

during a particular dynasty. Inevitably, this approach, however adroitly undertaken, brings with it certain disadvantages, notably a loose piling up of similar examples and a certain hesitation in pursuing an argument, due to the difficulty of linking up certain interesting comments or conclusions persuasively to make a larger point. As a result, a degree of blandness takes over a few sections of the later chapters. Nonetheless, one finishes this book grateful for its careful scholarship, intelligent readings, novel findings, and the sense of a demanding job well done.

Middle Kingdom and Empire of the Rising Sun: Sino-Japanese Relations, Past and Present. By JUNE TEUFEL DREYER. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 472 pp. \$34.95, £22.99 (cloth), \$23.99 (ebook).

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China and Japan, the two biggest powerhouses in Asia, have in modern times gone through so much turbulence, including two wars, numerous iterations of political conflict and, more recently, even an arms race and military face-off, that they exhibit traits of what political scientists call “enduring rivalry.” Today, more than seventy years after their last war, they have arguably one of the most volatile major-power relationships in the world.

June Dreyer’s new book traces the origin of this rivalry to the inception of their interactions at least as long ago as the sixth century, and narrates its evolution into the present day. The main proposition is that throughout history each of the two nations has refused to accept the other as an equal, nor would either concede a position of superiority to the other. When they were separated by natural barriers, and when power was asymmetrically distributed between the two, chances for tension were low; at other times, there was a high risk of conflict. While the idea conforms to some realist theories of international relations, Dreyer adds an important cultural-psychological dimension that has complicated the superiority/inferiority complex between the two Asian nations.

The first part of the book is devoted to a chronological account of Sino-Japanese relations. From premodern days, says Dreyer, the Middle Kingdom took a condescending attitude toward Japan, treating it as a lower, barbarian vassal state in a Sinocentric tributary system, a role that Japanese rulers persistently rejected. The two nations escaped direct conflicts earlier on only because the ocean between them made military conquest difficult and because Japanese power was not nearly sufficient for Japan to qualify as a worthy rival to China. From the late nineteenth century, however, the balance of power shifted dramatically to favor Japan, which emerged as a western-style imperialist power after the Meiji Restoration, over the Middle Kingdom, which disintegrated under the dual pressure of imperialist aggression and domestic turmoil. Now it was Japan’s turn to handle China with contempt and, in their war of 1937–45, brutal oppression.

Direct confrontation was again muted during the Cold War because the two countries were divided by their alignment with the communist and capitalist camps respectively, and both were weak in international power politics—China was an economically third-class country and Japan was strategically insignificant. Friction nevertheless

arose during diplomatic normalization talks in which China imposed several conditions and caused some in Japan to feel disgraced, and in the years after normalization when Japanese gains in bilateral economic deals reminded China of its wartime suffering. China was also reluctant to play second fiddle to Japan in the regional economic system. The sense of competition and mutual antipathy only worsened after the Cold War. Since the decade of the 2000s in particular, not only have the two countries been approaching a point of power parity never seen before, but also their bickering over WWII memories has generated enough heat emotionally and politically to further drive the two peoples apart.

This historical narrative is followed, in the second part of the book, by a detailed analysis of three main areas of contention in Sino-Japanese relations: economic rivalry, mutual military apprehension, and the controversy over Taiwan. In each area, the rise and decline of tensions are to a great extent symptomatic of the general thesis spelled out in Part One.

Dreyer is not the first to advance the thesis that “a mountain cannot accommodate two tigers.” She makes a unique contribution by grounding her work in a comprehensive and meticulously careful study from ancient times until the present. The book draws heavily on primary sources in both Japanese and Chinese, in addition to a large number of secondary materials in English. Yet despite its rich scholarly content, the text is highly accessible to the general reader. Dreyer is admirably attentive to details, and her analysis of party and factional politics in Japan is particularly informative, such as the discussion about the infighting among Japanese leftists (the Communists and Socialists) regarding policy toward China. Compared to the absorbing story from the Japanese side, her coverage of the Chinese perspective, either official or popular, is relatively plain and brief. Some parts of the book read like explanations of Japanese responses to China rather than of their mutual responses. Another minor shortcoming is that the years and months of historical events in Part One are not always indicated clearly, which may be hard to follow for someone who is not already familiar with the history. Regardless, with its impressive breadth and depth, *Middle Kingdom and Empire of the Rising Sun* is an excellent reference for those interested in all important aspects of Sino-Japanese relations.

This book is generally persuasive in arguing that the two big Asian powers find it hard to get along when they are both strong and have substantial conflicts of interest. The rare exception, though, would be their armed clashes over Korea in the 1590s, long before either condition was met. Considering this together with their wars in more recent history, however, one can arrive at the worrisome observation that even when one side is predominantly stronger than the other, stable coexistence also proves illusory. Of course a near power equality between the two, like the situation today, only makes it worse. But ultimately neither power nor interest determines Sino-Japanese relations; their current rivalry is the product of each country’s internal political structure and prevalent nationalist outlook that necessitate an image of the other country as an enemy. Their long-standing cultural prejudices toward each other described in the book notwithstanding, an almost knee-jerk repulsion between the Chinese and Japanese has only developed since the twentieth century, first produced by the wars, then perpetuated by political manipulation of the war history by both, and now exacerbated by not just conflicting interests but also divergent values. No dyadic relationships in world politics can fare well under so many adverse conditions. Without a fundamental shakeup of their

national self-identities in the direction of narrowing the gap, the two tigers are destined to collide irrespective of their real interests.

After The Prosperous Age: State and Elites in Early Nineteenth-century Suzhou. By SEUNGHYUN HAN. Harvard University Press, 2016. 306 pp. \$42.95, £33.15 (cloth).

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Conventional studies of Qing history have tended to focus on the so-called prosperous era of the eighteenth century and the age of humiliation initiated by the first Opium War. Sandwiched between the two epochs of dramatic transformation, the Jiaqing and early Daoguang reigns (1796–1830s) had long been overlooked as an unremarkable period of dynastic decline. Over the past decade, however, a new generation of scholars has been rejecting this monochromatic view in favor of a more nuanced and positive picture of the early nineteenth century.

Seunghyun Han's book, *After the Prosperous Age*, represents a successful effort in this regard. It traces the social and cultural history of a particular region (Suzhou) in the heartland of traditional China—lower Yangzi delta (Jiangnan). Han takes the rise of elite activism as a prism through which to view the changing state-society relations during this “least researched period in the entire history of the Qing” (6). In so doing, he seeks to provide “a systematic and coherent explanation through which we can relate diverse incidents of the time with one another” (9).

Apart from Introduction and Conclusion, this book is composed of two main sections. They are further divided into seven chapters, organized in terms of the different manifestations of elite activism in diverse dimensions. The first part (Chapters 1 to 3) deals with the social aspect of elite activism, mostly the management of local public works ranging from water conservancy to famine relief and philanthropy. The expanding role of the elites in those arenas, Han maintains, strengthened the governmental claims to formal positions of power in the local society. Therefore it was tolerated or even welcomed by the state, which became increasingly financially and bureaucratically strapped.

The more insightful section of the book, in my opinion, is the second part, which consists of Chapters 4 to 7. It shifts the focus by discussing how the social changes explained in Part One shaped Suzhou's cultural environment in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. This is most evident in the increasing enshrinements as well as the changing nature of the shrines and the choice of those to be worshipped. This period also saw the growing production of local literature and the changing historical memories about such controversial local figures as Zhang Shicheng 張士誠. All these new developments showcase “the relaxation of state power in the cultural realm and the greater freedom of the literati's cultural activities in the early nineteenth century” (132).

It is the central proposition of this book that the early nineteenth century marked a watershed in Qing history because of the dual process of elite activism and state retreat. While it has been customary to link this activism to the Taiping Rebellion, Han traces it back to the Jiaqing and early Daoguang reigns, which “witnessed a