



RESEARCH REPOSITORY

*This is the author's final version of the work, as accepted for publication following peer review but without the publisher's layout or pagination.
The definitive version is available at:*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2015.1075309>

Boyd, J.G. (2016) The China Problem in Postwar Japan: Japanese National Identity and Sino-Japanese Relations. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 46 (1). pp. 159-161.

<http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/28119/>

Copyright: © Taylor & Francis.
It is posted here for your personal use. No further distribution is permitted.

The China Problem in Postwar Japan: Japanese National Identity and Sino-Japanese Relations.

By Robert Hoppens (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

Given the current state of Sino-Japanese relations, which could be best termed as icy, Hoppens' book is a timely reminder that, while there have been other periods where the two countries have been at loggerheads, that between the conclusion of hostilities in 1945 and the early 1980s, the two countries were able to largely reconcile the differences and overcome their past animosity.

While the title implies that Hoppens' book examines the entire post-war period in detail, in fact the majority of the book is focused on the period between 1971 and 1980. Hoppens reason for taking this approach is that he characterises the 1970s as a pivotal decade in Sino-Japanese relations, a time when the two countries “overcame Cold War estrangement to establish a relationship characterized by friendship and cooperation” (1). In doing so, he argues that his work “challenges some common interpretations of Sino-Japanese relations in the 1970s” (7), particularly on the Japanese side. For example, Hoppens disputes the position of Okabe Tatsumi, a scholar of Chinese foreign policy, that postwar Japan lacked a sense of nationalism, thereby making it “difficult to understand and deal effectively with countries like China, where nationalism is still powerful” (9). With regard to the question of war guilt, a subject that continues to rear its ugly head, Hoppens contends that the “argument that Japanese approaches to the China problem have been determined by war guilt or war responsibility issue is oversimplified” (10), later suggesting that “PRC leaders actively supported Japanese nationalist narratives that served their interests and gratified their own self-images” (13).

Hoppens' argument is backed by a solid base of Japanese, Chinese and English-language primary and secondary sources, with a bibliography that runs to some twenty-two pages. While many of these sources are those that one would expect to find in a work of this nature, Hoppens is to be applauded for not merely relying on the “official” sources, those produced by the Chinese

and Japanese governments. As Hoppens himself stresses, to study the China “problem” “requires a more eclectic approach to sources than in the case of diplomatic history” (16). He has, therefore, also made effective use of Japanese monthly general interest magazines (*sōgō zasshi*) such as *Sekai*, *Chūō kōron* and *Bungei shunjū*, which are “written to appeal to a large, educated, general audience” (16). In moving beyond just the “official” position, readers get a much richer, more nuanced analysis of how the Japanese general public viewed China in the 1970s.

Structurally, Hoppens’ book is comprised of an Introduction, four Parts (which are each further divided into two sections), and an Epilogue and Conclusion. In the Introduction, Hoppens explains that this has been done so that the first section of each Part “relates the diplomatic history of the relationship in the context of the changing Cold War” (15), while the second is a “discursive study of the China problem in Japan” (15). In structuring the body of the book in this manner, Hoppens enables the reader to first understand the diplomatic nature of Sino-Japanese relations before tackling the larger and more complex question of how Japan viewed the relations.

Part 1 gives an overview of the “China problem in Postwar Japan, 1945-70.” The first section, “The China Problem in Postwar Japanese Foreign Policy,” examines the problem in terms of Japanese foreign policy. Here Hoppens reviews the “China problem” from the Occupation onwards, including the various measures taken by successive Japanese leaders to shape Japan’s China policy within the constraints of the Cold War. In section 2, “The China Problem in the Japanese Discourse of National Identity,” Hoppens considers how both the left and right in Japan strove to define what Japanese national identity was in relation to the “China problem,” with the “conservative narrative of national identity ... referred to as patriotism (*aikokushugi*) to distinguish it from the civic nationalism (*kokuminshugi*) of the progressives ... or the ethnic nationalism (*minzokushugi*)” of others on the left (68).

Part 2 covers the “Nixon Shock and the Normalization of Relations, 1971-72.” In the first section, “Diplomacy from the Nixon Shock through the Normalization of Relations,” Hoppens considers the fallout that occurred post-July 1971 in the wake of Richard Nixon’s unexpected rapprochement with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) through to the eventual normalisation of Sino-Japanese relations following Tanaka Kakuei’s meeting with Mao Zedong in September 1972. The second section, “The China Problem in a New Era,” then examines the reaction across the political spectrum as all parties sought to “make sense of the changing international political situation and the new relationship with China” (126).

Part 3 considers “Anti-Hegemony, 1973-76.” In the first section, “Anti-hegemony: Japan and the Sino-Soviet Cold War,” Hoppens considers how Japan sought to maintain its improved relations with the PRC, while managing the impact that this would have with regard to Japan’s then close relationship with Taiwan. Hoppens also considers the challenges that Japan faced in balancing its relations with the PRC and with the Soviet Union, as relations between the two superpowers, both of whom Japan sought stronger economic relations with, deteriorated. The second section, “Japan’s China Problem in a Time of Crisis,” examines the sense of crises that “pervaded public discourse in Japan in the 1970s” (147) and further impacted on the discourse then occurring on relations with China.

Part 4 covers “Peace and Cooperation, 1977-79.” In the first section, “From the Peace Treaty to Economic Cooperation,” Hoppens reviews the political process that saw the conclusion of a peace treaty between the two countries in August 1978, noting that many at the time saw this as an event that promised to “remove the last of the constraints imposed on Japanese foreign policy by defeat and make Japan a more normal, independent country” (196-7). Hoppens also considers how the PRC’s desire for internal economic reform made the Chinese government more willing to compromise with regard to the terms of the treaty, a degree of flexibility that, once the

treaty was signed, resulted in an agreement by Japan to extend large-scale economic aid to the PRC. The second section, “Triumphalism and Alienation: The China Problem Transformed,” examines how the “redefinition of national interests and identity in both countries” resulted in some Japanese conservatives viewing Sino-Japanese relations in terms of “Japanese success and a positive reinterpretation of modern Japanese history” (227), while leftists and progressives were largely alienated by what had occurred.

Hoppens notes in his Epilogue and Conclusion that by the start of the 1980s there were good reasons to be optimistic about the future of Sino-Japanese relations, for it seemed as if the “two countries had overcome a century of imperialism, war, and the Cold War estrangement to establish a foundation for close, cooperative relations” (229). Hoppens recognises, though, that his work is “not meant to provide a final, comprehensive explanation for the evolution of postwar Sino-Japanese relations or to deny the importance of other factors in shaping those relations including, especially, the changing international strategic environment” (236). Despite this caveat, Hoppens’ work will be the standard to which those interested in this period of Sino-Japanese first turn for the foreseeable future.

James Boyd
School of Management and Governance
Murdoch University, Perth, Australia
Email: J.Boyd@murdoch.edu.au