

Listening for Echoes from the Past: Chinese Operational Design of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895)

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Listening for Echoes from the Past: Chinese Operational Design of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), by MAJ David Trinh, US Army, 40 pages.

As the United States recognizes a revisionist China, there has been much speculation about inevitable conflict. Political commentators concede that conflict is predetermined, but their predictions are based on sensationalism. Whether these pundits are correct is still unknown, but contemporary US leaders and military planners may examine key historical events as a part of understanding a potential adversary.

The case of the Sino-Japanese War and the events leading up to it is an example of how the Chinese government and military leadership developed capability in response to Western imperialism. This response, known as the self-strengthening movement, coupled with existing cultural views and biases translated into how the Chinese executed the war against Japan. At the very least the study of such a critical event in Chinese history may allow current leaders to understand the relationship between worldview, military capability, and operational approach.

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Acronyms

PACOM	Pacific Command
AOR	Area of Responsibility
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
PLA	Peoples' Liberation Army
PLAAF	Peoples' Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	Peoples' Liberation Army Navy

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Introduction

The Chinese came to recognize that civilization was not singular but plural. Theirs was just one among a constellation of civilizations. This realization made them see the world in a very different light.

—SCM Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy*

The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States describes Chinese actions in the Indo-Pacific as destabilizing to the region. The Chinese have made territorial claims in the South China Sea and threatened their neighbors by building bases in the Spratly Islands and challenging freedom of navigation operations. These actions are part of a strategy to secure territory and exclusive economic rights in the South China Sea. The United States recognizes China as a revisionist power with a potential to either transform into a more reliable security and economic partner or an adversary. As a result, US security strategy has shifted focus to respond to China's actions, which has implications on how planners from the US Army's Pacific Command (PACOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR) frame their operational environment.¹

Pundits point to China's growing political, military, and economic power and its territorial claim to the "cow's tongue" as factors that drive disagreement. This dispute could become armed conflict against the backdrop of historic and current Indo-Pacific geopolitics. Robert Kaplan, a senior fellow for the Center for New American Security, states that the South China Sea is a strategic maritime crossroad of global trade and energy, and nations will compete to control it. Kaplan highlights the Straits of Malacca as a chokepoint in the transit of China's oil from the Middle East and untapped natural resources in the South China Sea among the reasons for competition.² Geoffrey Till, the British naval expert, echoes Kaplan, making the point that

¹ Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017* (Washington DC: The White House, 2017), 45-46.

² Robert D. Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (New York: Random House, 2014), 10-11.

since the beginning of globalized age in the sixteenth century, trade routes have historically generated increasing rivalry and contention.³



Figure 1. “Maritime Lines” (map) Robert D. Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (New York: Random House, 2014), 2-3.

As Chinese leaders consider what the South China Sea means for China’s economic competitiveness, Alfred Mahan’s concept of sea power aids the understanding of Chinese actions. Mahan was the American maritime theorist who coined the term sea power, but the most fitting definition of sea power as it relates to the Chinese comes from American historian Peter Paret. Paret calls sea power the “command of the sea through naval superiority and the combination of maritime commerce, overseas possessions, and privileged access to foreign markets that produces ‘national wealth and greatness.’ ”⁴ This means that control of sea lanes is essential to military

³ Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron*, 11.

⁴ Philip A. Crowl, “Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 451.

power and China's economic potential. Additionally, as a continental power, China can create a geographical buffer between it and potential adversaries by using sea power to control the South China Sea. Kaplan suggests that China understands its role and place in the world through a Middle Kingdom mentality, meaning China's claim to the South China Sea harkens back to times when China was the political and cultural center of the world.⁵ This mentality is important to understand as China seeks to extend its influence from the mainland to what it calls the first island chain of the Western Pacific and eventually to the mid-Pacific and beyond.⁶

In this context, the United States must evaluate its position in relation to China as both vie for strategic advantage. US military planners must account for a potential adversary with increasing military capability while operating in today's complex and uncertain environment. Former PACOM Commander Admiral Samuel J. Locklear said, "we will need ever more transparency and understanding of Chinese military intentions and capabilities if we are to minimize friction and avoid conflict in the future."⁷ The challenge for US military planners is to determine Chinese strategic aims and how they could use their capabilities in an operational approach to achieve those aims. The US military must avoid false assumptions, as they may lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding, and miscalculation.

Therefore, it is imperative for planners to help commanders fully understand a potential adversary in the operational environment. Analyzing the factors that affect worldview may allow a planner to make sense of how an actor decides and acts. Planners must study history as a key input to understanding the operational environment. Social scientists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann state that "it is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an

⁵ Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron*, 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷ *Statement of Admiral Samuel J. Locklear, US Navy Commander, US Pacific Command Before the Senate Committee on Armed Services on US Pacific Command Posture*, day 12, 113th Cong., 2d sess., 25 March 2014, 9.

understanding of the historical process in which it was produced.”⁸ Thus, history may aid understanding of Chinese political aims and military actions. Furthermore, planners may find continuities across time by appropriate scaling and scoping of a historical case study to help anticipate the future.⁹

The Relevance of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895)

Using a historical lens to analyze how the Chinese translated strategic aims into an operational approach (using today’s terms) during the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 may help contemporary military planners understand China’s current worldview. The Sino-Japanese War is a historical example that shows how Chinese policy and political objectives affected military capabilities, and how that capability manifested into operational design during war. This war was a pivotal event in China’s history because it was the intersection of the fall of China and the rise of Japan, both rooted in Confucian philosophical origins. The war resulted in the Japanese invasion of Korea and mainland China, and Japan supplanting China as the hegemon in East Asia. Japan’s victory shattered Chinese elites’ worldview of the Middle Kingdom as the center of world and the only civilization among barbarians. Additionally, the defeat shocked the Chinese because its leaders had always considered Japan the subordinate nation in filial Confucian tradition. As Japan rose to be the pre-eminent power in East Asia, China declined as part of a century of humiliation characterized by imperialism and invasion.¹⁰

Although China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese War shocked the world, it was the final blow in a decline that was years in the making. The origins of Chinese defeat came from the inept Qing Dynasty and China’s repeated failures to adapt to its changing strategic and operational environments. To attempt change, the Dowager Empress Cixi of the Qing Dynasty charged

⁸ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Irvington, 1980), 54-55.

⁹ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 22-30.

¹⁰ S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3-5.

provincial leaders like Viceroy Li Hongzhang to institute the self-strengthening movement in 1862 as her best attempt to quell further domestic unrest and Western imperialism. The political-military relationships and military capabilities established during the movement directly influenced China's operational approach for the war. Despite this effort, the Chinese could not improve enough to reverse their decline.¹¹

The Sino-Japanese War shows how the Chinese ingrained their history into their culture, an idea that Berger and Luckmann call institutionalization.¹² The war gives contemporary military planners an example of how China's policy, strategic aims, and capabilities led to its operational approach. Additionally, the specific case of the Sino-Japanese War is germane to the current planner because this defeat is rooted in the Chinese national psyche. An example of this indoctrination is the Communist Party's use of China's decline in the nineteenth century to show that the current regime has recovered its international standing. President Xi Jinping often reminds the Chinese people of the foreign violations of China to engender national unity and build support for his ideas such as the "Chinese Dream."¹³ Therefore, the Sino-Japanese War is a primer for US military planners to understand the Chinese worldview, anticipate how Chinese policy dictates strategy, grasp how history informs the Chinese, and allow the United States to prepare for how the Chinese may use operational design to achieve political and military objectives.

The Historical Context Preceding the Sino-Japanese War

Before studying the Sino-Japanese War itself, examining China's historical context through political, military, economic, and social variables help the planner understand the Chinese state preceding this pivotal event. Tracing how the Middle Kingdom worldview changed from China's inception to the Sino-Japanese War shows the concept's continued relevance and its

¹¹ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 29.

¹² Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 54-55.

¹³ Bill Hayton, *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 177.

effect on Chinese perceptions. For example, Qing Dynasty leaders used this worldview to justify their ruling mandate over the people and maintain prestige within the international community. Studying how the Qing Dynasty responded to domestic unrest and European imperialism with the self-strengthening movement explains how these events affected the Chinese operational approach of the Sino-Japanese War.

The strength of the Middle Kingdom concept stems from Chinese civilization becoming the dominant cultural influence in Asia from its beginning in circa 2,000 BCE.¹⁴ The spread of Chinese culture, or Sinicization, allowed China to establish tributary states, of which Japan was one. Japanese adoption of Chinese culture and institutions was widespread. For example, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), Japanese envoys traveled to China and “copied the plan of Ch’angan [Xi’an] in their capitals, and in art, literature, religion, and administrative organization sought to imitate their great neighbor.”¹⁵ Far-reaching Chinese influence established the Middle Kingdom concept that China was the cultural center of the world.

Confucianism, the most influential school of Chinese philosophy, reinforced this view. Ceremonial rites, ethical behavior, and the education of man were the hallmarks of Confucianism. The purpose of Confucianism was to advise correct conduct and self-improvement.¹⁶ Part of this correct behavior was the idea of filial piety. China’s relation to Japan demonstrated this concept, in that China and Japan had a father-son or older brother-younger brother relationship, with Japan being the subordinate and owing respect and deference to the elder.¹⁷

Confucianism, the Legalist concept of the absolute power of the emperor, and the Taoist concept of ethical conduct established the foundation of the Han Synthesis. The Han Synthesis was a cultural concept that brought these philosophies together and laid the groundwork for a

¹⁴ Peter M. Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China: From the Manchu Conquest to Tian'Anmen Square* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 1.

¹⁵ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Chinese, their History and Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 168.

¹⁶ Latourette, *The Chinese, their History and Culture*, 54-56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 568.

pattern of Chinese suzerainty over neighboring states, beginning with the Han Dynasty in the third century. Therefore, China was always the leader within Asia, as it dominated subordinate states from Han Dynasty to the Jin (Qing) Dynasty during the Sino-Japanese War, after which its influence waned until the proclamation of the republic in 1912. Throughout this time period, China subdued client states with war and diplomacy, and enjoyed a tribute system in return for military protection.¹⁸ This political and cultural system perpetuated the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, wherein a Chinese ruler derived the power to rule from the favor of heaven.¹⁹

Politically, the Jin Dynasty's mandate was complicated because it was not Han, but ethnically Manchu, a minority within China. In 1625, the Jin minority took advantage of a weak Ming Dynasty and consolidated power, setting up its political power base in Shenyang. Eventually, the Jin Dynasty became the Qing Dynasty (Sinicized name) in 1644, further showing the Han influence even as the Manchu pacified the Han Chinese in the following century. The history between the Han and Manchu shows the Han practice of "using the barbarian to control the barbarian," as the Han gave the Manchu a ruling mandate in exchange for fighting off the more hostile Mongolians of the north. Therefore, even after the Manchu gained control of China, the ethnic Manchu-Han divide always directly influenced Qing power.²⁰

The Manchu-Han relationship highlights the deep-seated xenophobia and Han exclusivism in Chinese culture. This relationship is an example of China's constant discord not just between Han and Manchu, but of Han and ethnic groups like the Mongols, Uighurs, and Tibetans throughout its history. The persistent threat of overthrow by other ethnic groups and the Han majority drove the Qing Dynasty's strategic aims and decision-making. Consequently, the Qing Dynasty separated the Chinese Army along ethnic lines in different regions of the country, in the *fu bing* (soldier-farmer, or local militia) system. By dividing the army along ethnic lines,

¹⁸ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 8-9.

¹⁹ David Andrew Graff and Robin D. S. Higham, *A Military History of China* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 22.

²⁰ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 17.

the Qing organized army units to control ethnically homogenous groups in each province. The Qing maintained power by using this patronage system of *fu bing* to pacify groups like the Han Chinese, who were loyal to the Ming Dynasty.²¹

Therefore, the Manchu emperors were always aware of the need to “continually try to present themselves as Confucian rulers worthy of the Mandate of Heaven to win acceptance from the Chinese population.”²² To continue the Mandate of Heaven, the Manchu divided its military strength into the Army of the Manchu Banner Forces and the Army of the Green Standard. The Banner Forces consisted of separate Manchu, Mongol, and Chinese Banners, whose job was to defend the dynasty against overthrow. At its height, the Banner System had eight Chinese, eight Mongol, and eight Manchu banners, with each banner consisting of 8,000-25,000 soldiers. These units primarily consisted of foot soldiers, with some cavalry and artillery. The Manchu Banners were the best equipped and best paid, and only they could join the Imperial Guard.²³

Armies of the Green Standard, on the other hand, consisted of captured Chinese soldiers, which the Qing used to pacify their own people in rural areas. The Armies of the Green Standard numbered 600,000 at their height. While they governed both Han and Manchu, the Qing did not incorporate these Han into their Banners, keeping them nominally and physically separate. These army units were more akin to a constabulary force, as they handled keeping the peace and law enforcement.²⁴

This division under the *fu bing* system resulted in an ethnically and geographically fractured army. Since the Banner Army defended the Qing against internal threats, and the Green Standard Army policed the provinces, the Chinese Army was more a constabulary force than an expeditionary force. Local army commanders led these regionally based units, so internal rivalries

²¹ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 10-11.

²² *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²³ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

materialized as they competed for funding. These factors resulted in the Chinese Army's lack of cohesion and contributed to its ineffectiveness in the Sino-Japanese War.²⁵

Even before the Sino-Japanese War, the army had performed poorly when trying to keep order against the White Lotus Rebellion, starting in 1796. At the time, overpopulation and environmental erosion had reduced the amount of arable and grazable land, which resulted in unemployment and reduced tax revenues for the government. Consequently, public infrastructure deteriorated, and famine struck the population. As the Qing mandate to govern weakened, the White Lotus sprang up to challenge to Qing authority. The White Lotus was a political and religious movement with followers that were determined to overthrow the Qing and re-install the Ming Dynasty. Although the Banner Forces eventually quelled the domestic unrest in 1804, they displayed poor leadership and inefficiency. The Banner Armies were ineffective because of the wanton corruption and budgetary cuts stemming from the reduced tax revenues. Civilians started to view the army as the chief representative of an illegitimate government that was not only unable to defend the people but posed more of a threat to its people through its nepotism and crookedness. The Banner Armies' performance during the White Lotus Rebellion contributed to the Qing loss of the Mandate of Heaven.²⁶

Against this backdrop of civil unrest, European imperialism compounded the Qing's political and socio-economic problems. As European nations took advantage of their political power in relation to a weakened China, they eventually foisted unequal treaties upon China to impose their economic wills. Great Britain first opened China to trade in the eighteenth century. At first, the Chinese maintained their veneer of a superior civilization even as the barbarians refused to submit to the emperor by kowtowing. The Chinese imposed the Canton System in 1759, which relegated the British to trade in only the port of Guangzhou (Canton). At this lone port, the Chinese subjected the British East India Company to unreasonable prices and tariffs for

²⁵ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 20-21.

²⁶ Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Manchus* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 151-154.

Chinese goods and refused to barter for Western goods. As a result, a trade imbalance developed, in favor of the Chinese. To overturn the trade imbalance, the British started smuggling highly addictive opium through the port in 1767. Opium usage increased until the trade deficit turned in the British favor. Even as the Qing government tried to enforce the prohibition of opium, many of its government officials were themselves addicts.²⁷

In an attempt at restoring its sovereignty, the Qing government appointed imperial advisor and bureaucrat Lin Zexu to the post of Imperial Commissioner. This gave him broad powers to enforce the opium ban. Lin suspended trade, confiscated opium at Guangzhou, and temporarily incarcerated British officials at the Canton trading house. His enforcement drove the China-trade proponents in the British Parliament to lobby for war to protect British interests, thus establishing the pretext for war.²⁸

The Opium War (1839-1842) proved that the Chinese military was no match for a Western one. China's lack of a navy prevented the fragmented Banner and Green Standard Armies from moving quickly. Conversely, the British used steam power to move and land forces and dictate the time and place of each battle. British soldiers used modern weapons and artillery that outmatched the Chinese matchlocks and swords. In 1842, the Qing had no choice but to negotiate the Treaty of Nanking as British troops threatened the former capital of Nanjing.²⁹

The unequal Treaty of Nanking humiliated the Chinese. It abolished the Canton System and gave European traders freedom to move trade outside of Guangzhou. It also opened five treaty ports exclusive to the British with a British official presiding over each. The treaty charged the Chinese twenty million dollars in war reparations. As a final insult, the Treaty of Nanjing granted Great Britain "most favored nation" status. Most favored nation status meant that the Chinese would have to give the British any terms that they granted any other trading partner if

²⁷ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 32-33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 155-156.

they were better than the existing agreements. The Opium War's secondary effects were that other Europeans took advantage and negotiated their own unequal treaties.³⁰

As unequal treaties weakened the Qing mandate, domestic unrest followed with the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), which was a civil war that inflicted an estimated twenty million deaths and bankrupted the Qing Dynasty as it devoted resources to suppressing it. The aims of the Taiping rebels were to overthrow the Qing government, redistribute wealth through land reform, and establish an egalitarian government. Disaffected masses were also moved to join because of anti-Manchu sentiment. Rebel leader Hong Xiuquan led the Taiping from Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces and seized the symbolic imperial capital of Nanjing. His fighters displayed surprising resilience against the Banner Forces in defending the city. Most of Hong's tens of thousands of rebels did not subscribe to his bizarre Chinese-Christian ideas such as he was Jesus Christ's younger brother. Instead, his followers fixed on the alternative he provided to the futile Qing government whom which they saw as indifferent to the plight of the peasant class.³¹

Ironically, the British and French prevented the Qing overthrow by invading Beijing in 1860 during the Arrow War (Second Opium War) of 1856-1860. The imperialists' military forces helped the Qing to defeat the Taiping rebels, and restored order. They did this to prevent disruption to the unequal trade treaties from which they profited. On the grounds that the Chinese needed European imperialists to suppress the Taiping Rebellion, "The end of the Taiping War marked, in the eyes of many people, the actual end of the Qing Empire, though the emperors continued on the throne until 1912"³² Although the Qing Dynasty stayed in power, the damage to its political capital was irreversible.

The way the Taiping Rebellion ended continued and even intensified the intrusive foreign presence in Qing affairs. Independent provincial governors gained power at the expense of the

³⁰ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 46-49.

³² Crossley, *The Manchus*, 163.

Qing central government, and that encouraged secessionist movements. The British installed an inspector-general in Beijing to levy customs tariffs as part of the war reparations, and China ceded territory north of the Amur River to the Russians. This marked the beginning of the Russo-Japanese competition for influence in East Asia, which sowed the seeds for the Sino-Japanese War and later Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). As part of this competition for influence in East Asia, Japan started expansionist treaties with Korea. Muslim uprisings such as those in Shaanxi Province cued off the Taiping Rebellion, adding to the unrest. The provincial governors levied their own taxes to raise and train their own armies to fight these uprisings, which in turn strengthened their hands against the Qing government.³³

The gradual loss of Qing power in relation to provincial governors and Westerners began to change the idea of Chinese superiority put forth by the Middle Kingdom worldview. However, the Chinese held on to their Confucian concept of filial piety, so they still regarded Japan and Korea as inferiors. Westerners were still very much barbarians, but barbarians the Chinese could not ignore. Civil war and Western imperialism had caused the Manchu to redouble their efforts to keep their mandate to rule. To keep their mandate, the Manchu had to adapt, which led to the self-strengthening movement.

The Self-Strengthening Movement and Its Effects on Chinese Military Capability

The self-strengthening movement started in 1862, when the Qing tried to transform its military to meet existing and anticipated threats. Dowager Empress Cixi appointed Viceroy Li Hongzhang, a Han, the leader for the modernization effort. Viceroy Li and his military counterparts who had fought the Taiping created a modern military force, to include a navy during this period. The self-strengthening movement shaped the political-military relationships, military organizations, doctrine, and capabilities that the Chinese took into the Sino-Japanese War. The Chinese improved equipment and education with the self-strengthening movement.

³³ Crossley, *The Manchus*, 165-169.

However, they could not escape Manchu-Han distrust, the weak central government, and deep-seated biases about Westerners. Therefore, the Chinese preference to incorporate Western technology but not embrace Western ideas limited improvement.³⁴

Viceroy Li implemented the reforms that brought the Chinese modern military equipment such as repeating rifles, artillery, and warships, but did not change how they employed these weapons. He was effective in military equipment reform, not doctrinal reform. Li was not a proponent of maritime command of the seas, and instead emphasized a coastal defense force to protect ports. This favoring of an army-centric military against command of the seas would directly affect the Chinese Navy's operational approach against the Japanese Navy.³⁵

Predominant Confucian thought and xenophobia toward Westerners affected military policies on army training. The resistance to ideas on training was a partly a product of the Qing Dynasty struggling to keep its last measure of legitimacy. It was also partly because "the Chinese had consciously learned little from any one: they regarded themselves as teachers, not pupils."³⁶ This attitude stunted the adoption and adaptation of Western military doctrine and training, even after the Chinese had seen firsthand its effectiveness against their existing practices. For instance, soldiers still drilled with spears, only trained marksmanship at fifty feet, and many simply did not know how to operate their weapons. Henry Bristow, the British consul at Tianjin, noted that Chinese Army "drill was purely spectacular...[but] for fighting purposes it was beneath contempt."³⁷ Even as Bristow highlighted Chinese drill as impressive, the Chinese Army lacked

³⁴ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 60-62.

³⁵ John Lang Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 69.

³⁶ Latourette, *The Chinese, their History and Culture*, 306.

³⁷ Quoted in Allen Fung, "Testing the Self-Strengthening: The Chinese Army in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895," in *Warfare in China Since 1600*, ed. Kenneth Swope (Wiltshire, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 205-206.

basic discipline and skill as its officers never fully adopted the practice of building cohesion and competence.³⁸

Training for the new Chinese Navy was better, but still had shortfalls. Li built naval training academies at the major arsenals and ports, as he fought skeptical bureaucrats who objected to the expenses incurred from running the schools. His emphasis on coastal defense forces meant that guarding the “gateway to China”³⁹ from the Liaotung Peninsula to Shantung Province was imperative to maritime forces. Therefore, Li became the commissioner of Northern Coastal Defenses, along with his responsibilities as commander of the Anhui (Huai) Provincial Army.⁴⁰ As Northern Commissioner, Li personally founded the Tientsin Academy, where his Beiyang (Northern) Fleet was based.⁴¹ Furthermore, two schools were established at Fuzhou (Foochow) to teach construction in French and naval studies in English, the latter consisting of a five-year curriculum focused on navigation and maritime maneuver.”⁴²

Although Li set up schools and bases for seamanship training, which was beyond what the army had done, the Chinese could not get past their prejudices to take full advantage of these opportunities. Conservatives in the dynasty opposed foreign education and training because they feared the foreigners would Christianize the recruits.⁴³ Compounding the problems, Chinese society at large did not respect the military profession. It was more prestigious to study, take the civil service examinations, and enter the bureaucracy than to serve in the military. Even as cadets went through naval training, civil service exams still enamored them, an influence of the Confucian value system. As a British observer noted, “Not even Li Hongzhang could make the

³⁸ Fung, “Testing the Self-Strengthening,” 204-209.

³⁹ Stanley Spector, *Li Hung-Chang and the Huai Army; a Study in Nineteenth-Century Regionalism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 180.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴¹ Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*, 154.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 52-56.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 89.

navy into a respected profession or career in China.”⁴⁴ A consequence of this view was that the military could not recruit the best soldiers and sailors from the civilian population. Even when qualified recruits got through navy training, the fleet commissioners had to compete over the graduates, as there was no personnel management system to dictate the stationing of sailors.⁴⁵

Aside from inconsistent training, inefficient military organization also contributed to the self-strengthening movement. The Chinese Army continued to operate under the *fu bing* system, characterized by abundant and well-equipped but disparate provincial forces that emerged from the Taiping Rebellion. Li Hongzhang’s was a prime example, as he bought Western military equipment on its own to arm his Huai Army. Although it was effective in defeating the Taiping Rebellion, the Chinese Army as a whole was still divided along ethnic and provincial lines.⁴⁶ The Green Standard Army, the traditional pacification force, was 500,000-strong at the time and actually outnumbered the Japanese.⁴⁷ However, the Chinese Army’s lack of coordination and loyalty to individual provincial leaders (and not the central government) fostered by nepotism would hurt Chinese operations later.

Since the Chinese Navy originated from the need for a coastal defense force to protect China’s ports following the Opium Wars, it followed the Chinese Army’s model of development. Empress Cixi’s poor leadership and caution to not create a military rival that challenged Qing governance resulted in decentralized forces. At the time, these army and navy commanders often surpassed the War Office and Foreign Affairs Office (Tsunqli Yamen) in influence. Therefore, Cixi tasked the Tsunqli Yamen to set up a power-sharing system among three admirals in charge of these fleets, all competing for resources.⁴⁸ The Tsunqli Yamen organized the Chinese Navy into four separate fleets, based geographically: the Beiyang (Northern) Fleet, Nanyang

⁴⁴ Quoted in Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*, 166.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 90-94.

⁴⁶ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 62.

⁴⁷ Fung, “Testing the Self-Strengthening,” 208-209.

⁴⁸ Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*, 66-67.

(Southern) Fleet, Fuzhou (Foochow) Fleet, and Guangdong Fleet. Navy commissioners, like army commanders, (many, like Li, commanded both) raised separate navies of their own to guard their home ports.⁴⁹

After China's defeat in the Sino-French War (1884-1885), in which the French started the colonization of Vietnam, it was clear that the Chinese Navy needed centralization. General Tso-Tsung-T'ang, the founder of the Fuzhou Shipyard, advocated the need for a central Navy Board, which he helped establish in 1885. However, because Tso-Tsung T'ang and Li Hongzhang were rivals who competed for resources (the Fuzhou Fleet was one of the most modern at the time), Li just used his position on the board to strengthen his Northern Fleet at the expense of the others. Empress Cixi controlled funding. Also, her irrational decisions, poor leadership, and ignorance of naval affairs overruled the power of the board. In the end, the Navy Board did not improve organization and it remained up to each fleet commissioner to secure funding for his own fleet, which deepened existing rivalries. Despite advancements in training and ship-building, the single greatest failing of the Chinese Navy was its inability to form a unified fleet. Ironically, budget constraints hindered naval development, but a united fleet with centralized administration would have reduced training and maintenance costs.⁵⁰

Rivalries and mistrust characterized the Chinese at the individual soldier-sailor, inter-service, and strategic leadership levels. The ethnic prejudice that existed in the Chinese Army also existed in the new Chinese Navy. For example, northerners from the Beiyang Fleet often mistreated and alienated the large southern Fukien contingent in their formation.⁵¹ At the national strategic level, the head of state Empress Dowager Cixi, granted Li Hongzhang broad powers, but he was still a Han within a Manchu regime. Cixi monitored Li's activities to prevent him from

⁴⁹ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 62.

⁵⁰ Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*, 129-135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 163-166.

gaining too much influence. It was a paradox that Cixi needed Li to succeed, but if he failed, Cixi would scapegoat him and save the Manchu regime.⁵²

Despite the infighting and shortsightedness, Chinese self-strengthening was not entirely dysfunctional. The Chinese developed the technical capability and industrial capacity to produce guns, ammunition, and ships, rather than just purchase them from others. They built important bases for naval maintenance and training. In 1868, the Jiangnan (Kiangnan) Arsenal in Shanghai used US-purchased machine tools and built its first ship, *T'ien Chi*, a 185-foot steamer with fifteen twenty-four-pound howitzers. Chinese and Western contractors developed expertise to the point where a British consul described *Hai An*, another steam-powered gun-boat, as a “most creditable specimen of naval architecture.”⁵³ The Jiangnan Arsenal built six of these ships by 1871. The contracting of Westerners supervisors increased production scale even more, exhibited by the fact that “by 1882, China had fifty steamships, approximately half made in China.”⁵⁴ These steamships were manned by Chinese officers who had studied at naval academies at Fuzhou, Tianjin, or abroad.

While the Chinese Navy was successful in steamship development, the Tientsin Arsenal took the lead in small arms and artillery gun production in the 1870s. Li Hongzhang ran the arsenal himself, as the governor-general of Chihli.⁵⁵ The Fuzhou Shipyard and Jiangnan Arsenal joined Tientsin to produce small arms as well.⁵⁶ By 1894, the Chinese produced reliable Mauser breech-loaders that compared well with Japanese Murata rifles.⁵⁷

The main criticisms of Chinese equipment modernization were two-fold. First, most Chinese-made ships were wooden and inferior to Western iron-clads. Then, as budgetary

⁵² Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 162.

⁵³ Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*, 42.

⁵⁴ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 62.

⁵⁵ Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*, 43-44.

⁵⁶ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 60-62.

⁵⁷ Fung, “Testing the Self-Strengthening,” 198.

constraints from famine and building the Dowager Empress' Summer Palace in Beijing diverted funds away from self-strengthening, defense production converted to commercial production.⁵⁸ For example, the Fuzhou Shipyard became a merchant ship builder after the contract for French expertise ran out.⁵⁹ To keep up modernization, Li turned to foreign purchase rather than internal production of iron and steel gunboats starting in 1875.⁶⁰ That same year, the Jiangnan Arsenal switched to guns and ammunition production because ship-building was too costly.⁶¹ Foreign purchase of weapons was a solution to budget cuts, but that led to incompatible equipment, which was inefficient for subsequent combat operations.⁶²

While the Sino-French War showed a regionalized military that resulted in equipment incompatibility, it also showed other endemic problems that the self-strengthening did not address. In the years preceding the war, the French, like the British, had exploited the Chinese with unequal treaties and had taken advantage of the weak Qing government. This led to the Sino-French War, which tested the tenuous Chinese political-military relationship and showed the military flaws from the self-strengthening movement, a forewarning of the Sino-Japanese War. In short, the Chinese had modern equipment, but not doctrine, leadership, or training. These conditions resulted in their defeat as a mistrusting civilian-military relationship and lack of cohesion between the army and navy negated its technological parity and advantage of interior lines.

The most telling example of Chinese intra-service conflict and weak Qing leadership was when the French attacked and destroyed the Fuzhou Shipyard. The Fuzhou Shipyard was the home of the Nanyang (Southern) Fleet, so the southern commissioner appealed to the other fleets for aid. Li Hongzhang refused to risk his Beiyang Fleet to defend the shipyard, leading to its

⁵⁸ Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*, 68-75.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-54.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 68-75.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 79-81.

destruction.⁶³ The Nanyang Fleet Commissioner got retribution on Li during the Sino-Japanese War, when Li's fleet was at risk of being destroyed.⁶⁴ In both cases, the Qing never adopted the institutions to control these disparate military forces. Therefore, the Qing showed weak control when it came time to deploy its military. Along these lines, mixed fleets, unique guns, and mismatched ammunition contributed to Chinese defeat in the Sino-French War because local commanders raised and equipped units without central direction.⁶⁵ At the end of the Sino-French War, the Treaty of Tianjin of 1885 was another embarrassment to the Chinese when the French took Vietnam as a protectorate and forced China to pay war indemnities.⁶⁶

As the final precursor to the Sino-Japanese War, the Sino-French War revealed that the Qing still could not counter Western imperialism, even after self-strengthening. However, the Chinese did not adjust after this defeat. This gave the Japanese the opportunity to join the European imperialists and challenge China, with the intention of gaining Korea as a client state. Against this backdrop, the Qing Dynasty faced a dilemma. If it completely assimilated Western ways to fight Japanese adventurism, the Qing would in effect renounce the Han Synthesis. This would mean that the Qing would lose legitimacy in the eyes of the Han majority. In Qing calculation, regime survival was paramount, so it was rational not to completely Westernize. However, by keeping Han traditions, the Chinese would hurt their chances against the Japanese, which had made major improvements in their military with the Meiji Restoration. As a result, by the outset of the Sino-Japanese War, Japan had risen to become a co-protector of Korea. In 1894, Japan supported the peasant uprising called the Tonghak Rebellion, favoring the Grand Prince Hungson to overthrow his son, King Kojong. This led to a buildup of Chinese and Japanese forces in Korea, with each sponsoring a side, leading up to the Sino-Japanese War.⁶⁷

⁶³ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 63-66.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁵ Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*, 79-81.

⁶⁶ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 64-65.

⁶⁷ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 112-113.

Chinese Operational Design During the Sino-Japanese War

At the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War, the Han Synthesis still predominated the Qing Dynasty's worldview. This worldview, combined with European imperialism and the self-strengthening movement, led to China's strategic aim of continuing its hegemony in Asia. In the Qing frame of mind, Japan, another Asian nation, whose culture borrowed heavily from Chinese tradition, was still the younger brother in the Confucian filial relationship. Within this mental frame, Empress Cixi and the Chinese expected (as did many Western observers) to defeat the Japanese handily. Although European imperialists had dominated China for a century, the Chinese did not expect to lose to an Asian upstart.⁶⁸

China's strategic aim to continue East Asian predominance led to its political objective of maintaining Korean suzerainty. The political objective would complement the economic objective because keeping Korean suzerainty would ensure that China would have a viable economic market and continue as the cultural leader in the region. These political and economic objectives translated into the military aim of defeating the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN). Japan's strategic aim was to use the excuse of extricating Korea from Chinese domination to advance its own objective of expanding influence in Korea. On the other hand, if the Chinese won, they could gain leverage against repeated Western incursions and eventually reverse some of the unequal treaties.⁶⁹

Therefore, the Chinese military had to defeat Japanese forces to maintain control of Korea. While the Japanese needed to force decisive victory, the Chinese just needed to not lose as they were fighting to keep the status quo by defending Korea. The Chinese aligned the military objective with the political aim because they did not have to win on Japanese soil. This meant

⁶⁸ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 126-127.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

China would fight a limited war. Consequently, the Chinese pursued aggressive diplomacy and employed a defensive approach at the operational and tactical levels.⁷⁰

A limited objective war fought with limited means characterized this defensive operational approach, guiding Chinese operations from the start of hostilities with the sinking of the transport ship *Kowshing* to the end of the war with Japan seizing Weihaiwei. To that end, Empress Cixi charged Viceroy Li Hongzhang with implementing a “policy of pursuing war and peace simultaneously.”⁷¹ Therefore, when King Kojong of Korea appealed to China to quell the Tonghak Rebellion at the beginning of the war, the Chinese sent troops to Korea accompanied by a strong diplomatic outreach to the international community. Viceroy Li engaged the Russians and British to forestall Japanese escalation. In an effort not to provoke Japan, Arthur Cassini, the Russian minister in Beijing, warned Li not to deploy too many troops to Korea lest he squander the chance for peace. The British expressed same sentiment. China obliged, sending only 2,000 soldiers to Asan to deter the Tonghak rebels. Therefore, the international community hindered the Chinese from building combat power because of the desire to broker a quick end to conflict. This was an example of Chinese policy dictating strategy and thereby affecting military resources.⁷²

Ironically, by aligning military actions to political objectives, the Chinese gave the Japanese a combat power advantage on the Korean Peninsula. Since diplomatic constraints prevented Li from building combat forces in Korea, China ceded the maritime domain to the IJN. The Chinese only contested on the land because they did not want to instigate the fighting. The Japanese took advantage of Chinese passivity as the Tientsin Conventions allowed the Japanese to station forces in Korea equal with Chinese forces. Under Tientsin, Japan deployed its army to Korea under the guise of protecting its citizens and economic interests. It was clear that the

⁷⁰ Fung, “Testing the Self-Strengthening,” 202.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 195-196.

Japanese “adopted a much more warlike posture from the beginning,”⁷³ as the Japanese deployed five times the number of Chinese soldiers sent to the Korean Peninsula, without reprimand. They used uncontested sea lines of communication to mass up to 10,000 combat troops of the Japanese First Army in the capital of Seoul by mid-July of 1894.⁷⁴

Once in Korea, Japanese forces helped the Tonghak rebels depose the Kojong monarchy in favor of his father, Grand Prince Hungson. Japan announced a new government for Korea on 23 July 1894. The Japanese’s preliminary basing allowed them to set up lines of operation that extended their operational reach towards potential operations on the Chinese mainland. These actions forced the Chinese into a decision to either give up suzerainty of Korea or confront Japan.⁷⁵

As the Japanese took the initiative by driving the First Army to the Korean royal palace in Seoul, the Chinese staged their army at Asan to reinforce the existing garrison. The Chinese troops in Asan threatened the Japanese at Seoul. This location also provided a buffer between the Japanese and Chinese to prevent unintended hostilities. This decision put Chinese troops in a disadvantageous position, outnumbered and immobile at Asan. Poor troop positioning on the Korean Peninsula meant the Chinese could not disrupt the landing of more Japanese forces.⁷⁶

The Chinese Army also could not quickly reinforce Korea from the mainland China because the one million-soldier force still fell under the Banner and Green Standard Armies of the *fu bing* system. Moreover, the Chinese stationed the bulk of their army in major populated areas like Beijing and Shantung Province because of their history of internal rebellion. This distribution of forces meant the Chinese Army had limited operational reach due to poor roads and no railways. Inadequate infrastructure negated interior lines and initially forced the Chinese to use

⁷³ Fung, “Testing the Self-Strengthening,” 192.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷⁵ Vladimir [pseud.], *The China-Japan War: Compiled from Japanese, Chinese, and Foreign Sources* (Kansas City: Franklin Hudson, 1905), 65-66.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

maritime transport to reach the Korean Peninsula. This meant that the Chinese Army could not mobilize quickly even if ordered to.⁷⁷

Hence, the Chinese faced a mounting Japanese threat with only the troops they had in Korea. Viceroy Li could not prepare a more flexible plan and had to maximize the troops he had while waiting for reinforcements to come by land across the Yalu River. Li's plan called for a defensive posture to protect naval bases from the Liaodong Peninsula to the Yangzi River, holding a Yangzi-to-Weihaiwei defensive line.⁷⁸ Once the reinforcements arrived from the north by way of the Yalu River and into Pyongyang, this army would drive the Japanese off the peninsula while the army at Asan fixed the Japanese First Army. This double-pincer maneuver called for the Chinese to synchronize simultaneous operations. Due to their inability to coordinate between forces, the Chinese never got to execute this plan, and ended up engaging the Japanese in piecemeal. The Chinese inability to coordinate between army and navy units was a byproduct of their disparate organization.⁷⁹

As Chinese operations stalled, the Japanese went on the offensive, first by disrupting Chinese units reinforcing Asan by sea. On 25 July 1894, Japan initiated hostilities when its Flying Squadron attacked Chinese transports near Feng Island. The Japanese fleet intercepted a convoy of Chinese soldiers in British-contracted transport ships carrying troops to Asan. After the Chinese soldiers refused arrest, the IJN's Flying Squadron sank *Kowshing*.⁸⁰ The *Kowshing* sinking was a major blow to the Chinese foothold in Korea, weakening their base of operations at Asan and prompting a formal declaration of war.⁸¹ With the attack, the Japanese showed they

⁷⁷ N.W.H. Du Boulay, *An Epitome of the Chino-Japanese War, 1894-1895: Compiled in the Intelligence Division of the War Office by Captain NWH Du Boulay, Royal British Army* (East Sussex, UK: Naval and Military Press, 2010), 10.

⁷⁸ Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China*, 70.

⁷⁹ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 86.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 68-74.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

could dictate tempo from the beginning of the war as the defeat cost the Chinese 1,000 of their best soldiers without any political or military gain.⁸²

After the *Kowshing* attack, the Japanese maintained the initiative and quickly transitioned to offensive operations on land. A brigade from the Japanese First Army left a security force to guard the Korean royal palace and conducted a two-day march to Songhwan, where Chinese forces encamped near Asan. During the Battle of Songhwan on 29 July, Major General Osima Yoshimasa and 2,500 soldiers from the First Army attacked and defeated the 1,500 Chinese soldiers. From their dug-in positions at Songhwan, the Chinese were the southern prong of the double-pincer movement, the other one being the direction of attack from Pyongyang. The Chinese-prepared defenses were no match as the Japanese forced a retreat to Pyongyang and captured significant supply stores. The outcome was predictable, General Ye-Zhichao (the Chinese commander), retreated ahead of the Japanese arrival. This action was indicative of future battles, starting a pattern of Chinese retreats that strengthened Japanese supply lines and combat power.⁸³

The Chinese loss of *Kowshing* and the defeat at Songhwan foiled their plan of a double-pincer movement converging on Seoul by simultaneous maneuver from Pyongyang and Asan. After losing the southern pincer, all the Chinese could do was continue their focus on defending their ground lines of operations from the Chinese mainland to Korea. At this point, the Chinese still owned the Yangzi-Weihaiwei defensive line and a prepared defense at Pyongyang. With this plan, the Chinese could still defeat the Japanese while defending north at the Yalu River, albeit through piecemeal effort. From the Japanese point of view, having neutralized the Chinese at Asan, the aggressive Japanese First Army could now attack Pyongyang from multiple directions.⁸⁴

⁸² Fung, "Testing the Self-Strengthening," 197.

⁸³ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 77-79.

⁸⁴ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 167.

The Japanese military followed the Battle of Songhwan with naval demonstrations against Port Arthur and Weihaiwei on 10 August, further capitalizing on their success. These naval actions fixed Chinese forces in their ports and covered the movement of their own transports to mass more troops on the Korean Peninsula. The Japanese were adept at sequencing their operations to continue the offensive, as the naval demonstrations concealed their next move on Pyongyang.⁸⁵

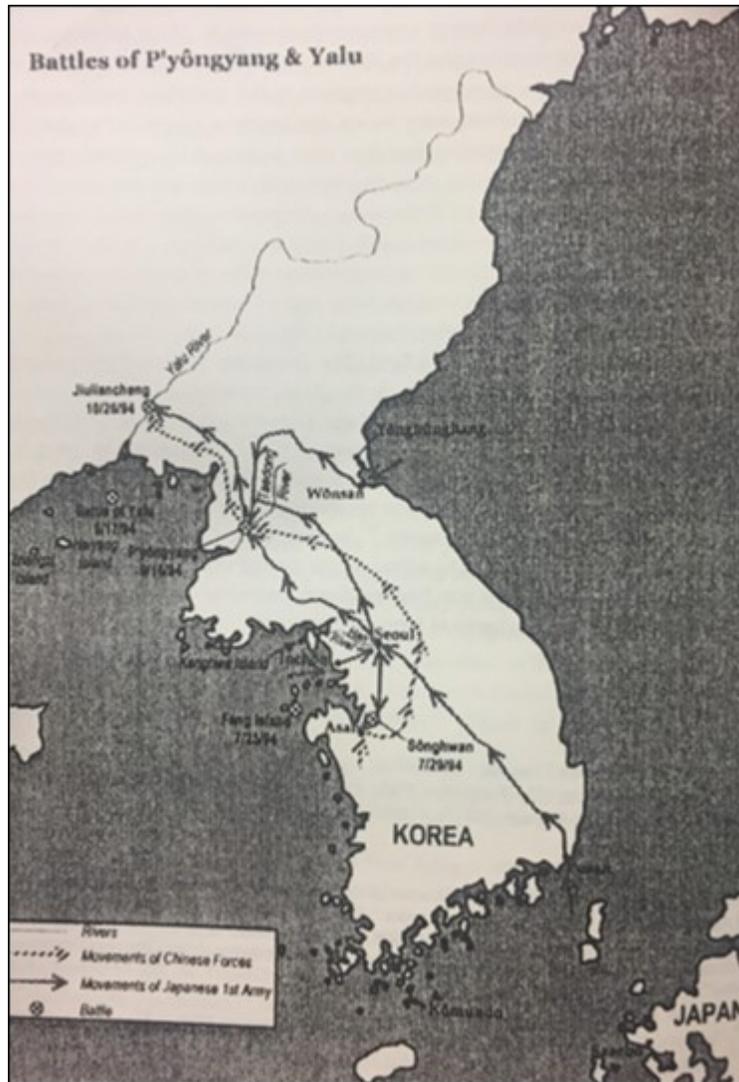


Figure 2. “The Battles of Pyongyang and Yalu” (map) S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 164.

⁸⁵ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 84.

In stark contrast to the passive Chinese, Field Marshal Yamagata Aritomo, commander in chief of the Japanese First Army in Korea, maneuvered his 14,000-soldier force simultaneously on Pyongyang. To prepare for this maneuver, the Japanese started pre-staging forces from five regiments into attack positions two weeks prior to the battle on 15 September. The naval raids on Port Arthur and Weihaiwei enabled deception and secured sea lines of communication for the heavy troop movement.⁸⁶

At the Battle of Pyongyang (15 September), the Chinese allowed the Japanese to advance on four routes, using a coastal route, two inland directions of march from Seoul, and one from the eastern coastal route from Wonsan. The Japanese consolidated their forces and attacked Pyongyang from the north, south, and east while the Chinese Army did not adjust its own forces to meet the threat. The 13,000 Chinese soldiers were well fortified and equipped, but poorly trained as they consisted of soldiers from four armies led by four generals. The only plan the generals devised was to divide Pyongyang into defensive sectors.⁸⁷

Thus, when the Japanese attacked, most of the army fled while few fought. The soldiers that fought only did so at the insistence of General Tso Pao-kuei, commander of 3,500 of the men. Consequently, General Tso died in battle, as he fought the most bravely while his peers ran from danger.⁸⁸ General Ye-Zhichao (the commander from Songhwan), who was the ranking Chinese officer in this battle, did not wait to fight and urged retreat at once. However, the retreat was poorly planned and resulted in Japanese fire cutting down the retreating Chinese forces. Altogether, the Chinese lost 2,000 dead, with another 600 captured while the Japanese lost only 162 dead with 438 casualties. Keeping the precedent from Songhwan, the Chinese lost a key city

⁸⁶ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 116.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸⁸ Du Boulay, *An Epitome of the Chino-Japanese War*, 26.

in Pyongyang, their last foothold in Korea. The Chinese retreated 100 miles north to the Yalu River, as the Japanese drove them completely out of Korea ⁸⁹

In the same manner of the sinking of *Kowshing* and the Battle of Songhwan, the Battle of Pyongyang was significant for the Chinese in terms of the irreplaceable loss of seasoned soldiers and tactical leadership. The Chinese Army showed an overall lack of training and discipline in their dismal performance and withdrawal. Although Chinese Army might have done well to fight a delaying action, its problem was in execution, as its disorderly escape to the Yalu River was their end. When it came time to fight, it was easier to save themselves and not sacrifice for the state because army commanders and soldiers had no loyalty to each other, nor to the Qing government. Once one army ran, the others followed, as they did not want to die in a lost cause. It was smarter to preserve combat power, resulting in another Japanese rout. The Chinese Army continued to show the ineffectiveness and propensity to abandon its mission from the Sino-French War.⁹⁰

Two days later, as the Chinese leadership was still unaware of the Pyongyang defeat, a convoy of ten Chinese ships including six cruisers carrying 4,000 reinforcements and four escort torpedo boats reinforced units at the Yalu River from Taku (mainland). The Beiyang Fleet helped secure the ships. After delivering the reinforcements, Admiral Ito Yuko's IJN fleet, which included the First Flying Squadron and Main Squadron (also totaling ten vessels), detected the convoy. The IJN had been patrolling the coast since sinking *Kowshing*, tasked with interdicting sea lines of communication, a tactic the Chinese did not use. The Chinese defensive approach dictated that navy fleets would perform convoy escorts and not active patrolling. The contrasting approaches resulted in this chance encounter, the Battle of Yalu on 17 September. This battle further displayed the Chinese Navy's deficiencies from the self-strengthening movement. The

⁸⁹ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 113-115.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 113-115.

Chinese convoy had interior lines and comparable ships but lost to the Japanese due to poor tactics.⁹¹

The IJN was more competent and employed its fighting formation for greatest firepower on a weak Chinese flank. The Japanese column formation massed firepower on the Chinese line abreast.⁹² A foreign observer noted that “the Japanese vessels, working in concert and keeping together, as we began to perceive, seemed to sail round and round the enemy, pouring on them an incessant cannonade, and excelling them in rapidity of fire and maneuvering,” compared to the Chinese, whose “vessels appeared to me to present an appearance of helplessness, and there was no indication of combination amongst their opponents.”⁹³ Here, the differences in training showed as Chinese lost the tactical battle by employing the wrong formation, playing into the hands of the IJN. The battle was so one-sided that the Chinese lost 700 sailors killed, along with five ships, with the remaining five retreated to Port Arthur for extensive repairs. On the other hand, the Japanese suffered 80 killed, 162 wounded, and damage to three ships, but lost none.⁹⁴

Admiral Ito Yuko received credit from his military and international observers for using his Flying Squadron to outmaneuver the Chinese fleet and his counterpart Admiral Ding Ruchang. The Chinese fleet did not pose a challenge, as Admiral Ding was a cavalry officer who was inexperienced in maritime operations. Ding, a Li Hongzhang appointee, was observed deferring his decision making to his German advisor General Constantin von Hannecken during the battle.⁹⁵ An English engineer, contracted on the sunken *Chih-Yuen*, stated that the Chinese “are very brave...and I believe Ting to be a good man, but he is under the thumb of Von Hannecken (the German army officer).”⁹⁶ Li Hongzhang’s appointment of Admiral Ding speaks

⁹¹ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 116-127.

⁹² Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895*, 178-179.

⁹³ James Allan, *Under the Dragon Flag. My Experiences in the Chino-Japanese War* (London: W. Heinemann, 1898), 31.

⁹⁴ Du Boulay, *An Epitome of the Chino-Japanese War*, 29-30.

⁹⁵ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 117-123.

⁹⁶ Allan, *Under the Dragon Flag*, 34.

to the nepotism that dominated the Chinese military, as Li put the maritime novice in charge of his best-equipped fleet, the one that Li personally built during the self-strengthening movement.

The destruction of the Beiyang (Northern) Fleet was a major decisive point in the Japanese maritime effort, as they defeated the Chinese Navy's most powerful unit in its first major naval clash. The attrition and defeat of the fleet was a heavy blow, as the Chinese lost their most maneuverable naval force. The significance of the Beiyang Fleet was both symbolic in showing Chinese prestige and operational, as well as their most mobile strategic asset. When the Battle of the Yalu combined with the Battle of Pyongyang, it destroyed Chinese morale.⁹⁷

The Japanese followed the victory at Yalu on 17 September by continuing to build combat forces in Korea with the Japanese Second Army landing in Hua-yuan-kou on 24 October 1894, this time with designs to seize Port Arthur. Adding significance to this unopposed landing was the fact that the Japanese treated the villagers respectfully and forbade plunder. This policy was key to proving legitimacy within the international community. The Japanese demonstrated their effective sequencing of operations, as infantry and engineers followed the marines to seize the lodgment and build combat power.⁹⁸

It was inexplicable to foreign observers that the Chinese did not oppose the landing of the Japanese Second Army, as “‘a comparatively small Chinese naval force’ could make it very difficult for the Japanese to transport large quantities of troops to the Asian mainland.”⁹⁹ Instead, the Chinese continued to follow their approach of a coastal and land defense, giving Japan maritime freedom of movement. This poor leadership decision resulted in the Chinese giving up the initiative at sea. After the major losses suffered by the Beiyang Fleet at Yalu, Empress Cixi ordered Admiral Ding to preserve the force. Therefore, Ding could only conduct defensive operations to protect the fleet, but he also lacked the combat power to disrupt the Japanese from

⁹⁷ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 125-127.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

⁹⁹ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 206.

commanding the seas. The other reason the Chinese Navy left the sea lanes uncontested was outdated concept of *guanxi*, which was the idea that the possession of an asset like the Beiyang Fleet was more of a threat than using it. In this vein, the possessor created more leverage from the threat of use than actual use, because once the possessor spent a resource, there would be no value to it.¹⁰⁰

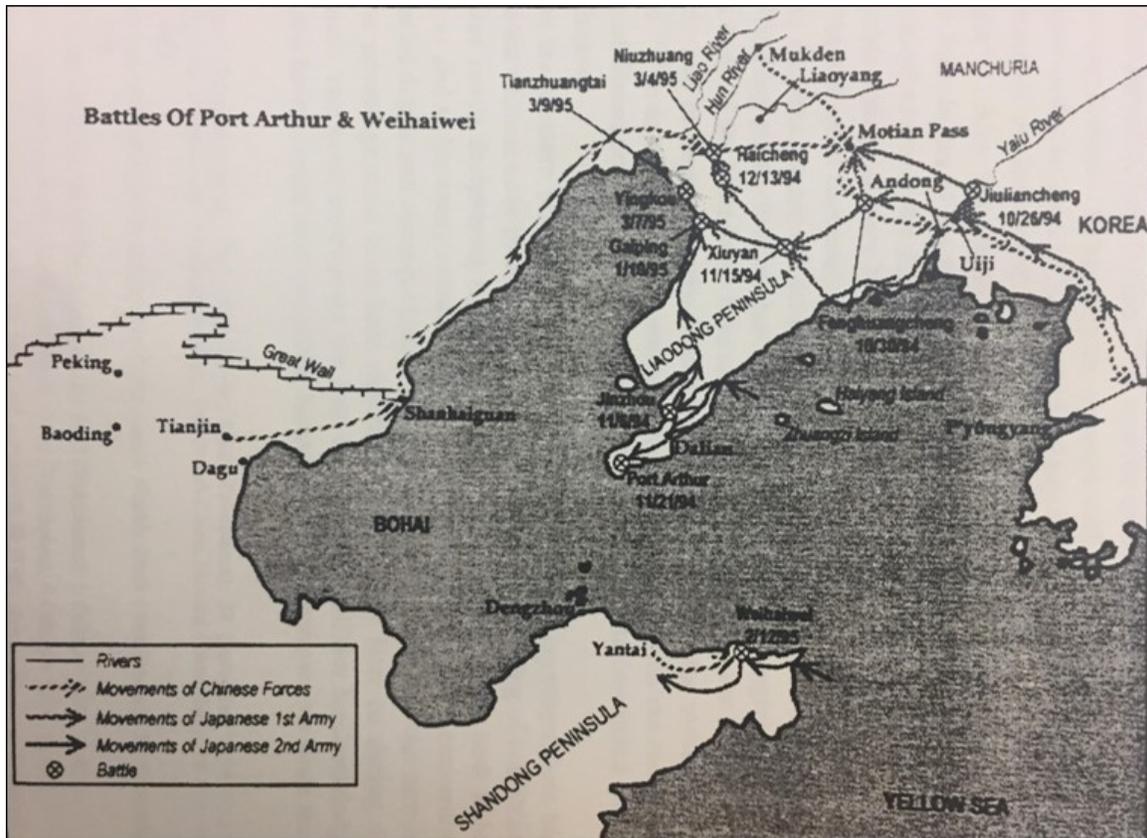


Figure 3. “Battles of Port Arthur and Weihaiwei” (map) S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 196.

In any case, the Chinese defeats at Pyongyang and Yalu and China’s disinterest in disrupting lines of communication allowed the Second Army to land at Hua-yuan-kou on the east side of the Liaodong Peninsula. Meanwhile, the First Army extended its line of operation and crossed the Yalu onto the Chinese mainland. The role of the Japanese First Army was to block the Chinese from reinforcing the Liaodong Peninsula from the north, isolating Port Arthur. The

¹⁰⁰ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 204-206.

Chinese Army had General Song Qing and 5,000 troops to oppose the Japanese First Army. Li Hongzhang had given the aged Song command of troops in Manchuria after the Taiping Rebellion, which he trained poorly during the self-strengthening. His soldiers were no match for the IJA in this campaign. On 26 October, the Japanese First Army seized Jiuliancheng, a foothold on the north side of the Yalu River, followed by Fenghuangcheng on 30 October to further the Japanese penetration. Although the Chinese had parity in land forces and were well-fortified, poor coordination prevented them from disrupting the IJA. General Song and his forces had to retreat towards Mukden. Following this formula, the Field Marshal Yamagata's First Army fixed the Chinese Army in place and threatened Beijing from two directions while maintaining the flexibility to advance towards Mukden (the symbolic capital of the Manchus).¹⁰¹

The Japanese First Army's actions allowed the Japanese Second Army, which consisted of a division and a mixed brigade, to seize Port Arthur as the main effort in this campaign. The Second Army, under Field Marshal Oyama Iwao, established intermediate basing and emanated lines of operation from Hua-yuan-kou to Jinzhou (Chin-chow) and Dalian (Talien) Bay, critical objectives to choke off Liaodong Peninsula and isolate Port Arthur. The geography of the Liaodong Peninsula made Jinzhou (Chinchow) an important decisive point because it commanded ground lines of communication from the major Chinese port northwards to the mainland, allowing the Japanese options to threaten multiple Chinese defenses. General Song did not resist these actions. The 129 captured guns and ammunition supported the Japanese effort and continued the theme of Japanese combat power strengthening at the Chinese expense. The weapons went a long way to ensuring Japanese firepower supremacy as they continued their line of operations to Port Arthur on 21 November.¹⁰²

The Chinese made their stand at Port Arthur with impressive defensive works. Port Arthur was a series of forts armed with guns on the high ground, guarded by over 10,000 troops.

¹⁰¹ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 199-202.

¹⁰² Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 147.

However, the Japanese were undaunted. As the mixed brigade attacked, resulting in the mortal wounding of one of their officers, Major Hanaoka, his soldiers lamented “What a pity he cannot see Beijing!”¹⁰³ signifying their supreme confidence and ultimate intentions. The seizure of Port Arthur gave the Japanese partial control of the Gulf of Bohai (Pechili). It also gave the Japanese the best naval port/base in the Chinese Navy, the only one that could provide ship maintenance. This objective therefore hastened Chinese culmination by not allowing their fleet to repair.¹⁰⁴

The Chinese lacked coordination and esprit de corps at Port Arthur, as they gave up with little resistance. The Chinese numbered 13,000 soldiers, but from seven Banners.¹⁰⁵ James Allan, a British merchant sailor-turned-observer noted the fall of Port Arthur, saying “It was with a feeling of bewilderment that I beheld such powerful defenses lost in such a manner, and realized that after three of four hours’ bombardment on one side, without a shot fired against the tremendous coast defenses, it was all up with Port Arthur.”¹⁰⁶ Again, deficiencies from the self-strengthening movement played out on the battlefield. Not only did the Chinese Army run, but it plundered, as officers abandoned their men. Undisciplined Chinese soldiers fired when the Japanese were still well out of their range, negating the dominant terrain they held. At Port Arthur, the Chinese had defensible terrain, quality equipment, and adequate numbers, yet the Japanese were able to win with relatively little cost. Again, the spoils of the battle supported the Japanese in their next objective of Weihaiwei by prolonging their operational reach.¹⁰⁷

Additionally, Chinese atrocities angered Japanese troops and made them retaliate. At Port Arthur, the Japanese Army stopped trying to engender international goodwill. They stopped abiding by the Geneva Conventions (that protected citizens and wounded soldiers), of which they were a signatory. However, the Japanese did not lose any legitimacy because they documented

¹⁰³ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 156.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁰⁶ Allan, *Under the Dragon Flag*, 72.

¹⁰⁷ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 210-215.

that the Chinese executed atrocities first, appealing to the international community. Moreover, after the atrocities, the Japanese acknowledged their actions and condemned them after investigating, gaining more international credibility in relation to the Chinese.¹⁰⁸

After the Port Arthur Campaign, the Chinese sent a delegation to Japan to negotiate the end of the war on 26 November. The Japanese rebuffed and dismissed them for insufficient credentials. The calculated diplomatic move of underrepresentation was an effort by the Chinese to belittle the Japanese. The Chinese took face seriously, a concept that hinged on the idea that one's worth was based on another's perception. One could give, receive, lose, or preserve face. The unqualified Chinese delegation was meant to disrespect the Japanese and show them that they had no worth. This ended up backfiring against the Chinese, as they lost credibility within the international community. The Japanese discovery of Chinese atrocities did not help the diplomatic missions. In the end, Chinese leadership miscalculated the Japanese and lost political capital with its game of face.¹⁰⁹

After the seizure of Port Arthur, the Japanese simultaneously threatened Beijing and Mukden with the positions of the First and Second Japanese Armies during the Manchurian Campaign. The Manchurian Campaign was a series of battles that allowed the IJA to garrison combat power and reinforce their stressed lines of communications in mainland China. The Japanese planning and execution of the Manchurian Campaign is the most telling example of how they were able to not just win tactical battles with better training, but campaign on a large scale. The actions of the IJA highlighted what the Chinese could not do, as it sequenced and arranged two armies to threaten Mukden and Beijing along three major avenues that penetrated through Manchuria, deeper into mainland China. These fights along the dominant ground routes leading onto mainland China allowed the IJA to transition to their next phase of operations.

¹⁰⁸ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 209-215.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 250-251.

There were three routes that led onto the Chinese mainland from the Liaodong Peninsula and the Yalu River. By controlling these approaches, the IJA presented multiple threats to the Chinese. The westernmost route hugged the west coast of the Liaodong Peninsula by way of Jinzhou (Chinchow), Gaiping (Kaiping), and Yingkou. The easternmost route extended from just across the Yalu River at Jiuliancheng to Fenghuangcheng and Motian Pass. This was the most arduous, but also the most direct route to Mukden. The center route between these two started at Fenghuangcheng and extended north to Haicheng.¹¹⁰

The Japanese Second Army defended the western route on the Liaodong Peninsula because it had occupied Jinzhou (Chinchow) since early November 1894, while preparing for Port Arthur. Its presence threatened the Chinese as the closest Japanese element to Beijing, mobile on land or transportable by ships. The Fifth Division of the Japanese First Army, led by General Tachimi, occupied the easternmost route via Jiuliancheng and Motian Pass. The First Army unit previously cleared as far north as and Jiuliancheng (26 October) and Fenghuangcheng (30 October) to protect Japanese Second Army forces seizing Port Arthur.

The Chinese also realized the need to control the main roads leading to Mukden and did what they could to defend the main trunk lines. They divided the army to oppose the IJA on each route, starting with a garrison at Liaoyang, to defend Mukden via the Motian Pass (eastern route). A central army defended the main route at Nuizhang and Haicheng, connecting the army on the eastern route to General Song and his force on the western route at Gaiping. The Chinese defense formed a line from Motian to Gaiping, by way of Haicheng.¹¹¹

Oposing the Chinese defensive line, the Second Army and Fifth Division of the First Army feinted on the eastern and western approaches and allowed the Third Division of the First Army to strike the main blow. Field Marshal Yamagata directed Lieutenant General Katsura Taro, commander of the Third Division of the First Army, to attack up the center route to seize

¹¹⁰ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 166-167.

¹¹¹ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 222-223.

Haicheng in mid-December, severing the Chinese line of defense from Motian Pass (eastern road) to Yingkou (western road). This threatened Mukden and Beijing simultaneously, which put the Qing Dynasty at direct risk.¹¹²

After the fall of Haicheng on 13 December, the Chinese had an immediate opportunity to attack the Third Division while it was consolidating its forces. Initially, Lieutenant General Katsura advanced to Haicheng without the simultaneous advance of the Second Army because the Japanese had to build combat power at Jinzhou and needed logistical transports catch up. The Chinese could have cut off and surrounded the Third Division but did not. From the beginning of the war up until this point, China had not taken any offensive action, so the lone Third Division advance was a risk that worked. A month passed before the Major General Nogi Maresuke's mixed brigade from the Second Army seized Gaiping on 10 January. The Chinese had ample time to attack, but stayed inactive.¹¹³ This solidified Japanese gain, as "the fall of Gaiping made a continuous line of Japanese troops stretching from Gaiping on the western coast of the Liaodong Peninsula northeast to Haicheng, [and] from there the line continued eastward back to the Korean border at Jiuliancheng."¹¹⁴

The Manchurian Campaign demonstrated aggressive Japanese operations and their link to strategic aims. The seizure of Haicheng did not allow the Chinese to unite their forces for the winter. More importantly, it directly threatened the Qing capital of Beijing and the Empress's rule. Simultaneously, it threatened Mukden which was part of the Manchu Mandate of Heaven, thereby making this a "one of the most brilliant strategic operations of the war"¹¹⁵

In aggregate, Chinese combat power was comparable to that of the Japanese, but the problem was they had no mechanism for synchronization. There was also no central decision-making to respond to the aggressive Japanese campaign. What resulted was that the Chinese

¹¹² Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 165-167.

¹¹³ Ibid., 175-178.

¹¹⁴ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 225.

¹¹⁵ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 166.

Army tried to inflict a series of pin pricks on the Japanese, who brought their full force to bear. Furthermore, each Japanese strike achieved a purpose that traced back to the political aim. The Japanese transition from the operational defense to the operational offense demoralized the Chinese, as the Japanese feints deceived Chinese into thinking they could hold their garrisons for the winter. At the end of the campaign, the IJA was in position to destroy Chinese forces in piecemeal, commanding all the roads leading into China.

As the IJA stopped short of advancing toward Beijing on land, the IJN Japanese dealt the decisive blow to end the war. After Port Arthur, the Japanese controlled half of the what Li Hongzhang deemed the “gateway to China,” in the form of the Liaodong Peninsula jutting into the Gulf of Bohai. The Chinese Navy base at Weihaiwei was the southern prong that controlled the “gateway.” Weihaiwei also hosted the remnants of Li Hongzhang’s Beiyang Squadron. After losing Port Arthur, Weihaiwei became even more important as the last refuge for the Chinese Navy to refit and rearm.

The Japanese deceived the Chinese with a feint on 18 January by attacking Dengzhou (Teng-chou), while the assault force landed the Second Division of the Second Army under Marshal Oyama Iwao at Rongcheng (Yung-cheng). The Second Division was to march and seize the port from inland. Meanwhile, a maritime force bombarded Weihaiwei from sea as the rest of the Second Army landed. The nearly unopposed landing was consistent with Chinese operational defense up until this point. It took between 19-26 January for the Second Army to land and marshal, but there were only 400 Chinese soldiers to defend the landing at Rongcheng. Most of the Chinese troops had massed to Dengzhou, a testament to Japanese deception. The main Port of Weihaiwei was defended with a series of forts and quick-firing guns, manned by a total of 10,000 men. However, because of the uneven training and poor discipline, some soldiers could not work the equipment and leaders could not keep cohesion.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 179-182.

Meanwhile, the remnants of the Beiyang Fleet, still commanded by Admiral Ding, remained idle, boxed in at Weihaiwei harbor. To prevent against attack from the sea, the Chinese blocked the entrance to Weihaiwei harbor with two booms held together by chains and anchors. Rather than disrupt the Japanese landings, the Chinese operational approach to cede the maritime domain and adherence to *guanxi* prioritized the preservation of the fleet. As the Japanese advanced into Weihaiwei harbor, Admiral Ding tried to sink his ships when Japanese victory was inevitable, but his crews refused.¹¹⁷ To his credit, Admiral Ding tried to convince the generals defending on land to use some of his sailors to operate the guns, but due to either pride or lack of familiarity among the units, the generals refused his help. Again, this pointed to the lack of coordination and training that preceded the war. This fatal decision aided the Japanese in seizing Chinese guns and turning them against their owners as the forts surrounding Weihaiwei fell, allowing them to be-siege the Chinese. The Chinese that did not flee held out for twelve days, but surrendered on 16 February.¹¹⁸ The result of the Weihaiwei land battle, sea bombardments, and siege spelled catastrophic defeat for the Chinese while strengthening the Japanese bargaining position. Materially, the capture of the key port, guns, four warships and six gunboats of the Beiyang Fleet allowed the Japanese to force Chinese culmination.¹¹⁹

After the loss of Weihaiwei, the Chinese tried a last effort to create favorable terms for negotiation in mid-February 1895. Empress Cixi made leadership changes after Port Arthur, appointing General Wu Dacheng commander of the Hunan and Hubei Armies. Li Hongzhang had steadily lost favor after each defeat but was still useful as a scapegoat. Basing from Niuzhang, Yingkou, and Tianzhuangtai, General Wu and the remnants of the Chinese Army in Manchuria attacked Haicheng six times from mid-February to early March. These efforts could not penetrate the Japanese defensive line, as the IJA not only repelled these attacks but punished the Chinese

¹¹⁷ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 234-235.

¹¹⁸ Vladimir, *The China-Japan War*, 186.

¹¹⁹ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, 235.

by seizing these garrisons. In early March, the IJA occupied Port Arthur and Weihaiwei (controlling the Gulf of Bohai), and had a defensive line from Jiuliancheng to Tianzhuangtai, able to march on Mukden or Beijing. The Chinese had culminated on land and sea, and the only recourse was to negotiate from a disadvantage.¹²⁰

These conditions forced the Chinese to sue for peace, giving the Japanese favorable leverage. Li Hongzhang negotiated the resulting Treaty of Shimoneki on 8 May 1895. The terms of the treaty dictated that China give up the Liaodong Peninsula (this held until the intervention of Russia), Weihaiwei, and Formosa to Japan, while paying a war indemnity. Chinese influence in Korea was now gone. So was the end of one of the most critical events in Chinese history, one that not only capped a century of humiliation, but sent China further into political decline.¹²¹

The Sino-Japanese War's Implications for the Current Planner

The Sino-Japanese War and its aftermath indelibly affected Chinese international and domestic politics, military development, and society. The current planner may examine this war and specific factors that led the Qing Dynasty to defeat to better understand the contemporary environment. These factors start with the hubris of the Middle Kingdom mentality and the dynamics of the Han Synthesis and its effects on the complicated Manchu-Han relationship. The current planner can learn from this example that Chinese culture has not always been as homogenous as one might think. Today, China's demographics show the same ethnic diversity that its government and military must account for, especially with nationalistic messaging.

These cultural principles drove how the government and military responded to Western imperialism with the self-strengthening movement. In turn, the self-strengthening movement produced the national strategic leadership, military relationships, and capability that the Chinese took into the war. As Chinese political aims and military operational approach influenced the execution of the war, distinct cultural concepts such as *guanxi* and face predominated Qing

¹²⁰ Du Boulay, *An Epitome of the Chino-Japanese War*, 63-71.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

decision-making and application of military power. Specifically, the Chinese viewed their capable navy as a lever for negotiation rather than as a tactical and operational maneuver force.

As the current Chinese military continues to develop capabilities, understanding *guanxi* and face may help planners understand the connection of military prowess to Chinese national prestige. China's newfound economic power has accelerated military modernization and production. For example, the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) has 3,000 modern tanks today, while in 1990, it had none. The Peoples' Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) has upgraded to fourth-generation planes (on par with US technology, while fielding some fifth generation). Likewise, the Peoples' Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) now has diesel electric submarines and destroyers, all built in the last quarter century.¹²² Understanding China's military development as an indicator of its pursuit to restore national pride and international standing is a part of anticipating intentions for its military. Aside from recovering face, the old concept of *guanxi* explains how the Chinese may combine the threat of their military assets with ongoing operations and diplomacy.

Additionally, as current Chinese political and military leaders understand their history as a former subject of imperialism, they may be sensitive to foreign influence in China's domestic affairs. Whether justified or not, there is a continuity that stems from China's past as an imperial subject to its current desire to use the South China Sea as a buffer. John Mearsheimer, the maritime theorist, refers to the stopping power of water as a deterrence to invasion as it is inherently difficult to mass a naval and landing force to invade a hostile shore.¹²³ Even as Chinese actions may reflect territorialism and not merely national defense, the Chinese may use their history and Mearsheimer's definition as an excuse for aggression. As a planner, it is important to understand this argument to refute it.

¹²² Eliot A. Cohen, *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power and the Necessity of Military Force* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 100-101.

¹²³ Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron*, 7.

Finally, in the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese remember a shameful past in which a Western-influenced Japan used military compulsion to impose unfair economic transactions and political arrangements. Today, China's political, military, and economic powers are inter-related and reinforcing, as economic power has translated to military capability, and a potential to "reshape an international order in its image."¹²⁴ With this emerging and restructured military power, China has established an Air Defense Identification Zone encompassing the South China Sea to defend its territorial claims. The base-building on artificial islands has elicited condemnation from the US government and demonstrations from the US Navy to enforce freedom of navigation operations.¹²⁵ The degree to which the Sino-Japanese War informs contemporary decisions and actions is unclear, but it provides current planners a starting to understanding Chinese decision-making. At the very least it gives historical context to contemporary issues that echo the past. Given the potential of the escalation from dispute to militarized conflict between the world's two largest economies, any lens to understand a potential adversary is critical.

¹²⁴ Cohen, *The Big Stick*, 99.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 184-185.

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