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The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and
Primacy (review)

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principle of “nonintervention” in China. He may have advised Tanaka Gi-ichi to proclaim “nonintervention.” But he urged, at the same time, preparation for occupation of the mainland, “if conditions are created that call for a dispatch of troops” (p. 55). Indeed, following the Manchurian Incident, he eagerly attempted to capitalize on the Japanese army’s advance into north China with plans to build a trunk line across China through Mongolia to the Tianshan mountains. That Matsuoka considered himself a disciple of Gotō Shinpei speaks volumes, particularly for what we know of Gotō’s pan-Asianist doctrines and his early attempts to redirect Japanese foreign policy from Britain toward Russia and Germany.⁵ Politically, Matsuoka genuinely admired Benito Mussolini, as exemplified both by his fascist youth corps and his excitement over Konoe Fumimaro’s own attempt to replace all political associations with one national unity party. For this reviewer, Matsuoka still represents not the “moderate” faction sincerely seeking a workable solution in a troubled age but Japan’s belligerent, antidemocratic forces whose strenuous efforts to derail the new national trajectory of democracy and internationalism ultimately invited the destruction of Imperial Japan.

Agony of Choice may not convince everyone of the valiant struggle of Matsuoka Yōsuke. But as a richly textured study of a pivotal figure who may, in more ways than one, be considered representative of his age, it belongs in the library of all serious students of modern Japanese history and diplomacy. As a product of the best of “old school” sensibilities and training, it is a real gem and should be required reading for graduate and undergraduate seminars on modern Japanese history, historiography, and diplomacy.

The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy.

By S. C. M. Paine. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003. xi, 412 pages. \$55.00.

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This is a very welcome book that promises to become the standard work on a strangely neglected topic in English. It is a tour de force, employing primary sources in an abundance of languages (English, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, German, and French). It is meticulous, well reasoned, and convincingly argued. It suffers only a bit of hyperbole, a smattering of clunky

5. For these attempts, see Frederick R. Dickinson, “Japan Debates the Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Second Revision of 1911,” in Philips O’Brien, ed., *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: A Reconsideration* (London: Routledge, 2004).

language, and a minor, unfortunate overextension of the author's central thesis. But these minor criticisms do not significantly detract from the book's fundamental excellence. To my mind, the bibliographic essay at the conclusion cancels out any flaws in the work.

The book is an extension of the author's previous research, *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia and Their Disputed Frontier* (M. E. Sharpe, 1996). Amazingly, after this book, Paine learned to read Japanese in order to bring greater focus to her new topic. Her avowed ambition in this work is that of "synthesizing current secondary research . . . supplementing this synthesis with an extensive reading of newspapers published around the world during the war" (p. ix). She has done so, by examining the day-to-day war reports in more than 20 newspapers. For the Japanese-language journalistic accounts, she has consulted contemporary papers in translations (primarily in the English-language "Spirit of the Vernacular Press" section of *Japan Daily Mail* published in Yokohama), but she has mined the Japanese- and Chinese-language secondary sources as well.

Paine's central thesis is deceptively simple: "military hardware and economic output alone do not determine international power; perceptions also play an important role" (p. ix). The perceptions of which she speaks are multidimensional. She weaves a fine narrative concerning the self-referent perceptions of the combatants as well as those of the European and American bystanders. She convincingly shows that those perceptions underwent a fundamental paradigm shift on the part of all participants.

Paine demonstrates what we all have known anecdotally, namely that Japan overcame distinct disadvantages in virtually every aspect of that war. The Chinese forces were superior in: number; sophistication and amount of modern military hardware; knowledge of terrain; and, shockingly, the strategies and tactics of some of its officers.

Even more surprisingly, Paine shows that some Chinese troops fought valiantly and well and might have carried the day in many battles had they been united in purpose and effort. She shows that Japanese officers often made serious tactical mistakes that could have cost them not only critical battles, but the entire war as well. Japanese supply lines were badly overextended and in real danger of interdiction and annihilation. Battle charges were ordered without proper intelligence and reconnaissance, mistakes that should have led to horrific defeats.

This begs the question of course: why then did Japan win virtually every battle and skirmish? Paine argues that the old chestnuts taught to students for a century are fundamentally true: Chinese incompetence, corruption, and disunity. In many cases, the Chinese troops abandoned virtually impregnable defensive positions without a fight. Japanese troops often survived on abandoned Chinese rations and weaponry because their own supplies had not caught up with their rapid advance.

But she also reminds us that the Chinese self-perception also fundamentally sabotaged their war effort. They simply never thought of the war as *their* war. The Han Chinese perception was that this was a Manchu war. Why fight and die for their hated foreign barbarian masters? The southern armies and navy thought of it as Beiyang Army and Navy affairs. The dynastic Manchu commanders never gave the Japanese any credit because they thought of them as the dwarf pirates of old. The Japanese were toadies of a morally corrupt West, they were *parvenus*, and they were barbarians. Could the morally superior Chinese fail to trounce them?

The rout of the Chinese subsequently caused a fundamental shift in Western perception about the nature of world politics in East Asia. Paine argues that these changed perceptions forced Russia in particular into fatal decisions that accelerated the political debacles on its horizons. Had China won, or even if the war had been fought to an inconclusive standstill, Russia would not have risked the Triple Intervention and the concomitant extension of its empire into Manchuria and Korea.

Paine suggests that the new perception of Northeast Asia as a dangerous vacuum as well as the perception of Japan as a threat to all Russian Asian ambitions led Russia into a fool's paradise that resulted in the Russo-Japanese War and perhaps the Bolshevik Revolution. Further, she avers that, "Had China not been trounced in war, thus providing the powers with a spectacle of incompetence, the 'scramble for concessions' might never have ensued" (p. 367). Had China been able to defend its own interests, the Western powers might have limited themselves to economic instead of political imperialism.

Paine further maintains that the Chinese "did not measure their own power relative to that of the Western powers and relative to Japan but assumed their own eternal superiority. They got it wrong in both cases and paid an enormous price for their mistake" (p. 368). Tragically, China was to pay for the dynasty's mistakes. By the time national regeneration and reform gained ascendancy, it was too late.

Finally, Paine suggests that the new self-perception led Japan to make many subsequent mistakes as well. She notes, "The Japanese ultimately derived the wrong lessons from their turn-of-the-century wars with China and Russia. They concluded that they had won. Actually their adversaries had lost" (p. 369). She suggests that mistakes made three decades later were influenced and engendered by this misperception of their own military invincibility.

None of these ideas is, in and of itself, startlingly new. We have intuited much of this, but it is here clearly articulated in a manner that is as convincing as it is concise and cogent. We owe much to Paine for this. She adds to a very small body of scholarly work on the war. With the exception of work by Jeffrey Dowart and Stewart Lone, and the translated memoir of Jap-

anese Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu,¹ we are hard-pressed to name many more substantive English-language studies. Virtually everything else is concerned with larger issues such as Western imperialism or the growth of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean nationalism. Paine does make extensive use of the works of Hilary Conroy and of Kajima Morinosuke, which contain considerable information on the war but have larger foci.²

The extensive Japanese works of Iguchi Kazuki, Kuwada Etsu, Tabohashi Kiyoshi, and Takahashi Hidenao are mined, as are those in Chinese by Qi Qizhang and Shao Xunzheng. With her examination of French, German, and Russian works on the topic, Paine certainly gives the reader the benefit of many viewpoints and analyses.

Paine's other service to us is her argument regarding the primacy of "face" in diplomacy. Basically, her premise is that the idea of "face" (which she glosses in two half-page footnotes on p. xi and p. 349) or self-worth and self-perception is inherently more important in Confucian regimes than in the Christian West. The concept of public reputation is so fraught with Confucian principles of propriety and ritual that it precludes the normal (read Western) protocols of diplomatic exchange.

What seems normal and equitable to the Judeo-Christian Western diplomat is humiliatingly anathema to the Confucian. Paine argues that Asian perceptions of nationalism are constrained by the concept of "face." She suggests that China's foreign relations were colored and sabotaged in every way possible by the concept. The fact that Japan was evolving toward a more Western concept of diplomacy, but still gave great credence to the traditional self-referents, complicated these exchanges even more. Of particular interest is Paine's treatment of this problem in the negotiations for the Treaty of Shimonoseki that ended the war (pp. 249–93). Unfortunately, she waits until the last third of the book to discuss the concept adequately. She would have served the reader better had she limned the argument in an earlier chapter.

Also, to my tastes, she overreaches in this attempt to give "face" pride of place in virtually everything. Her arguments therefore take on the character of a hobbyhorse ridden too often. I believe this detracts from the narrative.

Similarly, in her haste to give *éclat* to her arguments, she sometimes ascribes too much agency and importance to the war itself. It was certainly a

1. Jeffrey Dowart, *The Pigtail War: American Involvement in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975); Stewart Lone, *Japan's First Modern War: Army and Society in the Conflict with China, 1894–95* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1994); and Mutsu Munemitsu, *Kenkenroku: A Diplomatic Record of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895*, trans. Gordon M. Berger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

2. Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea, 1868–1910: A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960); and Kajima Morinosuke, *The Diplomacy of Japan, 1894–1922* (Tokyo: Kajima Institute of International Peace, 1976).

critical juncture for East Asian diplomacy, and perhaps led Japan and Russia into inexorable war. But did it have the same world-shaking influence of, say, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5? It is difficult to argue that other Asians were as affected in their dreams of liberation by the defeat of China as they were by Japan's drubbing of Christian Russia a decade later.

Other than these minor and niggling criticisms, the book is flawed by Paine's occasionally stilted language. Her position on the faculty of the Strategy and Policy Department of the United States Naval War College perhaps explains why the narration sometimes lapses into policyspeak. The most egregious examples are in the summing-up tailings of the chapters where she attempts to be analytically succinct and quotable. Let one example suffice: "The war broke the dikes and depleted the reservoir of foreign respect for China. What followed was a crass competition to vivisect the unresponsive patient into a welter of foreign spheres of influence" (p. 293). Fortunately, most of the rest of the book is readable and may be assigned to undergraduates without fear.

I have but one final picayune criticism. Paine translates the *kanji* characters for the *Asahi shinbun* as the "Rising Sun Newspaper." That is accurate enough I suppose, but she does not do the same for the *Nichi-nichi*, *Hochi*, *Tōkyō jiyū*, and *Kokumin*, much less *Königlich privilegirte Berlinische Zeitung* and *Novoe vremia*. The *Asahi* is arguably among Japan's most famous newspapers and probably deserves its official name. I hope she does not order a "Rising Sun" beer when she next dines on sushi.

Lest these final few paragraphs give the reader the impression that Paine's book is anything but an excellent piece of scholarship, let me say that I greatly admire Paine for her contribution to the field of diplomatic history. She collates and synthesizes the current scholarship in several languages. She provides us with much to consider. I believe she has kept her word to us that "this is also a story told, as far as possible, in the words of those who were alive at the time, for it is their story—what they saw and what they thought about it" (p. 11).

Japanese Pride, American Prejudice: Modifying the Exclusion Clause of the 1924 Immigration Act. By Izumi Hirobe. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2001. xiii, 327 pages. \$49.50.

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U.S. Congressional action in 1924 blocked Japanese immigration, and one of the regrettable pages in the history of Japan-U.S. relations was opened.