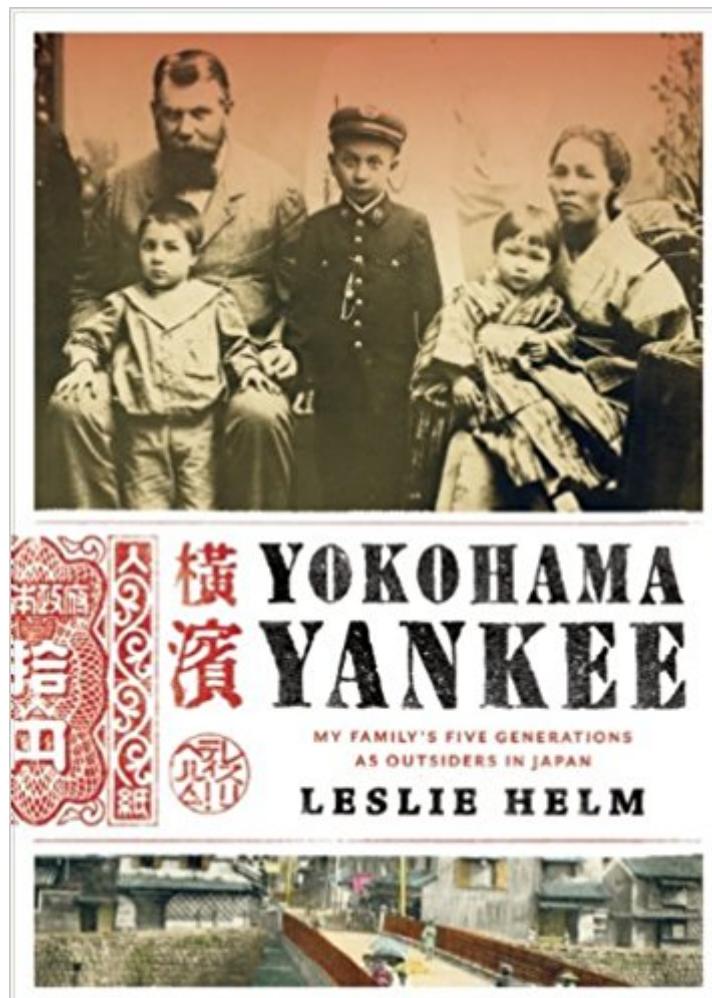


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Yokohama Yankee: My Family's Five Generations As Outsiders In Japan



Synopsis

"A lovely, unsettling family story and a vivid traversal of modern Japanese history that will impress the jaded Japan scholar and inspire the curious general reader or memoir fan." ¹ Library JournalHelm was the Tokyo correspondent for the Los Angeles Times when he realized that the majority of the articles he had written were "critical of Japan in some way." This was surprising considering Helm was born in Japan and is part Japanese himself. In this lovingly researched memoir, he sifts through five generations of Helms living in Japan...history buffs will relish Helm's painstaking detail and impressive command of the material. ² Publishers Weekly"Yokohama Yankee is a marvelous and eloquent work of family history. What makes it more remarkable is this family's history also sheds light on the political, economic, cultural, and racial interactions and tensions between Japan and the United States for more than a century and a half, right up to the present day. This is a humane and insightful book that will be read many years from now." ³ James Fallows, national correspondent for The Atlantic and author of *China Airborne*⁴;Like a sword cleaving a bittersweet fruit, Leslie Helm's saga of his mixed-blood family in Japan cuts to the inescapable isolation of being white in a country where blood still means so much. Yokohama Yankee is a painfully intimate story that spans more than a century and brings the wrenching history of modern Japan into a focus that is both razor sharp and deeply human.⁵ Blaine Harden, author of *Escape from Camp 14* and former Tokyo bureau chief of The Washington Post⁶;Leslie Helm has written a lively and engaging account of his remarkable family history and its intertwining with Japan ... It is a warm and human story that will charm its readers.⁷ Kenneth B. Pyle, Henry M. Jackson professor of Asian history and Asian studies, University of Washington, and recipient of Japan's Order of the Rising Sun⁸;One of the finest correspondents to have reported on Japan, Leslie Helm tells the riveting, sometimes painful story of his multinational, biracial merchant family. Living in Yokohama for generations in war and peace, the Helms are at the heart of Japan's long modern history without ever actually becoming Japanese.⁹ Sheldon Garon, Nissan professor of Japanese history at Princeton University"Helms mines the many treasures of his family's past, and the multicultural futures of his adopted, Japanese children, to investigate the mysteries of identity that are locked away inside all of us. The family fortune disappears, and relatives scatter in the winds of war and reconstruction. But this lovely story remains, about an erudite man trying to make sense of the world, of the past, and of himself."¹⁰ Alex Beam, Boston Globe columnist¹¹;¹²[A] wonderful work full of pathos, insight and humanity.¹³ Fred G. Notehelfer, emeritus professor of Japanese history at UCLA and author of *Japan Through American Eyes: The Journal of Francis Hall, 1859-1866*Leslie Helm's

decision to adopt Japanese children launches him on a personal journey through his family's 140 years in Japan, beginning with his great-grandfather, who worked as a military advisor in 1870 and defied custom to marry his Japanese mistress. The family's poignant experiences of love and war help Helm overcome his cynicism and embrace his Japanese and American heritage. This is the first book to look at Japan across five generations, with perspective that is both from the inside and through foreign eyes. Helm draws on his great-grandfather's unpublished memoir and a wealth of primary source material to bring his family history to life.

Book Information

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Chin Music Press Inc. (March 12, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0984457666

ISBN-13: 978-0984457663

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1 x 8.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (100 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #611,853 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #108 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > Japan #195 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Japanese #289 inÂ Books > Travel > Asia > Japan > General

Customer Reviews

YOKOHAMA YANKEE will appeal to a wide range of readers: those interested in German immigration to and business in Japan from the Victorian times on; those who are intrigued by how a somewhat closed society absorbed immigrants; those who have adopted, are thinking of adopting, or are fascinated by stories of adoption by Americans of Asian babies, and lovers of Japanese history and culture. Leslie Helm traces his family's history in Japan from the arrival of his German great-grandfather, Julius, and his marriage to a Japanese woman during Victorian times to his own upbringing in Japan and eventual marriage to an American woman and their adoption of two Japanese children. There is a lot of information in Helm's book and many photographs as well. Unfortunately the photographs - at least in the advance reader copy - do not carry captions and this makes piecing some of Helm's story together a bit difficult. There are many times while reading the text when it would have been helpful for the photographs to match up with names of individuals or locations mentioned. Obviously these are mostly family photographs passed down, so perhaps

Helm did not feel his knowledge deep enough to commit to definite captions. The book reads quickly and is quite absorbing, very much like watching a well-produced documentary on PBS. Probably most of us have not thought much about immigrants to Japan during the Victorian era, let alone Germans who started successful businesses. Helm introduces us to a world many do not know and might not hear of at all if it were not for Helm's book. There is a good deal of Japanese history to be learned as well, so as the reader takes in Helm's personal family history, there is also the history of an entire country to think about.

I pre-ordered this book on the recommendation of the author's brother. Having grown up in the same area and around the same time as the author I couldn't wait to get my hands on something that would bring back the "familiar" Japan I used to know. When the book came I sat right down and read a couple of chapters. Then I stopped. I realized this was not the kind of book I thought it would be. It is BETTER than I thought it would be. I decided to stop looking for the familiar and start the book all over again. I wanted to see it for the book Leslie Helm intended it to be. I am so glad I did. This is a stunning book. The artwork, layout, photos and prints are all best appreciated in book form. I wouldn't recommend this to anyone as an eBook. unless there is no other option. I found myself going back to the genealogy page and other photos for reference several times. Besides this being a book with rare, documented insight into Japan at a time of transformation and through two wars it gives wonderful detail into other non-historical aspects of Japan that we might otherwise never encounter. This is a book about belonging and not belonging. Wanting to belong and not wanting to belong. Being accepted and not accepted and finally...about being accepting. Interspersed the historical chapters are Leslie Helm's personal stories and questions about his family, about Japan and more questions raised after the the adoption of his two children in Japan. This chronicles the history the Helms, a well know foreign family in Yokohama from the late 1800's until now. A family for whom through marriage, intermarriage and business association, questions of comfort with identity(familial, cultural, social and national allegiance) seemed to be always present.

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