

## Book Review

**Joshua A. Fogel. *Articulating the Sinosphere: Sino-Japanese Relations in Space and Time.* Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 2009. 206pp. (ISBN 9780674053823)**

*Articulating the Sinosphere* examines the depth and breadth of Sino-Japanese relations from the earliest records up until the end of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Fogel approaches Sino-Japanese interactions from three levels of history: ‘macro’, ‘micro’, and ‘mezzo.’ He first argues for the introduction of a new term, the Sinosphere, to be used by scholars studying China and Japan. Scholars understand and accept that China’s historical worldview is Sinocentric. “Sinocentric” refers to China’s place at the center of its political and social world. China was the source and arbiter of culture enforced through the tribute missions, where any state that wanted to have a relationship with China acknowledged its superiority and operated within this worldview. Fogel argues that this term is too simplistic regarding the intricacies of Sino-Japanese relations that often went beyond formal tribute missions and political influence.

The introduction of a new term, Sinosphere, is this book’s greatest strength. It allows for the changing conceptions of both China and Japan, before the inception of modern statehood. As a term it also includes an important historical ending point in the late 1860s to early 1870s when the Japanese were no longer willing to buy into China’s worldview. The Sinosphere also provides a level of agency on the part of states and groups outside of China. It was not

just that China believed itself to be the world's center and superior to the surrounding polities, but rather that the political entities surrounding China were willing to operate within this worldview to further their own aims both culturally and economically. Fogel argues that 'Sinocentrism' does not make enough allowance for the agency of non-Chinese state actors.

*Articulating the Sinosphere* features three essays divided by their different historical lenses, albeit with minimal linkages between them. The first covers the macro history of Sino-Japanese relations going back to the earliest records in the *Houban shu*, and traces political, economic, and cultural exchanges through to the first decade of the Meiji Restoration, ending with the Treaty of Amity in 1871. The Treaty of Amity marks the point where China and Japan signed as equal states rather than Japan as subordinate to China. This treaty was a formal break from the Sinocentric worldview, as it forced China to acknowledge Japan as its political equal. Fogel works within the standard periodization of both China and Japan, but he also offers his own more malleable interpretation that periodizes history according to interactions rather than dynastic politics. This alternative periodization provides new ground for scholars to examine exchanges of ideas without being constrained by the more conventional divisions and their associated baggage.

The second essay takes a micro history of the voyage of the *Senzaimaru* in 1862, which brought the first Japanese migrants of the modern age to Shanghai. The *Senzaimaru* was an important voyage as it predated the conclusion of *sakoku* on the Japanese Islands. It shows how the Dutch played a role in this migration by providing access to China. This event did not happen within the Sinocentric world because it did not involve exchange between the two states; rather it was an exchange between two groups mediated by a western power. This particular essay takes a very detailed view of one specific event and its place in the normalization of relations in the modern era

of East Asian history, and Fogel has pieced together the story of the *Senzaimaru* from a limited number of available sources, with great success.

The third essay comprises the ‘mezzo’ view of history and examines the first Japanese expatriate community in Shanghai. Bridging the gap between what is occurring with the people and what is happening between the Meiji and Qing governments; this last essay tries to bring together the macro and micro histories to form a practical understanding of the Sinosphere’s collapse in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Fogel looks at the creation of Shanghai’s Japantown. Rather than assimilate to Chinese social and cultural norms, the Japanese expatriate community chose to recreate Japan within Shanghai. This recreation marks a distinctive difference in Sino-Japanese relations. As Fogel discusses, earlier Japanese populations in China would assimilate into Chinese society as an acknowledgement of Chinese superiority. By remaining distinct, the citizens of Shanghai’s Japantown had declared their social identity as equals, marking a break with both Sinocentrism and the Sinosphere.

*Articulating the Sinosphere’s* essays are ready to be expanded upon. Fogel’s introduction of the term ‘Sinosphere’ to further scholarly understanding of Sino-Japanese interactions outside of strictly politics is impressive and useful. As a theoretical frame, the idea of the Sinosphere will enrich future discussions about China and Japan, as well as promote a more nuanced discussion of the Sinocentric worldview. While Fogel is aware of his place in Sinocentrism’s broader historiography, he is not trying to address any of its arguments directly. Beyond that, by the end of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the balance of power and influence had fundamentally shifted away from China to Japan. With three examples of how the term Sinosphere can function for scholars, Fogel makes a persuasive case, though a stronger explanation for the reasons he chose his examples would provide the book more

cohesion. In sum, the Sinosphere as a term provides scholars with another way of understanding and approaching this shift and its repercussions on East Asian history and politics into the twentieth century.

Reviewed by  
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