition by the Japanese. We get an extended look at Theodore Kroes, the Dutch businessman in Shanghai who facilitated the trip before learning about the efforts of the Tokugawa shogunate and the Hakodate and Nagasaki Magistrates behind it all, as well as a tally of the names, positions, and home domains of all fifty Japanese passengers (including shogunal officials, merchants, interpreters, and attendants). Using diary entries, Fogel then presents the rough voyage in

miserable detail and conveys the wonderment—and, at times, disgust—of the travelers as they walked through Shanghai and encountered its inhabitants for the first time.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the Japanese interest in the Western presence in Shanghai. Fogel approaches this from two opposing positions: Japanese anger at the deleterious influence of Westerners on China and admiration for Western power and wealth. On the negative side, the Japanese felt that the Chinese were too submissive to the arrogant West, especially with regard to the twin threats of opium addiction and the Taiping Rebellion. At the same time, they greatly, if reluctantly, admired the Western powers and wished to acquire their technology, weapons, and knowledge.

Although Fogel's choice to spend a fair amount of time on the Western presence in Shanghai may seem an odd or even unfortunate one given the book's title, it makes sense. The *Senzaimaru's* voyage was first envisioned in response to the Western presence in Japan; the ship's captain and crew were British; and its success was predicated on the help and goodwill of the Dutch. Importantly, the main purpose of the mission was to learn about international trade at the port, or, as Fogel states, "to observe the Western world in microcosm in Shanghai" (188). Even as the triangular nature of the Sino-Japanese relationship is unavoidable here, Fogel does go beyond it to get at direct interaction between ordinary Chinese and the Japanese travelers, especially through the "brush talking" they used to communicate with one another about China's contemporary situation. Fogel does not lose sight of this relationship and finds that the Japanese were sympathetic to Chinese suffering and that "often that human dimension far outweighed the larger geopolitical considerations" they faced (116).

In chapters 7 and 8, Fogel turns to official meetings between Japanese and Chinese officials (most notably Wu Xu, the Shanghai circuit intendant) before assessing the trip's outcomes. A significant feature of China's trade discussed in the official meetings is that in continuing older (pre-1842) patterns of trading relationships, it maintained three categories: trading countries with treaties; non-treaty trading countries; and non-treaty, non-trading countries (126). Even though Fogel spends a few pages discussing this issue with respect to Japanese intentions and Chinese responses, he certainly could have emphasized this finding and considered its implications even more.

After Fogel follows the voyagers home to Nagasaki, he traces three subsequent Tokugawa-era missions to Shanghai. These voyages, especially one from Hakodate in 1864,

serve not only to follow up on the *Senzaimaru's* voyage but also to further contextualize and assess its greater significance. The final chapter jumps ahead in time to examine the *Senzaimaru* in historical fiction and film. Particularly interesting is Fogel's discussion of the 1944 film *Noroshi wa Shanhai ni agaru*, which was shot on location in Shanghai in 1944. The inclusion of this chapter points to Fogel's no-stone-unturned sensibility, but it also demonstrates how this first modern mission has been memorialized and reinterpreted according to later imperatives. Unwittingly on the author's part, it also serves to show how important his contribution is in making the factual details and primary records of the voyage and those associated with it so accessible to us now.

In the end, the *Senzaimaru's* voyage was about Japan, its ability to trade in China, and the potential impact the West might have at home. In other words, it "focused on the future of Japan as viewed through the mirror of China" (5). In this way, Han's work is not so different, for it could similarly be said that *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown* shows us the Yokohama Chinese community's concerns for its own well-being as experienced through the prism of Japan.

Han's book considers "how people attempted to reconcile a cosmopolitan and inclusive local identity with national or ethnic identities that are exclusive and conflictual" (18). And, indeed, it is here that Han makes his main contribution by rejecting the idea that national identity necessarily trumps other kinds of identity. Han demonstrates that national identity (Chinese) constructed through difference from others (the Japanese) can still accommodate local integration to allow for a place-based identity (Yokohama-ite) that crosses national lines.

In order to make his case, Han keeps his focus on Yokohama's Chinese community from its 1859 inception in the treaty port all the way to the present. In the first chapter, he briefly steps back in time to consider premodern identities and exchanges in order to deny any preexisting or immutable Chinese identity. Then he moves quickly to the pivotal Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, often viewed as an important period of nation-building, to investigate its unifying impact on the Chinese community in Yokohama. With the acknowledgment that the war prioritized self-identification of the Chinese as Qing subjects, national and ethnic affiliations remained porous.

Chapter 2 examines the period between China's 1895 defeat and the 1911 fall of the Qing as decisive in forging a national political consciousness. Led by famous reformers and revolutionaries who fled to Japan, such as Kang Youwei and Sun Yatsen, the Yokohama community helped create new mechanisms for nation-building, including schools and political

journals. Simultaneously, their integration into Yokohama continued as they garnered Japanese support through commonly held pan-Asian ideals. Importantly, though, Han does not take any of these developing identities for granted. Even as he makes the case for new cohesion, he then qualifies their solidity by showing divisions within the Chinese community and among Yokohama citizens.

While still proceeding chronologically in time, chapter 3 shifts scale to address new legal and national frameworks for citizenship and subjectivity as the newly established Republic of China began shaping its diasporic citizens. Again, Han keeps both centrifugal and centripetal forces in motion by checking these nation-building processes with an examination of how baseball and Chinese food aided local integration by contributing to the creation of a unique Yokohama culture. Since we also learn here about the Yokohama community's experiences with the 1923 Tokyo earthquake and the 1932 Manchurian Incident, it becomes fairly difficult to follow the main idea of diaspora through this overburdened chapter.

In chapter 4 Han returns to a more reasonable set of expectations in examining the Chinese community through the second Sino-Japanese War and the ways they had to be willing to bend their identity as Chinese nationals in order to remain safe in their host country. More than at any time in the past, the Chinese of Yokohama had to contend with outside forces telling them who they needed to be as they encountered surveillance, economic hardship, pressure to support China's collaborationist regimes, and mandates to cooperate with the Japanese state. Han invokes James C. Scott's well-known idea of hidden transcripts to argue that conflicting demands for loyalty and the use of survival strategies make detecting true motivations throughout this period difficult. Nonetheless, many people were able to remain within this community through the war and thrive there after the conflict ended.

Chapter 5 takes the Chinese community through the postwar era of U.S. occupation, the split of their homeland into two states, and the rise of Japan as an economic power. Throughout these postwar shifts, Han shows that the Chinese community became divided politically at the same time that Chinatown firmly established itself culturally and economically within Japan. Han concludes the book with the argument that, in essence, the Yokohama Chinese community survived "radical transformations in their collective identities" (194) over the course of its existence by allowing for overlapping identities that did not necessarily privilege the nation over other affiliations. He then suggests that this community be used as a model for challenging

exclusive notions of Japanese citizenship and casting new light on Sino-Japanese relations by seeing the interactions between these two peoples at the local rather than the national level.

In the end, these two books have much in common. Each situates its cast of characters within broader world events while elucidating their individual lives and relating them to a deeper history of Sino-Japanese connection. Fogel and Han both examine their subjects from Chinese and Japanese points of view (using sources in both languages), look closely at a range of interpersonal contacts while keeping larger mitigating circumstances in view, and consider the backgrounds and motives of individuals. These authors have a common tendency to emphasize porous identities, collective concerns, and self-interested cooperation in telling their respective stories of Chinese and Japanese relations. As a result, Fogel and Han offer sympathetic portrayals that allow us to see mutual understanding and the intricate and contingent nature of constructing self and other. Echoing Eric Han's conclusions, it seems that by directing focus away from entrenched national problematics, these books—in content and implementation—can help point the way toward reconciling competing historical narratives and improving the relationship between China and Japan.

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Notes

- 1 See also Dower and George (1995, esp. 275–280, 294–304).
- 2 For the impressive list of Fogel's monographs, edited volumes, and translations, see www.chinajapan.org/fogel/, accessed March 8, 2015.

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