

Down and Out in Late Meiji Japan

Martha Chaiklin

The word 'muckraking' does not appear once in *Down and Out in Late Meiji Japan*. This is somewhat surprising, given that James Huffman's earlier books focused on the press in Japan and the time period defined in the book title aligns exactly with the American Progressive Movement, whereas the inspiration for the title, George Orwell's *Down and Out in London and Paris* (Victor Gollancz, 1933) relates events from 1928. Muckraker was a term used (in reference to a character in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*) to label journalists devoted to exposing the corruption of politics and the social ills of industrialization. Although in use since the 1870s as a pejorative to the press rather than the agricultural compost raker of its origins, it was popularized in a speech by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 and taken as a badge of honor by those so designated. It would have been interesting to know if Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair and their ilk influenced the efforts of Yokoyama Gennosuke, Suzuki Umeshirō, Matsubara Iwagorō and the other journalists Huffman references for insight into the poor, but perhaps that would have been a different book, a shift in focus from 'nameless' destitute people to journalists.

Moreover, given that this book is a work of history rather than investigative journalism, Huffman is not a muckraker either. But nevertheless, his goals are not too far from those journalists of the past: expose the underside of a society. In that much of the scholarship of this period focuses on how Japan successfully industrialized, it is not only a fresh perspective, but an important one to fully evaluate just how that industrial success was achieved. Huffman seeks 'to understand how it felt to live the life of a *hinmin*, or poor person' (p. 2) and explore how modernity impacted their lives. To examine the lives of those made 'voiceless' (p. 2) through

Reviewed title:

Down and Out in Late Meiji Japan

James L. Huffman. 2018.

Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press
ISBN 9700824872915

illiteracy and indifference, Huffman relies heavily on the muckrakers, or as he prefers, 'poverty journalists' of late Meiji Japan, heavily supplemented with literary diaries, government papers, social commentaries and academic analyses. The results of Huffman's explorations have shined light on those underexposed parts of Meiji society. Importantly, he shows that these people did not fit neatly into stereotypes such as victim or criminal, that they were not entirely defined by their poverty but lived in constant 'tension between visibility and invisibility' (p. 97). Where he really departs from the views of muckraking journalists is in the way that he seeks not just to document the misery, crime, and disease of poverty but also to show the joy the destitute managed to make even in their difficult circumstances because there were not always powerless victims without agency.

In order to accomplish this, Huffman like the muckrakers, largely focuses on the urban poor, which he suggests made up between 12 and 20

per cent of urban populations. As the author explains, many of these poor are migrants from rural villages. He therefore does not spend too much time parsing where they came from, and while he acknowledges the presence of *buraku* (an outcaste class), he does not dwell on these kinds of differences, instead narrating as many individualized stories as possible to emphasize the humanity of subjects that are often equated with animals.

The down and out of Meiji Japan are examined in eight content chapters, of which the first six focus on the city, and the last two on the country. In Chapter 1, the scene is set by describing the pull of the poor to the city and the built environment in which they resided. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the working lives (because even beggars do work of a sort) of the underclass looking at the labor through the manufacture of, for example, textiles and matches, and those in the building and service professions like carpenters, rickshaw pullers and masseurs. Chapter 4 is on family life,

noting that the perception in the Japanese media and among the public of the nuclear family unit as the norm was not born out in the reality because the largest number of migrant workers were men, and divorce and disease were prevalent. Written as a comparison, Huffman's description of rural poor is admittedly skeletal and sweeping rather than specific, because its true intent is to elucidate the urban poor rather than ponder the conditions of the countryside. Huffman argues that the strong community ties extant in the countryside alleviated some of the harshest aspects of poverty. The final content chapter completes the system of migration out from Japanese rural communities by examining the emigration of agricultural workers to Hawaii. He notes the similarities between the migration patterns to cities in which, the migration was largely of single men but diverge because the emigrants were able to improve their economic status much more rapidly.

Clearly and objectively written, the book only fails in being accessible to a general audience through Huffman's decision to use Japanese terms like *hinmin* (the poor) or *kasō shakai* (underclass) for ideas that can adequately be expressed in English. Huffman clearly has deep empathy for his subjects, which is only partially explained by his accounting of his own impoverished rural childhood in rural Indiana in the introduction. In using an interdisciplinary approach, Huffman has married individuals to a systemic examination so that the stories appear simple on the surface but underneath are contained deep questions about the nature of poverty. It is an indicator of the state of academics that Huffman felt that he had to justify his choice of topic as a 'middle-class white American' (p. 21). Some historians are inspired by their personal histories, but most of us write about dead people, who otherwise could tell no tales. The down and out of late Meiji Japan were fortunate in having James Huffman as a spokesperson.

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Queer Comrades

Travis Kong

Reviewed title:

Queer Comrades: Gay Identity and Tongzhi Activism in Postsocialist China

Hongwei Bao. 2018.

Copenhagen: NIAS Press
ISBN 9788776942342

Hongwei Bao's monograph offers an excellent example of an examination of gay identity and activism in contemporary China from a cultural studies perspective. It draws from queer theory, feminism, Marxism, and postcolonial and critical race studies for its theoretical lens.



QUEER COMRADES

Gay Identity and *Tongzhi* Activism in Postsocialist China

HONGWEI BAO

More specifically, driven by a leftist politics, Bao brings queer theory and Marxism into dialogue to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexity and fluidity of non-normative male sexual identities: *tongxinglian* (同性戀), gay, *tongzhi* (同志), *ku'er* (酷兒), MSM. He examines the challenges and potential of a radical gay politics against the backdrop of China's socialist legacy and contemporary postsocialist reality, which is infused with nascent capitalism, neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism.

Inspired by Judith Halberstam's 'queer methodology', which uses various methods to produce knowledge on subjects who have been excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour, Bao brings together medical records, published diaries and films, as well as interviews, ethnographic accounts and personal anecdotes in his analysis. Moreover, he is no detached researcher, but rather a passionate and engaged ethnographer. Bao was born and grew up in China, self-identifies as gay, studied in Australia for his PhD, and has taught at various universities in China and Europe. He is now teaching in the United Kingdom. He was well aware of both the privileges and limitations of his research position as insider and outsider when he was in conversation with queer communities in China, conversation that took place primarily during his field trips to the country over the 2007 and 2009 period. With his distinctive and sometimes witty writing style, Bao illustrates the 'structure of feelings' of the kaleidoscopic