

Book Review: Anti-Japan: The Politics of Sentiment in Postcolonial East Asia by Leo T. S. Ching

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Ching, Leo T. S. *Anti-Japan: The Politics of Sentiment in Postcolonial East Asia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. xii + 163 pages.

Anti-Japan is the third book written by Leo T. S. Ching, a specialist in Japanese and East Asian Cultural Studies. His work analyzes the politics of the anti-Japanese sentiment that has existed in East Asia since the end of the Second World War. Ching notes that the sustained anti-Japanism in the region is due to an absence of decolonization following the end of the war and is a symptom of the rapidly shifting power structure in the region today.

Ching argues that post-WWII East Asia did not experience decolonization as it happened in other regions of the world. Instead, Asia was thrust into Cold War politics under U.S. hegemony. As both a victimizer and a victim of the nuclear bombs, Japan was largely shielded from taking immediate responsibility for its war crimes in China, Korea, and Taiwan after the War and while under U.S. occupation. Ching notes that the U.S. Cold War agenda prioritized economic recovery that truncated decolonization in the region. A Japan-centered economic order was, thus, quickly reestablished and continued until recently with the rapid emergence of China. Ching argues that it was in this new context of the shifting power structure that anti-Japanism continued its vigor in the region. Drawing from his background in East Asian Cultural Studies, Ching analyzes anti-Japanism in China, South Korea, and pro-Japanism in Taiwan, mainly through an examination of films, documentaries, and literature.

Ching argues that anti-Japanism in China was largely a state sponsored political strategy and often had little to do with Japan. The War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), a common theme in Chinese films, was portrayed as positive history at one time, and negative history at another, to serve the different political objectives of the state. Before the 1980s when national unity and the legitimacy of the Communist Party leadership were top priorities, the War

of Resistance was portrayed as positive history emphasizing the power of unity of the people and the successful leadership of the Communist Party in defeating Japan. Since the 1980s, however, the War of Resistance began to be portrayed as negative history of China's victimization. Ching notes that the shift from positive to negative portrayal of the same history reflected the changing political objectives of the Chinese government. As China's internal socioeconomic tensions increased in the new market economy, the government promoted China's victimization as a distraction by pointing fingers at an external target.

Ching highlights that anti-Japan sentiment in South Korea has been intensely connected with its patriarchal national identity and its sense of shame. Through the study of a documentary trilogy that recorded the lives of a few surviving comfort women, Ching argues that Japan's subjugation of the Korean women as war-time military sex slaves not only shamed the women's body but signified the deprivation of Korean men's masculinity and, therefore, challenged Korean's patriarchal national identity. As such, anti-Japan rallies and demonstrations in South Korea would often result in self-inflicted bodily injuries. Governmental negotiations between Japan and South Korea on the issue were often compromised by political and economic agenda. Consequently, intense animosity against Japan continued in South Korea.

Taiwan's sentiment towards Japan was fragmented among the different population groups. While the indigenous Taiwanese fiercely resisted Japanese colonization, pro-Japan sentiment developed among the natives, the "so-called Japanese-speaking tribe" (p. 81) following the end of the War when Taiwan was recolonized by the Nationalist Chinese. Through examination of several books written in Japanese, Ching argued that it was the feeling of abandonment by the Japanese and the brutal rule of the new colonizer that gave rise to the nostalgic memories of the bygone era and the pro-Japan sentiment in Taiwan.

Ching concludes that the East Asian sentiments directed at Japan, whether anti-Japan or pro-Japan, are a manifestation of unresolved historic issues. Cold War politics under U.S. hegemony that compromised decolonization, Japan's continued denial of its past crimes against humanity in its neighboring countries, and the anxiety over the changing power structure as China rises in the region combined to sustain anti-Japanism. As state level negotiations surrounding decolonization in the region continues to be ineffective and often tempered with political agenda, Ching proposes that the solution to resolving the tension in the region could be sought outside the official channel. As Japan's economic and cultural products are widely consumed in the region, universal love and cultural intimacy through interpersonal and intergenerational channels could facilitate new possibilities of reconciliation. But Japan has to connect with its neighbors, accept its neighbors' anti-or-pro-Japan sentiment, and engage in meaningful dialogues with its neighbors on issues of decolonization.

Anti-Japan is a timely analysis of the complex relationships among countries in East Asia as the political and economic power relationship in the region is rapidly reconstructed. *Anti-Japan* encourages readers to rethink the possibilities of reconciliation for unresolved historic atrocities. While I laud the author's optimistic proposal for non-governmental channels in creating reconciliation, I believe reconciliation could be more substantial, complete, and lasting if the perpetrator was to publicly and officially admit, and show remorse for, past crimes as in the case of South Africa.

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