Of Civilization and Savages: The Mimetic Imperialism of Japan's 1874 Expedition to Taiwan

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IN THE SPRING OF 1874, a Japanese military expedition departed the Japanese port of Nagasaki bound for southern Taiwan. According to government documents, the expedition had two purposes: an ostensible purpose of punishing a group of Taiwanese aborigines responsible for the murder of fifty-four people from Ryūkyū (present-day Okinawa), who were shipwrecked in southern Taiwan late in 1871, and a real purpose of establishing colonies on eastern Taiwan in order to civilize the savage inhabitants of the region. The government denied in public that the expedition had any colonial intent, and under foreign pressure decided to postpone the expedition, but the commander in charge of the Japanese forces, holding previously issued imperial orders, preempted the government by dispatching his troops to Taiwan before they could be recalled. The expedition subsequently achieved its ostensible purpose, and Japanese forces punished a group of Taiwanese aborigines in a brief series of violent battles. Almost five months after the fighting ceased, a languorous series of negotiations in Beijing produced an inconclusive diplomatic settlement, and a month later the expeditionary force withdrew from Taiwan and returned home, without having achieved its publicly unacknowledged purpose of colonization.

If we looked no further than government documents, the story of the Taiwan Expedition would seem to end there. Commercially published sources—newspapers, woodblock prints, and kawaraban, crude monochrome prints similar to European broadsides—show there is more to the story. In particular, they show the intimate connection between Japanese imperialism and Japan’s vexed encounter with Western civilization, and they shed light on how the selective appropriation of Western civilization and the projection of Japanese military force abroad contributed to the formation of modern identity in Japan. In recent years, European historians have offered increasingly sophisticated appraisals of the contributions that colonial empires made to modern life in European metropoles, but Japanese historians have barely begun to consider the close relationship between Japan’s colonial empire and modernity in Japan. Indeed, in a recent review article, one scholar has criticized historians in the field of Japanese history for failing to pay attention to how Japan’s colonies—especially Korea—contributed to modern

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Japanese identity. He argues, among other things, that Japan did not export modernization to its colonies after it had accomplished its own modernization but, rather, that Japanese colonialism happened concurrently with and contributed much to Japan's modernizing process. The discourse on civilization and savagery that gained popularity at the time of the Taiwan Expedition points to a similar pattern. Even before Japan established a formal colonial empire, debates about using Japanese military power overseas drew heavily on the imagery and rhetoric of Japan's own efforts at modernizing. Despite being shot through with contradictions and ambivalence, the idea of exporting the Western civilizing impulse to the indigenous population of Taiwan helped justify, naturalize, and explain the concurrent effort to modernize Japan. Mimesis of Western imperialism, in other words, went hand in hand with mimesis of Western civilization.

In order to elucidate the connection between the mimesis of imperialism and civilization in Japan, this essay will describe how the attempt to export the Western civilizing impulse to Taiwan constituted part of Japan's concurrent appropriation and adaptation of Western civilization. To that end, the explanation that follows will proceed in five parts. First, it will describe how the Japanese strategy of appropriating and adapting selected aspects of Western civilization, which took place during a period of upheaval and rapid change, helped define the historical context in which the Taiwan Expedition took place. Second, it will explain the specific colonial logic of bringing civilization to the "savages" of Taiwan, a legalistic definition of political jurisdiction that the Japanese government used as a way of justifying the colonization of Taiwan. Third, it will examine how commercially published sources about the expedition exaggerated the savagery of the Taiwanese aborigines, thereby exaggerating the cultural difference that separated them from the Japanese. Fourth, it will examine how commercial sources portrayed Japanese dominance over the aborigines as an instrument that could improve Japan's status in a world order dominated by the West. Finally, it will examine how commercially published representations of the submission of the aborigines diverged from the government's rationale for the expedition and stressed instead the importance of establishing Japanese authority as a first step in exporting civilization to the "savages."

The strategy of simultaneously appropriating and exporting Western civilization came easily in Japan, because Westerners self-consciously pursued imperialism in the name of civilization, and because, for Japan, the prospect of exporting civilization to Taiwan provided an attractive means of resisting Western imperialism. In effect, commercial representations of the expedition simply extended an existing strategy of resisting imperialism by appropriating Western civilization so that it included the idea of exporting civilization to Taiwan. To interpret commercial representations of the expedition this way shares an affinity with the approaches used in some postcolonial studies, but only to the extent that a postcolonial point
of view helps explain the adaptation of Western discourse for the purpose of resisting it. Indeed, many readers may see a postcolonial interpretation of the Taiwan Expedition as ironic at best, since Japan never suffered Western colonization and since the expedition intended to colonize Taiwan, not to mention the fact that Japan later went on to establish a colonial empire. Japan's role in imperialism is not as clear-cut as these facts suggest, however, and historians disagree about how to characterize Japan's status—as colonizer or as “semi-colonized”—in the second half of the nineteenth century. The historiographical disagreement about Japan's status points to a key ambiguity about Japan's role in imperialism, but it is not necessary to debate here whether Japan was a victim or a perpetrator of imperialism. Rather, it is important instead to recognize that Japanese efforts to appropriate and adapt Western ideas about power and hierarchy pervaded Japanese society at the time, that these efforts offered a means of resisting Western assertions of Japanese inferiority, and that Japan's mimesis of Western imperialism took place in this context.

Because it involved mimesis of Western imperialism, the Taiwan Expedition surely bears some relationship to the origins of Japanese imperialism, although this, too, remains a matter of debate. Again, the debate need not be resolved here, but the question of origins nevertheless deserves a few words if only to highlight more clearly how the expedition fit into the historical context of Japan during the 1870s. In their explanations of how Japanese imperialism began, historians have overwhelmingly devoted their attention to the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and to the establishment of formal external colonies in Taiwan and Korea, in 1895 and 1910 respectively. Few historians have sought to explain the Taiwan Expedition as an example of Japanese imperialism, and the historiography has tended to treat the

2 For one example, see Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse, 2d edn. (Minneapolis, 1993). Historians have made postcolonial arguments similar to the one being made here about Japan's colonial relationships in the early twentieth century. For one example, see Kim Brandt, “Objects of Desire: Japanese Collectors and Colonial Korea,” positions: east asia cultures critique 8, no. 3 (2000): 711–46.

3 Many scholars in Japan, following a more- or less Leninist interpretation of the spread of industrial capitalism, have characterized Japan's relationship with the West in the second half of the nineteenth century as semi-colonial, in particular by placing it in the context of the spread of British imperialism from India to China and Japan. On the other hand, historians also stress Japan's role as a colonial power in Taiwan and Korea (with formal annexation in 1895 and 1910 respectively). For a review of the historiography about Japan's opening to the West, see Tanaka Akira, "Meiji ishin no sekaiteki kankō o dō toraeru ka," in Sasaki Ryūji, ed., Sōten Nihon no rekishi (6): Kin-gendai hen (Tokyo, 1991), 14–25. Recent scholarship in Japan has tended to follow Kato Yūzō's interpretation that Japan's position in the East Asian treaty port system was less unequal than China's because China signed unequal treaties as the result of losing a war, whereas Japan signed them as the result of negotiated agreements. Kato, Kurofune zengo no sekai (Tokyo, 1985).


incident as a bilateral diplomatic conflict between China and Japan that clarified Japanese claims to sovereignty over the Ryūkyū Kingdom and Chinese claims to sovereignty over Taiwan. Some historians have argued that the internal colonization of Hokkaido marks the beginning of Japanese colonialism, and the fact that Hokkaido was colonized around the time of the Taiwan Expedition raises questions about the connection between the expedition and internal colonization.

These various historiographical perspectives on the origins of Japanese imperialism point to a number of key issues of interpretation, but they provide little help in explaining the colonialism of the Taiwan Expedition. The establishment of Japan's formal colonial empire has served as an influential historiographical guidepost, but it also encourages the view that Japanese colonialism happened after Japan had accomplished its own modernization, rather than that colonialism and modernization happened concurrently, and this has created a historiographical blind spot about the colonial dimension of the Taiwan Expedition. Similarly, the view of the expedition primarily as a bilateral diplomatic dispute between China and Japan, or as a conflict that clarified their borders, relies on a top-down national frame of analysis that excludes from consideration the domestic reaction to the expedition, which provides a number of important clues about how people in Japan also understood the expedition as a military operation and as an expression of Japanese dominance. Nor does the internal colonization of Hokkaido or Okinawa raise the same issues about Japan's willingness to project military power abroad in order to increase its standing in the world. These various historiographical perspectives cannot explain, in other words, how people in Japan used the Taiwan Expedition as an opportunity to assert, rather aggressively, Japan's new status in the world, nor how their aggressive assertions grew out of Japan's engagement with Western civilization in the middle of the nineteenth century.

It may seem unremarkable, viewed from our perspective today, that in the 1870s people in Japan would worry about Japan's standing in the world, but in a number of ways their concern represented an important departure from past practice, and it helped define the unusual character of Japanese imperialism. The Meiji Restoration, a palace coup followed by a brief civil war, brought an end to the Tokugawa bakufu, or shogunate, which had governed Japan during the Edo period (1603–1867), and it inaugurated a revolutionary transformation of Japan's political, colonial venture” and sees it instead primarily as a response to samurai unrest. M. J. Mayo, “The Korean Crisis of 1873 and Early Meiji Foreign Policy,” Journal of Asian Studies 31, no. 4 (1972): 818.


7 For an example, see Richard Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan (London, 1996). Siddle criticizes Peattie's view of Japanese colonialism (cited above) because it ignores Japan's earlier development of Hokkaido, which Siddle sees as an example of internal colonization.
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social, economic, and intellectual order that dominated the early decades of the Meiji period (1868–1912). The Meiji Restoration thus brought to an end the era of government dominated by the samurai class, and it nominally restored the emperor to a central role in governance, although samurai authority and imperial authority existed in an uneasy tension until the ideology of imperial authority became more firmly established in the 1880s.¹⁸ The revolutionary transformation of the Meiji period also involved a radical reformulation of what civilization meant in Japan, and this impinged on a wide range of practices and beliefs, including how people looked at Japan's place in the world. Until the 1850s and 1860s, when the old order began decisively to pull apart due to a variety of indigenous and exogenous causes, any number of explanations could be invoked to assert Japan's political, cultural, or spiritual superiority, and none of them paid much attention to what the rest of the world thought.¹⁹ Such explanations did not disappear overnight following the Meiji Restoration, but Western explanations gained predominance quite rapidly in the 1860s and 1870s. The close link in Western thinking between civilization and a global order of nations, and the way these two ideas were received in tandem in Japan, accounts for the abrupt shift. In effect, the strategic appropriation of Western civilization offered a way of contesting Japan's low status in a Western-dominated global order of nations. Appropriating Western civilization for this purpose quickly became one of the defining features of the period.

To be sure, the instrumental use of Western civilization to resist Western assertions of Japanese inferiority began before the Taiwan Expedition. By the mid to late 1860s, a number of Japanese intellectuals had already begun to extol the virtues of Western civilization, but the mid-1870s marked a high point in the bunmei kaika (“Civilization and Enlightenment”), a broad effort, bordering on a fetish at times, to introduce selected aspects of Western civilization into Japan. Not everyone in Japan accepted Eurocentric influence on Japanese culture, though, and opposition to it contributed to rural revolts and samurai rebellions during the 1870s.¹⁰ Indeed, domestic opposition to the bunmei kaika underscores the fact that Japan's reception of Western civilization took place in the context of resistance to the West. The bunmei kaika amounted to an important domestic reaction both to Western civilization and to Western imperialism, and commercial representations


The circumstances of how Japan engaged Western civilization as a response to Western imperialism had important consequences. For one thing, the reproduction of Western civilization existed in tension with an antipathy to its corrosive effects on Japanese culture, and for better or for worse Western imperialism left Japan little choice but to engage Western civilization, which meant that the corrosion could not be avoided. For another, the strategy of appropriating Western civilization in order to challenge Western imperialism and improve Japan’s status in the world involved weakening the middle ground between civilization and savagery. That middle ground—semi-civilized status—might under other circumstances have served as a basis for solidarity between the Japanese and other East Asian peoples. Japan’s strategy thus foreclosed the possibility of solidarity with the rest of East Asia in order to boost Japan’s status. Fukuzawa Yukichi, one of the foremost intellectuals of the age and an early champion of the bunmei kaika, evoked these themes in an 1885 essay entitled “On Escaping Asia” (Datsu-A ron). In it, he likened Western civilization to a measles epidemic—a fatal scourge that plagued Japan repeatedly during the nineteenth century—because it spread in the same inexorable manner as an epidemic, although infection by Western civilization brought benefits as well as harm. Further, Fukuzawa warned against Japanese solidarity with China and Korea because, as he saw it, if Japan became associated with such weak and backward countries, it would only drag Japan into permanent subservience to the West. He predicted that China and Korea would both succumb to the onslaught of Western civilization because they would not embrace being infected by it as Japan had. In other words, partly as a means of survival and partly to gain the benefits of Western civilization, Japan must accept the corrosive influence of the West, and it must escape solidarity with the rest of East Asia. In 1874, commercial sources about the Taiwan Expedition prefigured Fukuzawa’s famous formulation. They showed that Japan’s involvement in Taiwan emulated Western methods of domination, but with key modifications that served a dual purpose. First, the modifications elevated Japan’s standing in the Western-dominated international order, and, second, they eliminated the middle ground between civilization and savagery that might trap Japan in an inferior status to the West. As in Fukuzawa’s famous essay, commercial sources about the Taiwan Expedition evince a sense of Japan’s vulnerability to Western imperialism and an awareness that Western civilization could be adapted to mitigate its vulnerability. They show that mimesis of civilization went hand in hand with mimesis of imperialism, and both worked for distinctly Japanese purposes.

A LEGALISTIC EXPLANATION OF CIVILIZATION AND SAVAGERY informed the colonial logic that the Japanese government employed during the Taiwan Expedition, and it derived from a theory of sovereignty and jurisdiction devised by Charles LeGendre during the years he spent as American consul in Amoy. LeGendre left the U.S. diplomatic service in 1872, joined the Japanese government as an adviser, and over the next several years wrote a number of plans for the Japanese government that
called for Japan to colonize eastern Taiwan in the name of bringing civilization to the savages.12

Before working for the Japanese government, LeGendre served as American consul in Amoy from 1866 to 1872, and as part of his duties he sought redress from Chinese officials for the murder of several American castaways by a group of Taiwanese aborigines in 1867. During his negotiations with the Chinese, LeGendre argued that, under the terms of the Treaty of Tianjin (1858), an “unequal treaty” that gave Western powers unreciprocated legal and economic rights in China, the Chinese government had an obligation to exercise its jurisdiction over the aboriginal territory and to punish the acts of the aborigines. Moreover, he argued from international law that, unless China sustained the exercise of its jurisdiction over the aboriginal territory, in other words unless China civilized the savages who lived there, it could not claim sovereignty over the territory. In an attempt to motivate the Chinese to action, LeGendre repeatedly raised the threat that unless China exercised effective jurisdiction over the territory, a foreign power would colonize it.13

The recalcitrant stance of the Chinese authorities frustrated LeGendre. They countered his argument by claiming that China held sovereignty over the entire island of Taiwan but that the terms of the Treaty of Tianjin did not apply to the aboriginal territory because it lay outside the boundaries of Chinese legal jurisdiction, and they steadfastly refused to take action to exercise jurisdiction over it.14 The conflict between LeGendre and the Chinese proved impossible to resolve for several reasons. An unequal treaty, a quintessential feature of Western imperialism in East Asia, provided the legal basis for LeGendre’s repeated claims against the Chinese government, and Chinese officials rarely wasted an opportunity to dispute the applicability of the unequal treaties. The two sides also used different meanings of sovereignty, one deriving from Chinese practice and the other from European, and this disagreement created a virtually irreconcilable conflict about what jurisdiction over the aboriginal territory meant. Finally, Chinese officials knew from experience that bringing the aboriginal territory to heel, as LeGendre demanded, would come at an unacceptably high price in money and human lives, and they concluded that inaction posed less of a risk than action.15 In 1872, LeGendre left his


14 Yen, Taiwan in China’s Foreign Relations, 127–28, 133, 146, 152–53; John Robert Shepherd, Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600–1800 (Stanford, Calif., 1993). Shepherd argues a similar general point that Qing dynasty authorities adopted a strategy of minimizing military conflict and monetary cost in their effort to contain violence along the border between the Chinese settler population and the aboriginal territory in Taiwan during the eighteenth century.

15 Yen, Taiwan in China’s Foreign Relations, 131, 140, 145–46.
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position as consul at Amoy without having resolved the dispute, and he set sail from Amoy, intending to return to the United States.

On his way back, LeGendre stopped off in Yokohama, where the American minister in Japan introduced him to Japan's foreign minister, Soejima Taneomi. LeGendre impressed Soejima with his knowledge of southern Taiwan, and Soejima hired him to advise the Japanese government about how to deal with problems raised by the massacre of the Ryûkyûans in 1871. At Soejima's request, LeGendre prepared a number of memoranda about the Taiwan problem. The memos outlined a plan for Japanese annexation of the eastern part of the island, and they gave Soejima a compelling rationale for establishing Japanese colonies there.16 In his memos to Soejima, LeGendre used the same logic he had used with the Chinese—that China had no valid claim to sovereignty over eastern Taiwan because it did not exercise legal jurisdiction over the aboriginal territory. As unclaimed land, eastern Taiwan could be claimed by any nation willing to undertake the burden of civilizing it, including Japan. In this way, LeGendre introduced into Japanese government discourse the idea, derived from international law, that bringing civilization to the “savages” of Taiwan justified colonizing the territory. Not all Europeans and Americans agreed with LeGendre’s interpretation of Taiwan’s status, but they attacked his argument on the grounds that it might cause war, which would harm Western commercial interests in East Asia, or that he had dismissed too lightly Chinese claims to sovereignty over eastern Taiwan. They did not attack his general argument that territory inhabited by savages could be claimed in the name of civilizing it.17 Indeed, LeGendre seems to have done little more than transmit to the Japanese a decades-old Western interest in colonizing Taiwan.18

Soejima and several other leaders left the government late in 1873 after a dispute about whether Japan should invade Korea, but the remaining leaders continued to pursue the goal of colonizing eastern Taiwan based on LeGendre’s rationale. A few members of the government, such as Kido Takayoshi, opposed the colonial plan because they wanted to use Japan’s resources to address domestic problems rather than to waste them on a foreign entanglement of uncertain outcome,19 but no records exist that suggest that anybody in the government opposed colonization per se. By the spring of 1874, advocates of the expedition had smoothed over the opposition enough to begin making concrete preparations. On March 13, 1874, LeGendre submitted his final expedition plan to Ôkuma Shigenobu, the Japanese official who had taken charge of planning for the expedition after Soejima left the government. LeGendre’s memorandum stated that the Japanese government intended to “civilize the whole aboriginal population” and that, in order not to provoke unnecessary foreign opposition, the “ostensible object” of the expedition would be to punish the aborigines who had murdered the

17 Môri, Taiwan shuppei, 134–35; Ichinose, “Meiji shoki ni okeru Taiwan shuppei,” 32–35.
18 George Williams Carrington, Foreigners in Formosa, 1871–1874 (San Francisco, 1977), 71–78, 89–102; Yen, Taiwan in China’s Foreign Relations, 100–09.
Ryūkyūans in 1871, while “its real object will be the annexation of Aboriginal Formosa.”

In the middle of March, Japanese officials began to take steps to implement the colonial plan. Ōkuma and several other government officials drew up a list of objectives for the expedition, and they began to lay the groundwork for the administrative apparatus that would control it. On April 5, Prime Minister Sanjō Sanetomi, acting in the name of the Japanese emperor, issued orders to Saigo Tsugumichi, the military leader of the expedition. Saigo’s orders spelled out the two purposes of the expedition, though with a different emphasis than LeGendre had given them in the plan he had presented to Ōkuma. The first clause of Saigo’s orders, corresponding to LeGendre’s “ostensible object,” stated that the primary purpose of the expedition would be to pacify the aborigines, while the second clause, similar to LeGendre’s “real object,” stated, “The purpose is to lead the natives gradually to civilization [yūdō kaika seshime], eventually establishing a profitable enterprise between them and the Japanese government.” The second clause added an important limitation, however: it ordered Saigo to send the government a detailed report about China’s response to the expedition and to ask for further orders before he could implement the step of civilizing the natives. In other words, Saigo had to receive further orders before he could actually begin to establish colonies along the east coast. The Japanese government may have been willing to colonize eastern Taiwan, but it would not allow irreversible action without reassessing the risk of war with China beforehand. In early April, the government established a Bureau of Savage Affairs (Banchi Jimukyoku), called the “Colonization Office” in official English translations, and it appointed Ōkuma as the “Minister of Colonization.” LeGendre, acting on Ōkuma’s orders, hired personnel in Amoy who would help in establishing colonies along the east coast of Taiwan. Someone, it is not clear who or when, wrote a detailed list of objectives for the expedition that went far beyond the plan outlined in LeGendre’s memorandum. It called for stationing military colonists at several points along the east coast, and it laid out a plan for troops to establish small branch camps that would form the basis of a permanent presence in the aboriginal territory. The plan to colonize Taiwan, in full swing at least through the middle of April 1874, bore LeGendre’s imprint, but Japanese actors had also contributed a great deal to its formulation and implementation.

Leaks about the expedition plagued the government in April, and the expedi-

20 “Ōkuma monjo” C426.
23 Ishii, Meiji shoki no Nihon to higashi Ajia, 47; Ōkuma to LeGendre, April 7, 1874, LeGendre Papers.
24 Telegram from LeGendre to Manson, March 24, 1874, LeGendre Papers.
25 Saigō totoku to Kabayama sōtoku, 63–69. Various government documents refer to “military colonists” and “military colonies,” in some cases glossing the Japanese characters in phonetic script (for example, miriteri koroni) to indicate the English-language provenance of the term. The planned military colonists differed from the tondenhei, unemployed samurai who resettled to Hokkaido and provided combined military and police protection for the area, although plans for the tondenhei were formulated and implemented around the time of the Taiwan Expedition. Rinji Teishitsu Henshūkyoku, ed., Meiji Tennō ki, 13 vols. (Tokyo, 1968–77), 3: 274.
tion's colonial purpose seems to have been an open secret among the foreign community throughout the treaty ports of East Asia, including Yokohama. Reports in Japanese newspapers also made veiled references to the plan to annex eastern Taiwan, but with only a few exceptions Japanese newspapers exercised restraint—probably due to self-censorship—in describing the colonial intent of the expedition. Terashima Munenori, Japan's new foreign minister, publicly denied that the expedition had any colonial intent, but the British and U.S. ministers to Japan remained skeptical and, fearing that the expedition would cause war with China, intervened as forcefully as they could in order to prevent it from proceeding. Under foreign pressure, the Japanese government decided to postpone the expedition, but at the end of April, Saigō Tsugumichi preempted the government by dispatching his troops before they could be recalled. A variety of sources show that, for several months after the expedition had arrived on the island, its leaders continued to see their purpose as the colonization of eastern Taiwan.

The government apparently never made a formal decision to set aside the colonial plan, but after a series of meetings in early July, it shelved its plans to colonize eastern Taiwan because it did not want to risk war with China, which would have invited an unwelcome and potentially dangerous intervention by Western powers. In sum, the government formulated a plan to colonize eastern Taiwan, it took concrete action to implement the plan, and it backed away from the plan not because it thought better of colonization but rather because it thought it could not afford a war with China and the risk of Western intervention that war would invite. Colonization remained a possibility, though a distant one, throughout the lengthy negotiations that finally resolved the dispute between China and Japan in the final months of 1874. Japanese negotiators never abandoned their fundamental position that for China to claim sovereignty over eastern Taiwan it must exercise effective jurisdiction there. From beginning to end, therefore, the Japanese government's rationale for intervening in Taiwan rested on the colonialist logic that for any government—Chinese, Japanese, or Western—to claim sovereignty over eastern Taiwan, that government must bring civilization to the savages.

26 Japan Daily Herald (hereafter, JDH), April 11, 17, May 8 (quoting from the Nagasaki-based Rising Sun), May 11 (quoting from the Shanghai-based North China Herald); Kōbun tsūshi (hereafter, KT), April 20; Yūbin hōchi shinbun (hereafter, YHS), April 16. A notable exception to the muted coverage of the expedition's colonial plans in Japanese newspapers is an article by Kishida Ginkō in the May 15 edition of the Tokyo nichinichi shinbun (hereafter, TNS). Unless otherwise noted, the year for citations from newspapers is 1874.

27 Ishii, Meiji shoki no Nihon to higashi Ajia, 48-60.

28 Cassel to LeGendre, May 26, 1874, “Ōkuma monjo” C453; Saigō to LeGendre, June 7, 1874, LeGendre Papers; Kabayama Sukenori diary entry, May 8, 1874, Saigō to tokoku to Kabayama sōtoku, 320.

29 Memorandum by Yamagata Aritomo, July 1874, “Ōkuma monjo” A169; Ōkuma to Sanjō, June 28, 1874, and Government Order on July 9, 1874, Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, ed., Ōkuma Shigenobu kankei monjo, 6 vols. (Tokyo, 1932-35), 2: 396-99; Meiji Tennō ki, 3: 279-80. Reservations about going to war with China constrained Japanese plans for the expedition from the start and contributed to the clash in 1873 that precipitated Soejima's departure from the government. The government's change of heart in July 1874 thus represented a small shift by a divided government in a finely calibrated attempt—ongoing for several years—to press forward with the expedition without provoking war with China.

30 “Memorandum of the Course of Action Taken towards the Aboriginal Territory of Formosa” (No. 7), LeGendre Papers.
COMMERCIAL SOURCES ACCENTUATED THE SAVAGERY of the Taiwanese aborigines in a striking manner that contrasts with the generally bloodless description of them in government documents. Unlike the narrow, legalistic contrast between civilization and savagery that the government used to justify the colonization of Taiwan, commercial sources, especially newspaper reports, proffered florid descriptions of the savagery of the aborigines in a way that underscored Japan's status as a civilized nation. Exaggerating the savagery of the aborigines also had the effect of evacuating the middle ground between civilization and savagery—semi-civilized status—that many Westerners believed Japan occupied at the time, so the exaggeration did more than simply foreclose the possibility of solidarity with the aborigines, it also implicitly challenged the Western view of Japan as semi-civilized. Stressing Japan's status as a civilized nation and denying the possibility of solidarity with the aborigines played on the hierarchical possibilities inherent in Western imperialism, but the hierarchical implications of aboriginal savagery would not necessarily have been clear to most Japanese at the time. As a result, commercial sources explained the implications by using analogies to Chinese concepts or to Japanese concepts from the Edo period, either of which would have been more accessible to most readers than Western concepts.

In the months and weeks before the expeditionary force departed, newspapers regularly exaggerated the aborigines' violent nature, characterizing them as cruel, inhuman, and ignorant of civilization (sometimes expressed by the term kyōka) or as lacking ethics (the Confucian jinri). Many of the articles heaped further criticism on the aborigines by accusing them—unjustly—of cannibalism. To be sure, during the preceding 250 years, foreigners had often been denigrated or mocked in Japan for their lack of civilization, but not even strident xenophobes had made savagery the defining characteristic of foreign barbarism. The unprecedented emphasis on savagery should, therefore, command our attention.

Many of the early newspaper reports about the expedition reproduced Chinese categories in their descriptions of the aborigines, following the Chinese distinction between “mature savages” and “raw savages” (or, more properly, “barbarians”). For example, the Yūbin hōchi shinbun of April 16, 1874, described the aborigines as follows:

The eastern part [of Taiwan] is inhabited entirely by natives [dojin]. Those among them who have attained a measure of civilization [kyōka] are called mature savages [jukuban]. They regularly engage in trade with the Chinese and they can understand each others' languages. They are not violent by nature. The next group are called raw savages [seiban]. There are about 200,000 of them. This kind [of savage] trades with the mature savages, but knows little of ethics [jinri]. [Also] known as native savages [doban], they comprise the eighteen savage races [banshu]. They are wild and rapacious, have large bodies and are very strong.

According to this view, civilization, violence, trade, and language served as a matrix that organized the aborigines hierarchically. The “mature savages” commanded more respect than the “raw savages” because they had Chinese trading partners and were not violent. The “mature savages” had also attained a degree of civilization, from China rather than Europe it should be noted, and the report described their partial civilization as kyōka, a term used during the first half of the nineteenth
century either to describe the Japanese effort to civilize the Ainu, an indigenous people living at the northern periphery of Japan, or to describe the effort to elevate other presumably inferior peoples, such as peasants. The article thus gave credit for the partial civilization of the “mature savages” to Chinese civilization and explained it by analogy to an older Japanese term for cultural transformation. Violence remained the most pronounced characteristic of the “raw savages,” and it gave fuller meaning to their lack of ethics, understood in Confucian terms. Unlike the partial civilization of the “mature savages,” however, the violence of the “raw savages” had no obvious antecedents in Edo-period descriptions of subordinate or inferior peoples. Commercial sources such as this newspaper report thus used more familiar concepts of hierarchy and cultural difference to give meaning to the newly important characteristic of violence that defined the aborigines’ savagery.

Commercial sources about the expedition also used exaggerated reports of cannibalism to stress the savage nature of the aborigines. The aborigines practiced headhunting, to be sure, but not cannibalism, and the earliest reports of cannibalism appear to have been inspired by Western expectations that the aborigines engaged in that quintessentially uncivilized act. A number of early articles about the expedition in expatriate newspapers described the alleged cannibalistic practices of the aborigines, such as an article in the China Mail that predicted the failure of the expedition despite Japan’s military advantage because the “cannibals” knew the land better and could travel light by “liv[ing] off the carcasses of their prisoners!” Many of the articles in expatriate newspapers voiced skepticism about reports of cannibalism, however, such as an article in the Japan Daily Herald that cast doubt by reporting that the aborigines “are figuratively called ‘the cannibals,’” but “[t]here is no authentic record of any Formosan . . . having actually dined off their unfortunate victims.” Compared to expatriate newspapers, Japanese newspapers exaggerated reports of cannibalism among the aborigines and rarely voiced skepticism. For example, the Kōbun tsūshi picked up the account from

31 Siddle, Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan, 40.
32 In the Edo period, Confucian scholars distinguished samurai learning from peasant learning. Ogyū Sorai, for example, distinguished between the self-cultivation of the samurai (expressed as manabu, to learn, or utsuru, to change) and the transformation of the general population that was imposed by a higher authority (kassuru, to change). Samuel Hideo Yamashita, trans., Master Sorai's Responses: An Annotated Translation of “Sorai sensei tōmonsho” (Honolulu, 1994), 93 n. 107. In the 1870s, the term kyōka conveyed a similar hierarchical understanding of the cultural transformation of an inferior brought about by a superior. According to Sheldon Garon, the leaders of modern Japan inherited the idea of kyōka, which he translates as “moral suasion,” and used it systematically on a nationwide scale as a tool for paternalistic social management. Sheldon Garon, Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life (Princeton, N.J., 1997).
33 The two most important Edo-period sources that taxonomize foreigners are Nakamura Tekisai's Kinmō zui (1666) and Terajima Ryoan’s Wakan sansai zue (1713). Neither of them stress savagery or violence as an important characteristic of barbarian peoples. After their subjugation by Japanese forces in the seventeenth century, the Ainu were not particularly prone to violence or uprisings. Richard Siddle, “Ainu History: An Overview,” in William W. Fitzhugh and Chisato O. Dubreuil, eds., Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People (Seattle, 1999), 68–71; David L. Howell, Capitalism from Within: Economy, Society, and the State in a Japanese Fishery (Berkeley, Calif., 1995), 27–35.
35 China Mail, reported in JDH, May 21.
36 JDH, April 7.
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the Japan Daily Herald mentioned above and reported that the aborigines lived “by eating the meat of the people they defeat in battle” (shisha no niku o kutte), in the process erasing the doubt raised in the original report.  

Even after credible firsthand reports appeared in Japanese newspapers explaining that the aborigines did not practice cannibalism, commercially published accounts of the expedition—especially books—continued to accentuate the savagery of the aborigines by describing them as cannibals.  

Figure 2 is an illustration from Meiji taiheiki, a popular history of the Meiji period published two years after the expedition, that shows how persistent the view of the aborigines as cannibals became. Reports of cannibalism persisted partly because they buttressed assertions of Japan’s status as a civilized nation but also because they conformed to older associations from the Edo period. Expressions of cannibalism had a long history in Japan, including one influential account that was originally inspired by sixteenth-century European reports of Brazilian cannibalism. Mention of foreign cannibals that derived from this account remained confined for hundreds of years, however, to rare and conventionalized references to Brazilians who ate the flesh of men and lived in burrows in the ground.  

In 1874, expatriate newspaper reports often

FIGURE 2: Sensai Eitaku, book illustration, Meiji taiheiki, vol. 8, 1876. Historiographical Institute, University of Tokyo.

37 KT, May 25.  
38 YHS, June 27; Tashiro Mikio, Taiwan gunki (1874).  
39 The characteristic phrasing can be traced to the 1602 Beijing edition of a map of the world by the Jesuit scholar Matteo Ricci; Japanese jinbutsuzu, diagrams of peoples of the world, preserved the...
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mentioned cannibalism among the aborigines but never mentioned cave dwelling; by contrast, Japanese commercial sources often added references to cave dwelling to their reports about Taiwanese cannibals that had been translated from Western newspapers. Commercial sources thus blended and accentuated the alleged cave-dwelling and flesh-eating practices of the aborigines and touted their savagery so effectively that cannibalism endured as a defining feature of Taiwanese savagery for years after the expedition.

The way that commercial sources accentuated the savagery of the aborigines stands out as striking. It broke dramatically from past practice, and it contrasted almost as dramatically from the more subdued portrayal of the aborigines in government documents. While commercial sources clearly accentuated the savagery of the aborigines, they offer little evidence to explain why they did so. The systematic and persistent nature of the references to aboriginal savagery show, however, that the exaggeration could not have been an accident or an anomaly. To be sure, the aborigines of southern Taiwan had a bad reputation among the Chinese settlers in the area, and endemic violence punctuated the uneasy relationship between the two populations. Japanese sources picked up on Chinese reports of violence, just as they picked up on sensationalized Western reports of the aborigines' cannibalism, but they pushed these characterizations further than Chinese or Western sources did. The fact that Japanese commercial sources remain silent about why they exaggerated the aborigines' savagery makes it difficult to draw hard and fast conclusions, but one effect of the exaggeration is clear: it increased the perceived cultural distance that separated the Japanese from the aborigines. In the context of the 1870s, a larger cultural distance helped both to validate Japanese claims for higher status in the Western-dominated international order and to eliminate a middle ground between civilization and savagery that might trap the Japanese in a less than salutary solidarity with other East Asian peoples.

The idea of using force as an instrument to establish Japanese dominance in Taiwan became a popular theme in commercial representations of the Taiwan Expedition, more popular than the theme of aboriginal savagery, even though it was far from clear what Japanese dominance over the aborigines meant. When Japanese forces landed in southern Taiwan in 1874, they sought first and foremost to establish military dominance over the aborigines, and commercial sources gave prominent place to descriptions of the military action. They did not portray dominance as an end in itself, however, stressing instead that dominance would bring Japan prestige in the world. They suggested, in other words, that dominance could be used as an instrument to increase Japan's status and power. Viewing force as an instrument that Japan, as opposed to a Western civilized power, could wield in this way constituted an important modification of Western imperialism, but while

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the use of force to establish dominance over the aborigines appears to have enjoyed broad support, commercial sources provide abundant evidence that no consensus existed about what constituted the proper political basis of Japanese dominance. Viewed from another angle, in the years after the Meiji Restoration, a consensus had not yet been reached about what constituted the proper basis of political authority in Japan, and the confusion about political authority found expression in the way that commercial sources portrayed Japanese dominance over the aborigines.

The confusion about political authority centered on overlapping debates about two related questions: should the samurai class or the emperor be the preeminent symbol of political authority, and should Japan embrace Western civilization or expel it? Debates about both issues contributed to the formation of modern national identity in Japan, and both issues lay at the center of the political transition that took place during the Meiji Restoration. Considering the contested nature of the Restoration and the gradual nature of identity formation, it should come as no surprise that both political authority and national identity remained confused in the 1870s. More surprising, however, is the close connection between mimetic imperialism and debates about domestic political power and national identity: the way that commercial sources depicted Japanese dominance over the aborigines suggests that mimetic imperialism was implicated in the complex process of redefining political power and national identity as Japan engaged Western civilization in the 1870s. Mimetic imperialism, in other words, did not result from Japan's engaging Western civilization; rather, it constituted part of the process of Japan's engaging it, and for that reason mimetic imperialism helped shape national identity and the new political order in the Meiji period. In order to elucidate how these overlapping debates informed representations of dominance in commercial sources about the Taiwan Expedition, the discussion below will first explain how Japanese forces established military dominance over the aborigines, then offer an example of a commercial source that portrayed dominance as an instrument that could improve Japan's status.

Soon after the Japanese expeditionary force arrived on Taiwan, it sought to establish military dominance over the aborigines through a series of aggressive strikes. Newspaper articles and accounts of the expedition by participants provide compelling evidence that the fighting proved to be one-sided and short, if not exactly easy. The fighting began when a group of aborigines ambushed a small Japanese scouting party on May 18. Using matchlock rifles, they shot to death two Japanese soldiers and, in their tradition of headhunting, took the head of one of the Japanese dead before they retreated into the mountains. Within a few days, Japanese forces mounted a retaliatory strike, and on May 22 a major battle took place at a ravine that the Japanese sources called Sekimon (literally, Stone Gate). The Japanese suffered four killed and twelve wounded, while the aborigines suffered seventy killed and wounded. In the samurai tradition, Japanese soldiers took the heads of several of the dead, including the leader of the Butan and his son.

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40 Ochiai Yasuzō, Meiji shichinen seiban tōbatsu kaikoroku (Tokyo, 1920), 74–76; TNS, June 3; YHS, June 13; JDH, June 23.
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and Kusakut, the two villages suspected of participating in the slaughter of the Ryūkyūan castaways in 1871, and the assault took place between June 1 and June 3. Following the recommendation of his American military advisers, Saigō split the Japanese force into three units: the first carried out a frontal assault against the Butan, the second set out with a Gatling gun in tow to attack the Kusakut (impassable roads compelled them to send the gun back to camp before they had traveled far), and the third performed a flanking maneuver, proceeding north along the coast before heading over the mountains to attack the Butan from the rear. By the time the fighting ended, the villages inhabited by the Butan had been burned to the ground, as had several other villages in the area, and the Butan and Kusakut had been scattered. By the middle of July, the chiefs of all the aborigine villages of southern Taiwan had presented themselves at the expeditionary headquarters and “submitted” to Japanese authority.41

A few months later, woodblock print artists produced a number of prints that depicted the fighting.42 By the 1870s, the woodblock print publishing industry had existed in Japan for nearly two centuries, but the advent of newspapers and new printing technologies after the Meiji Restoration had forced print publishers to adapt. Many print publishers and print artists went into the newspaper business,43 the most famous example being the print artist Ochiai Yoshiiku, who helped found the *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun* and who probably drew most of the illustrations for that newspaper.44 Print artists and publishers also tried to survive by exploiting the success of newspapers, taking popular themes from newspapers and transforming them into catchy prints—called newspaper prints (*shinbun nishikie*)—that probably sold more for their sensationalist impact than for their news value.45 The *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun* carried the most influential reports about the expedition, and many of the prints about the expedition purported to take their information from that newspaper. One of the most famous prints about the Taiwan Expedition, a triptych by Yoshiiku from October 1874, depicts the fighting as a glorious victory for the Japanese (Figure 3), and it provides an example of the sensationalistic nature

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41 Ochiai, *Meiji shichinen seiban tôbatsu kaikoroku*, 80–105; *TNS*, June 3, 6, 12, 25, 26; *YHS*, June 13; *JDH*, June 10, 23.

42 In addition to the triptych by Ochiai Yoshiiku shown in Figure 3, Tsukioka Yoshiitoshi produced a print of the battle of Sekimono (reproduced in Segi Shin'ichi, *Tsukioka Yoshiitoshi gashû* [Tokyo, 1978], plate 74), and Nagashima Mōsai produced a triptych about it. Nagashima’s triptych and an additional six-print composition about the battle by Yoshiiku (possibly two triptychs) are listed in a catalog of items displayed at the Japanese colonial library on Taiwan in 1932, but the prints are no longer extant. Taiwan Sōtoku-fu Toshokan, ed., *Meiji nanannen seitai keiki kanketsu shiyou tenkan mokuroku* ([Taihoku], 1932), 14.


44 Onishi Hayashigorō, *Nihon shinbun hatten shi—Meiji Taishō hen* (Tokyo, 1995), 45. Because Yoshiiku helped found the *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun*, many scholars conclude that he probably did the illustrations for the newspaper, too; Tan’ō Yasunori, Tsuchiya Reiko (personal communication with the author).

45 Japanese scholars remain divided over whether newspaper prints sold for their sensationalist impact or for their news value; the difference may be partly geographical, with Tokyo prints being more sensationalist and Osaka prints being more news oriented. Satō Kenji, “Shinbun nishikie to nishikie shinbun,” in Kinoshita Koreyuki and Yoshimi Shun’ya, eds., *Yūsū no tanjō: Kawaraban to shinbun nishikie no jōhō shakai* (Tokyo, 1999), 14–16; Tsuchiya Reiko, “Nishikie shinbun to wa nanika,” in Kinoshita, et al., *Yūsū no tanjō*, 102–04; Tsuchiya, *Osaka no nishikie shinbun*.  

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FIGURE 3: Ochiai Yoshiiku (October 1874), "Tokyo nichinichi shinbun nanakyaku jūni go" (Tokyo Daily Newspaper, No. 712). Special Collections Room, Waseda University Library.
of newspaper prints. The journalist Okada Jisuke, an associate of Yoshiiku who also worked for the *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun*, wrote the text in the cartouche in the upper left of the triptych. The title indicates that the print is based on a report in the June 10 edition of the *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun*, but in fact the text and the visual image only loosely follow the newspaper report. Okada’s text describes the May 22 battle at Sekimon in the following way:

It was in the seventh year of Meiji [1874] when Japanese soldiers came to this island to punish the violence of the Taiwan raw savages. But the untutored barbarians do not know ethics and they attacked without warning, so at last the hideout of the Botan [Butan] race was attacked in May in order to suppress them with the military power [hei’i] of the empire [kōkoku] . . . [For their defense, the Butan] relied on cliffs so steep that a single person defending could impede the advance of ten thousand, and using large stones they made battlements that blocked any movement. From within this [stronghold] they let loose a hail of gunfire. At this point our troops contrived a plan. They managed with great effort to circle around a mountain that had no footpaths, and aiming down at the stronghold of the Botan from the side of the mountain they fired, [their gunfire] like hail pelting down in an onslaught by a strong mountain storm. The savages lost heart and they surrendered and apologized, and at dawn on May 22 Japan’s imperial prestige [tei’i] shone before the world [bankoku] in this battle at Sekimon.

Okada credits the victory over the aborigines to Japan’s military power, evoking the prestige of the samurai class, but according to Okada, prestige for the victory also accrues to the empire, and the most important result is to make Japan’s imperial prestige shine throughout the world. While Okada’s rhetoric leaves open the question of whether imperial prestige or samurai valor constituted the source of Japanese dominance over the aborigines, his text conveys an unmistakable message about how the instrumental use of dominance overseas could improve Japan’s status in the world.

The visual images in the print use a different mixture of codes to convey Japanese dominance over the aborigines, and they convey a different ambiguity about the source of Japanese dominance, suggesting that it may derive either from Japan’s martial tradition or from its engagement with Western civilization. Read from upper right to lower left, the images in the print convey Japanese dominance in multiple ways. The Japanese figures are placed higher in the print, they appear either composed and confident (such as the officers on the right) or fierce and threatening (such as the soldiers in the middle), and they stand over the dead bodies of several aborigines (the second Japanese figure from the right, for example, holds up the head of a dead aborigine by his queue). The portrayal of the aborigines, on the other hand, evinces an utter lack of valor. They are either dead (foreground) or running away from the Japanese in fear (background). The depiction of Japan’s military victory draws on the enormously popular theme of samurai valor from Edo-period woodblock prints, but at the same time the tradition of samurai valor has been clothed quite literally in Eurocentric symbols of power characteristic of.

46 The signature in the cartouche at the far left identifies the author as Onkatsu Ryūgin “Okada,” a penname of Okada Jisuke. Miyatake Gaikotsu and Nishida Taketoshi, *Meiji shinbun zasshi kankeisha ryakuden*, vol. 20 of *Meiji Taishō genron shiryō* (Tokyo, 1985), 34. I would like to thank Henry Smith for bringing this fact to my attention.
the bunmei kaika: the soldiers sport, for example, close-cropped hair, trousers, and jackets. Little more than a decade earlier, it would have been unimaginable for samurai to wear such clothing, and even when a few samurai broke with tradition during the waning years of the old regime to experiment with the new Western garb, they faced the prospect of punishment. To be sure, official attitudes toward Western clothing changed during the early years of the Meiji period, but the adoption of Western clothing—and, more broadly, Western material culture—became a site of bitter contention as some Japanese vigorously opposed any Western influence on Japan, and this was particularly true among those members of the samurai class who were inclined to rebel against the fragile Meiji government. The European aspect of the soldiers’ appearance in Yoshiiku’s print may have provided a general idea of how members of the expeditionary force actually looked, but their appearance also surely evoked an awareness of samurai resistance to Western influence in Japan. Yoshiiku’s portrayal of the soldiers seems to betray an awareness of this resistance, because he chose not to portray rifles, a weapon that true samurai scorned as beneath their dignity and that some samurai saw as a Western perversion of Japan’s purity. His choice seems all the more deliberate since newspaper articles—and even the text by Okada that appears on the print—highlighted the Japanese use of rifles, and since his greatest rival at the time, the woodblock print artist Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, accentuated the Japanese use of rifles in his print about the battle at Sekimon. Yoshiiku’s easy blending of samurai valor and the appropriation of Eurocentric civilization thus elided the hotly contested issue of whether it was proper to introduce Western civilization into Japan, and it clouded the question of whether Japan’s victory over the aborigines occurred because of Japan’s tradition of samurai valor or because Japan had appropriated attributes of Western civilization.

The combined visual and verbal depiction of the battle at Sekimon by Yoshiiku and Okada offers a contradictory view of Japanese dominance, as do other commercial sources that will be discussed in the next section of this essay. The crossed codes of dominance betray a complex and ambivalent appreciation of dominance that arose because of contention over how Japan should engage Western civilization and what the new basis of political authority ought to be. In the 1870s, then, Japan’s mimetic imperialism did not rely on a consensus about how Japan should engage Western civilization, or what political authority meant. Commercial sources do suggest, on the other hand, that mimetic imperialism entailed accepting the instrumental use of force as a way of improving Japan’s position in the world, and that establishing dominance over the aborigines took place in the context of appropriating Western civilization and redefining the nature of political authority in Japan.

Representations of the submission of the aborigines similarly asserted a higher status for Japan while evoking the troubled and contradictory terms on which Japan

47 Eskildsen, “Telling Differences,” 331.
48 Cited in n. 42 above.
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engaged Western civilization. In June and July of 1874, Japanese newspapers reported how the leaders of various villages in southern Taiwan had capitulated to Japanese authority, which they described as an act of submission (kijun). As they did with their expressions of Japanese dominance, commercial sources about the Taiwan Expedition refracted their representations of the submission of the aborigines through an understanding of civilization and savagery, and they conveyed a number of messages about the nature and purposes of the expedition that differed from the government view. Most important, the government saw submission as a step toward establishing Japanese jurisdiction over the aboriginal territory, which would justify the Japanese effort to annex it. Commercial sources, on the other hand, generally interpreted the submission of the aborigines as part of a process of establishing Japanese authority over them. While the explanations of submission diverged, the effects they envisioned were similar: in either case, establishing jurisdiction or authority served as a necessary first step in the process of bringing civilization to the savages. In the case of commercial sources, however, portraying the submission of the aborigines also involved a key modification of what submission meant in order to distinguish Japan’s encounter with Western imperialism from the Taiwanese aborigines’ encounter with Japan’s mimetic imperialism. Modifying what submission meant, in other words, helped draw attention away from the similarities between Japan’s subordination to the West and the aborigines’ subordination to Japan.

As soon as word of the expedition’s activities on Taiwan reached Japan, Japanese newspapers began to carry accounts of how the aborigines had surrendered to Japanese forces. On June 15, both the Yūbin hôchi shinbun and the Kobun tsūshi published an account, based on a letter from a member of the expedition to the branch of the Bureau of Savage Affairs in Nagasaki, that explained how the chiefs of seven aborigine villages in southern Taiwan came to the Japanese camp on May 24 to capitulate.49 According to the account, the chiefs received gifts of blankets, swords, and Japanese flags as a reward for their cooperation in the fight against the Butan, and the Japanese and the chiefs sealed their friendship with toasts of champagne and beer. Over the ensuing weeks, more villages capitulated, and newspapers reported that by the end of July all of the villages of southern Taiwan had submitted to the Japanese. Most newspaper accounts described the capitulation of the aborigines in formulaic terms, usually including how the aborigines exchanged items of local produce for Japanese gifts. Exchanges of this sort resemble the ritual exchange of gifts that took place under Chinese-style diplomacy, and, while the exchanges implied a strict subordination of the aborigines to Japanese authority, they did not necessarily involve an assertion of Japanese jurisdiction. The role of flags in the exchanges with the aborigines does reveal, however, an attempt by members of the expedition to assert jurisdiction over southern Taiwan.

A careful look at the exchange that took place on May 24 suggests that the aborigines understood the Japanese flags they received as symbols of protection. On June 23, the Japan Daily Herald published a long account of the events on

49 YHS, June 15; KT, June 15. Most sources agree that the meeting took place on May 24, but these newspaper reports list the date as May 25.
Taiwan, probably based on reports from the American newspaper correspondent Edward House, who had accompanied the expedition to Taiwan.\footnote{IDH, June 23. For House's account of the expedition, see Edward Howard House, The Japanese Expedition to Formosa (Tokio [Tokyo], 1875).} It included a description of the negotiations led by Douglas Cassel, an American military adviser to the Japanese who handled the negotiations with the aborigines. Cassel drew an enthusiastic response from the assembled chiefs when he promised on behalf of the Japanese that each village that pledged its cooperation would be given a Japanese flag guaranteeing its protection. As obvious as the symbolism might appear to us today, the aborigines would not have understood the flags as a national symbol. Rather, they would have seen them as a signal of cooperation and non-aggression similar to an arrangement LeGendre made with them in 1867, where pieces of red cloth—a luxury item to the aborigines—symbolized the agreement.\footnote{LeGendre, “Notes of Travel,” 3: 241–43, 282–83, LeGendre Papers.} Cassel's description of the negotiations suggests that the aborigines viewed the 1874 agreement with the Japanese as a quid pro quo arrangement of cooperation in exchange for a guarantee that the Japanese would not attack them, a reassurance they wanted in the wake of the devastating Japanese attack on the Butan at Sekimon only a few days earlier. According to Cassel, the decision to give each chief a Japanese flag as a sign of protection was made after the leader of the aborigines took the initiative and asked the Japanese for papers that would guarantee their protection, similar to a written agreement LeGendre had made with them several years earlier. The aborigine leader requested the guarantee of Japanese non-aggression, though, just after he guaranteed the Japanese that they could land their ships and take on supplies in the coastal areas of southern Taiwan.\footnote{Cassel to LeGendre, May 26, 1874, “Okuma monjo” C453.} It seems likely, then, that the aborigines understood the two guarantees as an exchange.

The Japanese, on the other hand, ascribed a more far-reaching colonialist meaning to the flags: they saw them as a symbol of jurisdiction over the aborigines. Between the end of May and the end of September, the Japanese occupation force distributed flags and “certificates of submission” to over fifty villages throughout southern Taiwan, including villages well outside the area where the fighting took place. On the front, the certificates bore the seal of the government-general (totoku-fu) as well as the name of the chief receiving the certificate and the name of his village; on the back, according to one template, they read:

The person who bears this certificate has submitted [kijun] to the empire, thus he should not be treated with violence.

Meiji 7, sixth month.

Headquarters of the army of Great Japan.\footnote{Ochiai, Meiji shichinen seiban tōbatsu kaikoroku, 104.}

An account of the expedition by Mizuno Jun, one of the Japanese participants in the expedition, spells out the intended use of the flags and certificates. In his unpublished memoirs, Mizuno explained how people from villages all over southern Taiwan came to the Japanese camp and asked to become “good people under the jurisdiction of the Japanese government” (Nihon seifu chika no ryōmin), in return...
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for which they received the flags and certificates. According to Mizuno, the villagers were instructed to fly the flags if Japanese troops passed through their area, or to show the certificates as a sign of their allegiance to the Japanese government (Nihon seifu ni reizoku suru hyōshō) if they came to the Japanese camp. The phrase “good people” often appears in Chinese sources, and the aborigines appear to have used it to distinguish themselves from troublemakers who deserved to be punished, but Mizuno adds to this conventional Chinese locution the colonialist logic of the Japanese government when he invokes the idea of jurisdiction. Mizuno’s description of the flags provides firm evidence that members of the expeditionary force saw their actions as an attempt to establish Japanese jurisdiction, which, according to the official rationale for the expedition, provided a legal basis for colonization.

In contrast to the view of submission held by members of the expedition, commercial sources rarely depicted the submission of the aborigines in terms of an assertion of Japanese jurisdiction. Instead, they usually linked submission to the assertion of Japanese authority and to the inauguration of a civilizing process among the aborigines. Moreover, in order to explain what submission meant, commercial sources often relied on a synthesis of symbols of hierarchy from the Edo period and symbols of dominance and subordination from “Civilization and Enlightenment” (bunmei kaika). The print shown in Figure 4, for example, employs a complex synthesis of symbols to convey a particular message about submission and the civilizing process. The print, by Yoshiiku, depicts a pair of aborigines bowing submissively before a fierce-looking Japanese soldier. Their respective postures express dominance and subordination in much the same way that Edo-period prints expressed social and political hierarchy, but the soldier’s cropped hair alludes to the civilizing imperative of the bunmei kaika and serves as a Eurocentric counterpoint to the Edo-period imagery that also defines his power. The soldier’s hairstyle and clothing, though not his weapon, serve as distinct and obvious markers of Western influence on Japanese culture. (For a contrasting view of samurai clothing and hairstyles from the 1850s, see Figure 7.) The aborigines thus bow down not to an undifferentiated image of Japanese authority but rather to an image of Japanese authority that was in the process of being transformed—sometimes in unwelcome ways—by Japan’s engagement with Western civilization.

The text, by Takabatake Ransen, describes the process of subjugating the aborigines in somewhat different terms, building an implicit contrast between Japan’s engagement with Western civilization—“Civilization and Enlightenment”—and the enlightenment (kaika) of the aborigines:

All the savages of Taiwan have surrendered to our forces, but among them the savages of only the Botan [Butan] tribe fled deep into the mountains and did not come out, [so] the entire army attacked in mass from three directions, setting fire to the mountains so that they had no place to hide. The chiefs who had already submitted [kijun] acted as intermediaries,


and on the first day of the seventh month of the year 2534 of imperial rule [kigen] [1874], [the Butan] came to the headquarters to apologize for [their] transgressions, and they surrendered in earnest. Thereafter the savage land became completely tranquil. It must be said that this expedition to punish the savages is the first stage in advancing the enlightenment [kaika] of this island.

As in other examples that have been discussed above, the text juxtaposes Japan's military prowess and its imperial authority, evoking the unsettled nature of domestic political authority. Specifically, the print contrasts a description of the military victory over the aborigines to the theme of imperial authority. It invokes imperial authority in this case by referring to kigen, a way of reckoning time based on the mythical origins of the imperial house that gained popularity in the Meiji period as an alternative to the Western reckoning of time, which assumed the primacy of Christianity. The text thus gave credit for the aborigines' submission to Japan's military prowess, it situated their submission in imperial time, and it identified their submission as the point at which the civilizing process could begin.

While the print represented the submission of the aborigines through a synthesis of allusions to power and hierarchy from the Edo period and to allusions to the bunmei kaika, it did so without establishing a basis of solidarity between the aborigines and the Japanese despite the fact that both of them were, after all, presumably going through their respective "enlightenments" at the same time. The print denies the possibility of solidarity between the Japanese and the aborigines, as its unmistakable message about hierarchy makes clear, and in doing so it implies that their respective enlightenments were incommensurate.

Other prints conveyed a similar message about the expedition, but they used different strategies to do so. For example, the print shown in Figure 5, the first panel of a pair of anonymous kawaraban entitled "Taiwan gunki" (A Military Tale of Taiwan), shows a striking image of aborigine submission that recalls some of the representations of the Perry Expedition from twenty years earlier, one of which will be described below. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this expedition as a symbol of Western intervention in Japan. The Perry Expedition, which succeeded in inaugurating Western diplomatic relations in Japan, provoked an unprecedented wave of woodblock prints about the Americans and their ships, and, a century and a half later, Perry's "black ships" still remain an important symbol of Japan's nineteenth-century encounter with the West. It should not surprise us, then, that in 1874 people in Japan saw the Perry Expedition as a paradigm of Western intervention and domination and attempted to explain Japan's involvement in Taiwan by analogy to it. In its explanation of aborigine submission, however, the print also relies on an extraordinarily dense web of analogies and allusions that touch on issues of Japan's national prestige, tropes of authority from the Edo period, and references to the bunmei kaika. Through its

56 Tokyo Daigaku Shiryō Hensanbo Shozoku Gazō Shiryō Kaiseki Sentā, ed., Surimono sōgō hennen mokuroku (kō) (Tokyo, 1998). This chronological catalog lists extant monochrome prints (kawaraban) from the nineteenth century held in major Japanese collections. The list is comprehensive, but it understates the number of prints actually published (it does not list multicolored prints, prints in smaller collections, or prints that are no longer extant). The section on political and social disturbances lists the titles of approximately 250 different prints published in 1853–1854 that dealt with the Perry Expedition, American ships, or fortifications of the coast in response to the expedition (pp. 43–51).
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various analogies and allusions, the print suggests that Japan’s and the aborigines’ experiences with imperialism were incommensurate.

To begin with, “Taiwan gunki” makes sense of the aborigines’ submission through a synthesis, as did Yoshiiku’s print. It portrays the expedition as a conflict between Japan as a nation and the aborigines as a savage people, and it defines Japanese authority through a mixture of Edo-period tropes and tropes from the bunmei kaika. For example, the visual image stresses the nationality of the soldiers by placing them beneath a banner that reads “Great Japan” and next to a pair of Rising Sun flags, symbols that had long histories in Japan but that became explicit symbols of the nation only in the Meiji period. The text, by contrast, stresses the savagery of the aborigines. The Butan, it says, “burrow into crags to make their dwellings, the spirit of the people is savage [bōaku] and they eat the flesh of people,” combining the themes, described above, of cannibalism, cave dwelling, and savagery. The image of the aborigines on the left of the print shows them as large-headed and hirsute, perhaps making a visual analogy to the Ainu, who were usually described as a hairy people.

The image of the Japanese soldiers on the right offers a different synthesis, however: it is an odd conflation of Edo-period tropes of military authority and tropes of Western civilization from the bunmei kaika. The general, for example, sits
with his legs apart, a trope used in Edo-period prints of samurai to identify a military leader, and he wears a samurai's coat of arms and breastplate, attire abandoned during the modernization of the military during the early Meiji period. In Edo-period prints, military leaders would be shown sitting on folding stools, a sign of their authority over the lower-ranking samurai around them, but in this case the general is seated on a Western-style chair. Yet his chair is not simply a Western implement: in this context, it is a Western implement that has been appropriated to convey a particular message about authority. The use of chairs as signs of political authority can be seen, for example, in many illustrations of civil ordinances promulgated in Japan only a year or two before the Taiwan Expedition as part of a self-conscious effort to “civilize” Japan.† Illustrations of the ordinances regularly depicted government officials seated in chairs, clad in Western-style trousers, and sporting close-cropped Western-style haircuts, as they dispensed justice to the Japanese transgressors who knelt before them in clothing and hairstyles characteristic of the Edo period (see Figure 6). The chair in “Taiwan gunki” thus refers not to Western civilization but rather to the adaptation of Western civilization as part of an effort of redefine political authority in Japan, and it shows how it was possible to imagine that Japan’s new, partially Westernized political authority could be

exerted overseas. The cropped hair and clothing of the soldiers surrounding the general in “Taiwan gunki” make a similar statement about the relationship between the changing nature of domestic political authority and the bunmei kaika.

More striking, however, is the visual allusion to the Perry Expedition that “Taiwan gunki” makes. The composition of the visual image mimics prints that depicted the fictive submission of Commodore Perry and the American “barbarians” in 1853–1854 (see Figure 7). In spite of the government’s utter failure to expel the Perry Expedition, dozens of the most popular prints from those years inverted the foreign threat and showed Perry or Americans as a defeated enemy. In “Taiwan gunki,” as in prints of a “defeated” Perry in the 1850s, the dominant Japanese forces sit beneath military banners, and their leader faces the submissive enemy magisterially, while the enemy bows down in obeisance to the Japanese.

Through this visual allusion to prints of a defeated Perry, “Taiwan gunki” inscribed the Western imperialist power to dominate onto Japan, in effect replacing an older conception of Japanese superiority with a new one that was defined partly by reference to the attributes of Western civilization, and it displaced the subordination of the American “barbarians” onto the aborigines.

Inscribing the power of Western imperialism onto Japan presented an opportunity to assert for Japan a higher status in the world, and the text attends to this when it voices concern about Japan’s prestige. It invents two speeches by Japanese leaders who warn against bringing shame upon Great Japan, and it claims in its conclusion that the military campaign that forced the last of the aborigines to submit “is Japan’s glory and is truly a courageous feat.” Displacing the “barbarism” of the Americans onto the aborigines, on the other hand, entailed a complementary transformation of what subordination meant. For one thing, it straightened out the inverted view of submission in prints from the 1850s—Perry never capitulated in the 1850s, whereas the aborigines actually did in 1874. For another, the text defined the subordinate status of the aborigines through the Western dichotomy of civilization and savagery rather than through Edo-period categories of barbarism that were used to describe Perry and the Americans in the 1850s. To understand the print’s displacement of subordination thus required conceiving of Japan’s relationship to the aborigines through a dense and complex set of inversions and analogies, but the meaning of the displacement was readily apparent: it showed how Japan’s subordination to the West could be displaced onto the aborigines. In this example, too, the portrayal of the aborigines’ subordination foreclosed the possibility of solidarity between the Japanese and the aborigines in favor of asserting a hierarchical relationship between them patterned in part after Western imperialism.

Commercial representations of the submission of the aborigines thus show a

59 Prints from 1853–1854 showed the “defeat” of the Americans by analogy to the defeat of the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century, as well as by representing Americans who were (fictively) captured in battle, overpowered by Japanese military might, overpowered by Japanese gods, or, as in Figure 7, cowering before Japan’s great leader. At least two other compositions from 1853–1854 use exactly the same image of Perry cowering before the Japanese that is shown in Figure 7. For a discussion of inverted views of the foreign threat in 1853–1854, see Eskildsen, “Telling Differences,” 178–201.
keen awareness of how Western civilization could be adapted to describe new hierarchical relationships that resembled the relationships of Western imperialism. Members of the expeditionary force, pursuing the colonialist logic of the government, interpreted the submission of the aborigines as an assertion of jurisdiction, a legal precondition that would make it possible to claim the aboriginal territory for Japan. Commercial sources, on the other hand, interpreted submission more broadly, most often seeing it as an assertion of Japanese authority. Irrespective of the government’s motives, but by no means antithetical to them, commercial sources depicted the submission of the aborigines both in terms of the contested nature of domestic political authority in Japan and in terms of Japan’s engagement with Western civilization. To be sure, an assertion of Japanese authority over the aborigines made Japan look more civilized than a mere assertion of jurisdiction would, but it did more than this. It also made it possible to assert that Japan had begun the process of civilizing the aborigines, a key point of congruence between the government’s goals for the expedition and the expectations voiced in commercial sources. At the same time, the submission of the aborigines to Japanese authority exaggerated the contrast between the respective civilizing processes that presumably were taking place simultaneously in Japan and among the aborigines, cutting off the possibility of a sympathetic comparison between their experiences. Further, one of the prints described above achieved the same effect by portraying a symbolic displacement of Japan’s subordinate status onto the aborigines. In sum, commercial sources about the expedition depicted the theme of the submission of the aborigines to Japanese authority in a variety of ways that asserted a higher
status for Japan while foreclosing the possibility of solidarity with the aborigines, and they did so partly by reference to Japan's engagement with Western civilization and partly by reference to older conceptions of hierarchy that helped explain a new relationship between Japan and Taiwan that mimicked Western imperialism.

The cultural dimension of Japan's mimetic imperialism stands out when we examine commercial sources that describe the Taiwan Expedition. To be sure, government documents show how the Japanese government received a particular set of ideas about civilization and savagery and used them to justify an attempt to establish colonies on Taiwan, but the government view can take our understanding of the expedition only so far. In order to ground our understanding of the expedition more fully in the historical context of Japan during the 1870s, and to gain a fuller understanding of the expedition's mimetic imperialism, we need to broaden our perspective to include commercial sources. The most striking insight produced by this approach is the recognition that the reproduction of Western imperialism in Japan took place in the context, and as part of the process, of Japan's appropriation and adaptation of Western civilization. One implication of this insight is that in order to understand the mimetic imperialism of the expedition, and perhaps to understand the origins of Japanese imperialism more generally, we need to look beyond diplomatic, economic, and strategic motivations for imperialism and recognize that Japan's aggressive stance toward East Asia constituted an integral part of its contested engagement with the Western civilization.

In order to elucidate this cultural connection, the foregoing discussion has emphasized several ways that commercial sources adapted Western thinking about civilization and savagery. First, the sources exaggerated the cultural difference between the Japanese and the aborigines of Taiwan by accentuating their savagery. Second, they used analogies to Edo-period conceptions of hierarchy in order to explain the hierarchical relationship that the expedition intended to establish between the "civilized" Japanese and the "savage" Taiwanese. Third, they framed that hierarchical relationship in terms of Japan's domestic political authority, which remained confused in the wake of the Meiji Restoration. Finally, they explained the hierarchical relationship partly by reference to Japan's own troubled encounter with Western civilization and Western imperialism.

Commercial sources do not explain why they adapted the ideas of civilization and savagery this way, but by examining the effects of the adaptations we can make some inferences about what their purposes may have been. First, and most obviously, the adaptations made it easier for people in Japan to claim for their nation a higher status in a world hierarchy defined and dominated by the West. Japanese people could, in other words, claim a higher status for their nation by modifying what civilization and savagery meant. Because Japan did not belong to the West, however, appropriating attributes of Western civilization could not produce a simple or straightforward increase in Japan's status. Claiming higher status for Japan on Western terms threatened claims to power that relied on indigenous attributes, such as samurai authority and imperial divinity, and the
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threat posed by appropriating Western civilization stimulated debates about the nature of political authority in Japan throughout the 1870s and beyond. A second effect, similar to Fukuzawa Yukichi’s call to “escape Asia,” involved evacuating a middle ground between civilization and savagery that might have served as a basis of solidarity between the Japanese and other peoples of East Asia. Removing this middle ground did more than simply deny the possibility of solidarity, though; it also asserted aggressively that Japan could, by appropriating Western attributes of dominance, displace its own Western-imposed subordination onto other peoples in East Asia. A denial of solidarity meant, in other words, not simply an escape from Asia but also a concomitant assertion of dominance over others in Asia. Third, the adaptations made it easier to see Japanese dominance over a foreign people through the lens of the ongoing debate about the contested and ambiguous nature of domestic political authority. Thinking about what civilization and savagery meant in the case of the Taiwan Expedition offered an opportunity, in other words, to think about what imperial authority might or might not mean, or how the attributes of Western civilization might or might not be suitable for Japanese society.

Finally, the timing of the expedition’s mimetic imperialism is crucial because it shows that mimetic imperialism occurred as part of the process, not the result, of Japan’s engaging Western civilization. The timing shows that, from the outset of the Meiji period, the cultural process through which people in Japan engaged Western civilization had an important influence on how they viewed their nation’s role in the international order, and that mimetic imperialism played a part in how domestic political power and national identity were redefined in the 1870s. Commercial representations of the Taiwan Expedition therefore implicate mimetic imperialism in Japan’s broader adaptive response to Western civilization and in the effort to refashion Japan into a modern nation-state.

Robert Eskildsen is an assistant professor of Japanese history at Smith College. His dissertation (Stanford University, 1998) examined the ideology of visual representations of foreigners in nineteenth-century Japan, and the present article grew out of a brief discussion in the dissertation of a few seemingly minor woodblock prints that depicted the aborigines of southern Taiwan. Eskildsen is currently writing a book that will explain the cultural and diplomatic history of the Taiwan Expedition.