

# Visualizing Protest in Modern Japan 近代日本の抗議行動を視覚化する

John W. Dower



Between 2002 and 2013, the *Visualizing Cultures* (VC) project at M.I.T. produced a number of "image-driven" online units addressing Japan and China in the modern world. Co-directed by John Dower and Shigeru Miyagawa, VC tapped a wide range of hitherto largely inaccessible visual resources of an historical nature. Each topical treatment—which can run from one to as many as four separate units—formats and analyzes these graphics in ways that, ideally, open new windows of understanding for scholars, teachers, and students. VC endorses the "creative commons" ideal, meaning that everything on the site, including all images, can be downloaded and reproduced for educational (but not commercial) uses.

Funding and staffing for VC formally ended in 2013, with around eight topical treatments still in the pipes. These will go online over the next several months. Overall, including the treatments to come, the project includes a total

of fifty-five individual units covering twenty-six different subjects. The China-Japan division will be roughly equitable when everything is in place. (There will also be a two-part treatment of the U.S. and the Philippines between 1898 and 1912.) The full VC menu can be accessed at [visualizingcultures.mit.edu](http://visualizingcultures.mit.edu).

Needless to say, the number of Asian countries and potential topics *not* covered by VC is very large. (Needless to say, as well, there are many other valuable image-rich web sites on Asia in the modern world—although tracking them down can be a challenge.) In any case, it remains for present and future researchers, students, and activists to take the production of critical image-driven scholarship and education to the next level conceptually, topically, and technologically.

VC is closing shop for the production of new units at a moment when it was just reaching a "critical mass" of subjects that invite crisscrossing among separate topical treatments. Western imperialist expansion beginning with the Canton trade system, first Opium War, and Commodore Matthew Perry's "opening" of Japan is potentially one such subject; comparing and contrasting Japanese and Chinese engagements with "the West" is another. The VC units draw vivid attention to political, cultural, and technological transformation in East Asia between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of them highlight graphic expressions of militarism, nationalism, racism, and anti-foreignism. Because the visual resources tapped for these units range from high art to popular culture, and are especially strong in the latter, it is now

possible to tap the site to explore the emergence of consumer cultures and mass audiences in Japan and China. This, in turn, calls attention to popular cultures and grassroots activities in general.

One example of the insights to be gained by approaching the VC menu with this comparative perspective in mind is the subject of popular protest in Japan. That is the common thrust of the four separate VC units introduced here. This is, of course, a pertinent subject today, when the mass media in the Anglophone world tends to portray Japan as a fundamentally homogeneous, consensual, harmonious, conflict-averse and risk-averse "culture" (a familiar rendering, for example, in the venerable *New York Times*).

No serious historian of modern Japan would endorse these canards, which carry echoes of the "beautiful customs" nostrums of Japan's own nationalistic ideologues. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that the past four decades or so have seen nothing comparable in intensity or scale to the popular protests in prewar Japan, or the demonstrations and "citizens' movements" (*shimin undō*) that took place in postwar Japan up to the early 1970s. How can we place all this in perspective?

The image-driven VC explorations of protest in Japan begin in 1905 and end with the massive "Ampō" demonstrations against revision of the U.S.-Japan mutual security treaty in 1960. The four treatments that will be reproduced in *The Asia-Pacific Journal* beginning in this issue are as follows:

1. *Social Protest in Imperial Japan: The Hibiya*

*Riot of 1905*, by Andrew Gordon.

2. *Political Protest in Interwar Japan: Posters & Handbills from the Ohara Collection (1920s~1930s)*, by Christopher Gerteis (in two units).

3. *Protest Art in 1950s Japan: The Forgotten Reportage Painters*, by Linda Hoaglund.

4. *Tokyo 1960: Days of Rage & Grief: Hamaya Hiroshi's Photos of the Anti-Security-Treaty Protests*, by Justin Jesty.

VC and the Asia-Pacific Journal are committed to bringing the highest quality visual images to the classroom. In establishing this partnership, we anticipate publishing the subsequent units on protest every two weeks. We hope to follow this up with new units in preparation and projected.

John W. Dower is emeritus professor of history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His books include *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954* (1979); *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (1986); *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (1999); *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor / Hiroshima / 9-11 / Iraq* (2010); and two collections of essays: *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays* (1994), and *Ways of Forgetting, Ways of Remembering: Japan in the Modern World* (2012).

*Recommended Citation:* John W. Dower, "Visualizing Protest in Modern Japan," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 12, Issue 11, No. 1, March 17, 2014.