This volume by Unryu Suganuma inaugurates a new series, "Asian Interactions and Comparisons," to be jointly published by the Association for Asian Studies and the University of Hawai'i Press. Books within the series will look at issues that cross national or cultural borders within the context of Asia. Dr. Suganuma's work therefore marks an excellent point of departure.

While there has been peace between China and Japan for the past half century, massive amounts of trade, numerous educational and cultural exchanges, and memories of World War II and before still cloud virtually every state-to-state interaction between the two countries today. One of the most contentious issues has been the disputed sovereignty over a tiny chain of uninhabited islands known in Chinese as the Diaoyu Islands and in Japanese as the Senkaku Islands. Dr. Suganuma takes a deep historical approach in trying not so much to resolve this issue as to understand how the two parties have come to articulate their opposing legitimacy claims to sovereignty.

"Irredentism," the claim to terrain based on a historical "right," is the model he applies. While the Chinese repeatedly contend that the island chain was known and used by Chinese navigators from Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) times on, the Japanese ground their arguments in the "discovery theory" of international law, namely that the land had long been ignored and unused until Japan "rediscovered" it in 1884. In both instances, the irredentist claims of history ground the arguments, and no one seems to be questioning the validity of history as a determinant. History as the ultimate deciding factor in disputes of this sort can be found around the world, but in East Asia
—with its long tradition of history writing as a means of claims to legitimacy—history is something much more.

Thus, we have in Dr. Suganuma’s work a study simultaneously of geography, international relations, comparative history, and international law, a mixture rarely found in East Asian studies. It is based on a primary and secondary literature that almost never finds its way into mainstream East Asian studies. With the publication of Dr. Suganuma’s book, a whole new literature opens up for interested readers. He examines the wealth of texts from premodern and modern China that mention the Diaoyu Islands in the context of navigation to and from the Liuqiu (Ryūkyū) Kingdom—connected with contested claims over sovereignty there—and, to a lesser extent, to and from Japan. In addition, he uses a vast array of recent Chinese, Japanese, and English-language studies to situate the issues in the larger context of the debate not just about the islands themselves but of irredentism itself.

From the perspective of the present, international law has ultimately been unsuccessful—or, at least, inconclusive—in mediating the competing claims to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands made by Chinese and Japanese. Absent a clear resolution emerging from accepted norms of international law, Dr. Suganuma sees continued irredentist claims being made by the two sides well into the foreseeable future.

This volume is, without a doubt, the fullest scholarly treatment that the contested issue of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands has received to date—and in any language. It will be of interest to historians of modern China and modern Japan as well as to political scientists in international relations and Sino-Japanese interactions. And it will certainly be of interest to those in the field of historical geography, Dr. Suganuma’s specialty. It would be a valuable addition to any publisher’s list, and we are especially proud that it launches “Asian Interactions and Comparisons.”

Joshua A. Fogel
Series Editor