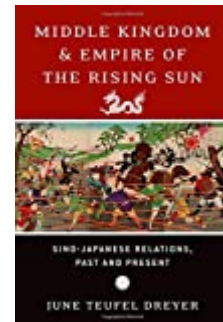


June Teufel Dreyer. *Middle Kingdom and Empire of the Rising Sun: Sino-Japanese Relations, Past and Present.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. xi + 454 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-537566-4.



Reviewed by Peter Mauch (Western Sydney University)

Published on H-Diplo (January, 2017)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

June Teufel Dreyer's *Middle Kingdom and Empire of the Rising Sun* is a timely book. It is also sobering. A study of the Sino-Japanese relationship, it forecasts no particular improvement in the uncomfortable peace that today prevails between Japan and China. It regards resolution of the issues that beset the relationship as unlikely. The best it can offer is the hope that bilateral problems might somehow be managed (p. 379).

Dreyer's book convincingly argues that Sino-Japanese relations remain tense. Problems are related to such issues as war guilt, territorial jurisdiction, and terms of trade. Much ink has been spilled on each of these topics. Yet Dreyer views these issues as insufficient ... explanations of the animosity between China and Japan. She locates what she calls the roots of Sino-Japanese tension elsewhere (p. 357). Specifically, she points to the unwillingness of either China or Japan to accept the other as an equal, and the refusal of either to accept a position of inferiority to the other (p. 3). This mutual antipathy, she suggests, began when the two cultures first came into contact in the seventh century and has run like a thread throughout the entire history of Sino-Japanese relations.

The book's first five chapters bring together an ar-

ray of incidents and historical case studies in support of this basic premise. One colorful example should suffice: Dreyer quotes a Ming dynasty (1368-1644) emperor, who in an angry letter lambasts the Japanese as "stupid eastern barbarians," and charges them with being "haughty and disloyal." The defiant Japanese response, quoted by Dreyer, reminds the Chinese that "heaven and earth are vast; they are not monopolized by one ruler" (p. 17).

These chapters do an admirable job, insofar as they provide ample evidence of each nation's disinclination to accept the other as anything but inferior and the friction this has almost invariably created. Dreyer's sources nonetheless leave room for some quibbling. For example, her portrayal of World War II-era Japanese policy-making relies heavily on decades-old historical scholarship. I take no issue with Dreyer's use of such fine books as James Crowley's *Japan's Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy, 1930-1938* (1966), Ben-Ami Shillony's *Revolt in Japan: The Young Officers and the February 26, 1936 Incident* (1973), and Hugh Byas's *Government by Assassination* (1942); I nonetheless wish that Dreyer had also cited more recent works, including (among others) Edward Drea's directly relevant *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall* (2009). To cite another issue with Dreyer's sources: thirty-three of the thirty-nine

endnotes on page 393 cite newspaper sources, including *Kyodo*, *Xinhua*, *Reuters*, *New York Times*, *Asahi*, and *Japan Times*. Dreyer's use of primary sources is commendable, but there are other—even better—sources available. For example, the Japanese Foreign Ministry in 2009 kick-started a long-overdue declassification process that unleashed a tidal wave of hitherto inaccessible archival materials. These materials have shed fascinating light on Cold War-era Japanese diplomacy, and would certainly have added grist to Dreyer's mill.

Chapters 6 and 7 take up the story from the early aftermath of the Tiananmen Square incident and bring it up to the present. These chapters are illuminating, and fold into a later chapter titled "Mutual Military Apprehensions." I found Dreyer's treatment of the Senkaku-Diaoyu Island controversy insightful, and read a later chapter concerning Taiwan with interest. I found her analysis of the triangular Sino-Japanese-US relationship particularly fascinating. The United States has seemingly waded into the Senkaku-Diaoyu Island issue by avowing that its security commitment to Japan applies to "any provocative set of circumstances" (p. 239). As Dreyer correctly points out, this moves well beyond the language of the US-Japanese security treaty. The Chinese, for their part, are pushing ahead with "double-digit increases" in their defense budget and simultaneously "railing against revived Japanese militarism" (p. 241). Meanwhile, the Japanese grapple with the thought that they could conceivably come under Chinese (and/or North Korean) nuclear attack. Where does all this lead? Might the Chinese concede that for Japan to possess a regular military is

not to become militaristic" (p. 318)? Will the Japanese continue to believe in the efficacy of the US nuclear umbrella? Is Renmin University professor Shi Yinong correct in asserting that China will act, regardless of what is in its own best interests, in accord with "popular nationalism, the dynamics of the [People's Liberation Army], and the ... strategic perspective of the top leaders" (p. 246)?

The Sino-Japanese economic relationship provides Dreyer's other principal point of focus. She regards economic cooperation, for the foreseeable future, as "preferable to the alternatives" (p. 280). Even so, the signs must be discouraging for those in the Japanese government who distrust their Chinese counterparts. To quote Dreyer: "As trade with China has become increasingly important to the health of the Japanese economy, trade with Japan has become progressively less important to China" (p. 275). It is difficult to see how the Japanese might correct this growing imbalance.

In the final analysis, this is a fine book. It deftly uses the past to illuminate the present state of Sino-Japanese relations. Its twofold thesis—that neither nation will accept the other as an equal, and that neither nation will accept a position of inferiority in relation to the other—provides a most welcome point of departure from the existing focus on such issues as war guilt. It is neither blindly optimistic nor overly pessimistic in its thoughts regarding the future. It is a book that everyone interested in international relations and the future of Asia and the Pacific would do well to read.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

Citation: Peter Mauch. Review of Dreyer, June Teufel, *Middle Kingdom and Empire of the Rising Sun: Sino-Japanese Relations, Past and Present*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. January, 2017.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=47460>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.