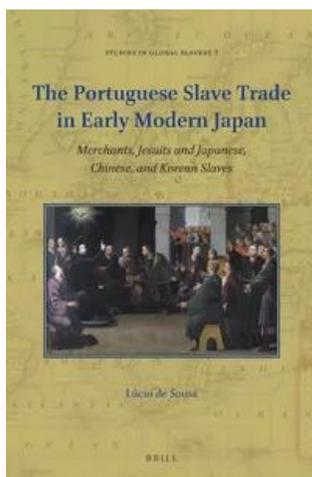




Lúcio de Sousa. *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019. 594 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-44723-3. (Studies in Global Slavery, volume 7)



This book is a major contribution to the history of the worldwide slave trade and fills a major gap in our knowledge. Hitherto the existence of a Portuguese trade in human beings from China, Japan and Korea during the 16th and 17th centuries has not been well-known in the literature, and indeed has been largely forgotten. For example, a major reference work, *A Historical Guide to World Slavery* (Oxford University Press, 1998) does not even mention it. This is the more astonishing, because as de Sousa shows, these slaves were not confined to East Asia, but spread throughout the Hapsburg Empire, and were found in far-flung Iberian outposts from Macao to Goa, Manila, Acapulco, Lima, and even in Lisbon and Madrid.

This dispersal is reflected in the author's assiduous research which has been conducted in 23 archives in eight countries on four continents. Primary sources include Jesuit correspondence and other Jesuit writings. A distinctive form of evidence is the ballot papers issued by the Jesuits which gave details of buyer's name, slave's name, and other details.

The traffic in slaves on Portuguese ships from Japan in the 16th and 17th centuries is the focus of the first four chapters of this book. The fifth chapter explores the structure of the trade. Chapter six consists of case studies of four individual slaves. The seventh chapter explores the diaspora of Japanese slaves. The last chapter is a study of the Iberian legal aspects relating to Japanese slavery.

The story which emerges is a very complex one with slave sources shifting over time. The subtitle: *Merchants, Jesuits and Japanese, Chinese, and Korean slaves* indicates the diversity of this story. The presence of the Portuguese in Macao from the 1550s served as the fulcrum of their trade with Japan, ending in the 1630s. Slaves became the return cargo in the annual "great ship from Amacon," as the large trading vessel was called, which brought Chinese silks from Macao to Nagasaki. As the Japanese paid for these silks in silver and other compact goods, there was space for human cargo on the return voyage. Initially these were Chinese slaves from Kyushu, but soon Japanese slaves, sold by their owners, and Korean POW slaves (ca. 1000/year in 1592-1597) were included. However, in the early 17th century, the numbers declined sharply. In addition to the great ship, there were smaller

vessels of private traders from Macao, which also engaged in the slave trade. No records exist for the numbers traded on these smaller ships.

From Macao these slaves were then sent to Malacca and Goa and other parts of the Portuguese empire. With the accession of Philip II to the Portuguese crown, Manila became open to Portuguese traders from Macao, and a whole new pattern of slave trading, of Chinese, African and other slaves to the Philippines, began. From Manila slaves went via galleon to Mexico, a trade explored recently by Tatiana Seijas, in a work hailed by de Sousa.¹

Although the trade was never legitimized by the Portuguese Crown (p. 277), there was a convenient workaround. A newly purchased slave child or adult would be baptized by a Jesuit priest, a sacrament converting them into de facto Catholics, hence a meritorious act by the slave purchaser. Indeed, a major thrust of this study is the important involvement of the Jesuits in the Asian slave trade, an involvement often overlooked or avoided in the extensive historiography of the Society of Jesus.

The scale of this trade never approached Atlantic slave trade levels, but it is clear that many thousands were involved, with annual totals of 1000 slaves being met or exceeded for several years. The author is prudently reticent about providing overall totals: the archival sources are rarely statistical. The number of ships may be ascertained, but not the details of their human cargos.

De Sousa's research focuses on individual case histories, on slaves' lives which have been documented, however fragmentary their surviving records may be. His narrative is interspersed by summary tables offering mini-biographies of hundreds of slaves. The close detail means that these slaves are glimpsed in their individuality at a level rarely seen in histories of the Atlantic slave trade. They are seen, with their Portuguese baptismal names, in a few brief strokes.

The history of these slaves is achieved by a mosaic-like process of piecing together individual tiny details. The data are by their nature incomplete, and the historian's task painstakingly incremental. Here are no ship's manifests, listing hundreds of slaves embarked, mortality lists, lists of slaves disembarked. Instead there are micro-histories of individuals, listed and cataloged; a few of those of whom more is known are explored in some depth.

Despite the many lists provided, the author's reluctance to provide numerical summaries means that at times the reader is left to surmise the scale of the slave presence. For example, in the chapter on Japanese in Mexico, de Sousa discusses the stories of about a dozen individual slaves but nowhere offers overall numbers. The raw data for meaningful statistics is simply lacking. Seijas by contrast gives a single table of all the ethnicities of slaves she discovered in Mexico: the Japanese total is four. The actual total will doubtless never be known, but was far larger

¹Tatiana Seijas. *Asian slaves in Colonial Mexico: from Chinos to Indians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

than these small figures. The Mexican story is complicated by the presence of some free Japanese, including some from a large delegation of 150-180 who remained behind.

In a show of empathy with the hitherto forgotten victims of this trade, this book is dedicated to the memory of these Japanese, Chinese, and Korean slaves.

James C. Armstrong
Independent scholar



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the University Library System, University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program and is cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press.