

Facing the Dragon: Teaching the Boxer Uprising Through Cartoons

Ariane Knüsel

University of Fribourg, Switzerland, Kantonsschule Baden, Switzerland

WHILE MANY HISTORY TEACHERS and lecturers include political cartoons in their classes, they often use them simply to illustrate arguments instead of treating them as unique sources that deserve to be analyzed in detail. Who can blame them? Most textbooks and even academic publications use cartoons in the same way, further spreading the perception that cartoons are nice to look at but are not worthy of greater scrutiny. Using British and American cartoons about the Boxer Uprising in China, I want to demonstrate on the following pages that cartoons contain a wealth of information and should be treated in history classes as unique primary sources containing various discourses from the social, cultural, economic, and political context, including cultural stereotypes, geopolitical interests and anxieties, and national perceptions of self and other. This article is not meant to be a “how to” guide or to present a systematic approach to cartoon analysis in the classroom like the B.A.S.I.C. steps or the various lesson plans that can be found online.¹ Rather, it is a field report in which I combine the research I carried out for a book on media images (including political cartoons) about China² with my experience of teaching the use of cartoons

as primary sources at university and high school levels to discuss issues that teachers and lecturers might come across when they are working with cartoons in their classes, including common mistakes and assumptions that students make when they analyze cartoons.

Political cartoons are unique sources because they often provide readers of magazines and newspapers with information on a particular topic with a perspective that differs from those in articles. While journalists have to keep their articles within certain word limits, be as objective as possible, and follow their publication's style, political cartoonists are usually very explicit in their view on a subject and take a clear side. Moreover, they often achieve their effect through satire, stereotyping, and ridicule, and rely on simplification and symbols.³

Although the visualizations of stereotypes make cartoons a treasure trove for history teachers and lecturers, there is no universally accepted method of analyzing them. Instead, there exists a plethora of theoretical and methodological approaches, many of which do not place great emphasis on the social, cultural, or political context for interpretation.⁴ Similarly, lesson plans for cartoon analyses in the classrooms often focus on rather superficial aspects like the people portrayed, the message contained in the caption, or the use of symbols, and do not give enough weight to the historical context. This is problematic because the use of symbols as well as their decoding was shaped by a particular cultural context. The analysis of hundreds of cartoons about China has led me to conclude that the portrayal of China in cartoons—including the use of symbols like the dragon—has always been culture-specific and both contributes to and is influenced by the discursive construction of nationhood.⁵

In order to facilitate the comparison of the cartoons in this article, I selected four cartoons from the well-known humorous magazines *Punch*, *Fun*, and *Puck*, which were famous for their cartoons. I have decided to analyze two British and two American cartoons because I want to demonstrate that we cannot speak of China and “the West.” Even though the dragon was a popular symbol for China in Western cartoons, its usage in cartoons varied from nation to nation.⁶ Historians have largely ignored that national portrayals of “self” and “other” are connected to national interests, geopolitical aspirations, and culture-specific values, stereotypes, anxieties, and beliefs. All these factors differed a great deal among the Western

powers and caused depictions of China to differ from country to country. Students also tend to think that all cartoons had similar messages. Analyzing more than one cartoon in detail allows teachers and lecturers to sensitize students to the fact that one cartoon does not represent all of the cartoons that were published on a certain topic in a country (or even in a publication, as I will show later). The Boxer Uprising is a good topic for such an analysis because it occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, which has been called “the age of the periodical.” The Uprising also took place at a time when the age of humorous magazines with their cartoons drew to a close, soon to be replaced by pictorial magazines with photographic images.⁷ It, therefore, marks one of the last major events in Chinese history in which cartoons and sketches still dominated images in the Western press about China.

Before I begin the cartoon analysis, I usually ask my students what aspects they think influenced political cartoons during the Boxer Uprising and draw a mind-map with their answers. It is crucial to make them realize that the whole process depended on various factors, such as the cartoonist’s views and values, the publication (i.e., the editor and/or owner, distribution, political orientation, target audience), the technological process (how long it took for the cartoon to be published, the speed of the information flow from China to Europe/the U.S., how the cartoon was printed, what colors could be used, etc.), the contemporary cultural discourses (including symbols and stereotypes about China and the Western powers), the regional, national, and international social, cultural, economic, and political context (including media discourses and political debates), and communication technology. While it is obviously very difficult for students to research all of these aspects, it is important that they are aware of these factors and of their influence upon one another.

Since cartoons require a lot of knowledge about the historical background, I usually let my students analyze them after we have covered a topic. In the case of the cartoons about the Boxer Uprising, I work with the cartoons once the students have learned about the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860), the unequal treaties, the scramble for concessions in the 1890s, the missionary presence, and the causes and course of the Boxer Uprising in 1900. Since most world history textbooks deal with the Opium Wars and the foreign presence in China in the late nineteenth century as well as the causes,

course, and consequences of the Boxer Uprising, I will only briefly summarize the period June to September 1900 because it is crucial for my interpretation of the cartoons.

The Boxer Uprising began in 1898 in Shandong province as an anti-Christian movement because many foreign missionaries took advantage of their extraterritorial privileges, interfered in local legal disputes to protect Chinese Christians, and blatantly disrespected Chinese traditions and beliefs. In spring 1900, the Boxer movement became anti-foreign, and the Boxers (mainly poor Chinese peasants, seasonal workers, and unemployed men) increasingly focused their efforts on Beijing. In May and June 1900, they destroyed railway lines between Tianjin and Beijing. Meanwhile, the diplomats in Beijing were joined by an increasing number of missionaries from surrounding areas with their Chinese converts who were seeking protection in the walled foreign legations quarter. An international relief force left Tianjin on June 10, 1900 for Beijing, but it eventually had to return. Although there were several battles between Qing troops and Boxers, the Qing Dynasty did not take an official stance against the Boxers. After the Boxers attacked the foreign settlements in Tianjin, the foreign powers reacted by shelling the Dagu Forts on June 17, which resulted in the Qing Court openly siding with the Boxer movement. On June 20, Chinese soldiers and Boxers began the siege of the foreign legations quarter in Beijing. Since the Boxers had destroyed the Western telegraph cables connecting Beijing with Tianjin and with Russia, communication between the foreigners in Beijing and the outside world came to an almost complete halt during the siege, which lasted until August 14, when a second international relief force from Tianjin reached Beijing, causing Empress Dowager Cixi to flee Beijing with her entourage. During the siege, sixty-six foreigners were killed and over 150 wounded. Western soldiers then went to go on several brutal punitive expeditions in September and October 1900.⁸

The article is structured in the following way: I first discuss the dragon as a symbol for China. This includes a short overview of the dragon in Chinese and Western cultures, and the adoption of the dragon as a national symbol for China in Western political cartoons. Then I analyze the two British cartoons, followed by the two American cartoons. In the discussion of each cartoon, I highlight certain aspects that are often overlooked in classroom analyses of

political cartoons or problems that arise when cartoons are analyzed, and I discuss how I try to solve them.

The Chinese Dragon and Western Cartoonists

Since the Opium Wars, Western political cartoonists have been drawing China as a dragon whenever they want to visualize China as the Yellow Peril. The symbol of the dragon allows a Western cartoonist to portray China not only as dangerous, but also as subhuman and inferior.⁹ China was, of course, not the first nation to be drawn as an animal. For centuries, cartoonists have portrayed enemies as animals in order to dehumanize them and to ascribe to them the character traits associated with those animals.¹⁰ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, popular symbols for nations included a lion for Britain, a bear for Russia, or an eagle for the United States (such as in **Figure 4** below). The animals were portrayed positively or negatively according to the situation.

The choice of the dragon as a symbol for China can be explained with its prominence and different interpretation in Western and Chinese cultures. Myths, legends, and images of dragons are common in cultures all over the world. Yet, while in Asian countries dragons are portrayed mostly positively, the opposite is the case in Western countries. In Chinese culture, *long* (龍)—which has been translated as dragon—figures as the most powerful and positive animal. Dragons are benign or even divine creatures in Chinese folklore and were associated with imperial power. Thus, the dragon as a symbol was connected to the Chinese emperor, and it was featured prominently on the imperial robes of various Chinese dynasties as well as on the national flags of the Qing Dynasty.¹¹ Western legends are also teeming with dragons, but these are of a very different nature. In the Christian tradition, the dragon was presented as an embodiment of Satan or as a demonic power, while in chivalric romances, the act of slaying a dragon became almost a prerequisite for a hero. The transnational circulation of chivalric romances caused the image of the evil dragon to spread further in the West. As a result, almost all European and American myths about dragons present them as evil creatures, and dragons usually function in the narratives as antagonists to the heroic, knightly dragon slayer.¹²

Western encounters with China increased massively in the nineteenth century when the rule of the Qing Dynasty meant that dragons were almost omnipresent as symbols, particularly in the official surroundings in which the Westerners would often have found themselves. The Opium Wars and Western ambitions to create spheres of interest in China had the consequence that China was portrayed negatively in the Western press. Since the dragon was such a prominent symbol in China at a time when Western publications increased their negative coverage of China, Western cartoonists were quick to use the dragon as a symbol for China because of its negative connotation in Western cultures. Thus, for Western cartoonists, the dragon presented itself as a ready-made negative symbol for China, which Western audiences had no problems in decoding properly by interpreting the dragon as a threat to the heroic actions of the Western powers.¹³

The dragon was so popular among Western cartoonists that it became one of the quintessential Yellow Peril images. The Yellow Peril is a racial enemy image that centers on the Social Darwinist concept of a yellow race that threatens the white race. It has been invoked by Westerners at various times to portray China and/or Japan as a political, economic, social, or cultural threat, claiming that their actions would result in such apocalyptic scenarios as the degeneration or even the annihilation of the white race.¹⁴ Although cartoonists relied on the concept of the (superior) white race being threatened by the (inferior) yellow race, they did not automatically agree on the finer details, such as which Asian nation the Yellow Peril actually referred to, what the nature of the Yellow Peril was, or how serious the threat of the Yellow Peril was. All this affected the visualization of the Yellow Peril by the individual cartoonist.¹⁵ While various studies have been published on the Yellow Peril, most neglect the fact that it was interpreted differently in each nation, and that the definition changed even within the same nation due to factors like shifting political alliances or fears associated with Asian immigration.¹⁶

A British Knight in Shining Armor

The cartoon “The Avenger!” was drawn for the magazine *Punch* by Sir John Tenniel. *Punch* was founded in 1841 and became the most successful comic magazine in Britain. By 1900, it was among the few

remaining British satirical journals specializing in cartoons.¹⁷ Tenniel began working for *Punch* in 1850 and became its main cartoonist in 1864. He left the magazine in 1901, but was so influential that his style continued to shape *Punch* cartoons long after his retirement. While some publications gave their cartoonists considerable leeway in the message and content of their cartoons, Tenniel could not draw cartoons completely at will and instead was given detailed information of the concepts that the cartoon had to include. He also had to draw his cartoons according to the specifications of the editor F. C. Burnand, who insisted on seeing rough sketches before he approved cartoons for publication. By 1900, *Punch* supported conservative values and since Tenniel was a supporter of the Conservative Party, he only objected to a few subjects and also proposed many of them.¹⁸

Whether Tenniel was told to draw a knight in his cartoon (see **Figure 1**) or thought of it himself is unclear. However, it is possible that the idea was his own, as he was a medievalist and fan of classics, and often drew knights and other medieval imagery in his cartoons.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the choice of the subject as a knight slaying a dragon is interesting. In 1900, Britain still dominated commercial and diplomatic relations with China, but it was deeply suspicious of the other powers' ambitions to increase their presence in China. The Boxer Uprising's anti-foreign stance was hugely problematic for Britain because it challenged not only British commercial and financial interests, but also Britain's military presence in China. As the Uprising took place during a time in which jingoism was rampant in Britain due to the Boer War (1899-1902), press reactions to the Boxer Uprising were almost unanimously negative, and editorials in various newspapers demanded punitive action to avenge rumored massacres of Britons in China.²⁰ British cartoons of the Boxer Uprising, therefore, often depicted China as a dragon because the malign character associated with the dragon meant that British cartoonists could not only present the Uprising as a threat to Britons in China, but also justify the use of force against the Chinese.

"The Avenger!" was published in late July 1900, a time when most British newspapers printed stories of alleged massacres, and described in detail the way white men fought heroically to their last breath, defending helpless women from "hordes of yellow savages."²¹ Yet, unbeknownst to the editors in London, the Westerners were not killed en masse in Beijing, but actually managed to hold out until



Figure 1: “The Avenger!” by Sir John Tenniel in *Punch* (July 25, 1900).

they were rescued. Since neither the government nor the editors could communicate with Britons in Beijing, however, the massacre stories were believed to be true and described such gory detail that they left the British public riling with jingoism, demanding revenge for the atrocities.

The title of the cartoon—"The Avenger!"—is a clear indication that it justified the use of force against the Chinese and ignored any questions regarding the behavior of British missionaries or the effects of the British presence in China in general. Resembling Raphael's painting, "St. George and the Dragon," the cartoon depicts a winged knight with a cross on his shield, fighting a dragon. This would have reminded British readers of St. George, the patron saint of England.²² The legend of St. George and the dragon is one of the most famous Western dragon legends, even though the dragon was not part of early accounts of St. George's life. However, after it became common in the Middle Ages to symbolize a heroic character by turning the hero into a dragon slayer, the same was applied to the legend of St. George. Accordingly, George was a knight from Cappadocia (in modern Turkey) who fought a dragon with poisonous breath in order to save the daughter of the King of Silena (in modern Libya) from being sacrificed. George defeated the dragon, saved the princess, and slayed the dragon after the people of Silena agreed to become Christians. He later became St. George, and his armor with a red cross on a white breastplate and shield were used for the English national flag.²³ The fact that the knight in the cartoon is holding a white shield with a cross not only identifies him as a symbol for England, it also brings to mind St. George's heroic act of slaying the dragon. Using St. George as a symbol for Britain might have been problematic at any other time because of Welsh, Scottish, and Irish nationalism and demands for Home Rule,²⁴ but the jingoist atmosphere seems to have overruled any sensitivity about such issues in July 1900.

"The Avenger!" depicts the situation in China in a very curious way, namely as a fight between Britain and China, completely ignoring the fact that an international force with British, German, French, Russian, and other soldiers had left Tianjin on June 10, 1900 to assist the beleaguered foreigners in Beijing. This fact was known in London because the British government authorized Vice-Admiral Seymour to lead the international force and informed the House of Commons about its lack of success and eventual return to Tianjin.²⁵

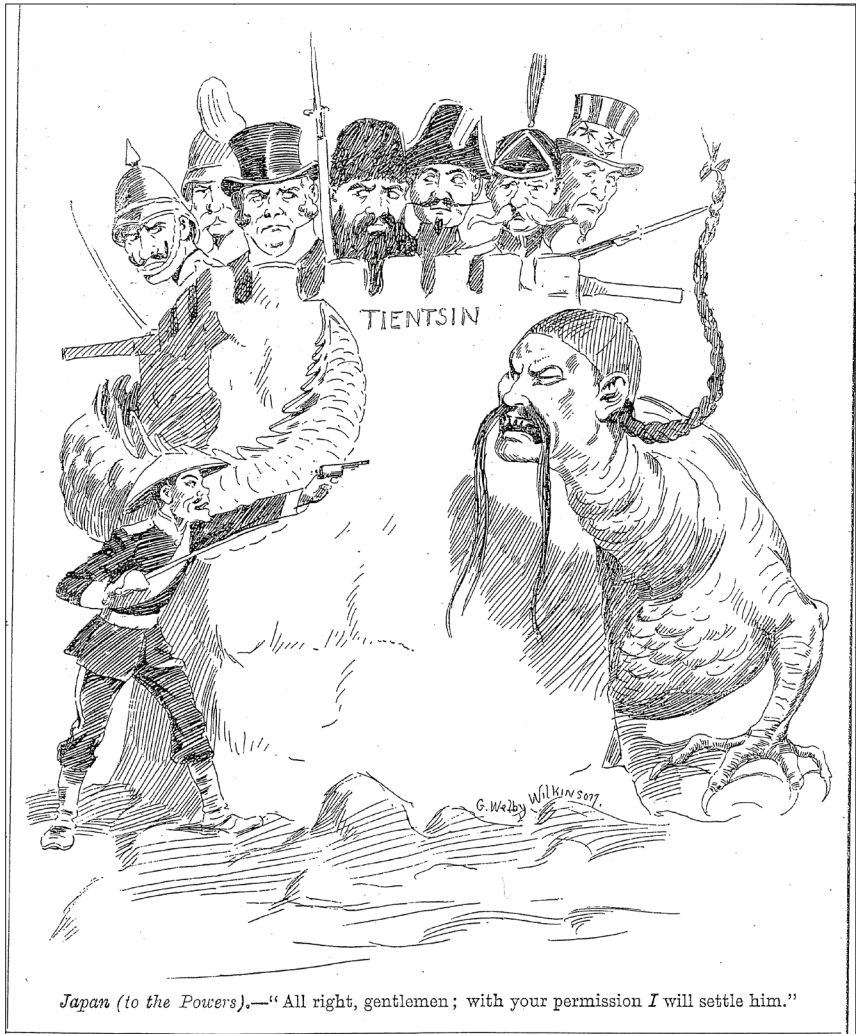


Figure 2: “Tientsin” by G. Welby Wilkinson in *Fun* (July 17, 1900).

Yet the readers of *Punch* were clearly supposed to view the response to the alleged atrocities in Beijing as a purely British action, not as an international collaboration.

The use of a dragon slayer in the cartoon is also a good example of the utilization of the dragon as a negative, threatening symbol for China by Western cartoonists. By relying on the dichotomy

established by chivalric romances of a knight in shining armor on a white horse fighting a dragon, the cartoon portrayed British actions as morally impeccable and Chinese actions as despicable and evil. The fact that St. George is just about to slay the dragon in the cartoon also legitimizes future British actions in China; just as the dragon had to be slain, the British soldiers in China would rightfully punish the Chinese for their evil actions. Since the knight was fighting the Chinese dragon in the name of civilization (inscribed on one wing), the cartoon served as a reminder to the audience not only that England—and by extension Britain—was the spearhead of civilization, but also that China was uncivilized. Such a view was in line with *Punch*'s general stance on imperialism, which it supported without sympathy for the colonized or anticolonial movements.²⁶ Thus, we see that this particular cartoon not only contains the dragon as a visual stereotype of China, but also portrays England/Britain as a heroic nation. Moreover, it references political debates surrounding imperialism and the British presence in China. This was fairly atypical for British cartoons on the Boxer Uprising because they usually contained the other powers that were present in China.²⁷

Heroic Japan and Evil China

“Tientsin,” by G. Welby Wilkinson (**Figure 2**), was printed in the British liberal magazine *Fun*, another humorous paper famous for its cartoons.²⁸ *Fun* was published weekly from 1861 to 1901, when it was incorporated in the publication *Sketchy Bits*. Since it was considerably cheaper than *Punch*, it was also known as “the poor man’s *Punch*.”²⁹ While *Punch* and Sir John Tenniel have been covered by historians in detail, this is not the case for *Fun* or Wilkinson. Despite the lack of biographical information, however, the cartoon is interesting because it focuses on the foreign powers in Tianjin. About 900 foreigners lived in the foreign settlements in Tianjin in June 1900. After the Boxers occupied the Chinese part of the city, they attacked the foreign settlements. However, unlike Beijing, which remained out of reach for the relief forces, international relief forces arrived in Tianjin on June 26 and managed to end the siege on July 13.³⁰

The juxtaposition of China and Japan in the cartoon highlights Japan’s considerable role in ending the siege of the foreign settlements in Tianjin. While other powers were involved as well,

in 1900, Japan was beginning to form a special relationship with Britain. In the 1890s, various nations challenged Britain's leading position in China, and the British Empire was so widespread that Britain needed an ally in order to protect its interests in Asia (note how Britain and Russia are eyeing each other suspiciously). Although Britain remained somewhat apprehensive about Japanese imperial designs in China, Japan was an ideal candidate for such an alliance because it wanted to prevent further Russian expansion in East Asia. As a result, in 1902, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was initiated.³¹ The Anglo-Japanese Alliance caused Britons to describe Japan after 1902 in glowing terms. One enthusiastic author even declared in 1904 that Japan was "the Britain of the East."³²

Wilkinson's cartoon demonstrates that this positive view of Japan already existed in 1900. Japan's willingness to face the Chinese dragon while the rest of the foreign powers looked on underlined Japan's heroic status, befitting that of an ally. "Tientsin" therefore shows how the negative perception of China and the positive perception of Japan resulted in British portrayals of China as the Yellow Peril and of Japan as an (almost) equal of the Western powers in China. Thus, the cartoon follows the traditional portrayal of China as a backward, savage nation, but it uses this image to contrast it with that of a civilized and Westernized Japan. Such a dichotomy was not completely unrealistic. After all, Japan underwent immense modernization according to Western standards in the late nineteenth century, while China's modernization was much slower and more selective.³³ This is also depicted in the cartoon: Japan is not only holding a sword (the weapon associated with the Samurai, a common symbol for Japan in British cartoons), but also a revolver, which is a reference to the modernization of the Japanese military forces in the late nineteenth century. China (i.e., the dragon) has no such weapons; its whole strength lies in its size. Japan is also drawn as a civilized nation (it is depicted as a human being as opposed to an animal like China) and as a Westernized nation (it is wearing a Western-style uniform). China, on the other hand, is portrayed with various typical Yellow Peril visualizations such as the dragon, claws, sharp teeth, and slanted eyes. "Tientsin" is, therefore, a perfect example of the fact that the two portrayals reinforced each other's qualities; the more negatively China was presented, the more positive was Japan's appearance. One could also argue that Japan was portrayed

so positively in order to present China in a negative way, which in turn could be used to justify future British actions and ambitions in China. In any case, the importance of Britain's foreign relations are evident in this cartoon.

Although **Figures 1** and **2** portray the Boxer Uprising in different ways, both of them depict China as the Yellow Peril and use the dragon as a symbol for China in order to legitimize British imperialism in China and avoid facing any nagging questions about the negative aspects of imperialism or the presence of foreign missionaries in China. As the following two cartoons from the United States demonstrate, however, this was not typical of American cartoons.

The Dragon and the Emperor

“The First Duty” (**Figure 3**) was published as the cover of the American satirical magazine *Puck* in August 1900. *Puck* was founded in 1877 by Joseph Keppler, and was part of a group of humorous magazines for the American middle class that were founded in the 1870s and 1880s. By 1900, it had become one of the most influential and popular of these magazines, with a circulation of about 100,000.³⁴ Comparable to *Punch* in its importance and reputation, *Puck* stood out among other humorous magazines because it had “higher standards, better artists, wider interests.”³⁵ The artist of “The First Duty” was Keppler's son, Joseph Keppler, Jr. Like Tenniel at *Punch*, he was the main cartoonist at *Puck*, but since he was also its artistic editor, Keppler, Jr. had more control over both the subject and the content of the cartoon than Tenniel did.³⁶

Although “The First Duty” contains similar symbols and references to “The Avenger!”, its framing of the Boxer Uprising and its message are different because American political, social, and cultural relations with China were different from those of Britain. This brings me to another important issue that has to be considered when teaching with cartoons: the reconstruction of the context can be difficult for students because they sometimes have to think outside the box in order to get the information they need to reconstruct the social, political, economic, and cultural background in which a cartoon was published (this is obviously more of an issue when students are writing papers on cartoons). For example, most students would think of researching British imperialism in



Figure 3: “The First Duty” by Joseph Keppler, Jr. in *Puck* (August 8, 1900).

China for a British cartoon, yet few, if any at all, would think of researching the importance of American missionary organizations to the American public perception of China for the interpretation of an American cartoon. I try to overcome this problem by assigning my high school students a minimum number of texts and/or books that they have to consult for their cartoon analyses in the hope that this helps them in getting greater insight into the social, cultural, economic, and political context and allows them to consider a larger variety of discourses that could have affected the creation and the look of the cartoon.

Once students have read more about the American presence in China around 1900, they find out quickly that, while British interests in China were linked to British imperial and economic pursuits, by 1900, American interests in China were mainly commercial and religious. In the nineteenth century, American support for missionary organizations had increased massively because they were seen as carrying out the divine mission of bringing Christianity to the rest of the world and of leading the world according to God's will. As a result, by 1900, a large part of the American public regarded China as a pupil that could evolve with the help of American missionaries into a civilized, Westernized nation.³⁷

By the time of the Boxer Uprising, American missionaries dominated the foreign missionary presence in China. They also had very close ties to their community at home and to local newspapers, thus influencing the media reactions to the Boxer Uprising much more than British missionaries did.³⁸ Since missionary organizations constantly needed funding, missionaries tended to present China and the Chinese in a positive light.³⁹ Thus, whereas British businessmen and officials contributed to negative descriptions of China in order to legitimize British imperialism in China, most American media portrayals of China were more positive because of the influence of missionaries on the media discourse, resulting in the depiction of the U.S. as a mentor to China. This had the effect that, even though some American newspapers used Yellow Peril vocabulary in reports about the Boxer Uprising, overall, the reactions in the American press (including cartoons) were less sensational than in Britain.⁴⁰

Another reason that explains why China was not depicted as negatively in the U.S. as it was in Britain was that, although the American Minister Edward H. Conger was in the Beijing Legations



Figure 4: “The Real Trouble Will Come with the ‘Wake’” by Joseph Keppler, Jr. in *Puck* (August 15, 1900).

while they were under siege during the Boxer Uprising, the Chinese government gave him a telegram from the American Secretary of State, John Hay, and allowed him to send a reply. In order to ensure that Conger was still alive and that the reply had not been written by the Chinese, Hay asked Conger to include the name of Conger’s sister (Alta) in his reply. After Conger did so, the American government knew that he was indeed still alive and that the foreigners had not all been massacred.⁴¹ Yet, even before this news reached the American press, only a few rumors about massacres were printed (they were usually taken from British newspapers), and these were generally less hysterical than the British stories.

The different reactions to the Boxer Uprising can also be seen in the ways the four British and American cartoons analyzed here used the dragon to frame the Uprising. In all four cartoons, the dragon takes on a prominent role and is clearly portrayed as evil. In **Figure 3**, blood is dripping from the dragon’s mouth and it leaves behind

a scene of anarchy, murder, and riot. Yet in the British cartoons, China is dehumanized as a dragon, while the other nations are drawn as human beings. Moreover, by depicting China as a dragon, “The Avenger!” and “Tientsin” make no distinction between the Boxer rebels and ordinary Chinese. As it would turn out, neither did the Western soldiers who went on punitive rampages around the countryside after defeating the Boxers. In the *Puck* cartoon, however, the dragon does not represent all the Chinese—just the Boxers. China is depicted as a rather petulant child sitting on a throne, a possible reference to either the Guangxu Emperor (although he was not in charge during the Boxer Uprising) or to the Qing court’s rather long delay in taking sides until it finally supported the Boxers against the Westerners. Keppler, Jr., therefore, makes a clear distinction in “The First Duty” between “evil” Boxer rebels and “good” Chinese, turning the Boxers into a negative exception in an otherwise good Chinese society. Such a view was influenced by the American missionaries’ attempts to portray the Uprising in a way that the Chinese, in general, were not affected by it. After all, if all Chinese had been portrayed as evil, it would not have been possible to claim that they were good people that could be converted and educated by American missionaries.

Another interesting aspect is the role of civilization in the cartoons. “The Avenger!” and “The First Duty” imply that China is uncivilized. In “The Avenger!”, the knight is fighting China in the name of civilization. China is such a threat to civilization that it has to be destroyed. “The First Duty,” however, shows Civilization ordering China: “That dragon must be killed before our troubles can be adjusted. If you don’t do it I shall have to.” China is, therefore, not yet part of civilization, but neither is it a threat to civilization. Instead, the cartoon portrays the dominant American view of China as a ward of the U.S., implying that with the help of the U.S., China could become a truly civilized nation. This is further stressed with the portrayal of China as a child, while the figure of civilization is drawn like an angry mother chiding the child.

Imperial Scavengers

“The Real Trouble will Come with the ‘Wake’” (**Figure 4**) was published one day after the Boxers’ siege of the foreign legations

ended, and shows a dead Chinese dragon about to be carved up by the foreign powers.⁴² “The First Duty” and “The Real Trouble” were both printed in *Puck*, disproving the common assumption by students that cartoons published in the same magazine always contained the same message. In this case, the cartoons were even both drawn by Joseph Keppler, Jr., yet their content and message are very different. While the dragon is dangerous and menacing in “The First Duty,” he is dead in “The Real Trouble.” In fact, “The Real Trouble” is more similar to “Tientsin” than to “The First Duty” because of its focus on imperial rivalries in China. However, their messages were markedly different. The outspoken criticism of imperial rivalries presented by “The Real Trouble” was rare among cartoonists and journalists during the Boxer Uprising, even though publications in various countries alluded to them. As we have seen, “Tientsin” is an example of a British cartoon about imperial rivalries in China, in which British anxieties and interests were represented in the suspicious glances between Britain and Russia as well as in the heroic portrayal of Japan. *Punch* also published similar cartoons.⁴³ However, “The Real Trouble” is different from these cartoons in that it does not focus on the rivalry between two specific powers, but portrays all foreign powers except for the U.S. as imperial powers waiting to devour China.

Although commercial interest in China was still high during the Boxer Uprising, the American press usually focused not on commercial aspects, but on the America’s unique role in China, stressing that the U.S. did not harbor imperial ambitions in China like the other powers. The *Chicago Tribune*, for example, wrote in August 1900:

From the days when Anson Burlingame formulated the policy of forbearance and justice down to the present day the United States has always dealt more fairly by China than any other great power... The United States is the only nation in which the Chinese feel they can have any degree of confidence. Great Britain, Russia, Germany, and France have seized large tracts of Chinese territory and are suspected of desiring more... The American government has clean hands and a more unselfish record than the other powers.⁴⁴

This attitude is also the message of “The Real Trouble.” The focus of the cartoon is neither the U.S. (eagle on the far left) nor China (dragon in the middle), but the stand-off between the British lion

and the Russian bear. The presence of Italy, Germany, France, Austria, and Japan, which are hovering greedily around the body of the Chinese dragon, draws the audience's attention to the problem of imperial rivalries in China.

It is crucial that the American eagle is not participating in what is essentially portrayed as a scavenging, because it shows the U.S. as a power with no imperial interests in China. The position of the eagle served as a reminder to the American public that the U.S. did not harbor any imperial feelings and that the U.S. presence in China was not like that of other powers in China, whose only goal was to exploit it. This view was in line with that of most American newspapers, which stressed that, unlike the other foreign powers in China, the U.S. had no sphere of interest there.⁴⁵ Of course, the American government had significant economic and geopolitical interests in China and had taken various measures in order to protect those interests. Thus, the U.S. had participated in the First Opium War and had obtained the most favored nation clause in the Treaty of Wangxia in 1844, entitling the U.S. to every concession subsequently forced upon China by other nations. The American government could, therefore, profit from the imperial actions of the other foreign powers in China without having to carry them out.⁴⁶ However, when the other powers began to carve China up into spheres of influence in the 1890s, the American government was worried that it could fall behind. As a result, Hay tried to secure American interests in China via the Open Door Notes, which bound the foreign powers in China to respect China's sovereignty and to grant each other equal commercial privileges.⁴⁷ The Open Door Notes also allowed the U.S. government to continue presenting itself as a non-imperial power in China without having to give up its privileges and ambitions there. The Open Door Notes did not end American ambitions in China. For example, Conger suggested an American coaling station in Zhili province in 1899, and as late as November 1900, Hay was toying with the idea of a naval station that could be used to prevent complete control of Chinese economic relations by another power.⁴⁸ Thus, Hay cabled Conger:

Secretary of the Navy earnestly asks, in view of the importance of a naval station on the Chinese coast in the event of a future war, that you take first favorable opportunity to obtain for the United States free and exclusive use of Samsa Bay as a naval port with the additional

pledge that a circular zone twenty nautical miles in radius with its center at the east point of Crag Island shall not in future be alienated to, controlled or used by any other power nor fortifications be erected therein by the Chinese government.⁴⁹

Conger supported such action, but he was unable to secure a naval base in China for the U.S. because of Japanese objections.⁵⁰

Denying any imperial interests in China was also crucial for the U.S. because it dovetailed with the concept of American Exceptionalism, which was fundamental to the discursive construction of nationhood in the United States. Accordingly, the U.S. was not only the most civilized nation on earth, but it was also on a divine mission to bring liberty, progress, democracy, and self-determination to the rest of the world.⁵¹ By stressing the U.S.'s refusal to participate in the other powers' exploitation of China, "The Real Trouble" not only legitimized American actions and interests in China, but also emphasized the U.S.'s exceptionalism. American Exceptionalism was omnipresent in official justifications of American China policies, and it influenced most cartoons that were printed in the U.S. about China around 1900. "The First Duty," with its paternal depiction of China as a misbehaving child that is being chided, also feeds into the concept of American Exceptionalism. The view of China as a ward of the U.S. dominated American media discourse until the 1930s, and democratic reforms were interpreted as a sign of American influence in China.⁵² By including the discursive (and visual) construction of nationhood in their analysis, students are, therefore, sensitized to the influence that self-perception and concepts of nationhood have on media images, particularly on media portrayals of foreign policy issues.

Conclusion

Cartoons are a unique source for classroom discussions, group work, and research papers because they allow students to analyze the visualization of cultural stereotypes, political debates, and geopolitical interests and anxieties. Historical analyses of cartoons require considerable knowledge of the political, economic, social, and cultural context: the more we know about the situation in which a cartoon was created, published, and circulated, the more information we can extract from the cartoon. Pitfalls that have to be avoided by

students include the assumption that a cartoon can represent all the cartoons in a country, as the different takes on the Boxer Uprising by the British cartoons demonstrate. The American cartoons were even printed in the same magazine, yet they portray the Boxer Uprising from different perspectives.

Another point this article tried to make is that it is dangerous to make general statements about the use of one symbol, which is something that students are likely to do. The four cartoons analyzed in this article were all published during the Boxer Uprising and they all contained a dragon as a symbol. However, a closer analysis of the cartoons shows that the definition of the dragon differed from cartoon to cartoon. Thus, in “The First Duty” and “The Real Trouble,” the dragon is neither as powerful nor as menacing as it is in “The Avenger!” and “Tientsin.” In “The First Duty,” it is not even used to refer to China, but to the Boxer rebels. One explanation for these differences is that British cartoons of the Boxer Uprising were deeply influenced by Britain’s political and commercial relations as well as Britain’s need to justify (informal) imperialism in China, while American cartoons were influenced by American Exceptionalism, which was used to justify geopolitical aspirations and the missionary presence in China. Of course, some American cartoons about the Boxer Uprising were similar to the average British cartoon in their use of Yellow Peril imagery. However, most American cartoons contained different messages.

The analysis of the cartoons has also demonstrated how important it is that students research the national context in which cartoons occurred, and remember that cartoons both contribute to and are influenced by the discursive construction of nationhood. All four cartoons contained messages that correlated with those of official justifications for China policies in each country. In Britain, Yellow Peril imagery was omnipresent in cartoons and discussions of British China policy, while in the U.S., American Exceptionalism pervaded cartoons about China just as much as the government’s justifications of its China policy. However, this does not necessarily have to be the case. Depending on the political orientation of a publication, cartoons can also heavily criticize their government’s policies or arguments. In any case, the visual aspect of cartoons and their extreme nature distinguish them from other sources commonly used in classrooms, such as newspaper articles or government documents.

They are incredibly rich sources for teachers and lecturers that shed light not only on changing cultural perceptions of self and other, but also on the social, political, and economic factors that influenced them.

Notes

1. See for example Jack Schneider, "Columbus Day: 1892 not 1492," in *Reading Like a Historian: Teaching Literacy in Middle and High School History Classrooms*, ed. Samuel S. Wineburg, Daisy Martin, and Chauncey Montano (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 61; Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, "Teaching With Documents: Political Cartoons Illustrating Progressivism and the Election of 1912," <<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/election-cartoons/>>; Avishag Reisman and Bradley Fog (Stanford History Education Group), "Thomas Nast's Political Cartoons," <<https://sheg.stanford.edu/thomas-nast>>; Terry Bramhall, "Political Cartoons: Finding Point of View," <<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/political-cartoons/>>.

2. Ariane Knüsel, *Framing China: Media Reports and Political Debates in Britain, the USA and Switzerland, 1900-1950* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

3. Obviously, not all cartoons endorse stereotyping: David Low in Britain and Thomas Nast in the U.S. are famous examples of cartoonists whose works were highly critical of polemic arguments and stereotyping. See also Donald Dewey, *The Art of Ill Will: The Story of American Political Cartoons* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 6-33; Chris Lamb, *Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Keith Kenney and Michael Colgan, "Drawing Blood: Images, Stereotypes, and the Political Cartoon," in *Images that Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media*, ed. Paul Martin Lester and Susan Dente Ross, second ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 226 and 232; Thomas Knieper, *Die politische Karikatur: Eine journalistische Darstellungsform und deren Produzenten* (Cologne, Germany: von Halem, 2002), 72-97.

4. For an overview of some approaches, see Richard Scully and Marian Quarterly, eds., *Drawing the Line: Using Cartoons as Historical Evidence* (Clayton, Australia: Monash University ePress, 2009); Walter Koschatzky, ed., *Karikatur und Satire: Fünf Jahrhunderte Zeitkritik* (Munich, Germany: Hirmer, 1992); Gerhard Langemeyer, Gerd Unverfehrt, Herwig Guratzsch, and Christoph Stözl, eds., *Bild als Waffe: Mittel und Motive der Karikatur in 5 Jahrhunderten* (Munich, Germany: Prestel 1984).

5. Knüsel, *Framing China*.

6. Ariane Knüsel, "Les caricaturistes européens et le dragon chinois:

l'évolution d'une représentation de l'ennemi," *Relations Internationales* 167, no. 3 (Autumn 2016).

7. J. Don Vann and Rosemary VanArsdel, "Introduction," in *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, ed. J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 7. See also: Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 19-28; J. Don Vann, "Comic Periodicals," in *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, ed. J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 278-290; Ernst Bollinger, *Pressegeschichte II, 1840-1903: Die goldenen Jahre der Massenpresse* (Freiburg, Germany: Editions Universitaires, 1996), 99-100.

8. Paul Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Lanxin Xiang, *The Origins of the Boxer War: A Multinational Study* (London, United Kingdom: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Robert A. Bickers and R. G. Tiedemann, eds., *The Boxers, China, and the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); David J. Silbey, *The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in China* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Diana Preston, *A Brief History of the Boxer Rebellion: China's War on Foreigners, 1900* (London, United Kingdom: Robinson, 2002); Ariane Knüsel, "'Western Civilization' against 'Hordes of Yellow Savages': British Perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion," *Asiatische Studien* 62, no.1 (2008): 43-83.

9. Knüsel, *Framing China*, 127.

10. Gerd Unverfehrt, "Der Mensch-Tier-Vergleich: die Spinne als Zeichen," in *Bild als Waffe: Mittel und Motive der Karikatur in fünf Jahrhunderten*, ed. Gerhard Langemeyer, Gerd Unverfehrt, Herwig Guratzsch and Christoph Stölzl (Munich, Germany: Prestel, 1984), 238-249.

11. Roy Bates, *Chinese Dragons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Schuyler Cammann, "The Making of Dragon Robes," *T'oung Pao*, Second Series 40, no. 4/5 (1951): 297-321; Qiguang Zhao, *A Study of Dragons, East and West* (New York: Lang, 1992), 8 and 123; Richard J. Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 279.

12. Jacqueline Simpson, "Fifty British Dragon Tales: An Analysis," *Folklore* 89, no. 1 (1978): 79-93; Karl Shuker, *Dragons: A Natural History* (London, United Kingdom: Aurum Press, 2003); Jonathan Evans, *Dragons: Myth and Legend* (London, United Kingdom: Apple Street Press, 2008), 70-71.

13. Knüsel, "Les caricaturistes européens et le dragon chinois."

14. Heinz Gollwitzer, *Die Gelbe Gefahr: Geschichte eines Schlagworts* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1962).

15. For example, "John Chinaman" was a popular stereotype used by many—but not all!—American cartoonists, but hardly any European cartoonists to support demands of Chinese exclusion, because it was a very specific American issue. See Knüsel, *Framing China*, 127-201.

16. See for example Knüsel, *Framing China*; John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, eds., *Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* (London, United Kingdom: Verso, 2014); Gollwitzer, *Gelbe Gefahr*.

17. R. M. Healey, "Punch," in *Consumer Magazines of the British Isles*, ed. Sam G. Riley (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 154-161; Jerold J. Savoy, "Punch," in *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913*, ed. Alvin Sullivan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 325-329; Vann, "Comic Periodicals," 282.
18. R. G. G. Price, *A History of Punch* (London, United Kingdom: Collins, 1957), 159; Frankie Morris, *Artist of Wonderland: The Life, Political Cartoons, and Illustrations of Tenniel* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005).
19. See Morris, *Artist*, 228.
20. Knüsel, "Western Civilization"; Knüsel, *Framing China*, 28 and 31-32.
21. *Daily Mail*, July 4, 1900.
22. Another possible interpretation is that the knight is a crusader, which would portray China as a heathen country. However, this is not very likely since British cartoons usually did not focus on religious issues when it came to China because British missionaries did not have a great influence on the British media discourse about China. See Knüsel, *Framing China*.
23. Evans, *Dragons*, 116-125; Shuker, *Dragons*, 58-61.
24. Vernon Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2001); Patricia Jalland, "United Kingdom Devolution 1910-14: Political Panacea or Tactical Diversion?" *The English Historical Review* 94, no. 373 (October 1979): 757-760; Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707 to the Present*, fourth ed. (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2004), 20-23; Will Griffith, "Devolutionist tendencies in Wales, 1885-1914," in *Debating Nationhood and Governance in Britain, 1885-1939: Perspectives from the Four Nations*, ed. Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams, W. P. Griffiths, and Andrew Edwards (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2006), 93-96 and 110-111.
25. "Admiralty to Vice-Admiral Sir E. Seymour," June 7, 1900, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom (TNA) FO 405/92; "Statement made in the House of Commons by Mr. Brodrick," June 18, 1900, TNA FO 405/92. See also Cohen, *History*, 48-49; Tim Coates, ed., *The Siege of the Peking Embassy, 1900* (London, United Kingdom: The Stationery Office, 2000), 27.
26. See Price, *Punch*, 131-132.
27. Knüsel, "Western Civilization."
28. Morris, *Artist*, 226 and 253.
29. Jane W. Stedman, "Fun," in *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913*, ed. Alvin Sullivan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 135-137.
30. Cohen, *History*, 53.
31. Ian Nish, "Britain and Japan: Long-Range Images," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 15, no.1 (March 2004): 149-150.
32. Henry Dyer, *Dai Nippon: The Britain of the East* (London, United Kingdom: Blackie and Son, Ltd., 1904); Alfred Stead, *Great Japan: A Study in National Efficiency* (Houndmills, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002 [1906]); Demetrius C. Boulger, "The 'Yellow Peril' Bogey," *Nineteenth Century*

and After 60 (1904): 30-39; W. Petrie Watson, *The Future of Japan* (London, United Kingdom: Duckworth and Co, 1907); Charles A'Court Repington, *The War in the Far East, 1904-1905: By the Military Correspondent of the Times* (London, United Kingdom: John Murray, 1905).

33. Ariane Knuesel, "British Diplomacy and the Telegraph in Nineteenth-Century China," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 18 no. 3 (July 2007): 523-525.

34. Robert Secor, "Puck," in *American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals*, ed. David E. Sloane (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 226; David E. Sloane, "Introduction," in *American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals*, ed. David E. Sloane (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), xv and xxii-xxiv.

35. Secor, "Puck," 219.

36. Tom Culbertson, "The Golden Age of American Political Cartoons," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 7, no. 3 (July 2008): 277-295.

37. Lian Xi, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Michael C. Lazich, *E. C. Bridgman (1801-1861): America's First Missionary to China* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000); Paul A. Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958).

38. Varg, *Missionaries*; Clifton J. Phillips, "The Student Volunteer Movement and Its Role in China Missions, 1886-1920," in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 91-109.

39. Lawrence D. Kessler, "'Hands across the Sea': Foreign Missions and Home Support," in *United States Attitudes and Policies toward China: The Impact of American Missionaries*, ed. Patricia Neils and John C. Brewer (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1990), 78-96; Varg, *Missionaries*, 81-83 and 105-122.

40. Knüsel, *Framing China*.

41. "Mr. Conger to Mr. Hay," July 16, 1900, in *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, with the Annual Message of the President, Transmitted to Congress December 3, 1900* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), 156; "Mr. Hay to Mr. Conger," July 21, 1900, in *FRUS 1900*, 156; "Mr. Conger to Secretary of State," August 11, 1900, in *FRUS 1900*, 159.

42. It is highly unlikely that Keppler, Jr. knew of the Boxers' defeat because it happened the day before the cartoon was published. It is more likely that he simply foresaw the victory of the international troops.

43. *Punch*, June 13, 1900; July 18, 1900; October 31, 1900.

44. *Chicago Tribune*, August 20, 1900.

45. *The New York Times*, June 10, 1900; June 13, 1900; *The Washington Post*, June 30, 1900; July 11, 1900; *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1900; July 11, 1900; July 21, 1900; August 16, 1900; *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 7, 1900; July 20, 1900; *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1900; June 28, 1900; August 23, 1900.

46. "Treaty of Wanghia (Cushing Treaty), July 3, 1844," in Department of State, *United States Relations with China: With Special Reference to the Period*

1944-1949 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 413. See also Michael H. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 14-15 and 19.

47. Department of State, *United States Relations with China*, 414-416; "Hay to Conger," November 19, 1900, in *American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The United States and China*, series III, vol. 7, ed. Jules Davids (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1981), 343. See also David L. Anderson, *Imperialism and Idealism: American Diplomats in China, 1861-1898* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 171-180; Warren Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, fourth ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 39-43; Margaret Leech, *In the Days of McKinley* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 514-517.

48. Payson J. Treat, *Diplomatic Relations between the USA and Japan: 1895-1905* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1938), 109-110.

49. "Hay to Conger," November 19, 1900, in *American Diplomatic and Public Papers*, 343.

50. Treat, *Diplomatic Relations*, 110-113.

51. See for example Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); David Ryan, *US Foreign Policy in World History* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2000); Walter L. Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

52. Knüsel, *Framing China*, 58-59.