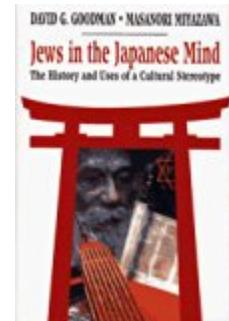


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David G. Goodman, Masanori Miyazawa. *Jews in the Japanese Mind: the History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype*. New York: The Free Press, 1995. xi + 360 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-02-912482-6.

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I find this a good and important book, clearly written and argued, interesting both in its details and in its implications for current theories of antisemitism. Professor Goodman presents a complex pattern of relationships between Japanese allo-Semitism and traditional Japanese xenophobias, a good part of which is based on the admirably thorough historical research of Professor Masanori Miyazawa of Doshisha Women's College, Kyoto.[1] The book traces the chronology of Japanese antisemitism, its development, impact on Japanese culture, and present status. I list chapter titles below to help the readers of this review follow the book's chronology, and to free me from the task of summarizing the details or the cast of characters involved in developing Japanese antisemitism. The book requires and deserves careful study. What follows is not strictly speaking a book review. While I try to do justice to Goodman's work, I am also conveying some of my own thoughts, hunches, and speculations suggested by a reading of his text. No doubt, I hypothesize more freely here than a more formal review might permit.

The Chapters are:

I. What the Japanese Think of Jews and Why Anyone Should Care (p. 1)

II. Momotaro as Antisemite: The Cultural Roots of Japanese Images of Jews (p. 16)

III. God's Chosen People: Jews in Japanese Christian Theology (p. 37)

IV. The Protocols of Ultrationalism: The Rise of Antisemitism Between the Wars (p. 76)

V. Jews as the Enemy: The Function of Antisemitism

in Wartime Japan (p. 106)

VI. Identification and Denial: The Uses of the Jews in the Postwar Period (p. 135)

VII. "The Socialism of Fools": Left-Wing Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism (p. 183)

VIII. Signal Failure: Recrudescing Antisemitism and Japan's "Spiritual Condition" (p. 220)

IX. Japan's Jewish Problem: Implications in a Multicultural World (p. 252)

The goals of *Jews in the Japanese Mind* are as follows (pp. 14-15):

1. "(T)o describe and trace the development of Japanese ideas about Jews, to explain the twin phenomena of antisemitism and philosemitism in a country that has practically no Jewish population."

2. "(T)o show how Japanese ideas about Jews, which are relatively insignificant taken in isolation, relate to and reflect the major intellectual and political currents of their time."

3. "(T)o explore the political and intellectual implications of Japanese ideas about Jews for our understanding of the quality and potential of contemporary Japanese culture."

At least the first two goals are nicely realized. My reservations about the success of the third do not in any way diminish the book's achievements, and its far-reaching implications for current theories of antisemitism are even more important, I think, than Goodman claims.

Chapter 1 is full of absorbing details, interesting as sociology in themselves and presented I presume to convince us that antisemitism DOES exist significantly in Japan. Here is a striking example. Between 1937 and 1962 Jews ranked consistently low among the least attractive or desirable humans to marry. During the 1930s, Jews fought it out with superior Africans and inferior Russians near the bottom of twelve ethnic groups. In 1946 Jews were deemed inferior to Russians and superior to Africans and Koreans. In 1962, the Chinese had replaced the Russians as number nine, but Jews were still number ten, Africans number eleven, and Koreans number twelve.

However shocking this might seem to Jewish readers, it was not all that unusual. Charles Stember (in *Jews in the Mind of America*, New York, 1966) reports the Gallup Poll answers from 1936-1945 to the question: who are the most dangerous to American democratic traditions and values? Jews were ranked first except for 1942 when the Japanese displaced them, presumably the result of Pearl Harbor. After the Holocaust, Jews either ceased being number one, or the question became too embarrassing to ask, publicly.

But not in Japan. Perhaps, at least one reason the Jews did not win greater Japanese approval after the Holocaust was that, following Hiroshima, the Japanese had already constructed a myth that made them the true innocent victims of World War II, a role they were unwilling to give up to six million Jews. According to Goodman, the acme of Japanese sympathy for and with Jews was reached and passed in the mid 1960s; so there was sympathy, but of a strange sort. It was displaced onto figures like the de-Judaized Anne Frank who was further metamorphosed into an image of the Japanese themselves.

On the positive side of the allosemitic coin, meanwhile, some Japanese—innocently or otherwise—were identifying themselves as “Jews” or “Jewish,” in the image of hustling successful businessmen, modern and international; or in the Christian theological image of G-d’s chosen people, perhaps in the Japanese tradition Goodman cites of propitiating, tolerating, and imitating the powers of foreign demons. (I ignore the few Japanese men of honor, memory, courage, and decency who fought these currents of displacement, erasure, and cooptation, that is, against the policies and fashions that led to success in their culture. Goodman tells their stories well, details the prices they paid, and concedes that they did not succeed in changing antisemitism much.)

Chapter 1 thus presents the paradox of a deeply al-

losemitic country, with not many more than a thousand Jews. Unlike many European countries, Japan does not even have a history of a once significant Jewish presence. This by itself, I would think, supports Gavin Langmuir’s theory—which Goodman cites—that antisemitism seems based entirely on hearsay and fantasy.

Chapters 2 through 4 present an historical survey and analysis of the origins of Japanese antisemitism as a powerful demonology. Antisemitism allowed the Japanese to displace the frustration at being unable to isolate themselves from foreign influence. Forcibly members of an international network of commerce, politics, culture, and ideology, they feel their identity, their very survival as a nation, to be threatened. Influences undermining the comfortable aspects of a homogeneous society, or their mythos of it, so vital to their sense of well-being, rendered the Japanese vulnerable to antisemitic myth.

Japanese concern over the “health” (read unity, optimism, satisfaction) of their culture began before the foreigners arrived. Goodman shows that as early as 1825 (I suspect but cannot prove, even earlier) there are texts prophesying the occupation and destruction of Japan and its culture by “foreign occult” groups. After Commodore Perry coerced the opening of Japan to the West, and the modern world, this foreign cult was identified with Christianity as the enemy. Soon afterwards, in a very subtle alteration with what I consider multiple benefits to Japan, the target became Jews and Judaism.

Goodman does not say this, but I infer it, correctly I hope, from the facts and the gist of his argument. First, it was advantageous for pure nationalist xenophobes that there were no Jews in Japan. They could hate them as much as they wanted, malign them to their hearts’ content; their Christian teachers, occupiers, and models would have found little to object to in this, in as much as it imitated widely accepted Christian views of the matter. Apparently, the alien Christians did not realize that “Jews” really signified “all foreign devils,” including themselves. It is even possible that the Japanese themselves were not consciously aware of the equation. No matter. Now they could at once hate Christians and the West, the modern World, and yet dress it in a Jew-hatred acceptable to the West itself. (I find this hypothesis helpful in explaining the curious fact Goodman records concerning the disinterest Japanese antisemites have so far shown in allying themselves with various worldwide antisemitic organizations.)

A second component of the mythology for the Japanese students of Christian missionaries (largely

American and mostly Evangelical Protestants in the modern era) involved a not uncommon redefinition of themselves as “Jews.” As with some American Christians, the Japanese converts thought of themselves as the “real” Jews, part of the continually rediscovered ten lost tribes of Israel, or as possessors of a truer tradition than modern Talmudic Jews. This, too, was acceptable to their Christian mentors. Thus, even though imported into Japanese culture, the complex relationship between Christians and Jews, the loves, hates, and competitions, were all present in the development of antisemitism in Japan.

Given the absence of real Jews, this emotional platform could sustain any number of scenarios, most filled with inner conflicts and logical contradictions. Xenophobia, nationalism, and opportunism combined with traditional ethnic ideology to reinforce a strong pre-Christian belief in the Japanese as a chosen, holy people living in a promised land, created for them by their own deities. Meanwhile, a universal imperialistic, Western Christian world and industrial technology lay ready to be appropriated and mastered. Fortunately, indeed, a specific holy/unholy people, “the Jews,” also stood ready to take the blame for all the difficulties, frictions, and dislocations involved in this transformation of traditional Japan. Naturally, inhabiting such a cosmic drama as this, the Japanese have shown no signs of being interested in, or much influenced by, living Jews or Judaism, at home or abroad. Nor, given the popular practice of invoking conspiracy theory and “hidden powers” to explain their own history, was there much pressure for the Japanese to find proof that a small and shadowy group of Jews provided the puppet-masters of all Western governments.

This indifference further suggests the need for Albert Lindemann’s theories, as recently discussed in *Esau’s Tears*, to be tested against a situation that appears to contradict them. What seems a perfect laboratory example of demonological epidemiology in our species, age, and clime, may turn out to be just another exception that keeps on proving the rule. An actual Jewish contribution or non-contribution to Japanese antisemitism may yet be discovered, but it is certainly difficult to find in Goodman’s book.

To my mind the most significant paradox that Goodman’s book raises is the use and non-use the Japanese have made of their antisemitism. Japanese antisemitism, he argues in Chapter 4, has historically been used against the Japanese themselves, to crush domestic dissent in the name of national unity of belief at times of crisis (World War II, disturbing fluctuations in the Yen, and other eco-

nomic and political uncertainties). Like other nationalistic antisemitisms, it blames the Jews for every economic, political, and cultural discomfort. International Jews, pulling the strings of Western governments, banks, communications, and industry, are out to destroy Japan. This is the usual paranoia, readily observable in the West.

What is unique about Japanese antisemitism, however, is that unlike most other nationalistic xenophobic antisemitisms it apparently—and very illogically—has NOT been used against living Jews. This failure to harm actual Jews is even stranger given that the particulars of Japanese ideological antisemitism entered Japan during the Manchukuo Occupation. It was then that the Japanese came into contact with the most successful contribution of White Russians to humanity, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the literary fraud that encouraged Eastern European pogroms and Western European indifference to the Nazi persecution of Jews.

Chapter 5 treats the domestic use of antisemitism during World War II as a means of thought control. In the process, the book describes one of the rarest, most strikingly decent behaviors by a government that must nonetheless be thought of as antisemitic. The Japanese government and army ignored the German example and Nazi pressure, choosing instead, as Goodman points out, to protect some 25,000 Jewish refugees in Kobe and later Shanghai (thereby giving refuge to a greater number than Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India combined).

Goodman refuses to romanticize this episode, arguing that the rescue was done from political pragmatism, self-interest, and, to my mind, a “reverse-English” peculiar to Japanese outlooks. Apparently the Japanese thought that if the Jews were really running the world behind the scenes, it was politic to behave decently to them. But the book may not give the Japanese enough credit in this case. There is always a gap between theory and practice, it seems, bridgeable only by acts of will. And the Japanese, in this case, willed decently.

Chapters 5 and 6 detail the use of antisemitism at home to repress dissent against extreme nationalism, and after the war to allow the Japanese to ignore the Jews while supplanting them in their own mythological history as the real innocent victims of the war, particularly of its nuclear conclusion.

(A more personal aside here: it is not clear to me just what the Japanese would have done had there been no Holocaust to co-opt, no Hiroshima to blur the horror and their responsibility for Asian suffering. Why is there

so little anti-Japanism, considering the well-documented horrors of the war? What little anti-Japanese feeling exists is clearly a result of economic preeminence. Why, in contrast, is there so much antisemitism despite a much less obvious contribution by Jews to their own or other people's suffering?)

The last chapter on "Japan's Jewish Problem: Implications in a Multicultural World" is less persuasive than the rest of the book. In part this may be the result of my own failings in matters of arithmetic. Be that as it may, I cannot assess the actual proportionate influence of antisemitism on the general attitudes or behavior of literate Japanese adults. Just how worrisome is it today and for the future? Part of the problem is, of course, the difficulty of predicting future behavior on the basis of history or even on current beliefs (as revealed in public opinion polls).

But the urgency of Goodman's appeal in his concluding chapters for changed behavior on the part of the Japanese government and leaders depends heavily on just such a clear estimation, as does the plangency of the book's last chapter. The importance accorded to Goodman's plea depends on whether or not the reader shares his assessment of the dangers of Japanese antisemitism. His assumption that a change will necessarily benefit Japanese national interests is also problematic. I, for one, do not disbelieve the accuracy of Goodman's picture and interpretation in chapters 7 and 8 of Japanese postwar hypocrisy toward Jews, particularly its fashionable dabbling in anti-Zionism as a transparent ploy meant to protect economic interests. But in all fairness, I just don't think Japanese postwar antisemitism as applied to Jews and Israel was or is significantly different from that of France, England, Russia, Canada, or others. If anything, it seems less harmful.

And it does not follow necessarily that using antisemitism for controlling domestic dissent must harm

Japan any more than it has harmed Europe or the Americas. It does not follow therefore that diminishing such antisemitism is in the interest of any government whose primary interest is remaining in power: that is, all of them. The change of policy would certainly be desirable to Jews, but is it as pressing a need for Japan as Goodman urges on the reader? Historically, at least, the only instance where government antisemitism could have been deadly was the moment when the Japanese, for whatever selfish or self-deluded reasons, behaved demonstrably more morally towards Jews than most other nations at the time.

Though the argument from or to self-interest, to my mind, fails, that should not bother scholars. After all, no argument has yet succeeded. The remainder of the book is important enough without such appeals. Goodman's *Jews in the Japanese Mind* certainly provides the lumber and plans with which to construct a theater where some of the world's allosemantic dialectic is being played out, and also something of the script. Therefore, it seems set to be both required and rewarding reading for members of this discussion list, and their colleagues on H-Holocaust, H-Judaica, and in the general field of cultural epidemiology.

Note

[1]. Goodman writes (p. ix): "There has naturally been a division of labor in preparing this volume. Miyazawa did much of the initial basic research, and the text incorporates translations and adaptations of substantial portions of his published work. I have supplemented his contribution with research of my own in both English and Japanese sources. I organized and wrote the book, and the voice is mine."

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