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Simon Partner. *The Merchant's Tale: Yokohama and the Transformation of Japan.* Asia Perspectives: History, Society, and Culture Series. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. Tables, illustrations. 320 pp. $60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-18292-8.

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Commissioned by Martha Chaiklin

The treaty ports were the official, negotiated sites of interaction and mediation, where the West—with all its technological and scientific, business, and cultural enterprise—arrived in the East. With the recent publication of edited volumes *Treaty Ports in Modern China: Law, Land and Power* (2016), edited by Robert Bickers and Isabella Jackson, and *Life in Treaty Port China and Japan* (2018), edited by Donna Brunero and Stephanie Villalta Puig, the study of East Asia's treaty ports is, at long last, attracting serious academic attention. Riding at the very crest of the wave, Simon Partner's *The Merchant's Tale: Yokohama and the Transformation of Japan* gives us a gripping account of Shinohara Chūemon, a Japanese merchant "on the make" struggling to turn a profit in Yokohama during the very earliest days of its forced opening. Chūemon's story is one of a fifty-year-old man, leaving his rural village, local privileges, a large home, his wife, and at least six children, to reinvent himself in what would become Japan's largest twentieth-century port.

The loyal retainers, merchants, and tradesmen of the shogunate who, along with foreigners, built Yokohama were essentially on the losing side during the last decade of the Tokugawa shogunate. After the Meiji "Restoration," they were generally tarred with a broad brush that painted their behavior as being something from "naïve and foolish" to "brazen and traitorous" (depending on the nature and depth of their involvement with foreigners and the shogunate). If that were not enough, the calamitous Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and firebombing during the Second World War have also robbed us of their voices. These unhappy events, therefore, serve to make Partner's retelling (representation and re-presentation) of Chūemon's story all the more compelling and important.

The Merchant's Tale is divided into four main chapters, conceived chronologically, to describe Chūemon's fourteen-year experience in Yokohama. The book's chapters start with "Out of Thin Air (1859-1860)" describing Yokohama's remarkable beginnings in late 1859, and Chūemon's attempt to seize whatever opportunities he could. "Years of Struggle (1860-1864)" tells something of Chūemon's trials and tribulations, in various business and family matters, while "Prosperity (1864-1866)" allows us to glimpse something of the heights and trappings of his worldly success. The wider political context of revolution and overthrow dominates the final chapter, "Transformation (1866-1873)," and much of the excitement of the early days is infused with post-Meiji Restoration worries and angst. The enigmatically titled

"The Power of a Place" concludes by providing mature and incisive observations on such things as the strength and continuity of the growing commercial economy; powerful Tokugawa legacies; and an extended consideration of the search for social mobility, economic opportunities, and what politicians of the 1980s would have referred to as "the magic of the market" (pp. 212-225).

In a sense, Partner's ***The Merchant's Tale*** serves as a kind of ***precious*** Japanese native counterpoint to the Dutch merchant outsider in Martha Chaiklin's ***A Pioneer in Yokohama: A Dutchman's Adventures in the New Treaty Port*** (2012), but its primary source (Chūemon) was writing for very different purposes. Unlike the didactic Assendelft de Coningh, the pioneer in Chaiklin's book (who published his insights for all posterity), Partner's "worthy protagonist," informer, or muse, is Chūemon, a "Kōshū man," who made no serious attempt to bear witness to, or explain, the historical development of Yokohama (pp. xix, xxii, 3, 7). Rather, he was simply writing to his eldest son (Shōjiro) to communicate business instructions, with frequent commercial exhortations, and occasional observations (often in the form of "man on the spot" market intelligence reports). Chūemon would be astounded, as are his great-great-grandchildren today, that a foreign professor from a prestigious American university would use the letters he sent to his home village as a "precious historical resource ... by developing the rich insights they offer" (p. 224).

There are many topics and themes that readers (along with the author) may wish Chūemon had commented on. For example, I would have loved to have heard Chūemon's thoughts on the sudden appearance of new Western technologies. What did Chūemon think about the spread of commercial shipping, railways, the telegraph, tunnels, and bridges, or even of the two-storied offices of other Western merchants? And what did Chūemon, the man who had become a tailor, think about Japanese men and women wearing all manner of foreign apparel (***yōfuku***), often mixed together with traditional native clothes (***wafuku***)? We have a wonderful picture of him and his family dressed in traditional (***haori hakama***) fashion, and we note that his hair is cropped short in a new Western haircut while his own sons still wear traditional ***chonmage*** topknots, in the style of Edo merchants (p. 202). Of course, many readers may yearn for accounts of interaction with the foreign communities of the treaty ports and all manner of things. These kinds of observations, however, were judged by Chūemon, at the time, to be of no importance to his family back home, and so we will never know about them. Consequently, Chūemon's "granular microhistory"—the narrative presented here by Partner—requires further investigation and extensive contextualization and explanation, which Partner does wonderfully well "in order to present a wider portrait of the Yokohama community" (p. xxii).

That said, there are things in the book that deserve further inquiry, and some ambiguity over what the geographical term "Ōshū" represents. Perhaps the subtitle ***Yokohama and the Transformation of Japan*** and Partner's claim in the introduction "to show how the economy of Kōshū was pulled into the orbit of the new commercial center of Yokohama" is a noble but unattained aspiration (p. xxii). Partner does not fully clarify the great challenge of his title, the ***Transformation of Japan***. The important question remains: what was the relationship between the urban core and the rural periphery in mid-nineteenth-century Japan? More to the point, what did Kōshū mean to this story of Yokohama? More local research on Kōshū is needed to explain the nature of its transformation; and to show how, a century-and-a-half later, the Shinohara family still farms the same five acres of land that it did when Chūemon first made his way to Yokohama.

To be sure, Chūemon the merchant from Kōshū ran Kōshūya in Yokohama; so this is a story of not just core Yokohama but also (the often ne-

glected) periphery. Significantly, the Kōshū merchant made his money, and achieved his greatest commercial successes (like many other fellow merchants), by selling silkworm eggs from "the great silk-producing areas of Shinshū and Ōshū" (p. 13). Partner's reference to "Shinshū and Ōshū" here, however, is puzzling and requires qualification. Without having viewed the letters, I suspect "Ōshū 奥州" might be a casual, slang reference (between father and son) to "Rikuōkoku 陸奥国" as in "Rikuōshū 陸奥州" (see p. 105), that is, another name for the part of northeastern Japan that faces the Pacific Ocean (now encapsulated by the term "Tohoku"). In regard to Chūemon's business interests (in an intriguing quartz crystal mine in Ōshū), however, "Ōshū" does not refer to the Tohoku region in general but almost certainly to a specific locality. Ōshū (奥州市) was, and is, an important town equidistant between Kitakami and Hirazumi, which was then part of the Morioka (Nambu) domain. So, his references to it (and Nambu) being in Fukushima or the "southern part of Ōshū" are confusing here (pp. 143-144, 164).

Returning to the question of silkworm egg production, later in the book it is said to have "long been concentrated in the Shindatsu district of Ōshū (now Fukushima prefecture) and the Ueda district of Shinshū province (now Nagano prefecture)" (pp. 103-104). It is my understanding that the regions around Suwa and Ueda, and their association with the Shinshū "kingdom of silk (***sanshi*** no ***ōkoku***)" is a somewhat later development. More information on what became the most lucrative aspect of Chūemon's business in Yokohama—silk, silk production, silk eggs, silk products (all extensively cited in the index)—would have helped the reader to better grasp its importance.

All in all, though, there is so much to learn from ***The Merchant's Tale*** that it can easily be forgiven for not being everything we might want it to be. It is well researched, with twenty-seven pages of notes and a ten-page bibliography, and is likely to have a very long "shelf-life" in many libraries. Partner writes engaging and entertaining prose with great fluidity and authority. For anyone looking for an introduction into treaty port Yokohama, especially with sensitivity toward the Japanese predicament, Partner's work is a great place to start the adventure.

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