

The Chinese Chameleon Revisited:  
From the Jesuits to Zhang Yimou

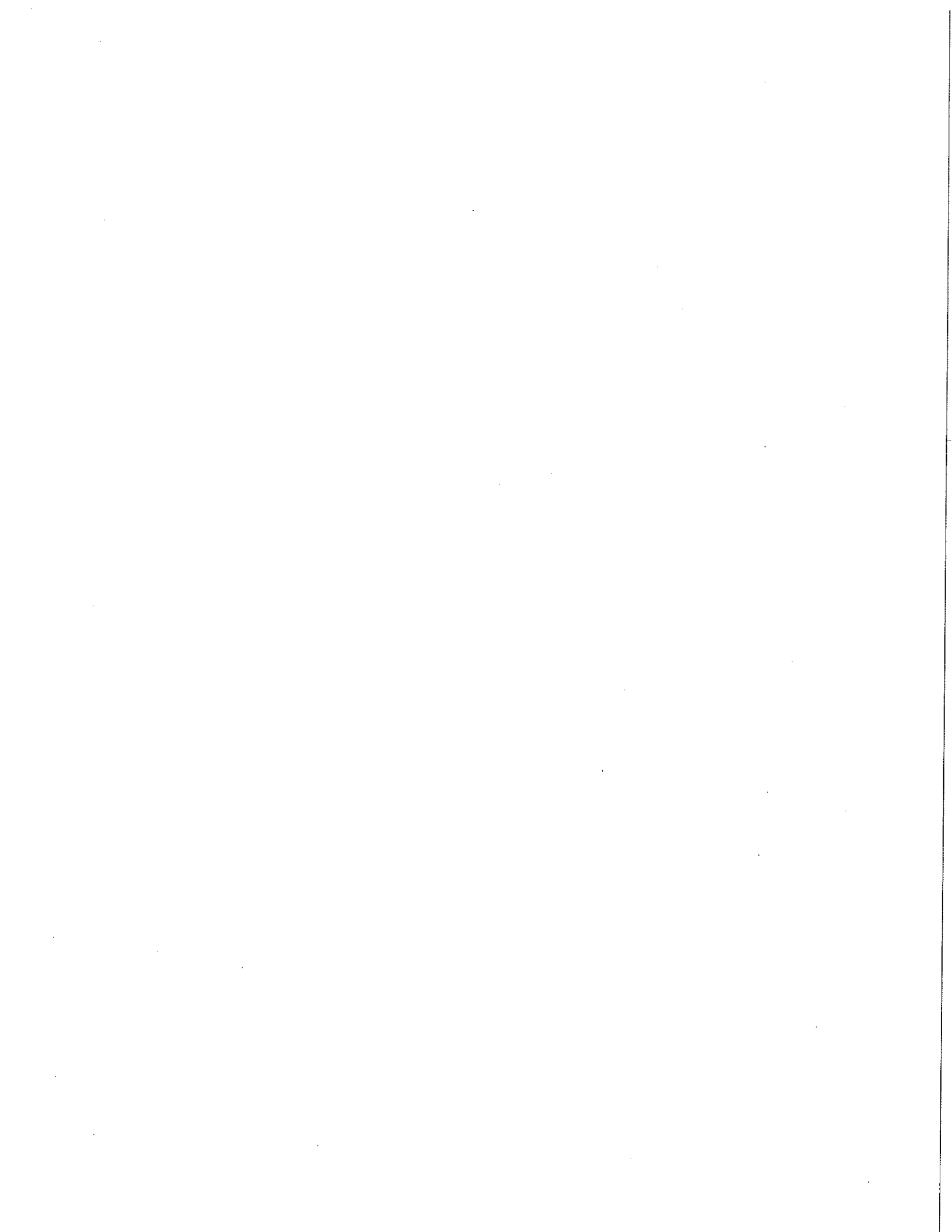
Edited by

Zheng Yangwen 鄭揚文

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

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**P U B L I S H I N G**



## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE "RISE" OF JAPAN AND THE "FALL" OF CHINA AFTER 1895<sup>1</sup>

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In spring 2006, I was teaching a course for the History Department at Princeton under the newly established rubric called "the sophomore initiative," an effort to prepare not yet declared History majors for the sorts of historical topics and issues they might deal with in their future junior research papers and senior theses. Both are still required of all Princeton undergraduates to graduate. We began by reading "The Travels of Marco Polo" and in the process looked at recent Danish images of Islam that have caused such a sensation. Marco Polo's portrait of the "Sheik of the Mountain" and the latter's assassins reminded the class of the Danish cartoons of Muhammad "posing" as Bin Laden.

Next we read European Christian accounts of Asia in the sixteenth century, a Europe on the threshold of imperialism, which we analyzed in light of Edward Said's "Orientalism." Our last project for the semester focused on the "First" Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, which is an understudied topic until its recent

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all images shown below are from the "Visualizing Cultures" website produced and maintained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. See "Throwing Off Asia: Woodblock Prints of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5)" at: [http://oki-dev.mit.edu:8080/narravision-web/col\\_asia\\_home.html](http://oki-dev.mit.edu:8080/narravision-web/col_asia_home.html), and [http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/throwing\\_off\\_asia\\_02/index.html](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/throwing_off_asia_02/index.html)

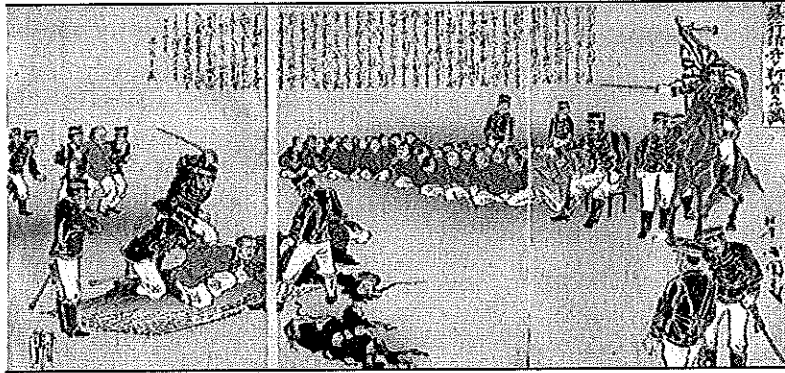
centennial, whose climax came in winter 1895 with an unexpected "walkover" Japanese conquest of the "Gibraltar of the Orient," Port Arthur (Luxunkou), the chief military base on the Liaodong Peninsula in southern Manchuria. The world press covered the Port Arthur campaign both as a great Japanese victory and simultaneously in light of troubling accounts by reporters of the *New York World* and *London Times* of atrocities committed by Japanese troops, which the reporters called the "Port Arthur Massacre."<sup>2</sup> The Japanese army marched by land into Port Arthur from the north (as they would from Malaya to Singapore in 1941), avoiding a damaging frontal naval clash with the Northern Chinese Beiyang Fleet under Li Hongzhang (1823-1901). Upon finding their captured troops allegedly butchered by the fleeing Chinese/Manchu forces, the crack Japanese army took their revenge on the surviving population at Luxunkou. The massacre at Port Arthur coincided with world press accounts of the Armenian massacres by the Ottoman Turks. As a result, both the United States and Great Britain considered for a time setting aside negotiations with Japan to end an era of unequal treaties and extraterritoriality vis-à-vis the Meiji government. Interestingly, patriotic Japanese captured the full brutality of Japanese military actions in their depictions of Japanese victories over the Qing army and navy on traditional woodblock prints.

For example, the most damaging of the controversial woodblock prints that touched off the MIT Visualizing Cultures Controversy in Spring 2006 depicted Japanese troops beheading violent Chinese/Manchu prisoners of war (see the figure below).

This violent image of Japan's flouting of the emerging global movement to protect prisoners of war was presented in Meiji circles as the rightful and terrible retribution Chinese and Manchu soldiers could expect if they caused trouble after their capture. The woodblock was never intended for a non-Japanese audience, much less the MIT website, or our eyes today.

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<sup>2</sup> On the birth of the war correspondent, see Saya Makito, *The Sino-Japanese War and the Birth of Japanese Nationalism*, translated by David Noble (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2011), 26-29, on the massacre, see, 42-50.



Japanese troops beheading Chinese/Manchu prisoners of war

After reading English language newspaper accounts of the 1894-1895 war, the class began an exercise to examine these graphically violent Japanese woodblock prints. They had been prepared as war propaganda, many of which appeared as "war pictures" in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (see below) and elsewhere to describe the events in East Asia and the unexpected tide of Japanese military victories over the Manchu dynasty. Since then these colourful Japanese prints have been exhibited several times in the United States. Indeed, several catalogues of them have been published a number of times, but the prints had never before appeared together on a unified website.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Shumpei, Okamoto, *Impressions of the Front: Woodcuts of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894-95* (Philadelphia: Museum of Art, 1983) and Louise, Virgin, *Japan at the Dawn of the Modern Age: Woodblock Prints from the Meiji Era, 1868-1912* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2001).



*San Francisco Chronicle report on Sino-Japanese war*

The class then turned to the integrated parts of the MIT website that Professors John Dower and Shigeru Miyagawa had prepared for viewing the woodblock prints. Dower's and Miyagawa's goal was to use the prints as a website to better understand: 1) Meiji Japan's attempts at "Throwing Off Asia;" 2) describing the conflicts between "Old China, New Japan;" and 3) Japan's "Taking on Russia" in the 1904-1905 War. The prints overall depicted chilling scenes of Japanese troop brutality toward Manchu and Chinese forces, not just Port Arthur. As optical illusions, these images gained academic traction in Europe and America as part of a Meiji domestic and international campaign to present Japan as the dominant culture and nation in Asia. The publishers directed their artisans to present Qing China in these prints as a politically and civilizationally backward empire doomed to failure. This "failure narrative" for China and "success story" for Japan became the dominant two themes for understanding East Asia globally throughout the twentieth century.

The "great reversal" occurring between Japan and China in the early twentieth-first century, whereby the 'rise of China' is replacing

'the 'rise of Japan,' lies in the background of the MIT controversy. To grasp the latter, we need new interpretations of the 1894-1895 War that will redress the Japanese and global propaganda that engulfed the world press in this "Social Darwinian" era of scrambling empires about the "rise of Japan" and the "fall of China." These views are still well-cemented in our out-of-date textbooks, which describe modern Sino-Japanese relations solely in light of the aftermath of the "First" Sino-Japanese War, and they informed the MIT protesters. One of the Japanese woodblocks, for instance, depicted the world press covering the war from the Japanese vantage point (see the two figures below, both on the battle at Songhwan, one a close-up).<sup>4</sup>

Chinese military defeats contributed to the transformation from success to failure of Chinese and Japanese official, elite, and popular perceptions of the Self-Strengthening reforms (1865-1898) under the Qing dynasty. New public opinions appeared in the Chinese and missionary press that shaped the emerging national identity and sense of crisis among Han Chinese who increasingly opposed the Manchu regime in power. Disappointment with the military losses convinced many Chinese that the late nineteenth century Foreign Affairs Movement had "failed", and that more radical political, educational and cultural changes were required to follow Japan's lead in modernizing and coping with foreign imperialism. Qing military defeats contributed to the transformation of official, elite and popular perceptions of the Self-Strengthening reforms. Euro-American missionaries and experts who aided in the Qing dynasty's scientific translation projects, which were used as textbooks in the arsenals and technical schools, now also thought that the Chinese nation, language and culture were doomed (see further at the end).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Elman, "Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China's Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, 2 (2003): 283-326.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), chapters 10-11.



Two images of Battle at Songhwan during Sino-Japanese war

When we first learned that MIT had taken down the website for the woodblocks, I told the students that I thought it was likely that



the Japanese right-wing was displeased that the MIT site had included woodblocks glorifying the violence of Japanese troops, which presented Japan in a negative light. Based on the images the class examined, we could see that the accusations that the Japanese, although incited, had perpetrated the "Port Arthur Massacre" by murdering some three thousand Chinese/Manchu innocents in winter 1895 were credible, particularly from the point of view of Europe and America, then groping toward an international agreement for prisoner's rights. The thrill of Japanese militarism was clearly the theme of these war representations, which were prepared by the inheritors of the arts underlying the traditional Edo period woodblock prints (see Hokusai, "Viewing Lake Suwai" below). The same artists who produced the war prints became patriots who also produced more subdued versions as cartoons for Japanese children.<sup>6</sup> My class noted that the "Port Arthur Massacre" during the "First" Sino-Japanese War deserved more attention, just as the "Nanjing Massacre" of 1937 has received so much attention since the "Second" Sino-Japanese War from 1931 to 1945.



Edo period style woodblock print "Viewing Lake Suwai"

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<sup>6</sup> Makito, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 29-31.



LONDON:  
 PUBLISHED AT THE OFFICE, 55, FLEET STREET,  
 AND SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.  
 1896.

#### Punch portrayal of Japanese easy victory over the Chinese

Subsequently, we learned that the critical reaction of the overseas Chinese student community at MIT toward the website had led to Professors Dower and Shigeru to take down the site voluntarily. To my mind, Professors Dower and Miyagawa had prepared the website to shed light on Japanese militarism and excessive patriotic exuberance, which arose after the unexpectedly easy victory of Japan (presented as "David" in "Punch") over China (presented as Goliath—see the figure above). While I could understand the deep emotions that the Chinese students felt when their people were presented in defeat by the Japanese military victors as animals, sub-humans, and primitives (see the figure below), the historical context that Professors Dower and Miyagawa enunciated to frame the Japanese depictions of violence and

excesses was for my class educational. They will never think about Sino-Japanese relations since 1895 in the same way again.



Portrayal of Chinese as sub-humans and primitives

Once the website was modified and back up at the end of the spring semester, the class used the controversy to debate the MIT presentation of the images that elicited the Chinese students' anger. Although we now realized how such horrifying images could be misused, none of us blamed Professors Dower and Miyagawa for maliciously placing the images on their website. Because of my personal history, I know that I often look at Auschwitz pictures from World War Two with similar anguish as the Chinese viewing the depictions at Port Arthur and later at Nanjing. Even if such feelings are justified, however, we should not blame the messengers as the legitimaters of the horrors of the past. Dower and Miyagawa did their best to present the horrors of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars by showing how what was dreadful for the victims was turned into patriotic sport by the victors. Fortunately, we have Akira Kurosawa's "Ran" and "Kagemusha" to tell us vividly via another medium of the horrors of war for the post-World War Two Japanese.

The MIT controversy was first reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on May 1, 2006. Although a number of us had already offered differing opinions on the controversy in the monitored precincts of H-Asia on-line, the *Chronicle's* reporting proved to be

one-sided and unnecessarily jingoist in favour of "American values." The assigned reporter's simple-minded conclusion in the May 19, 2006, issue that the "closed minds" of China had infiltrated the "open doors" of the United States only served to further disappoint the Chinese students who had voiced their misgivings about the MIT website.

The *Chronicle's* summary of the debate at MIT presented none of its pathos and never addressed the power of the images themselves. Why present it as "brainwashed" overseas Chinese students versus "open-minded" American universities? What a curious way this was to dismiss Chinese student protest in America by blaming the protesters for their failure to adopt American ways! Were they reincarnations of Mao's Red Guards? I wrote the *Chronicle* to remind its editors that expressing one's opinion, including on college campuses, was what the Constitution, the last I heard, permitted and encouraged. What was despicable about people who were horrified, rightly, by terrible images that the *Chronicle* never dared to publish, even when challenged to do so by follow-up letters to the editor. While I didn't agree with the minority of students who went out of bounds in their personal email attacks on Professors Dower and Miyagawa, I was more disappointed that the *Chronicle* could only charge that the Chinese in the United States were a danger to free speech. In the end, the matter ended reasonably, and the MIT website went back up with added warnings to all viewers. The *Chronicle* meanwhile was left vicariously defending free speech rhetorically.

Part of the problem is the role of wars in redirecting public opinion. We see this in the impact of the Vietnam War on the United States in the 1960s and 1970s and in the contemporary impact of the Iraqi War. Why was the "First" Sino-Japanese War so hot to handle in 2006 when the MIT site was first viewed by the Chinese students? I would suggest that we are in the midst of a sea change in the global perceptions of China and Japan during the twenty-first century, which is replacing a perennial perspective that had lasted since 1895 until today, namely that the Japanese are the dominant power, culture, and people in East Asia. The rise of China since the late 1990s has challenged the pre-eminence of Japan in Asia, a pre-eminence that certainly began in the aftermath of the

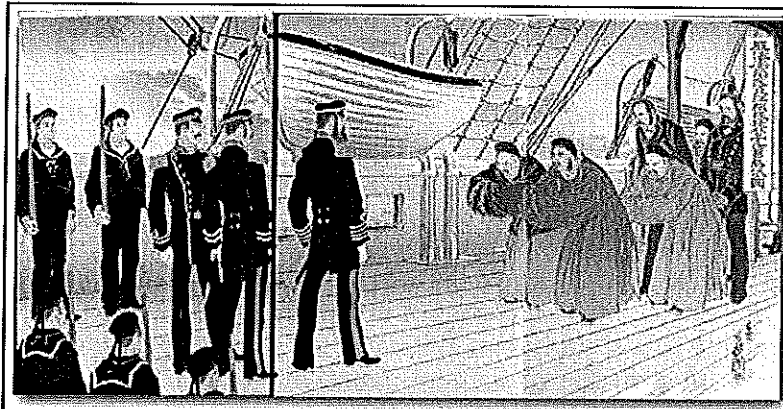
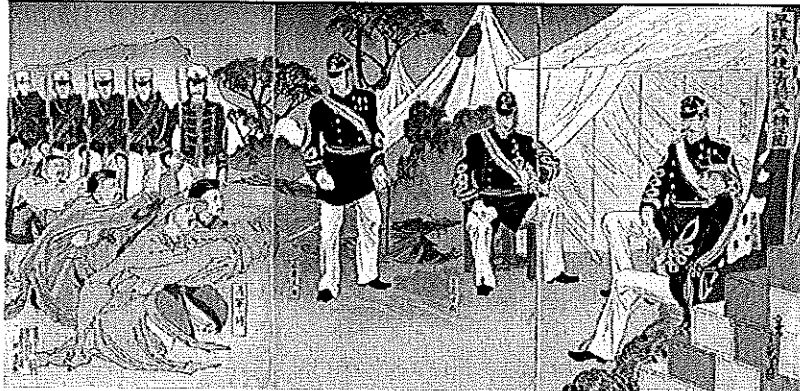
"First" Sino-Japanese War. The Chinese students at MIT mistakenly felt that the MIT website condoned the violence of Japanese imperialism in China. Unwittingly, they were also reacting to the symbolism of a modern, triumphant Japan, which had been constructed in Japan in 1895, but which had then been uncritically read into the pre-1895 period at least as far back as the Opium War (1839-1842). The American defeat of Japan in 1945 only temporarily changed such perceptions. By the 1960s and 70s, the image of a vibrant "Japan, Incorporated" had revived.<sup>7</sup>

### Warfare and the Refraction of Qing Reforms into Failure and Meiji Reforms into Success

The surrender of Qing forces to Japanese officers in the woodblock print below represents the first of a series of "optical illusions" that we must decipher and contextualize historically. When the Sino-Japanese War unexpectedly began on July 25, 1894, the foreign press in Shanghai generally predicted a Chinese victory even after reports of initial Chinese losses. At the time, the Qing modern navy (65 ships) ranked eighth in the world, compared to Japan's (32 modern ships), which ranked eleventh. China's navy was superior in armour plating, armaments, and tonnage. Some thought that China's two German built battleships were more powerful than the Maine and Texas, the United States Navy's largest warships. G. A. Ballard, Vice-Admiral in the British Royal Navy, believed the Beiyang fleet in the 1890s was in serviceable condition and ready for action. Some later comparisons of the Qing and Meiji naval fleets have suggested that China could have won the sea war.

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<sup>7</sup> All Chinese would accept, for example, that Japan was superior militarily to China from 1895 to 1945 and in economic power, as well as in science and technology, from 1945 until the end of the 20th century.



Chinese surrender to the Japanese

On land, however, the sixty battalions of the Chinese army in the north had serious organizational weaknesses. Only twenty thousand front-line troops faced Japan's fifty thousand man army. The logistical weaknesses of the Qing army contrasted sharply with the subjective depiction above by Japanese artists of the Manchu army's surrender to Europeanized Japanese officers at Pyongyang in northern Korea. Wearing immaculate black and white uniforms that mimicked German officers after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the Japanese officers remain standing or seated with no deferential bowing to their defeated enemies, who, dressed in traditional gowns and caps, revealed their backward,

Chinese/Manchu ways in their flowing gowns, traditional hats, and in their kneeling on the ground to submit. The Japanese, a bowing culture even today, are represented falsely as Europeans who towered over their Chinese and Manchu counterparts. The traditional Chinese depiction of the Japanese as "dwarf" pirates (*woko* 倭寇) since the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) was thrown back in their faces. The unsoiled uniforms of the Japanese officers make it appear that the victory had been effortless. The new Korea campaign added the rhetoric of a "Righteous War" to legitimate the earlier Hideyoshi invasions of 1592 and 1597.<sup>8</sup>

In 1894, China's navy was still divided into four units, namely the Beiyang, Nanyang, Fujian and Guangdong fleets. These four combined had about 65 large ships and 43 torpedo boats. The strongest, the Beiyang fleet, more or less equalled Japan's entire fleet. Chinese ships were equipped with more modern guns, but the navy lacked an adequate supply and transport system to take the offensive. The fleets took a defensive posture, which had contributed to defeat in the Sino-French War a decade earlier.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Editorials, *The North-China Herald*, July 27, 1894, 131, 152, and *The Japan Weekly Mail*, August 25, 1894, 227. Compare Makito, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 14-18. Foreign media accounts, which generally blamed Japan for the hostilities, are presented in S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power and Primacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 107-134, 138-140, 154-160, and 125, 141-144 which summarize the size of Chinese and Japanese sea and land forces in 1894. See also Marius Jansen, Samuel Chu, Shumpei Okamoto, and Bonnie Oh, "The Historiography of the Sino-Japanese War," *International History Review* 1, 2 (April 1979): 191-227, and Bruce Elleman, *Modern Chinese Warfare, 1795-1989* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 94-115. Japanese writers and painters also drew on Western Orientalist vocabulary and images of the Chinese and Japanese but inverted them to "Westernize" Japan and distance it from a "backwards" China. See Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Zhang Xia et al., *Qingmo Haijun Shiliao* (Beijing: Haiyang chuban she, 1982), 301-327, and John L. Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 163-169. Almost 14,000 men manned Japan's naval fleet of 32 warships and 23 torpedo boats. Ten ships were built in Britain, and two in France. The

These facts on the ground sharply contrast with the woodblock print by the Japanese artists, who depicted the surrender of the Chinese admiral in subjective and symbolic terms. Accompanied by his Western advisors, whom the Japanese apparently did not need on their side, the Qing admiral in the image below bowed to the ramrod straight-backed Japanese.<sup>10</sup>

The latter received the Qing concession with mixed pride and contempt. The only honour that accrued from the Japanese side to the Chinese Admiral Ding Ruchang (d. 1895; see small picture on the next page) was his subsequent suicide while under Japanese house arrest, thus placing him within the Japanese definition of war honour and taking responsibility for failure.

General opinion among foreigners in Shanghai and Tokyo initially favored Li Hongzhang's fleet over Japan's. Although Japanese newspapers, magazines, and *manga* fiction were marked by exhilaration at the prospect of war with China, some Japanese were not confident of victory. The publicist Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) warned against over-confidence, for instance, although he agreed with Japan's just cause in spreading independence and enlightenment to Chosŏn Korea. The Meiji emperor and the Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi (1849-1909) were reluctant to begin hostilities because—except for foreign minister Mutsu Munemitsu (1844-1897), the government feared the size and scale of the Qing navy, particularly the Northern Beiyang Fleet.<sup>11</sup> The emperor refused to send messengers to the imperial shrines at Ise or to his father's grave to announce the war until the news of the initial Japanese victories was communicated to him. Japanese Diet members were also surprised at the easy victory.<sup>12</sup> Another British

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*Yoshino* from Britain's Armstrong's shipyard was arguably the fastest vessel of its time when it was timed at twenty-three knots in 1893 trials.

<sup>10</sup> Actually, Western expertise at Yokosuka had been mandatory. See Takehiko Hashimoto, "Introducing a French Technological System: The Origin and Early History of the Yokosuka Dockyard," *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* 16 (1999): 53-72. Many of the Yokosuka experts first trained at the Fuzhou Shipyard.

<sup>11</sup> Makito, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Editorial, *The Japan Weekly Mail*, August 4, 1894, 130-131. See also Shumpei Okamoto, "Background of the Sino-Japanese War; 1894-95," in



observer noted that Chinese crews engaged in the war were at half-strength, but salaries were paid for full crews.

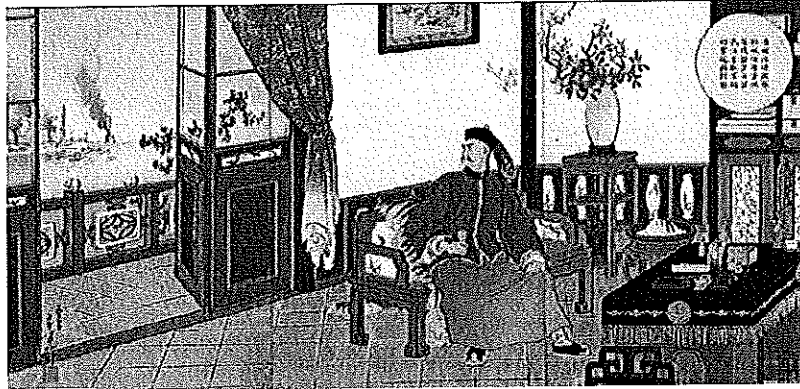


Image of Chinese naval Admiral Ding Ruchang

The greatest contrast lay in the fact that Japan's navy was unified. In the end Li Hongzhang's Beiyang navy fought the Japanese principally alone. Li had kept his fleet out of the Fuzhou battle at Mawei with France in 1884, and the southern Nanyang officers now got their revenge on the Northern Fleet by keeping their fleet out of war with Japan for the most part. It is highly unlikely the Meiji government would have initiated hostilities, or even a surprise attack, had they expected the Fuzhou fleet to eventually join the fray.<sup>13</sup>

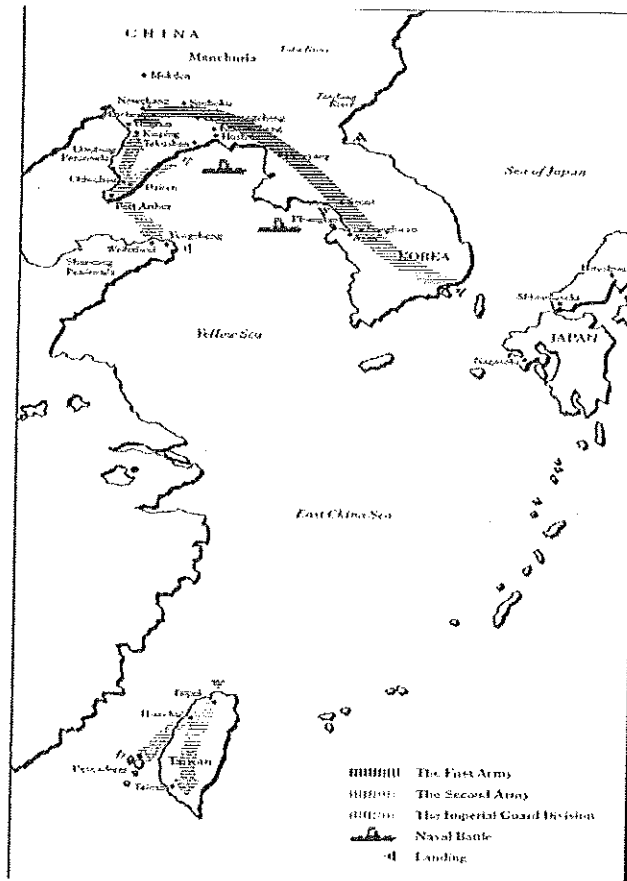
With the political and economic opening of Korea as the key dispute, hostilities commenced when the first encounter between Chinese and Japanese ships occurred on July 25<sup>th</sup> at Fengdao. China's two warships proved no match against an unprovoked attack. The Chinese naively honoured what they thought were the

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*Impressions of the Front: Woodcuts of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894-95* (Philadelphia: Museum of Art, 1983), 13. On Japanese media before the war, see also Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 134-140. Japanese newspaper reports claimed that Japan had defeated China despite China's initial military superiority.

<sup>13</sup> Elman, *On Their Own Terms*, 377-379.

required rules of protocol in warfare, expecting the Japanese to declare war before initiating hostilities. After Fengdao, the Qing Northern Fleet tried to defend the Chinese coast from Weihaiwei and Port Arthur to the mouth of Yalu River and finally declared war on Japan on August first (see map below).<sup>14</sup>



Map of the First Sino-Japanese war in 1894-95

<sup>14</sup> Editorial, *The Japan Weekly Mail*, August 4, 1894, 132, explains the importance of the naval war. See also Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 132-135 and 158-163.

Subsequently, the Japanese naval raid at Weihaiwei stunned the Qing court, while Li Hongzhang stalled and made excuses. Weihaiwei and Port Arthur controlled the entrance to Bohai Bay and the sea approaches to Beijing. The main Beiyang fleet gathered at the mouth of the Yalu where a major naval battle with Japan commenced on September 17<sup>th</sup>. It was the first great naval battle employing fully steam-powered and ironclad fleets.<sup>15</sup> Technology alone was not the key determinant. Japan, for example, could not match China's two major battleships. Japan proved to be superior in naval leadership, ship manoeuvrability, and the availability of explosive shells. With hindsight, assuming that Qing and Meiji strategic decisions remained the same, it was clear that the speed and rapidity of fire of Japan's more mobile ships were more important at Yalu than the weight of the Qing vessels and their superior armour.<sup>16</sup>

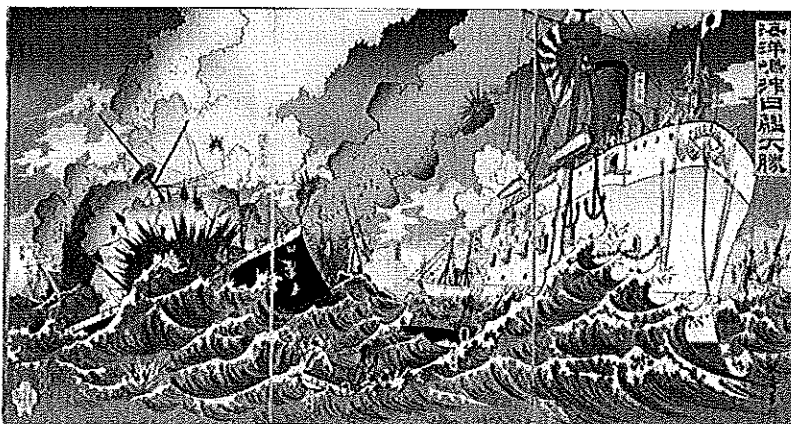
Shore engagements continued after the battle at the Yalu as the Japanese took advantage of their unexpectedly decisive victory at sea to launch a land war, which allowed the Japanese First Army to occupy Pyongyang and then cross the Yalu to enter Qing territory at the Manchurian border. In addition, Japanese cryptographers had since June 1894 decoded Li Hongzhang's

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<sup>15</sup> Some accounts claim the Chinese Northern fleet had fourteen warships led by two ironclad ships. Others claim the Chinese had only ten vessels. *The Japan Weekly Mail* claimed eleven Japanese ships faced twenty Chinese. See Okamoto, "Background of the Sino-Japanese War," 13 and Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 178-192, 197-198. Each side had twelve ships in the clash. China had the advantage in armor and weight in a single salvo, while Japan had a decided advantage in speed of ships and total amount of metal thrown in a sustained exchange of salvos. Japan had more quick-firing guns that could fire three times more weight in shells.

<sup>16</sup> Rawlinson, *China's Struggle*, 169-174, 201. From smaller guns, Chinese fired 482 shots and registered 58 hits, 22 on one ship. They also launched 5 torpedoes without hits. China scored about 10% of her tries. The Japanese, on the other hand, with their rapid-firers scored about 15% of their tries. In addition, the Qing was hampered by shortages of ammunition, especially for bigger guns. Some were filled with cement, e.g., the one that struck the Matsushima and the two that passed through the Saikyo. This suggests that there were serious corruption problems in Li Hongzhang's supply command.

military communications. The Japanese Second Army, formed in September 1894, landed on the Liaodong Peninsula and took Port Arthur. The poor command structure of the Beiyang Fleet and the lack of a court martial system made it impossible to place blame on any Qing officers or allocate reward properly.<sup>17</sup>



Japanese navy defeating Chinese Beiyang fleet

The Sino-Japanese War generated intense Japanese self-confidence after 1895. The Meiji Emperor, despite his initial qualms, returned in triumph to Tokyo on May 25, 1895. He had moved to Hiroshima in September 1894 along with the General Headquarters and Diet to be closer to the war front.<sup>18</sup> The Japanese navy was enhanced by the capture of twelve Chinese warships and seven torpedo boats

<sup>17</sup> Rawlinson, *China's Struggle*, 174-197, and Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 194-195, 206-222, 228-238. See also Yoda Yoshiie, "Jūkyūseiki Kōhan ni Okeru Nisshin Ryōgoku no Shokusan Seisaku ni Tsuite," *Shakai Kagaku Tōkyū* 12, 3 (March 1967): 1-38. See also Louise Virgin, "Japan at the Dawn of the Modern Age," in *Japan at the Dawn of the Modern Age: Woodblock Prints from the Meiji Era, 1868-1912*, compiled by Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2001), 66-72, 86. The Qing personnel system was unpredictable and far from impartial. Many Chinese captains and officers simply committed suicide. No one dared to question the command structure or demand a board of review independent of the navy.

<sup>18</sup> Makito, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 114-115.

during hostilities, which added significant tonnage to the Meiji fleet. Torpedoes, invented in 1866, were the most advanced weapons of the day. Japan used them for first time in the war to great effect. Moreover, Japanese industrialization accelerated after the Qing dynasty was forced to pay a considerable indemnity to the Meiji regime, with the London branch of the Yokohama Specie Bank acting as the repository.<sup>19</sup> The Japanese government used the indemnity as a windfall to bankroll a massive rearmament program to address the Russian expansion on the borders of northeast China. Korea and Taiwan were ceded to Japan and became colonies. Rather than the indemnity, the Japanese artists chose instead to emphasize the size and scale of their navy for their victory in 1895, rather than admit to the windfall profits in money and captured ships gained from the war (see image above of the victorious Yoshino battleship).<sup>20</sup>

The indemnity also meant that the Qing's huge payments to Japan could not be used to augment the dynasty's reconstruction projects. The Shanghai Arsenal and Fuzhou Shipyard in particular never recovered from the indemnities. If the Qing government was unable to integrate development so that innovative institutions reinforced each other before this, the added weight of Japanese and European imperialism after 1895 tipped the scales. The Qing reforms initiated in 1865 had even less chances of success under such political conditions.<sup>21</sup>

As shown below, the Japanese woodblock version of the treaty signing ceremony in 1895 depicts Itō Hirobumi and Admiral Mutsu standing tall as European-style generalissimos who dressed and looked like their European counterparts, replete with medals and honours bestowed on them for their political and military contributions. The Chinese ministers, Li Hongzhang and He Dikei, are shown seated in traditional robes and primitive feathers in their caps. They appear not to understand what is taking place at the

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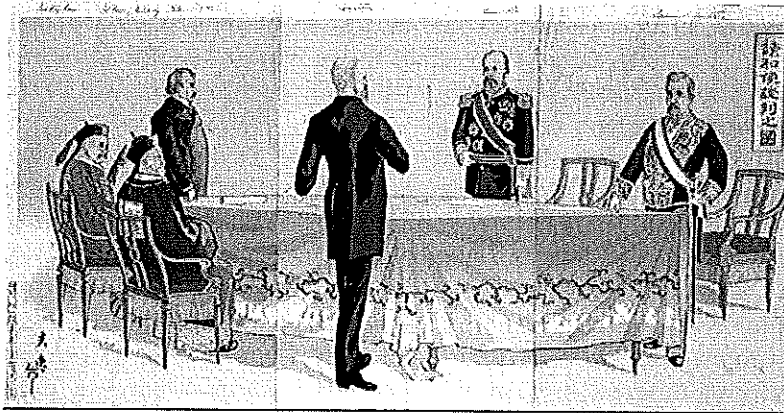
<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>20</sup> The 200 million Kuping Taels handed over to Japan amounted to about 7.45 million kg of silver, which was equal to over US \$3.8 billion at current prices, or two to three times the Japanese government's annual revenues. The Japanese press initially downplayed Japan's military superiority.

<sup>21</sup> Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 265-266, 326-327.

proceedings, in which they are represented by two American diplomats (one of whom, John Foster, 1836-1917), was the grandfather of John Foster-Dulles, who played a diplomatic role after the Korean War ended in the early 1950s). The Americans stand to the sides of their Chinese bosses and fully represent them in the negotiations. In effect, the Japanese at the peace conference are dealing with the like-minded Westerners and not the out-of-touch Qing delegates.<sup>22</sup>

### The Treaty of Shimonoseki

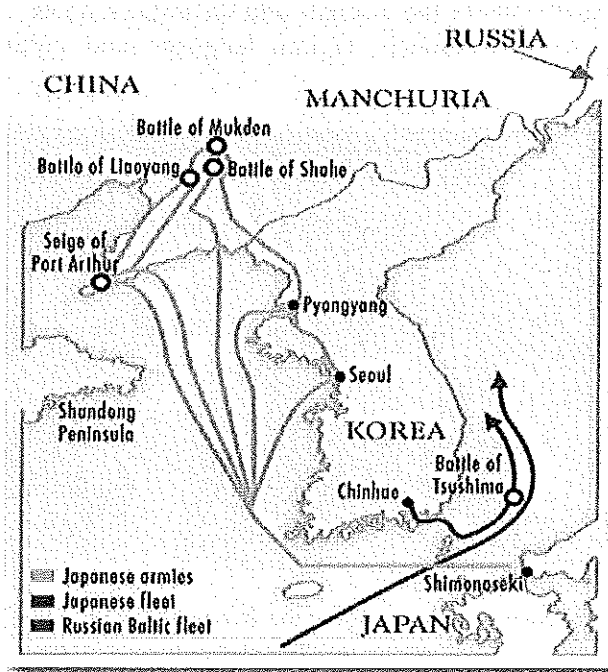


The signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki

For the Japanese public, the victory developed into the key event that energized the newly emergent Meiji press, and drowned out editorial debate over Japan's military role in Korea. Public rage and the Meiji emperor's personal anguish were also directed at the European powers for intervening on the side of China after the treaty was signed. When Russia later forced the Qing to lease the Liaodong Peninsula and Port Arthur to them, the Japanese were

<sup>22</sup> Okamoto, "Background of the Sino-Japanese War," 16, and Virgin, "Japan at the Dawn of the Modern Age," 112. See also Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War, 192-195, 247-293, 306-309*. On Russian military developments, see J. N. Westwood, *Russia Against Japan, 1904-05: A New Look at the Russo-Japanese War* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986).

primed for war with Moscow over the fate of Manchuria. Public enthusiasm for military adventures became a common feature when the dissemination of the national news became a central feature of the Japanese press after 1895. There were by then 600 thousand newspaper subscribers in Tokyo and Osaka alone. The Japanese victory over China reverberated throughout the country and demonstrated the pre-eminence of Meiji Japan in East Asia.

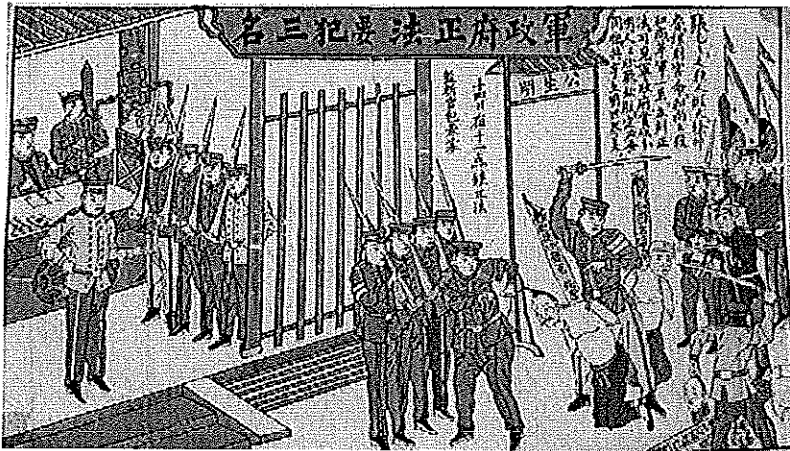


Map of Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 Russo-Japanese war

The Japanese naval victory over Russia in 1904-1905 cemented such national exuberance (see map above).<sup>23</sup> Subsequently in 1911, the

<sup>23</sup> James Huffman, "Commercialization and Changing World of the Mid-Meiji Press," and Giles Richter, "Entrepreneurship and Culture The Hakubunkai Publishing Empire in Meiji Japan," both in Helen Hardacre

Nationalist revolutionaries who overthrew the Qing dynasty in 1911 depicted themselves in native Chinese woodblocks (see image below) as Meiji-style patriots who dressed in modern uniforms and executed those who remained loyal to the Manchu regime, particularly those criminal elements who still shaved their heads and wore their braided queue to signal submission to their Manchu overlords. Euro-American missionaries and experts who had aided in the Qing dynasty's scientific translation projects, which were used as textbooks in the arsenals and technical schools, now also thought that the Chinese nation, language and culture were doomed.<sup>24</sup>



Cutting off Queues and Heads by the ROC forces (Princeton Firestone Library).

and Adam Kern, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Meiji Japan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 574-579 and 591.

<sup>24</sup> See Hans van de Ven, "War in the Making of Modern China," *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (1996): 737-756. See also Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War*, 64-66, 333-366, who explains China's failure to industrialize in light of cultural issues and Elleman, *Modern Chinese Warfare*, 102, who continues to stress China's scientific and technological inability to support a modern navy.



### Reconsidering the Woodblock Prints as "Optical Illusions"

In their depictions of the Sino-Japanese War, Japanese woodblock artisans depicted Japan's military victory as a decisive cultural victory. Japan had left the backward Chinese, Manchus, and Koreans behind, or so it appeared at the time, and had become an important player among the global powers in Europe, notably, Germany, Great Britain, France, and Russia. Thus the woodblocks that so upset the Chinese graduate students were not only offensive for their military violence. They were also offensive for their symbolic and cultural violence. They represented a modern Japan that had superseded China in the East Asian world.<sup>25</sup>

We see a similar cultural meaning in depictions of the Sino-Japanese War when we look at one of the recent images that Mark Tansey painted. His 1984 "Triumph of the New York School," in

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<sup>25</sup> Allen Fung, "Testing the Self-Strengthening: The Chinese Army in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, 4, Special Issue: War in Modern China (October 1996): 1007-1031. Richard Smith, "Foreign Training and China's Self-Strengthening: The Case of Feng-huang-shan," *Modern Asian Studies* 10, 2 (1976): 195-223, stresses the late Qing failure to train a modern officer corps. Fung reconsiders the "witch-hunt for the inadequacies of the Qing army and navy" after 1895. Fung focuses on the defeat of the Qing army in the Sino-Japanese War because Japanese land victories gave them a clear path to march on Beijing. This threat to the capital forced the Qing court to seek an immediate settlement of the war. In contrast to accounts in China that still accuse Li Hongzhang of cowardice for his peace at any cost policy, Fung maintains that Qing armies were well-equipped during the early stage of the war with Japan and that the Chinese field commanders were not incompetent. He refutes earlier claims that Qing land defeats in the Sino-Japanese War were due to the failure of the Chinese ordinance industry. Fung concludes that the primary explanations for Qing losses in the land war are: (1) the better military training Japanese troops and officers received when compared to their Chinese counterparts; and (2) the fact that Qing troops were decisively outnumbered by the Japanese at the major battles because the Japanese navy controlled the seas and the Qing could not land troops. I would add that the Qing court and its regional leaders underestimated the dangers of relying on European aid in an age of imperialism.

particular, presents New York's artistic pre-eminence as an American military victory via superior World War Two technology (above ground tanks) over the backward and deleterious warfare style (horses and below ground trenches) that maimed and killed millions of Europeans during the First World War. In their WWII fatigues, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning represent the modest "awe-shucks" attitudes of the Americans accepting concessions of a furious Pablo Picasso and grim-faced Henri Matisse, who are forced to concede Paris' leadership in the art world to New York. Dressed in ridiculously pompous plumes and standing in the back, Salvador Dali seems oblivious to the entire event. Tansey's point--though tongue-in-cheek--is roughly the same as that of the Japanese woodblock printers of 1894-1895. The cultural victory of New York over Paris in 1945, like that of Meiji Japan's victory over Qing China in 1895, grew out of a military victory whereby the stronger and superior moderns violently and once and for all thrust aside their backward and conservative predecessors.

The construction of Qing backwardness was a by-product of the Japanese victory in 1895. Thereafter, Japanese accounts of pre-modern Chinese art, literature, culture, economy, and politics focused on the infirm backwardness and fatal corruptions in taste and decadent values that the Manchu Qing dynasty had exhibited in its demise. These views were so well articulated and widespread in the Meiji scholarly art world of Okakura Tenshin (1862-1913) and Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908) that not only naïve Europeans and Americans were influenced by this conceited, Japanese cultural juggernaut. Chinese reformers and revolutionaries also memorized the Japanese lexicon detailing the Meiji defeat of Qing China on the battlefield and its triumph over Chinese values and taste in world opinion. One can hardly imagine the self-loathing of the Chinese after 1895 without a Japanese guidebook to Chinese backwardness. Naitō Konan (1866-1934) and other Kyoto scholars invented the Song dynasty (960-1280) as an early modern dreamscape of an Asian "Camelot," replete with precocious reformers, early modern economists, and brilliant artists and poets. This view survives via Robert Hartwell and his disciples, only mildly challenged in Western sinology. It represents the triumph of the "Oriental" past over its present poverty, which Japanese

scholars were astute enough to translate into the first East Asian version of Orientalism vis-à-vis China.<sup>26</sup>

In fact, John Fryer (1839-1928), the Englishman who had tirelessly translated several score of works on science and technology into Chinese while labouring at the Jiangnan Arsenal's Translation Bureau, presumed that the Sino-Japanese War had proven that all efforts since 1865 to reform Qing China had failed. Fryer became a voice for China's doom:

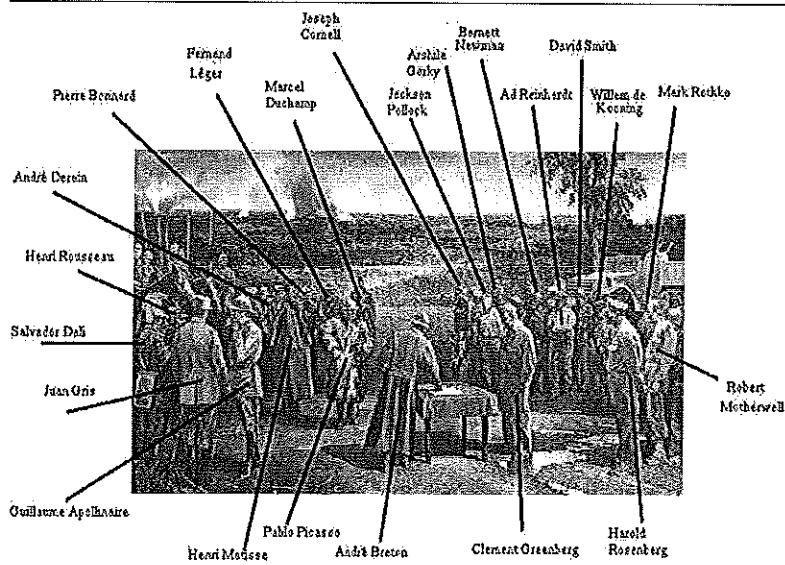
Of course this looks to the gradual decay of the Chinese language and literature, and with them the comparative uselessness of my many years of labour. Their doom seems to be inevitable, for only the fittest can survive. It may take many generations to accomplish, but sooner or later the end must come, and English be the learned language of the Empire.<sup>27</sup>

The triple evils of opium, stereotypical examination essays and footbinding symbolized this failure. In the 1890s, Qing radicals and revolutionaries increasingly adapted the "three evils" campaigns to discredit the Manchu regime. The Boxer Rebellion of 1900 confirmed the fears of many, such as the American missionary William Martin (1827-1916), who had translated Henry Wheaton's

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<sup>26</sup> Victoria Weston, *Japanese Painting and National Identity: Okakura Tenshin and His Circle* (Ann Arbor [MI]: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2004). Dieter Kuhn's *The Age of Confucian Rule: the Song Transformation of China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009) monumentalizes this Japanese narrative. See, however, Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*. The Japanese have been reinventing "China" for centuries.

<sup>27</sup> Ferdinand Dagenais, *John Fryer's Calendar: Correspondence, Publications, and Miscellaneous Papers with Excerpts and Commentary* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1999), Version 3, 1895: 4-6. On the eve of his departure to accept the Agassiz Professorship of Oriental Languages and Literature at Berkeley College, Fryer remained involved in China's affairs. He publicly announced a competition for new age novels in Chinese that would enhance the morals of China. A new literature written in "easy and clear language with meaningful implications and graceful style" attracted Chinese reformers who called for a new culture in China, premised on the failure of traditional Chinese civilization.



Mark Tansey, *The Triumph of the New York School*, 1984

influential *Elements of International Law* into Chinese. In the 1868 preface for his *Elements of Natural Philosophy and Chemistry*, Martin had hoped to rescue "the intellect of the Chinese" from the "barren field" of *belles lettres*. Now he sounded shriller: "Let this pagan empire be partitioned among Christian powers."<sup>28</sup>

What the MIT Visualizing Cultures Controversy in part represented was the Chinese students' rejection of the Meiji Japanese meta-narrative for the whole of East Asian history that began in 1895 and was then read into the past and future. The irony for Americans was that the contemporary agents of rejection of this very tired narrative were mainly PRC Chinese graduate students at MIT, Harvard, and other leading American universities where that Japanese master narrative had been reproduced uncritically for several generations by American professors.

The greater irony was for some of the Chinese students, however. The few who had spitefully attacked Professors Dower and Miyagawa for preparing the website presenting Japan as the dominant power in Asia failed to realize that the underlying Meiji narrative of Japanese cultural superiority over Qing China that they were attacking was accepted by both the Nationalists (Guomindang) and the Communists (Gongchandang) throughout the twentieth century. China's "failure" was a common presupposition in their all-out ideological war on Chinese traditional culture and civilization in the 1915-1919 New Culture Movement and during the 1966-1976 Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The cultural violence that grew out of the "First" Sino-Japanese War thus served both Meiji Japan and modern Chinese political parties--the Guomindang and the Chinese Communists--in their efforts to fashion a new China that would one day catch up with and surpass Japan. Using an old art form, Japanese printmakers created the Meiji woodblock prints to herald a new era after 1895.

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<sup>28</sup> William Martin, *The Awakening of China* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), 177. See also Patrick Hanan, "The Missionary Novels of Nineteenth-Century China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 60, 2 (December 2000): 440-441, and Anonymous, "The New Novel Before the New Novel," in Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu, eds., *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan* (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Asia Center - Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2003), 317-340.

That art form now conveys an age of Japanese dominance in East Asia and the Pacific that is rapidly passing from view in the 2010s. The deeper analysis of the MIT controversy thus leads us away from the Meiji woodblocks to the Chinese students instead. They spoke for a twenty-first century in East Asia in which Japan's superiority over China in world opinion would be decisively cut down to size.

Professor Dower, Miyagawa, and I were able to look back on these events more sanguinely at the opening address I presented for the Edwin O. Reischauer Memorial Lectures at the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University, on April 13, 2011, which focused on "Undoing/Redoing Modern Sino-Japanese Cultural and Intellectual History." It was very moving to listen to Professor Dower as he explained his anguish over the controversy. Looking back on the controversy now with over six years of hindsight, we can ask ourselves what critical perspectives we can develop to explain what happened in spring 2006, and why the controversy was handled reasonably well at MIT but discussed so poorly at the *Chronicle*. One thing is clear already: the medium of the global web and all of its avatars is an unpredictably empowering technology. It can enhance educational efforts, such as the ongoing MIT website to understand the transition from early modern to contemporary East Asia. It can also lead to manipulation and misrepresentation when not carefully planned and orchestrated. The pain that Professors Dower and Miyagawa endured was undeserved, but they persevered with the site, thereby improving its reception and expanding its educational forum globally.

In the end, the spring 2006 events surrounding the MIT East Asia website are a cautionary lesson in changing times: past events are not only viewed differently in the newer "presents" that we look back from, what art historians call "parallax"; they also take on new meanings when our "present" view of the "past" becomes outdated and no longer has a "future." East Asia will never be the same again in the twenty-first century. That is as true for us now as it was for Chinese, Manchus, and Japanese in 1895. The "rise of China," along with the "rise of India," may well be the new bookends for a historical myth of the twenty-first century around

which we organize our scholarly findings for another generation. The "rise of Japan" versus the "fall of China," however, is over as a historiographical fashion show.

