

Asia's Hope and Pacific Peril: Emergence of Japan as a Military Threat in the American Press at the End of the 19th Century

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Writing under the pen name "Ex-Attache",¹ the retired British diplomat Frederick Cunliffe-Owen (1855–1926), who had settled in the United States, reminisced how (kaiser) Wilhelm II of Germany had in 1895 presented to (tsar) Nicholas II of Russia a lithograph² representing "Western civilization personified by Europe and the United States menaced by a dreadful Eastern specter formed by a fusion of China, Japan, and the other yellow races of Asia." At the time, Cunliffe-Owen continued, there had been "a disposition to scoff at his expense and to ascribe the fears expressed in his drawing to a disordered mind."³ In contrast, when Cunliffe-Owen was writing in 1899, this "yellow peril"⁴ was apparently realistic enough to feature as a serious topic in an American newspaper.

The present article examines this rise of the idea of Japan as a military threat, as well as the images of Japanese armed forces, in the United States press at the end of the nineteenth century. The sources mainly comprise of the established east coast newspapers and magazines, *The New York Times* (NYT), *North American Review* (NAR), and *The Atlantic Monthly* (AM). The critical juncture was the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Before the war, the prevailing image of Japan in the United States was one of an enlightened and progressive nation. The war seemed to only confirm this image.⁵ The press coverage of the war events affirmed that Japan was a civilized nation also in warfare, and that Japan was a sovereign state with a modernized army and navy capable of protecting this sovereignty.

However, after the war the admiring imagery of Japan was partly supplanted with more sinister "yellow perillist" images. Factions in both Japan and the United States were imbued with doctrines of nationalism and imperialism, and the two nations emerged as rivalling first-class powers in the Pacific region. The growth of Japanese military power caused

¹ "F. Cunliffe-Owen, Writer, Dies Here," *The New York Times*, July 1, 1926.

² The lithograph, produced by painter Hermann Knackfuss, was titled "Völker Europas wahret eure heiligsten Güter" (Peoples of Europe, guard your most sacred possessions).

³ "Peril of Yellow Alliance," *The Washington Post*, August 20, 1899, 28.

⁴ Allegedly, also the phrase yellow peril was coined by Wilhelm II. Gregory Blue, "Gobineau on China: Race Theory, the 'Yellow Peril,' and the Critique of Modernity," *Journal of World History* 10, 1 (1999), 121.

⁵ Arthur Dudden, *The American Pacific: From the Old China Trade to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 143; Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 32; William Neumann, *America Encounters Japan: From Perry to MacArthur* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), 104.

concern in the United States, and resulted in views of Japan as a potential racial, commercial, political, and strategic threat.⁶ As the century drew to a close, Americans advocating the Hawaiian annexation to the United States, both in the islands and the U.S., began claiming that these threats were about to materialize sooner than was expected. They alleged that Japan was planning to seize Hawaii, either through a political or military coup, with the help of the large number of Japanese contract laborers settling in the islands. Then, the Japanese would use Hawaii as a stepping stone for reaching the United States. This short-lived panic in the American papers toned down after the United States annexed Hawaii in 1898, but the idea of Japan as a threat lingered on.⁷

Harbinger of Modern Civilization in Asia

Korea was the setting for the first Sino-Japanese War. The immediate pretext was the Donghak (or Tonghak, Eastern Learning) Rebellion, an armed peasant insurrection that was half religious and half political and spread through Korea in 1893 and again in 1894. However, the Japanese preoccupation with Korea vastly preceded the uprising. Almost as soon as the Meiji Restoration of 1868 had been completed, the Japanese foreign policy makers concurred that Korea was strategically and militarily of prime importance for Japan, and hence the neighboring kingdom took a central place in Japanese geopolitical thinking.⁸ In 1890, Prime Minister Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922) elaborated on the question. He stated that the way to secure a nation's sovereignty and security lay in the defense of, first, the nation's "line of sovereignty", and second, of its "line of interest" against any and all foreign threats. With this he meant that Japan had to be prepared to defend not only its homeland, but also areas that had a bearing on the homeland security. Korea was such an area. Not only did Korea belong to the Japanese line of interest, but if Korea was controlled by a hostile power, it would directly threaten Japan's line of sovereignty.

⁶ Joseph Henning, *Outposts of Civilization: Race, Religion, and the Formative Years of American-Japanese Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 138; Iriye, *Across the Pacific*, 73–74; Rotem Kowner, "'Lighter than Yellow, but not Enough': Western Discourse on the Japanese 'Race', 1854–1904," *The Historical Journal* 43, 1 (2000), 126; Daniel Metraux, "First Introduction," in *E. Warren Clark's Life and Adventure in Japan*, ed. Daniel Metraux et al. (San Jose: Writers Club Press, 2002), 15–16; Urs M. Zachmann, *China and Japan in the Late Meiji Period: China Policy and the Japanese Discourse on National Identity, 1895–1904* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 13.

⁷ Iriye, *Across the Pacific*, 78.

⁸ Edward Chen, "Japan's Decision to Annex Taiwan: A Study of Ito-Mutsu Diplomacy, 1894–95," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 37, 1 (1977), 62; Charles Schencking, *Making Waves: Politics, Propaganda, and the Emergence of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1868–1922* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), 79.

Geopolitically, the Korean Peninsula was a “dagger” pointing towards Japan. If Japan could not control Korea, the next best thing was to ensure that no other power did either.⁹

The main threats that seemed to compromise Korean independence were China and Russia. While the Chinese Qing Dynasty refused to relinquish its claim of ultimate sovereignty over Korea, its traditional vassal state, the Russians started constructing the Trans-Siberian Railway in 1891, which to the Japanese signaled only one thing: Russian expansion. The Japanese feared that Russia was out to invade parts of China first, then Korea, and finally perhaps even Japan. Because China had, in its own conflicts, proven to be no match for European powers, they could hardly be able to protect Korea against the Russian expansion. Thus, assuring the “independence” of Korea by blocking both Chinese and Russian attempts to wield control in the country became one of Japan’s main foreign policy objectives. Korea was to be stemmed away from the Chinese Confucian world order and brought into the world order inhabited by sovereign states and defined and regulated by international law. To this end, Korea needed to be strengthened and modernized.¹⁰

From the Chinese perspective, Japan’s contestation of the Qing dynasty’s right to predominance in Korea appeared equally threatening to China’s security and interests. In 1879, Japan had already annexed the Ryukyu Kingdom, which had been simultaneously a tributary state to China and a vassal state of the Japanese Satsuma domain. Careful not to lose any more of its traditional sphere of influence, the Chinese sought to frustrate the reforms Japan was advocating in Korea and to reassert its claim to supremacy. They also urged the Korean court to open and maintain diplomatic relations with the major European powers and the United States in order to prevent any other power besides China from wielding too much sway over the kingdom. In 1885, China and Japan made a mutual agreement that they would not meddle in Korea’s internal affairs. They also agreed to notify each other in advance if they were sending troops to Korea, and concurred that both countries had the right to station an equal number of troops to protect their interests in Korea. Thus, according to this agreement¹¹, when China sent its troops to Korea, at the request of the Joseon (or Chosŏn) dynasty, to assist in pacifying the Donghak Rebellion, the Japanese reciprocated by dispatching their troops. Japan saw an opportunity to settle the question of China’s stewardship over Korea once and for all, and took it. In July 1894,

⁹ Akira Iriye, *Japan and the Wider World: From the Mid-nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Longman, 1997), 11, 14.

¹⁰ John Benson and Takao Matsumura, *Japan, 1868-1945: From Isolation to Occupation* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2001), 59; Akira Iriye, *From Nationalism to Internationalism: US foreign Policy to 1914* (London: Routledge, 1965), 117–118; Iriye, *Japan*, 12; Daniel Kane, “Each of Us in His Own Way: Factors Behind Conflicting Accounts of the Massacre at Port Arthur,” *Journalism History* 31, 1 (2005), 24; Junnan Lai, “Sovereignty and ‘Civilization’: International Law and East Asia in the Nineteenth Century,” *Modern China* 40, 3 (2014), 297; Stewart Lone, *Japan’s First Modern War: Army and Society in the Conflict with China, 1894–95* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 24.

¹¹ Known as the Tientsin Convention, or alternatively as the Li-Itō Protocol after the signatories Li Hongzhang (1823–1901) and Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909).

the Japanese seized the Korean royal palace, and by the end of the month, China and Japan were practically at war.¹²

Among the first military actions between China and Japan was the controversial sinking of the British steamship *Kowshing*, which China had chartered for transporting troops to Korea. On July 25, the Japanese cruiser *Naniwa* stopped the *Kowshing* and ordered the captain Thomas Ryder Galsworthy to follow *Naniwa* to a Japanese naval base. After the Chinese officers prevented the captain from obeying the orders, *Naniwa* attacked and sank the ship.¹³ In a few days, the news of the incident started to trickle to *The New York Times*, first from British sources. On July 31, the *NYT* reported about a “barbaric butchery” and “fiendish brutality” of the Japanese in opening machine gun fire against, and then torpedoing, a ship flying the British flag and under circumstances in which a formal declaration of war was wanting. According to the report, after the *Kowshing* sank, the Japanese fired at the crew and Chinese troops struggling in the water, leaving only 41 survivors.¹⁴ *NYT* noted that the British newspapers emphatically denounced the “outrage” as an unnecessary bloodshed, and demanded compensation from the Japanese. However, some of the newspapers remarked that so far the news largely rested on Chinese authority, and one should wait for official statements before jumping into conclusions in the matter.¹⁵

On the next day, *NYT* informed that the Japanese government had issued an official statement repudiating the claim that the *Kowshing* was under the British flag or that the *Naniwa* crew had been “brutal in their treatment of the Chinese sailors struggling in the water.”¹⁶ The Japanese government offered an apology to Great Britain, but insisted on their statement that the Japanese were unaware that the vessel was British.¹⁷ The London sources, relying on their Chinese correspondents, discounted the Japanese statement and asserted that the Japanese attack had been unprovoked, unjust, and that the *Naniwa* crew had not rescued a single Chinese soldier who had jumped overboard. Quite the contrary, they had made “strenuous attempts” to destroy all witnesses.¹⁸ The Japanese authorities countered. Based on their interview of Captain Galsworthy and Chief Officer Tamplin of

¹² Kyung Moon Hwang, *A History of Korea* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 129–130; Kane, “Each of Us,” 24; Schencking, *Making Waves*, 80–81.

¹³ Douglas Howland, “Japan’s Civilized War: International Law as Diplomacy in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895),” *Journal of the History of International Law* 9, 2 (2007), 193–194; Douglas Howland, “The Sinking of the S. S. *Kowshing*: International Law, Diplomacy, and the Sino-Japanese War,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42, 4 (2008), 673, 680–681.

¹⁴ According to Douglas Howland, there had been approximately 1176 persons on board the *Kowshing*, of whom only around 205 survived. Howland, “Sinking,” 683.

¹⁵ “Sinking of the *Kow Shing*,” *The New York Times*, July 31, 1894, 5.

¹⁶ “Putting Blame on China,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 1894, 5.

¹⁷ “Japan Makes Apology,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 1894, 5.

¹⁸ “A Victory for the Chinese,” *The New York Times*, August 22, 1894, 5; “Japan Makes Apology,” 5; “Li Hung Chang in Command,” *The New York Times*, August 7, 1894, 5; “Violated the Laws of Peace,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 1894, 5; “What the London Papers Say,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 1894, 4.

the Kowshing, they stated that the Chinese crew had taken control over the ship, thus effectively making it a Chinese ship, and that it had been the Chinese themselves who had shot the men in the water.¹⁹ The Japanese Legation at Washington also stepped up, and shared with the *NYT* the official reports it had received from the government at Tokyo concerning the incident.²⁰ While the speculation on what actually happened on that July morning – and who was to blame – was ongoing in the pages of the *NYT*, Japan officially declared war on August 1, and the Chinese soon reciprocated.

In early August, the London correspondent of the *NYT* criticized the Japanese government for having done “little to remove the feeling” that the sinking of the Kowshing was “the most disgraceful and wanton piece of savagery of the century.”²¹ But in fact, as soon as the news of the Kowshing incident spread to Europe and the United States, the Japanese did set to work on controlling the damage done to their international reputation. The Japanese government issued official versions of the events and circulated them in their legations abroad, and the reports then made their way to publications such as the *NYT*. Soon, also prominent Japanese and British scholars of international law came to Japan’s defense, studied the key disputes of the case, and absolved the Japanese from all blame with their findings.²²

One of these scholars was Thomas E. Holland (1835–1926). Holland presented the viewpoint of international law in *The Times* of London, which was then quoted in the *NYT*. Supporting the Japanese side of the controversy, he argued that legally an actual state of war had existed even if not yet formally. The Kowshing was part of a hostile expedition, and since it refused to obey Japanese orders and Japan could not place a prize crew on board, it was perfectly justified for Japan to resort to force. Whether or not the Kowshing flew the British flag was wholly immaterial. The Japanese actions accorded with the international law, and there had been no violation of neutral rights, Holland concluded. Thus, Japan owed no apology or indemnity to Great Britain. Holland stayed silent on the question of the Japanese firing on the drowning men, and excused his silence by the lack of conclusive evidence and the irrelevance of the question as far as international law was concerned.²³ Indeed, the 1864 Geneva Convention, which stipulated that belligerents should provide assistance and medical care for the wounded and sick enemy combatants, did not extend to naval warfare.²⁴

¹⁹ The British *Daily Chronicle* and *Daily Telegraph* appeared to share these Japanese views. (“What the London Papers Say,” 4.)

²⁰ “Sinking of the Transport,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 1894, 5.

²¹ “Shining Specks on Mars,” *The New York Times*, August 5, 1894, 1.

²² Howland, “Japan’s Civilized War,” 190–191, 193–194; Howland, “Sinking,” 678–679, 682, 685.

²³ “Li Hung Chang in Command,” 5.

²⁴ Howland, “Japan’s Civilized War,” 194.

Following Holland's argumentation, one Japanese resident of the United States pointed out that "even if brutality was committed, Japan cannot be denounced for her barbarity," for it would be unfair "to condemn the Japanese in the case where international law does not condemn."²⁵ Holland exonerated the Japanese from the legal standpoint, but they still stood accused of barbarism, and the quote above did not even dispute the accusation. According to an article which was published in *The Naval & Military Record and Royal Dockyards Gazette*, and then quoted in the *NYT*, the Japanese could hardly be blamed for their conduct. Such acts as "to strike first and declare war afterward," and to summarily sink unarmed vessels, were lessons Japan had learned from "civilization," that is, from Europe.²⁶

Another question troubling the American spectators was: what were the grounds for the war, and were they legitimate? An article in the September 1894 issue of the *North American Review*, titled "China and Japan in Korea," delved into the question. The article presented the viewpoints of three authors: Augustine Heard Jr. (1827–1905), United States minister to Korea in 1890–1893; Durham White Stevens (1851–1908), honorary counsellor of the Japanese legation at Washington; and Howard Martin (1857–1926), former secretary of the United States legation at Beijing. Martin argued that the issue at hand in the war was the progress of "modern civilization in the 'Hermit Kingdom,'" meaning that Japan advocated governmental, social, and commercial reforms in Korea, and if successful in the war, Tokyo would press these reforms on Korea. The implication was that Japan was pursuing a civilizing mission: Europe and the U.S. had carried the torch of civilization to Japan, and now it was Japan's turn to pass it on around Asia. China, on the other hand, opposed reforms, and the success of China in the war would mean "the forcing back of the Koreans to Oriental sluggishness, superstition, ignorance, and anti-foreign sentiment and methods." For Martin, the war was a conflict between Japanese "modern civilization," upholding international law, and Chinese "barbarism," holding onto "its imperious ideas of vassal states."²⁷

Stevens was on the same lines. China and Japan, "two civilizations which once had much in common," had gradually grown apart. They espoused very different views on world order and foreign affairs, and consequently, were inevitably headed towards a struggle for supremacy. Stevens noted that Korea was "a natural bulwark" to Japan. Hence, the stability and independence of Korea was vital for Japan's safety and interests in the region. China persisted in the "manifest absurdity" of claiming sovereignty over Korea, even

²⁵ "Dainties for Soldier Japs," *The New York Times*, August 13, 1894, 5.

²⁶ "Violated the Laws of Peace," 5. Eventually, the British government officially concluded that Japan had acted according to international law and the matter was put to rest. Howland, "Sinking," 690.

²⁷ Augustine Heard, Durham W. Stevens, and Howard Martin, "China and Japan in Korea," *The North American Review* 159, 454 (1894), 316.

though it was clearly unable to protect the country. China was also unwilling to urge the Korean court to adopt such reforms as would be needed to prevent disturbances like the Donghak Rebellion from emerging. Korea in Chinese hands was a menace to Japan's security, Stevens concluded, and thus the Japanese had just grounds for rooting out such a threat.²⁸

Heard disagreed vehemently. The explicit object of his text was to put the readers on guard against the Japanese, who were clearly the American favorites. The Japanese were a progressive, ingenious, and courteous people, Heard admitted, but as far as Korea was concerned, their peaceful intentions were merely rhetorics. Plagued by internal unrest, wishing to divert the attention of quarreling politicians and divided people,²⁹ they had prepared for war. The Donghak movement was a pretext, perhaps even engineered by the Japanese. They forced China to make the first move in order to gain the sympathies of the world. They wanted to mask the fact that Japan was the real aggressor, resorting to force, not diplomatic persuasion in trying to protect its interests. Japan brought about this war with the aim to conquer Korea and subjugate the people, Heard opined.³⁰

Martin granted that the Japanese, if successful, would take all the territory they could, while Stevens disavowed the claim and reminded that Japan was waging war for Korea's independence and progress.³¹ In November, the Japanese minister at Washington, Kurino Shinichiro (1851–1937), responded by writing an article to the *NAR*. Kurino had studied law at Harvard College and worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, so he was not only conversant in the English language, but well-versed in the niceties of international law, foreign relations, Korean issues, and conceivably, in the prevailing attitudes and opinions of the Americans. The *NYT* noted that the appointment of Kurino was perhaps too timely and fitting not to have a connection to the Sino-Japanese War.³²

Kurino's expressed objective in writing the article was to appeal to "intelligent public opinion" and make the justness of Japanese cause clear and known to the Americans. Since the beginning of the war, Kurino observed, Japan had been accused of courting jingoism, of desiring territory, and of vain aspiration to become the leader of East Asia. None of these accusations hit the mark, Kurino maintained. Neither Japan nor China needed Korean territory; what they needed was a strong, independent, and friendly Korea.

²⁸ Heard et al., "China and Japan in Korea," 308–311, 313–315.

²⁹ In their private discussions Japanese statesmen, such as the Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu (1844–1897), had indeed contemplated on the idea of diverting the domestic attention from the unsettled political situation. The Japanese government was struggling with the recent political developments: elections, parliament, party politics, tug-of-war between the regional and central forces, and the growing demands of the army and navy. Subsequently, one of the aims of the war was indeed to unite the people behind the central government. Lone, *Japan's First*, 22, 24, 27.

³⁰ Heard et al., "China and Japan in Korea," 300, 304–308.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 310, 315, 320.

³² "Japan's Reasons for War," *The New York Times*, August 19, 1894, 5.

But China was weak, conservative, and stagnant. The Chinese refused to co-operate with Japan in reforming Korea; and instead, checked "every aspiration for improvement" and perpetuated "every ancient evil." The outcome of their policy would be that China would "surrender the poor victim, a sheep ready for the shearer, to the first comer strong enough to enforce his demands." Kurino emphasized that war had been the last recourse for Japan, but because of Chinese obstinacy, it had become unavoidable since Japan's national security was on the line.³³ Some less authoritative Japanese voices were also quoted in the *NYT*, presenting the same arguments on Japan standing on the side of modern civilization and fighting a morally and legally just war for Korea's independence and self-defense.³⁴

The discussion about the legitimacy of the war and the Kowshing incident gave a foretaste of the characteristics of American reporting on the war. First, there was the confusing and conflicting nature of the war reports. Whether the *NYT* reported about the casualties and damages of the war³⁵ or military engagements between China and Japan,³⁶ the facts and views were so widely contradictory that it was often impossible to fathom who was winning and who losing.

The *NYT* gathered news from a wide variety of sources: British newspapers with correspondents in, for example, Shanghai and Tianjin; news agencies such as Reuter and Central News; official reports from the Tokyo government and bulletins of the Japanese army commanders; private letters from American residents in East Asia; and interviews. Then there was the active – direct and indirect – Japanese participation in the discussion, especially by the Japanese legation at Washington, which was only accentuated by the silence of the Chinese voices in the media. The *NYT* remarked on the subject already in the early days of the war:

The contrast between the Western tendencies of the Japanese and the retrograde policy of China is particularly noticeable in the freedom with which the representatives of the first-named Government communicate all the news they receive, and discuss the progress of events, and the absolute non-communicativeness of the Chinese representatives.³⁷

³³ Shinichiro Kurino, "The Oriental War," *The North American Review* 159, 456 (1894), 529–534.

³⁴ "Dainties for Soldier Japs," 5.

³⁵ See e.g. "Japanese Ship of War Sunk," *The New York Times*, August 5, 1894, 5.

³⁶ See e.g. "A Victory for the Chinese," 5; "Another Battle Reported," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1894, 5; "As a Japanese Tells It," *The New York Times*, November 27, 1894, 10; "Chinese Loss at Seikwan," *The New York Times*, August 9, 1894, 5; "Decisive Battle of the Yalu," *The New York Times*, September 21, 1894, 5; "The Battle at Song Hwan," *The New York Times*, August 19, 1894, 5; "Victories Claimed by China," *The New York Times*, August 30, 1894, 5.

³⁷ "Japanese Ship of War Sunk," 5.

Trying to steer public opinion in Europe and the United States was a conscious strategy opted by the Japanese. They wished to reassert their sovereignty and to prevent foreign intervention in the war.³⁸ To achieve these objectives, Japan could not afford to alienate the sympathy of European powers and the United States, and hence the Japanese put all their diplomatic resources into use.

Use of war propaganda, especially carefully drafted and officially sanctioned reports, did not escape notice in the foreign press. Citing *The Times*, the *NYT* wrote that the news from the seat of war were either rumors or – mainly Japanese – official statements, “framed to suit official purposes” and “systematically misleading.” Thus, it was concluded that majority of the war news were untrue and “the rest ridiculously exaggerated.” Similarly, the London correspondent of the *NYT* called the authorities at Beijing and Tokyo as “purveyors of mendacity,” who wrapped all war events in “an impenetrable cocoon of myth and fable.”³⁹ The Japanese, for their part, made their distrust for the Chinese reports publicly known, and in February next year, also the *NYT* credited the Japanese official reports as “absolutely correct” in their “general tenor.”⁴⁰

A second characteristic of the press coverage was the profuse use of the two catchwords of the day: civilization and international law, and the ensuing prominence of legal scholars in the discussion. Both the concept of civilization and international law had their roots deep in the European history and were effectively European constructions. As the Europeans sought to extend their view of world order and international community on peoples outside Europe, the Christian values underlying international law were replaced with the vague principle of civilization. The standard of civilization was fashioned as the entry ticket to the international community of sovereign states. Yet, no one provided a clear-cut definition of what this standard exactly was. Certain prerequisites were formulated, such as a working legal system, guarantee of certain rights to citizens and foreign residents, participation in foreign relations and diplomacy, and adherence to international law and agreements. Japan fulfilled all the conditions, but was not guaranteed an automatic entrance to the ‘family of civilized nations.’ The so-called unequal treaties, with the foreign control of tariffs and extraterritoriality, still impinged on Japanese sovereignty in early 1894. Thus, in practice, international law was a flexible, pragmatic system, and all issues – including

³⁸ Chen, “Japan’s Decision,” 67; Iriye, *Japan*, 18; Lone, *Japan’s First*, 30.

³⁹ “China Will Eventually Win,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1894, 28; “Shining Specks on Mars,” 1.

⁴⁰ “Japan’s Victorious Ships,” *The New York Times*, February 17, 1895, 20; “The Japanese Moving North,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1894, 5; “The War Fever in Japan,” *The New York Times*, August 28, 1894, 5.

Japan's admittance as a sovereign nation on par with the 'civilized nations' – were negotiated case-by-case.⁴¹

When the Sino-Japanese war began, Japan had just concluded the renegotiations of the unequal treaties with Britain. Next, it had to convince the other powers of Japan's standard of civilization as well. Consequently, Japan made the war a showcase of their civilization in two ways. First, they framed the war as a struggle between Japanese civilization and Chinese barbarism, or as Kurino phrased: "a struggle between the forces of modern civilization" and "conservatism."⁴² Eventually, this view was espoused also by some Americans and Europeans.⁴³ It has been argued that while the adoption of the civilization discourse in relation to the war was a publicity stunt, it also provided an ideological motivation and justification for the conflict, persuading the Japanese public to rally behind the war effort.⁴⁴

Secondly, the Japanese sought to demonstrate that they were no strangers to the idea of civilized warfare. War and power politics were an integral part of nineteenth century conceptions of international law. A civilized nation waged a civilized war, that is, adhered to international rules and regulations, such as the Saint Petersburg Declaration of 1868, renouncing the use of small explosive projectiles; The Paris Declaration Respecting Maritime Law of 1856, regulating the relations between neutrals and belligerents in the seas and amending prize law; and the First Geneva Convention of 1864, guaranteeing care to prisoners of war and formalizing the International Red Cross. Japan was a signatory to the last two agreements, and the war provided a ground for testing Japanese observance of international law. Moreover, they could also manipulate the international law to their advantage: study the codes and precedents, and then prove that their actions were, indeed, legal and thus civilized.⁴⁵

Legal advisors were assigned for the Japanese army and navy, and commanders instructed the troops on how to conduct a civilized warfare, and admonished them on tarnishing Japan's international reputation.⁴⁶ Japan's strategy seemed successful. The *NYT* reported that the Japanese troops were disciplined and characterized by "kindness, magnanimity, and generosity," while the course of the Chinese troops was marked by "rapine and

⁴¹ Howland, "Japan's Civilized War," 182–183, 185; Lai, "Sovereignty," 284–287; Rune Svarverud, *International Law as World Order in Late Imperial China: Translation, Reception and Discourse, 1847–1911* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 21–22, 46–47.

⁴² Kurino, "The Oriental War," 536. See also "Dainties for Soldier Japs," 5.

⁴³ David Scott, *China and the International System, 1840–1949: Power, Presence, and Perceptions in a Century of Humiliation* (Ithaca: SUNY Press, 2008), 122.

⁴⁴ Lone, *Japan's First*, 58.

⁴⁵ Howland, "Japan's Civilized War," 183–185, 189, 200; Kane, "Each of Us," 26; Lai, "Sovereignty," 294, 296–299.

⁴⁶ Howland, "Japan's Civilized War," 181, 187; Lone, *Japan's First*, 144–147; S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 210.

violence." The Chinese troops were reproached for "robbing the natives and committing horrible atrocities wherever they pass," having set a price on Japanese heads, and for firing upon Japanese Red Cross workers and patients.⁴⁷ The success proved short-lived, however. In late November 1894, first news of the fall of Port Arthur, today known by its Chinese name Lüshun, reached the *NYT*.⁴⁸ The Chinese fortress in the Liaodong Peninsula, one of the strongest and most modern of its day in Asia, surrendered to the Japanese in one day.⁴⁹ Within the next weeks, unsubstantiated rumors started to circulate in the American press of "frantic," "revengeful reprisals" the Japanese had committed upon the Chinese inhabitants of the city.⁵⁰

The events at Port Arthur were eye-witnessed by British and American war correspondents and military attachés accompanying Japanese troops.⁵¹ First of the American correspondents to take a stand on the rumor was James Creelman (1859–1915). Creelman's special dispatch was published in the *New York World* on December 12, and six days later, a longer and more detailed sensational report followed. He portrayed a massacre lasting for several days, during which the Japanese soldiers summarily and brutally murdered and mutilated a large part of the civilian population of the city – including women and children.⁵² The Japanese government hastened to counter the report. The Foreign Minister Mutsu instructed minister Kurino to denounce Creelman's version of events and present the official Japanese version, which the Japanese authorities have maintained since.⁵³ The *NYT* faithfully repeated the official explanation: majority of the civilians had quitted the town, and the remainders were armed and forced to attack the Japanese; Chinese soldiers were among the civilians under disguise; children and women were not killed; and the Japanese army temporarily lost its discipline as, on their entrance to the town, they saw "the fearfully mutilated bodies of the Japanese prisoners, some of whom had been burned alive and some crucified" and took revenge on the Chinese soldiers.⁵⁴ The same explanatory model was later utilized in debates on the event known

⁴⁷ "Corean Light on the Far East," *The New York Times*, October 27, 1894, 12; "Flying Before the Japanese," *The New York Times*, November 7, 1894, 12; "Japan Pressing the Fight," *The New York Times*, August 20, 1894, 5; "Japan's Victorious Ships," 20.

⁴⁸ "Capture of Port Arthur," *The New York Times*, November 26, 1894, 5; "Japan's Great Victory," *The New York Times*, December 9, 1894, 25.

⁴⁹ Kane, "Each of Us," 23; Lone, *Japan's First*, 154.

⁵⁰ "Victor not Implacable," *The New York Times*, December 9, 1894, 5.

⁵¹ Thomas Cowan of *The Times*; Frederick Villiers of the London *Standard* and *Black and White*; James Creelman of the *New York World*; A. B. (Amédée Baillot) de Guerville of *New York Herald* and *Leslie's Weekly*; Lieutenant Michael O'Brien; Captain Noel du Boulay; and Surgeon-Colonel W. Taylor. Kane, "Each of Us," 24; Henning, *Outposts*, 141; Lone, *Japan's First*, 155–156; Frederic Villiers, "The Truth About Port Arthur," *The North American Review* 160, 460 (1895), 326.

⁵² Kane, "Each of Us," 29; Henning, *Outposts*, 141; Lone, *Japan's First*, 156.

⁵³ Henning, *Outposts*, 141; Kane, "Each of Us," 29; Masahiro Yamamoto, *Rape of Nanking* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing 2000), 25. In addition, Foreign Minister Mutsu wrote an open letter to the *New York World*, in which he pleaded the American readers not to make hasty judgments and promised that the incident would be thoroughly investigated. Lone, *Japan's First*, 161.

⁵⁴ "Japan on its Behavior," *The New York Times*, December 18, 1894, 5.

as the Nanjing Massacre. In 1937, the Japanese troops occupied the city of Nanjing and committed a protracted series of atrocities. The Japanese press had been running stories about the cruelty of the Chinese soldiers for a long time. And when the news of the brutal conduct of the Japanese troops belatedly made it to the headlines, the blame for Japanese violence was shifted to the “aggressions” of the Chinese.⁵⁵

From the Japanese point of view, the incident occurred at a very inconvenient time. On November 22, during the first days of Japanese occupation of Port Arthur, Minister Kurino and American Secretary of State Walter Gresham (1832–1895) had signed a revised treaty and protocol, which abolished American consular jurisdiction in Japan. The *NYT* rejoiced that the treaty stood for a most complete recognition of Japan as a civilized power with a right to rule its own affairs.⁵⁶ When Creelman’s report came out, the treaty had been handed over to the Senate for ratification. A massacre of Chinese civilians hardly accorded with the rules and regulations of civilized warfare. It could signal to the Americans that Japan fell short of the required standard of civilization, and obstruct the ratification of the treaty.⁵⁷ One writer in the *NYT* suspected that the charges of the Japanese “relapse” into “barbarism” were trumped up precisely for this purpose. The writer speculated that the allegations either came from British sources or, more probably, from the American opponents of the treaty.⁵⁸

By the end of the month, the other American war correspondent, Amédée B. de Guerville (1869–1913), came to Japan’s defense, using largely the same arguments as the official Japanese version submitted by Mutsu and Kurino. He also conjectured that the accusation of Japan’s barbarism had something to do with the treaty ratification. He did not deny that the Japanese had committed excesses at Port Arthur, but he laid the blame for it on the Chinese, who mutilated prisoners of war, used explosive bullets, and discarded their uniforms. In other words, the Japanese may have sidestepped from the path of civilized warfare, but the Chinese had never even entered it. De Guerville concluded his article by stating that Japan had done nothing that could jeopardize its “right to enter the great family of civilized nations,” and that the war still remained a “battle of civilization against barbarism.”⁵⁹ At the break of the year 1895, the stance of the Japanese and de Guerville continued to be supported in the *NYT*.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Mark Eykholt, “Aggression, Victimization, and Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre,” in *The Nanjing Massacre in history and historiography*, ed. Joshua Fogel (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000), 11–12; Yamamoto, *Rape of Nanking*, 23, 27–28; Takashi Yoshida, *Making of the “Rape of Nanking”* (New York: Oxford University Press 2006), 12.

⁵⁶ “Japan Gets Tariff Autonomy,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 1894, 5.

⁵⁷ Lai, “Sovereignty,” 299; Lone, *Japan’s First*, 157.

⁵⁸ “Our New Treaty with Japan,” *The New York Times*, December 17, 1894, 5.

⁵⁹ “Japanese Accused Unjustly,” *The New York Times*, December 30, 1894, 9.

⁶⁰ See e.g. “Cruelty of the Chinese,” *The New York Times*, January 1, 1895, 5; “The Japanese Danger,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1895, 4.

In the *NAR* issue of March 1895, the British war artist and correspondent Frederic Villiers (1851–1922) made one more attempt to prove that the Port Arthur massacre took place on the scale and intensity described by Creelman. According to Villiers, the “plain truth” about the massacre was that it had been “a cold blooded butchery” of civilians lasting three days. Citizens had been killed at their doorsteps in the act of kowtowing. What made the event more startling, Villiers pointed out, was the previously immaculate discipline and humane conduct of the Japanese troops. Considering this track record, then, Villiers urged the Japanese government to own up, and apologize for, the “little outburst of barbarism” of its military forces. But Japan, still “young in the ways of civilization,” had unblushingly lied and denied that a massacre took place. In their “naughty childlike simplicity,” Villiers continued, the Japanese had managed to discredit even the eyewitness reports with the assistance of their well-organized press system.⁶¹ In the end, Port Arthur was declared as only a human aberration, not a sign of Japan’s lack of civilization. The U.S. Senate gave its advice and consent to ratification of the treaty, and even before the consent, articles in the *NYT* noted approvingly that “the report of cruelties committed by the Japanese Army at Port Arthur” had “weighed a feather” and made absolutely no impression upon the Senate.⁶² On February 15, the treaty was ratified by the President of the United States.

Menace in the Pacific

On March 21, 1895 ratifications for the new Treaty of Commerce and Navigation were exchanged at Washington. By that time, Japan had won a battle after battle in the war with China. The Chinese Beiyang fleet was in shambles, Japan had secured footholds in Manchuria, and Japanese forces kept Beijing under threat. China had few options but to send its peace negotiator Li Hongzhang to Japan. Japan, feeling confident in its military pressure and leverage, sat on the negotiation table.⁶³ For Foreign Minister Mutsu and Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi, equality with the so called civilized nations entailed not only the termination of unequal treaties, but making Japan a strong, colonial power. This was reflected in the conditions for peace. The problem for Mutsu and Itō was how to find a

⁶¹ Villiers, “The Truth,” 325–328. Afterwards, historical scholarship has largely confirmed that excesses took place at Port Arthur between November 21 and 25, and that women and children were among the incalculable victims. However, the claim that almost the whole civilian population of the city was wiped out, as Creelman initially suggested, is highly improbable. Kane, “Each of Us,” 24, 29; Lone, *Japan’s First*, 155–157.

⁶² “American Treaty with Japan,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 1894, 5; “Japan Treaty Ratified,” *The New York Times*, January 31, 1895, 2; “New Treaty with Japan,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 1895, 9.

⁶³ Chen, “Japan’s Decision,” 63–65, 69; Allen Fung, “Testing the Self-Strengthening: The Chinese Army in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895,” *Modern Asian Studies* 30, 4 (1996), 1007; Schencking, *Making Waves*, 82–83.

balance between extorting too much from China, which would undoubtedly lead to foreign intervention, and yet satisfying the clamors of the army, navy, and the Japanese public – all elated by the victory. Finally, China and Japan signed the peace treaty at Shimonoseki on April 17, 1895. The treaty contained the following terms: China had to acknowledge the independence of Korea; cession of Taiwan (Formosa), Penghu (Pescadores) islands, and Liaodong Peninsula; a huge indemnity; and a new commercial treaty granting extraterritorial privileges for Japan.⁶⁴ However, Japan had taken a risk in including the Liaodong Peninsula to the list of territories to be ceded, and in the end, the risk did not pay off. Immediately after the peace treaty was concluded, Russia, Germany, and France made a joint intervention “advising” Japan to give up its rights in Manchuria in exchange for an additional indemnity.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the war – in words of Benjamin Elman – became a culmination point for the perceived fall of China and rise of Japan. Or, it was the culmination of the story of Chinese failure at modernizing its society, army, and navy in contrast to Japanese success, and a significant contributor to the so called Chinese “century of humiliation.”⁶⁶ In his article for *The Atlantic Monthly*, author Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) described how the war had exposed the Chinese “impotence” beneath the “military scarecrow of Western manufacture which China had purchased at so great a cost,” and left China a hopeless wreck.⁶⁷ Japan, on the other hand, had “broken down the power of China, made a new Korea, enlarged her own territory, and changed the whole political face of the East.” All this, Hearn claimed, Japan had achieved “without losing a single ship or a single battle.”⁶⁸ The Japanese nation had regenerated itself through war and “obtained the recognition of her rights and of her place among nations.”⁶⁹ U.S. Secretary of the Navy, Hilary A. Herbert (1834–1919), remarked that Japan had “leaped, almost at one bound, to a place among the great nations of the earth.”⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Benson and Matsumura, *Japan*, 61; Chen, “Japan’s Decision,” 62, 64, 70–71; James Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 215.

⁶⁵ Iriye, *Japan*, 15; Iriye, *From Nationalism*, 119; Huffman, *Creating a Public*, 216; Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 248–249.

⁶⁶ Dudden, *American Pacific*, 116; Benjamin Elman, “Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China’s Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865–1895,” *Modern Asian Studies* 38, 2 (2004), 285; Benjamin Elman, “The ‘Rise’ of Japan and the ‘Fall’ of China after 1895,” in *The Chinese Chameleon Revisited: From the Jesuits to Zhang Yimou*, ed. Yangwen Zheng (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2013), 146–147; Scott, *China*, 2; Yangwen Zheng, “Hunan: Laboratory of reform and land of revolution: Hunanese in the making of modern China,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42, 6 (2008), 1123.

⁶⁷ Lafcadio Hearn, “China and the Western World,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 77, 462 (1896), 451.

⁶⁸ Lafcadio Hearn, “The Genius of Japanese Civilization,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 76, 456 (1895), 449.

⁶⁹ Lafcadio Hearn, “After the War,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 76, 457 (1895), 600; Hearn, “China,” 451.

⁷⁰ Hilary A. Herbert, “Military Lessons of the Chino-Japanese War,” *The North American Review* 160, 463 (1895), 685.

First and foremost, Japan had proved to be a military success. It had taken its “just place among the peoples of the world” largely because it had distinguished itself in war.⁷¹ This had been unexpected.⁷² Initial assessments had run in China’s favor. Article after article in the *NYT* confidently predicted that China would win by its sheer numbers. The war would be decided on land, and if prolonged, Japan stood no chance. China could “pour troops into Korea as a child would pour sand into a rathole—for amusement and as a pastime—without missing them” and “swarm the Japanese islands like locusts.”⁷³ Still after Japan had “won every battle by land and sea with an ease shameful to the beaten party,” it was thought that the information given on Japan’s strength was misleading or that Japan was overstretching its powers and time was on the Chinese side.⁷⁴

The early war months witnessed very discrepant reviews of the Japanese Army in the American press. The Japanese Army was noted for being organized along first the French, and then the German model, and drilled by European officers. The officers and their troops were thought to be well trained, but their numbers were small when compared to China. Some commentators doubted the orderliness of the troops, while some emphasized precisely their good discipline. There were also contrasting opinions about the endurance and hardiness of the Japanese soldiers. Overall estimate was that, if well commanded, the Japanese Army was only slightly inferior to, or on par with, European troops.⁷⁵ In comparison, the Chinese Army was also lauded as thoroughly drilled, but unlike the Japanese, the Chinese lacked understanding of the military strategies and tactics of modern warfare.⁷⁶ Later on, however, views of the Chinese Army grew dimmer. In the *NYT*, the Chinese troops were declared inept and corrupt, and after the supposedly impregnable Port Arthur fell, the military prowess of China was characterized as “paper men, dummy guns, depleted stores, unignitable powder, undermanned ships, and an utter

⁷¹ “Japan’s Victorious Ships,” 20.

⁷² Weipin Tsai, “The First Casualty: Truth, Lies and Commercial Opportunism in Chinese Newspapers during the First Sino-Japanese War,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, 1 (2014), 148.

⁷³ “Numbers Will Probably Win,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 1894, 5; “The Two Countries’ Chances,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 1894, 5; “Thinks China Must Win,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 1894, 5.

⁷⁴ “China Will Eventually Win,” 28; “The Japanese Danger,” 4. One of the few things foretelling good for Japan in these estimates was that, after the Korean government had signed an agreement on August 26, declaring support for Japanese military actions in maintaining Korean independence, the Japanese were believed to have the firm backing of the Koreans. “China and Japan,” 4; Huffman, *Creating a Public*, 207; “Japan’s Treaty with Korea,” *The New York Times*, September 12, 1894, 5.

⁷⁵ Heard et al., “China and Japan in Korea,” 317; “Military Reviews in Japan,” *The New York Times*, August 27, 1894, 3; “The Army of Modern Japan,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 1894, 5. The more pessimistic reviews accord with assessments made by historians insofar as the universal male conscription system of 1873, and the revised three-tier structure of active military service launched in 1883, were fraught with problems, such as discontentment and indiscipline, and also evading the draft was common. The Japanese forces were untried, undernourished, and the infantry was armed with outmoded single-shot rifles. Lone, *Japan’s First*, 17–18, 28–29.

⁷⁶ Heard et al., “China and Japan in Korea,” 318–319; “Japan’s Learned Soldiers,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 1895, 14.

absence of all discipline and authority."⁷⁷ Once the war was over, there no longer seemed to be any doubt of the faultlessness of the preparations and conduct of the Japanese Army and the inferiority of the Chinese Army in comparison.⁷⁸

As to the navy, the Chinese Beiyang fleet and Japanese fleet were believed to be quite equal in strength and resources. Both China and Japan had supplied themselves with modern, foreign-built battleships and cruisers, and both had been trained by European and American naval experts. But again in tactics, the Japanese were thought to outstrip the Chinese, and ultimately, this had decided the Japanese preponderance at sea.⁷⁹ The contemplation on the reasons for China's defeat has continued to the present day. In the "witch-hunt for the inadequacies of the Chinese army and navy," China has been criticized for its failure to industrialize, lack of financial resources, lack of military training, poor leadership, poor preparations, outmoded armaments, shortages of ammunition, being outnumbered in critical battles, and lack of a united, national fleet.⁸⁰

But the contemporaries emphasized patriotism and martial spirit as the qualities that tipped the scales in Japan's favor. They asserted that, throughout their history, the Japanese had been distinguished in war and statecraft. The Japanese were "full of that esprit so essential to the soldier," while the Chinese were not. The Japanese were patriotic; the Chinese were not. And the Japanese nation was united and backing the war with enthusiasm, while the Chinese were "incapable of being aroused and united on any issue of foreign politics."⁸¹ These assertions support Stewart Lone's claim that the stereotype of the Japanese Army and society as fantastically united, patriotic, and inclined to militarism, was established in the course of the Sino-Japanese War.⁸² Minister to the U.S. Kurino, however, was intent on downplaying the militaristic image of Japan. Japan's success may have had something to do with the "warlike spirit" of its people, but mainly with patient and systematic planning of the Japanese military organization as an adjunct to national welfare and progress. Besides, the Japanese traditionally noted for their military mindset and accomplishments – the samurai – no longer existed as a class, Kurino reminded, and historically, they had formed only a small portion of the whole population. Japan had

⁷⁷ "Corean Light on the Far East," 12; "Japan's Victorious Ships," 20.

⁷⁸ Herbert, "Military Lessons," 686–687.

⁷⁹ Heard et al., "China and Japan in Korea," 317; "Japan's Victorious Ships," 20; "The War in the East", *The New York Times*, August 1, 1894, 4. The Japanese fleet totaled 32 warships and 23 torpedo boats, built in Britain and France, and manned by 13,928 men. The ships were mainly fast, small protected cruisers. The Chinese navy was divided into the Beiyang, Nanyang, Fujian, and Guangdong fleets. The strongest of them, the Beiyang fleet, alone was roughly the size and strength of Japan's national fleet. Elman, "Naval Warfare," 295, 318–319; Lone, *Japan's First*, 29.

⁸⁰ Elman, "Naval Warfare," 283, 319–320; Fung, "Testing," 1008, 1010, 1015–1016, 1022, 1026.

⁸¹ "China and Japan," *The New York Times*, August 23, 1894, 4; Heard et al., "China and Japan in Korea," 317; Hearn, "After the War," 600; Hearn, "Genius," 449, 457; "The Japanese Danger," 4.

⁸² Lone, *Japan's First*, 7–8, 69.

attracted the world's attention with its triumphs in war, but its real objective was to secure triumphs in peace, Kurino maintained.⁸³

Nevertheless, the end of the Sino-Japanese War inaugurated a decade of further military – especially naval – build-up in Japan. One factor in this was the humiliation of the Triple Intervention.⁸⁴ Russia, Germany, and France had deeply wounded the Japanese national pride, Lafcadio Hearn explained, and thus the Japanese Army, Navy, and public together clamored for revenge against the powers that snatched away their justly earned spoils of war. But the Japanese government knew that the national navy was yet no match against European navies, let alone a combination of three of them. Realizing that another costly war would be disastrous, the statesmen held the nation back. Instead, they decided to abide their time until they would be strong enough to attack, Hearn thought.⁸⁵ Also for the naval architect Charles H. Cramp (1828–1913), it was plain that the Japanese naval preparation was geared towards ensuring that next time Japan would be strong enough to defy any outside interference.⁸⁶

In a series of articles published in the *NAR*, Cramp, together with other members of the American naval circles, urged their compatriots to watch the Japanese naval program very closely. Ships representing the “very latest and highest types of naval architecture in every respect of force, economy and efficiency” were constructed in British shipyards, and the strength of the Japanese Navy was growing in leaps and bounds. Cramp, Hilary A. Herbert, and Commodore George Wallace Melville (1841–1912) from the U.S. Navy warned that the Americans were falling behind Japan in the race for a strong and modern fleet; the American modern war-tonnage equaling to only “about 28 per cent that of Japan.” All three authors pointed to Japan's prominence in the Pacific region. If the Americans were to maintain their proper status as a Pacific power, let alone defend themselves against Japan or any other potential menace, the United States could not afford to lose the naval race.⁸⁷

The American Army, too, demanded their share of military expenditures on account of Japan's military strengthening. Japan, it was remarked in the *NYT*, was passing a transitional stage of complete reorganization of its land forces. The Japanese were casting aside all outdated arrangements, and had hugely increased their expenditures in order to

⁸³ Shinichiro Kurino, “The Future of Japan,” *The North American Review* 160, 462 (1895), 622; Kurino, “The Oriental War,” 532–533.

⁸⁴ Huffman, *Creating a Public*, 216–217; Lone, *Japan's First*, 45; Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 290.

⁸⁵ Hearn, “After the War,” 601–602.

⁸⁶ Charles H. Cramp, “The Coming Sea-Power,” *The North American Review* 165, 491 (1897), 448–449.

⁸⁷ Cramp, “The Coming Sea-Power,” 444, 446–449; Herbert, “Military Lessons,” 688, 696, 698; George W. Melville, “Our Future on the Pacific: What We Have There to Hold and Win,” *The North American Review* 166, 496 (1898), 287, 291.

create a fighting force ready to take on any opponent by 1902.⁸⁸ George B. Duncan (1861–1950), a military officer in the U.S. Army, argued in the *NAR* that the Americans needed to keep up with the progress of transportation and science of warfare. They had to secure the latest and best armaments and equipment, and train their troops efficiently, because beyond the Atlantic were the armed camps of Europe, and beyond the Pacific Ocean, Japan had ascended to a first-class military and naval power. And Japan, Duncan claimed, was “ready to measure her strength with ours whenever occasion in conflicting interest presents itself.”⁸⁹

The American army and navy circles were more probably promoting their own interests, such as larger budgets, than genuinely alarmed of Japan’s growing strength and presence in the Pacific region. But still, Lafcadio Hearn noted, the spectacle of power Japan had exhibited in the Sino-Japanese War had startled the world “like the discovery of a danger.” It seemed evident that Japan could invade and subjugate the neighboring China with ease. Quoting the London newspaper, *St. James Gazette*, Hearn described how the Japanese would then civilize the Chinese people, drill the Chinese Army and Navy, arm them with the latest European weapons, and thus create an imposing military force. “If such a power chose to start on a career of conquest, what could resist? Nothing at present in Asia, not even Russia, could stand against it, and it might knock at the door of Europe,” Hearn continued the quote. In the end, this “Japanned China” could assert the “supremacy of the yellow race” and rule the earth. Hearn thought that while the vision was indeed possible in theory, it was unrealistic in the sense that no European power would allow such an alliance to take form in the first place.⁹⁰

Hearn did envision a coming struggle between the “white” and “yellow” races, but more on the line with Charles H. Pearson’s (1830–1894) volume *National Life and Character* (1893). It would not be a military struggle, but a commercial and industrial contest, which would in the end lead to the demise of Occidental civilization and race. Coming under the influence of Western civilization, the Chinese, like the Japanese before them, would learn to master the tricks of trade and utilization of modern science in manufacture, and enter into keen competition with the Europeans. They would thrive and multiply, and facing the pressure of overpopulation, they would immigrate to other continents. Being adaptable, thrifty, industrious, and content to minimal living standards, they would challenge the Occidental race, accustomed to luxury and pleasure. In this struggle for living space and survival, the chances of the Occidentals looked dismal, Hearn concluded.⁹¹ The low

⁸⁸ “Japanese Army of To-Day,” *The New York Times*, July 2, 1898, 3.

⁸⁹ George B. Duncan, “Reasons for Increasing the Regular Army,” *The North American Review* 166, 497 (1898), 452, 457–459.

⁹⁰ Hearn, “China,” 451–452.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 453–460, 463–464.

subsistence level of the Chinese, and thus low wage claims, combined with their high fertility rates, were arguments that also formed the core of anti-Chinese agitation in the United States during the latter half of the nineteenth century. With the influx of cheap goods from Japan to the American market, the negative sentiments were extended also to the Japanese.⁹²

But even though a Japanese and Chinese industrial and commercial threat seemed more plausible to many American observers than the military threat of a Sino-Japanese alliance, the latter idea persisted. For example, in January 1898, the *NYT* cited news from *The Spectator* that Itō Hirobumi had proposed an alliance to the Chinese in order to gain control over the Chinese soldiers and resources. Li Hongzhang was reportedly in favor of the proposal, and if the Chinese would accept it, the European peoples would be beaten, for they could not resist the “united yellow peoples.”⁹³ Frederick Cunliffe-Owen took up the topic a couple of months later in the *Chicago Tribune*. Of all races of the Orient, Cunliffe-Owen announced, the Japanese were the ones capable of forming an alliance of the great Asian nations against those of the Occident. And this alliance, he explained, spelled the doom for the white race, and was the “yellow peril” that haunted Wilhelm II. The two nations together would form such a magnificent army that if this “vast horde” would decide to march westward – “which somehow or other is the trend of every Oriental race” – it would be a repetition of the Hun and Goth invasions of the ancient times.⁹⁴

An alliance between China and Japan was indeed an idea that had been entertained in the Japanese Army before the Sino-Japanese War, but the idea had soon been dropped. After the war, the relations between the two empires grew warmer, as both had come to regard Russia as their mutual enemy. This was the beginning of the “golden decade of Sino-Japanese cooperation.” But the Japanese, fully aware of the European and American suspicions and “yellow peril” discourse, made sure that these relations did not give an impression of a too close, friendly, and official relationship.⁹⁵

In the 1890s, the fears of immigration and labor competition, and the idea of Japan as a military threat, merged in the *NYT* news reports about Hawaii. Emigration of Japanese contract laborers to Hawaii had started in 1868. Immigration was necessitated by the huge

⁹² Matthew Connelly, “To inherit the Earth. Imagining World Population, from the Yellow Peril to the Population Bomb,” *Journal of Global History* 1 (2006), 300, 302; Iriye, *Japan*, 28; Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18.

⁹³ “The Policy of Japan,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 1898, 19.

⁹⁴ “No English Defeat,” *The Chicago Tribune*, April 10, 1898, 31. A year later, Cunliffe-Owen declared that “the ‘Yellow Peril’ predicted by the Kaiser” had become “an accomplished fact and a grim reality.” He claimed that China and Japan had concluded an agreement and effected an alliance between the two nations. He ventured to predict that the objective of this alliance was to drive off the foreigners from Asia, and perhaps even attack Europe, for both the Chinese and Japanese were “imbued with a bitter and mortal hatred of the white races.” “Peril of Yellow Alliance” 1899, 28.

⁹⁵ Iriye, *Japan*, 17; Lone, *Japan’s First*, 25; Zachmann, *China and Japan*, 4–5, 59–60.

demand for labor in the sugar plantations, and the Japanese were favored as low-cost and reliable work force. The Japanese immigration was carefully regulated, and it was based on the Convention of 1886 negotiated between the Japanese and Hawaiian governments. By the end of the century, the Japanese made up a significant share of the immigrants, and around one quarter of the whole population in the islands. This demographic shift caused concern among the American population, who were intent on preserving their control over the government of Hawaii, and to have the islands annexed to the United States.⁹⁶ Some of them claimed that Hawaii should be made into a “white man’s country,” and the interests of working class whites should be protected from the competition of Asiatic labor.⁹⁷ To them, the Japanese laborers seemed like a threat, and they made these anxieties known through constant lobbying in the American press.

The annexationists had sympathizers and allies in the United States. Influential strategists, such as Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914), argued that Hawaii was essential for American security, defense, and naval supremacy.⁹⁸ Arthur Curtiss James (1867–1941), wealthy businessman, voiced similar views. He listed reasons for annexation in the *NAR* and concluded that Hawaii was the key to the defense of the American Pacific coast in case a war with Japan should erupt.⁹⁹ It was a prevailing belief that if the Americans would not take the islands, some other power, such as Britain or Japan, certainly would. It was claimed that Japan definitely had designs on the islands, and if the United States would withdraw their protection from Hawaii, the Japanese would quickly move in. And as “the naval strength of that young giantess,” Japan, grew fast, the Japanese would be in a very convenient position to attack the United States if they managed to obtain Hawaii.¹⁰⁰

Whether Japan would carry out their plans of seizing Hawaii through a political or military coup, or a combination of them, was a matter of some debate. Some observers feared that if the Japanese were given a suffrage in Hawaii, they would “go far toward carrying the islands for their own country” with their large numbers¹⁰¹. To counteract this possibility, the (white) oligarchy set to task of creating a permanent government to replace the provisional government, a temporary caretaker of the country after the Hawaiian revolution of 1893. They convened a constitutional convention and established the

⁹⁶ Monica Boyd, “Oriental Immigration: The Experience of the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Populations in the United States,” *The International Migration Review* 5, 1 (1971), 9; William Morgon, *Pacific Gibraltar: U.S.-Japanese Rivalry over the Annexation of Hawai’i, 1885–1898* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 39, 41, 44, 197; William Nimmo, *Stars and Stripes Across the Pacific: The United States, Japan and the Asia/Pacific Region, 1895–1945* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 2001), 8–9.

⁹⁷ “Willis seeks an answer,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 1894, 4.

⁹⁸ Dudden, *American Pacific*, 66; Morgon, *Pacific Gibraltar*, 2, 156, 172, 178, 202.

⁹⁹ Arthur C. James, “Advantages of Hawaiian Annexation,” *The North American Review* 165, 493 (1897), 759.

¹⁰⁰ “Greedy Eyes on Hawaii,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 1893, 1; “Japan’s Plans of Conquest,” *The New York Times*, July 19, 1897, 5; Melville, “Our Future on the Pacific,” 291.

¹⁰¹ “Greedy Eyes on Hawaii”, 1.

Republic of Hawaii on July 4, 1894. The constitution they drafted settled the property and literacy qualifications for citizenship and voting rights so that these rights were practically denied from the Japanese.¹⁰² Still, the issue surfaced in the *NYT* repeatedly, particularly during and after the Sino-Japanese War. It was feared that Japan, "flushed with its successes over the Chinese arms," would press on the issue of enfranchisement, and if the immigration would continue unhindered, this people with "great political ambition and martial qualities," was inclined to take over the Hawaiian government.¹⁰³ The Japanese Legation at Washington made several attempts to quell these allegations, maintaining that Japan was not an aggressor and did not have territorial ambitions in Hawaii, but apparently to little avail.¹⁰⁴

The situation became even more strained after the Hawaiian authorities refused entrance from a shipload of Japanese immigrants to the islands in 1897. Japan sent their cruiser *Naniwa* to Hawaii, according to the Japanese authorities, for the purpose of investigating and settling the issue, and of providing protection for their citizens.¹⁰⁵ The Americans in Hawaii represented the story differently. For them, it was clear that the arrival of *Naniwa* was a prelude to Japan's seizure of the islands. Soon rumors started to spread in the *NYT* that the Japanese immigrants, "pouring into these islands under the guise of 'students,'" were, in fact, trained soldiers, who had served in the Sino-Japanese War. "Suspicion of this fact was first aroused by their soldierly bearing and their military gait and movements," it was reported. Another piece of news informed that the Japanese passengers aboard the steamer *City of Peking*, although classed as laborers, were actually well-drilled soldiers sent to resist the possible American annexation of the islands. Again, this was evidenced by the "remarkably symmetrical movements" of the Japanese passengers. It was also claimed that Japan was about to send 1,500 men more to Hawaii, dressed up as "simple citizens, but drilled and ready for military duty at once," and these men would be transported by ships full of armaments, and followed by Japanese warships.¹⁰⁶

In the end, these wild rumors died down after the U.S. Congress annexed Hawaii unilaterally on July 6, 1898. The Spanish-American War of 1898 had convinced the

¹⁰² Morgon, *Pacific Gibraltar*, 142, 144–145, 196.

¹⁰³ "About Hawaiian Annexation," *The New York Times*, December 1, 1894, 3; "Hawaii Fears the Japanese," *The New York Times*, November 18, 1894, 1; "Hawaii Fears the Japanese: They Are Flooding the Islands and Asking for Votes," *The New York Times*, December 17, 1896, 2.

¹⁰⁴ "'Japs' Answer Mr. Thurston," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1897, 17; "The New Japan," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1897, 6.

¹⁰⁵ "Japan Not Seeking War," *The New York Times*, May 13, 1897, 4; "Japan Vexed At Hawaii," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1897, 4; "No Alarm At Washington," *The New York Times*, April 30, 1897, 3.

¹⁰⁶ "Japanese in Hawaii," *The New York Times*, September 23, 1897, 5; "Hawaii Becomes Alarmed," *The New York Times*, April 18, 1897, 22; "Ready to Annex Hawaii," *The New York Times*, June 15, 1897, 4; "War Story from Japan," *The New York Times*, July 28, 1897, 7. According to William Morgon, it was more than probable that some of the Japanese laborers had indeed served in the army, considering the Japanese conscription laws. Morgon, *Pacific Gibraltar*, 113.

Americans of the strategic vitality of having Pearl Harbor as a naval base, and in the geostrategic discussions that preceded the annexation, also the emergence of Japan as a strong Pacific power was among the main considerations. Japan's military build-up and imperialistic foreign policies suggested that the Japanese were preparing for war, and consequently, the Americans should make their preparations, too.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps Japan was not an imminent threat, but it was a potential peril.

Conclusion

The Sino-Japanese War was a widely publicized and closely watched conflict. In a sense, it was a "war of the media," for press coverage had a huge impact on how the combatants were viewed, and thus also on the foreign relations of these nations.¹⁰⁸ The power of the press was not lost on the Japanese. While the Chinese either sought or received far less press exposure, the Japanese tried to influence the American public opinion actively and directly through publicizing official reports, using their diplomats as mouthpieces, feeding favorable images of the Japanese armed forces and their maneuvers to the public, and marshalling legal experts to affirm their adherence to the laws of civilized warfare. There is also mounting evidence that the Japanese manipulated the foreign press more subtly. They controlled the access of foreign observers to the war front and telegraph; censored official dispatches; and forged close ties with the owner of the *Japan Weekly Mail*, who then forwarded the war news he received from the Japanese government to the British press and news agencies. The *NYT* obtained its war news from these sources, too. In addition, the Japanese attempted and succeeded in bribing certain European and American press organs.¹⁰⁹

Initially, the Japanese propaganda machine was clearly successful in the United States. The Japanese military tactics were lauded. Towards the end of the war, the armed forces were extolled for their discipline and efficiency, despite of the few breaches of the Geneva Convention. Legal experts exonerated Japanese conduct in the Kowshing and Port Arthur incidents from the point of view of international law, and the perceived victory of Japanese 'civilization' over Chinese 'barbarism' ended the discussion on whether Japanese prosecution of the war had accorded with morality. But in the long-term, as Stewart Lone has suggested,¹¹⁰ the Japanese victory, along with the Japanese diplomatic strategy, may

¹⁰⁷ Dudden, *American Pacific*, 68; Morgon, *Pacific Gibraltar*, 5, 172–173.

¹⁰⁸ Lone, *Japan's First*, 35; Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, 4; Svarverud, *International Law*, 60; Tsai, "The First Casualty," 146, 159.

¹⁰⁹ Kane, "Each of Us," 26–27; Barak Kushner, *The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 14; Nimmo, *Stars and Stripes*, 19–20, 22.

¹¹⁰ Lone, *Japan's First*, 179–180.

have not been successes at all. Japan impressed the United States with its military strength, favorably at first, but the war also inaugurated the image of Japan as a military yellow peril, taking the forms of Sino-Japanese alliance and Japanese occupation of Hawaii in the United States press. Often the image was accentuated by racial and Orientalist discourses, and utilized for promoting the interests of various groups, ranging from the Americans residing in Hawaii to the U.S. Army and Navy circles.

We should heed the remark of Iriye Akira, that neither the Americans nor Europeans were hysterical about the Japanese yellow peril at the end of the nineteenth century. Because if they had been, they would have opposed, not assisted and celebrated, the Japanese military build-up and emergence as a great power.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the image of Japan as a military threat proved lasting. The outcome of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), coupled with fear of Japanese naval power, and alarm over Japanese immigration, ushered the yellow peril scenario back to the fore during the first decade of the twentieth century, and then again in the 1920s.¹¹² The image was also reflected in the joint U.S. naval and army strategy titled “War Plan Orange” – orange being the color code for Japan. The plan was first drafted in 1906, and then periodically updated and adapted to the changing circumstances up until the World War II. All versions of the plan identified Japan as the likely U.S. enemy, and maintained the importance of safeguarding American naval bases in the Pacific, especially Hawaii and the Philippines, from Japanese aggression.¹¹³

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¹¹¹ Iriye, *Japan*, 20–21.

¹¹² Sadao Asada, *Culture Shock and Japanese-American Relations* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press 2007), 38, 64.

¹¹³ Asada, *Culture Shock*, 37–39, 65–67; Douglas Ford, *The Elusive Enemy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press 2011), 21–22; Louis Morton, “War Plan Orange: Evolution of a Strategy,” *World Politics* 11, 2 (1959), 222, 232, 234–235; David J. Ulbrich, “The Long Lost ‘Tentative Manual for Defense of Advanced Bases’ (1936),” *The Journal of Military History* 71, 3 (2007), 890–891.

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