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Guest Editors' Introduction: Unpacking a Controversy: National Histories, Visual Cultures, and Digital Dissent

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Introduction

Unpacking a Controversy: National Histories, Visual Cultures, and Digital Dissent

Jing Wang and Winnie Won Yin Wong

In April 2006, Chinese students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) mounted a protest over the appearance, on an MIT website, of historical Japanese war propaganda depicting the victorious killing of Chinese, Russian, and Korean enemy soldiers. The site on which the propaganda appeared was featured on the MIT homepage, and for two consecutive days, clicking from that homepage led the public to a large set of wartime images made during the 1894–95 Sino-Japanese war and the 1904–5 Russo-Japanese war. These images, some of which appeared gruesome while others innocuous, were embedded in the Visualizing Cultures website, a component of OpenCourseWare, which is a digital education initiative that MIT pioneered in 2001. On the day when “Throwing Off Asia”—a five webpage section on the Sino-Japanese War—was highlighted on the MIT homepage, a woodblock print that depicted Japanese soldiers beheading Chinese

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1 prisoners of war caught the attention of Chinese students on campus (See
2 Benjamin Elman, fig. 1, in this special issue, XX).

3 According to the commonly held view, students who were shocked that
4 such an image was being shown on their school's website spread the news
5 within and outside the campus without closely examining the texts sur-
6 rounding those images, a view to which we will return later for closer scrutiny.
7 The website itself provided no space for online comments or discussion,
8 and so the protest that ensued took the form of e-mails and telephone calls,
9 and one in-person discussion forum, among students, the MIT administration,
10 and the faculty and staff associated with the website. The e-mails and
11 telephone calls, however, soon came in the thousands from outside MIT,
12 from across the United States and China, and from the Chinese diaspora.
13 The author of the webpage, Professor John Dower, had provided no e-mail
14 address on the webpage itself or on MIT's official directory for correspondence,
15 but the site's only other listed faculty author, Professor Shigeru Miyagawa,
16 received a deluge of e-mails and telephone calls, which included several
17 violent and racist threats to himself and his family. As the responses
18 grew overheated, the Chinese students at MIT who initiated the protest
19 moved sensibly to condemn such reprehensible actions and pleaded on
20 online bulletin board systems (BBS) for such intimidation to stop. The web
21 pages were removed for approximately ten days by the authors, edited, and
22 then restored with "warnings" to those who would find the images offensive.
23 The damage, however, was done, and an on-campus dispute between
24 students and professors, fueled by media reports, spilled over into the global
25 realm. In the Chinese media, the incident was readily interpreted as yet
26 another sign of Japan's disregard for its past war crimes and the standard
27 hypocrisy of Western powers for condoning China's victimization. In the US
28 media, the incident was quickly interpreted as a battle between "Red China"
29 and "Free America" and cast in an irreversible and irrevocable frame of US
30 academic freedom violated by young malicious Chinese censors.¹

31 Why do we want to revisit the controversy almost a decade later? What
32 are the stakes for people like us, a Cantonese-Canadian, and a Taiwanese-
33 born US citizen who has lived in the United States for forty years? We
34 can cite many reasons: intellectual curiosity, commitment to our integrity
35 as cultural critics, but most importantly, the responsibility of rediscovering

1 issues that were summarily closed in 2006 by that same irrevocable frame-
2 work but that continued to resonate with us in our ever-intense quest for a
3 future in which war of all kinds, including those of race and culture, vanish
4 from sight.

5 To begin, there are basic values that the contributors of this special issue
6 uphold. Hate speech is utterly unacceptable. Although dissension is a natu-
7 ral right to which we are all entitled, no one should turn it into an instru-
8 ment of harassment without inviting public censure. Apart from pointing
9 a finger at those obvious acts of aggression, we edited this special issue not
10 to arbitrate who was right and who was wrong but to refocus ourselves on
11 those critical questions that befuddled many of us who observed and par-
12 ticipated in the controversy in 2006. In the realm of ideas, there is no right
13 and wrong to speak of, only the incessant desire and hope for productive
14 intellectual sparring and two-way dialogue.

15 At the outset of this project, we invited each of the sitting members of the
16 board of the Visualizing Cultures project, including professors John Dower
17 and Shigeru Miyagawa, to contribute essays to this special issue, but they
18 declined our invitations. Without the wider perspective and dialogue that
19 these scholars would have brought, this project took on a different tenor,
20 and we instead turned our attention to a broad interrogation of wartime
21 imagery and the representation of violence, student activism and image-
22 driven nationalism in cyberspace, visualized Sino-Japanese relations, digital
23 pedagogy, and the impact of the Internet on knowledge production. Each
24 of these issues calls for nuanced discussion and each recasts the 2006 con-
25 troversy in larger critical inquiries that have repercussions beyond the field
26 of Asian studies. The essays in this volume are thus tied in one endeavor—
27 providing longer and more layered historical contexts for conflicts like the
28 Visualizing Cultures controversy, and examining the crisscrossing contexts
29 of digital content with a critically balanced mindset. Together, these con-
30 tributors offer multiple avenues for understanding why the controversy
31 broke out and how it was represented in the public sphere.

32 There were many strands of controversy that divided the interpreters
33 and participants of the debate back in 2006.² A large number of scholars
34 saw the controversy as a disturbing symptom of Chinese nationalism and
35 online vigilantism, whose indoctrinated young agents were challenging the

1 academic freedoms held sacred by US professors, and that indeed, the protest
2 amounted to Chinese censorship of US scholarship. On the opposite
3 end, critics considered the incrimination of the student protesters as equally
4 problematic and saw it as a refusal to grant the time-honored US ideal
5 of student activism to Chinese students in particular. However, straddled
6 between those two opposite poles of opinion (i.e., blatant censorship and the
7 right of students to protest) are other frames of debate that can draw us into
8 more complex discussions of what was actually raised by the controversy.

9 *I can vaguely remember the images. It was not the images that I found objec-*
10 *tionable.*³ At the heart of the controversy was whether the students failed
11 to read the explanatory text and reacted to images alone, or whether they
12 were critiquing the texts simultaneously. Huan Zhang, the author of the
13 above quote and who served in 2006 as the president of the Chinese Stu-
14 dents and Scholars Association (CSSA) at MIT, emphasized repeatedly that
15 the students struggled with the texts too, not with the images alone. He was
16 insistent then, as he is now, about this important distinction (see his inter-
17 view in this special issue).⁴ The formal complaints lodged by CSSA officers,
18 according to him, were primarily about the “unclear [narrative] voices” of
19 the “Throwing Off Asia” author and that some passages accompanying
20 those images failed to find a critical voice. The offensive examples that the
21 CSSA protest letter cited included this passage from the Visualizing Cul-
22 tures website: “When all was said and done, what they visualized was beau-
23 tiful, heroic, and modern war. Still, predictable patterns give order to this
24 chaos. Discipline (the Japanese side) prevails over disarray (the Chinese). . . .
25 In short, the Chinese are riotous in every way disgracefully so in their
26 behavior, and delightfully so in their accoutrements.”⁵

27 For the students who launched the protest, passages like those above sent
28 an objectionable message because, in the dissenters’ view, such descriptions
29 did not pointedly support the thesis that the images at issue were propagand-
30 istic, racist, and nationalistic. Unfortunately, the caption for the contro-
31 versial image, “Illustration of the Decapitation of *Violent* Chinese Soldiers”
32 (italics ours), offered little help in making viewers grasp the sympathetic,
33 critical analysis intended and delivered by the author. The word *violent* in
34 the image caption was in fact not intended to be descriptive but was taken
35 from the Japanese inscription on the print itself, accusing the Chinese pris-

1 oners of war of an attempted escape in order to justify their execution. We
2 could indeed debate the art of captioning sensitive materials, but instead of
3 deploring “how easy it is for images to be misunderstood,”⁶ might it not be
4 more productive for critics to ask how expert writing, scholarly conventions,
5 and formal analysis should be deployed in the public sphere and made leg-
6 ible to lay readers? When written for a website, need we give more attention
7 than we usually do to the visual and textual implications of our pedagogy?
8 Sympathizers of the students may push the envelope even further by asking,
9 isn’t there some intellectual basis for someone to find the texts in “Throw-
10 ing Off Asia” troubling and in need of editorial attention? But shouldn’t we
11 give equal weight to the equally convincing counterargument: can a single
12 author really be held accountable to criticism from all global corners of the
13 vast Internet audience? On top of all those complexities, we might also con-
14 sider the proposition that reading online is an exercise totally different from
15 reading, citing, and interpreting a print publication, a point that deserves
16 more attention than it was afforded in 2006 precisely because universities
17 today are widely adopting online and digital platforms in pedagogy.⁷

18 Undoubtedly, no one would or should question the two professors who
19 intended to demonstrate the ways with which the atrocities depicted in those
20 graphic images were visualized for political purposes. In the middle of the
21 controversy, Professor Dower explained patiently in a public statement that
22 the images and text are intended to “to illuminate aspects of the human
23 experience—including imperialism, racism, violence and war—that we
24 must confront squarely if we are to create a better world.”⁸ Indeed, Dower
25 and Miyagawa received an outpouring of support not only from many col-
26 leagues and alumni of MIT but also from several lone mainland Chinese
27 sympathizers who expressed admiration for the two professors’ courage to
28 withstand attacks.⁹ (Here Zhou Kui’s contribution to this issue is useful
29 in its delineation of the mirror responses of netizens living in mainland
30 China.) But if we take the position that the texts rather than the images
31 were at the center of contention and that the students’ take on the texts
32 differed in ways intended by the professors, then the original accusation
33 that the MIT students purposefully decontextualized an image to instigate
34 a malicious attack does not stand well.

35 Much of the contestation over the interpretations of the Visualizing Cul-

1 tures webpage as it appeared in 2006 raises crucial questions of the expert
2 and native divide, a problematic familiar to anthropologists and cultural
3 studies critics. Who holds a privileged viewpoint over the images, texts, or
4 even the history of a tribe or a nation—experts or natives? This difficult
5 question is given an additional layer of complexity in the digital era in which
6 everyone has become a self-publishing author who can disseminate views
7 faster than experts. What are the appropriate measures of engagement and
8 responsibility that govern those who voice dissent in a digital civil society?
9 To what extent should academic intellectuals be obliged to explain the criti-
10 cal force of their work in generalist frames to the nonacademic community
11 and the wider public? As one individual protester put it, “When Open-
12 CourseWare makes all of its materials accessible to the world, it’s no longer
13 merely an academic tool, it has become mass media.”¹⁰ How do we present
14 our research on controversial subjects to the general public, or represent it
15 on our own institutional websites? This is something that remains relevant
16 today whether we are speaking of the 2006 webpages or the emerging digi-
17 tal classrooms designed for massive open online courses.

18 But even if we made a distinction of the “war on the text” from the “war
19 on imagery,” our task would only be half done. For the majority of the
20 hate mail Miyagawa received hinged upon a single image—the “Illustration
21 of the Decapitation of Violent Chinese Soldiers.” No matter how hard the
22 CSSA officers tried to dissociate themselves from these image-driven protes-
23 tors, what persisted in the US media was a homogenized picture of young
24 Chinese “Red Guards,” who irresponsibly mass-circulated a lone image of
25 the beheading of Chinese prisoners by Japanese soldiers as though it repre-
26 sented the point of view of Dower, Miyagawa, or, indeed, that of MIT. In
27 the town-hall-style meeting where the professors and students met for the
28 first time in a well-intentioned attempt to communicate with each other,
29 those present, including one of the editors, could recall the occasional out-
30 bursts from some agitated students who cried out in dismay, “This is not a
31 correct image!”¹¹ So certainly, the image issue loomed large, even though
32 we should not mistakenly collapse all the text-driven protesters into image-
33 driven agitators.

34 Several contributors in this special issue explicitly deal with the inter-
35 pretation of this war over visual images. Benjamin Elman reads into it the

1 changing political discourse of “Old China” and “New Japan” and inter-
2 prets the students’ protest as a symptom of the power reversal of the two
3 rivaling nations, while James Hevia advises us to resituate the image in a
4 global framework, “if for no other reason than to destabilize the China-
5 Japan binary.”

6 Speaking of images in an intellectually responsible manner entails con-
7 fronting an uncomfortable, controversial perspective. As an MIT student
8 commentator wrote:

9 I would like to get an idea of people’s opinion on obscene art, particularly
10 cultural and racially charged artwork, such as the artwork in question, as
11 well as images of the Holocaust, etc. Is it okay to show images such as these
12 if they are classified as “art” or “history” and if they are historical? . . .
13 Even with proper context and descriptions, the idea of these images
14 posted on OCW might still bother a lot of people.¹²

15
16 A handful of similarly minded critics echoed these concerns and wondered
17 whether certain types of images might, by their very nature, be inherently
18 unsuitable for reproduction on a nationally or globally visible forum.¹³ Some
19 may dismiss such an argument by critiquing its underlying nationalist-
20 racial logic, namely, that citizens of a nation necessarily share an aversion
21 to graphic depictions that are racially insulting or racially defeatist. But are
22 there visual representations that under any circumstance can be truly seen
23 as repulsive to basic decency and that no kinds of contextualization, deliv-
24 ered with utter sensitivity, would be sufficient?¹⁴ By unearthing and repub-
25 lishing those atrocious images, are we necessarily colluding with recorded
26 violence? These are questions that Tani Barlow takes up in her contribution
27 to this issue, when she reveals her own thought process in publishing and
28 using images of victims of rape and murder. Ethical questions of this order
29 are ultimately tied to the specter of (self-) censorship. And they represent
30 a far more challenging task than a default position of railing against the
31 Chinese censorship state or the US surveillance one. This dilemma of self-
32 censoring images of violence was given a different name in Guobin Yang’s
33 piece, which takes “critical reflexivity” as the starting point of all digitiza-
34 tion practices.

35 Ultimately, we need to ask: Were the students “protesters” or “censors”?

1 More specifically, what is the boundary that separates the protestors from
2 the censors, and how do we prevent debates over freedom and dissent from
3 becoming a casualty of the dichotomizing Sino-US competition over politi-
4 cal righteousness? These are the critical questions we hope readers of this
5 special issue will decide for themselves after they finish exploring the mul-
6 tiple contexts out of which the MIT controversy evolved. Indeed, censorship,
7 nationalism, and the narrative of victimization are three faces of the same
8 coin, a tightly knit ideological affect several authors endeavor to put under
9 scrutiny.

10 Opening this special issue, Benjamin Elman's essay places the images
11 of the Sino-Japanese war within the historical narrative of Sino-Japanese
12 relations, showing how dramatically the narrative has indeed changed and
13 fragmented since the 1894–95 Sino-Japanese War, and especially during the
14 twentieth-century meta-narrative of the mutual rise and decline of China
15 and Japan. Opposite that long historical perspective, Zhou Kui's contribu-
16 tion chronicles the more immediate events in Sino-Japanese and Sino-US
17 diplomatic relations in the three years leading up to 2006. He examines the
18 debate agenda of the protestors in China's cybersphere of the time, for whom
19 the interpretation of *daoqian* (apology) became a semiotic game in itself.
20 Like Zhou Kui, Qin Shao's contribution fleshes out the broad Chinese pub-
21 lic opinion that Japan's failure to come to terms with its imperialist past has
22 fueled as many ongoing controversies as Chinese nationalism. She argues
23 against the dismissal of the narrative of Chinese victimization and contends
24 that US-based Asian studies scholars' first reactions to the controversy too
25 easily gave way to an anti-China populism. In contrast to her position, Wil-
26 liam A. Callahan points to the narrative of "humiliation" as a continuing
27 effect of China's national humiliation education campaigns in the post-Mao
28 era, and he shows how patriotic indoctrination even underlies Xi Jinping's
29 present-day discourse of the "China dream."

30 Regardless of which position one sides with, a century or more of histori-
31 cal memory and narration is constantly reactivated by present-day politics.
32 A particularly illuminating example of this is shown in James Farrer's eth-
33 nographic account of the 2005 anti-Japanese demonstrations in Shanghai.
34 Farrer's rich analysis of that protest demonstrates how narratives of national
35 "histories" are woven by multiple interpretive communities (defined by

1 numerous racial, linguistic, and national allegiances), whose selective trans-
2 lation of controversial events generates new contexts and new biases.

3 To these positions, once again, a longer historical view provides food for
4 thought, and several contributors wrestle with the history problematic from
5 the angle of visual culture. The woodblock prints at the center of the MIT
6 controversy throws us back, in James Hevia's words, to "the ongoing strug-
7 gle over the meaning of the past 150 years of Sino-Japanese interaction."
8 Winnie Wong examines that historical legacy as a visual and technological
9 one, returning to Lu Xun's 1906 autobiographical story that narrates his
10 reaction to a lantern slide of Japanese soldiers beheading a Chinese victim,
11 exactly one hundred years before the MIT incident. She argues that the Lu
12 Xun "slide moment" institutionally reenacts a spectacle of *forced witnessing*
13 determined by the beheading images themselves. Reflecting further on how
14 visual power functions in the intellectual sphere, Tani Barlow and William
15 Callahan each probe how race and gender figure in these questions, show-
16 ing how China's "century of humiliation" is a history narrated, in Callahan's
17 words, through iconic photographs of "beheaded men and raped women."

18 Another arena to which our contributors turn are critical questions revolv-
19 ing around the digital medium. In her contribution, Jing Wang deconstructs
20 the seemingly seamless continuum of *image* and *text* by arguing that surf-
21 ing online necessarily entails decontextualization and the decoupling of the
22 two. Building on Wang's positing of the digital as an analytical frame, Jack
23 Qiu's study of Chinese youth digital nationalism takes us to the little-known
24 history of the MIT BBS platform in which the initial round of the MIT stu-
25 dents' protest was staged. Ironically, it was an indigenous Chinese platform
26 shut down by Chinese government censors and forced to migrate overseas,
27 to MIT! The BBS's forced exodus from Beijing accounts for "its distinct
28 sense of independence from the Chinese authorities," a position that was
29 woefully misunderstood by the media at the time of the 2006 controversy.
30 In tracing contemporary Chinese image-centric nationalism to the evolving
31 identity politics of the country's post-1980s generation, Qiu unravels the his-
32 torical context surrounding the controversy bit by bit and delivers a detailed
33 generational portrait of the protesters. Here the discussion of digital cul-
34 ture is rounded out by reminders from both Guobin Yang and Ian Condry
35 of its built-in liberatory as well as contentious ethos. While Condry finds in

1 digital media the potential to deconstruct the racial stereotypes mobilized
2 in visual imagery, Yang, wary of the moral ambiguity that often accompa-
3 nies digital representation, holds the universities responsible for “educat-
4 ing the next generation of digital consumers, inventors, and critics.” These
5 essays’ reflective stances on the potential and pitfalls of digital culture show
6 us how the issues of historical and visual narrative analyzed in the preceding
7 groups of essays is even further complicated by the participatory politics of
8 the Internet.

9 Last but not least, race. It is a topic that weaves in and out of several
10 pieces in this collection, just as it unavoidably impacted the framing of the
11 2006 MIT controversy. We saved this topic for last, since this is the most
12 destructive and the hardest identity marker to deconstruct, not least because
13 “postracial America” is more a fantasy than a reality. Jing Wang opens up
14 her piece with her experience of the racializing turn of the controversy and
15 its impact on its framing. Indeed, as ethnic Chinese, we two editors bore the
16 stigma after the controversy made a racializing turn. When the controversy
17 erupted, skin color, our names, and our ethnic origin all of a sudden became
18 determining factors by which our intellectual identity was classified, just as
19 for Shigeru Miyagawa, whose name made him the target of some hateful
20 attacks. At the time, we two editors were both submitted to pressures that
21 demanded we condemn wholesale the Chinese students. We both resisted,
22 and continue to, not only because we find important issues of the intellect
23 to debate here, but also because we have not yet given up the dream of hold-
24 ing onto an internationalist position, one that looms large in Tani Barlow’s
25 piece. Barlow’s meditation on whiteness, Chineseness, and gender in aca-
26 demic controversies reminds us once more why it is essential to challenge the
27 prevailing frame of “us vs. them” and “Americans vs. Chinese.” She makes a
28 clarion call for all scholars, regardless of our identity markers, to make our
29 positions politically progressive and legible.

30 In 2006, many assumptions were made about mainland Chinese students
31 who were seen, even by scholars of Asia, as products of the party-state narra-
32 tive of victimization, disruptive and hostile, devoid of humanistic aspirations
33 and whose politics need to be treated with suspicion. An article published in
34 the *Chronicle of Higher Education* even recorded and implicitly endorsed a
35

1 suggestion that US institutions make *all* foreign students attend orientation
2 sessions on US academic values.¹⁵ The invocation of race, and its slippage
3 with citizenship, language, ethnicity, or indeed individuality itself, marked
4 one of the most troubling moments of the controversy. Next to that was the
5 civilizational discourse those of us ingrained with Edward Said's *Oriental-*
6 *ism* feel compelled to critique. Luckily, the debate did not deteriorate any
7 further. It is worth noting that the timely collaboration of the politically
8 astute CSSA student committee with the responsible, generous, and learned
9 authors of *Visualizing Cultures* was never about deciding who was right
10 and who was wrong.

11 The *Visualizing Cultures* website has expanded and developed substan-
12 tially since 2006, and we wholeheartedly applaud our colleagues for provid-
13 ing the Asian studies field with an invaluable and accessible resource. Today,
14 it is hard to imagine that such a heated response greeted a history website. It
15 is helpful to remember, though, that the controversy erupted at a particular
16 historical moment: just at the time when US universities were venturing
17 into establishing branch campuses in Asia and the Middle East and offer-
18 ing free curricula materials in the virtual space targeted to a global audi-
19 ence. These dual trends took place alongside the growing vitality of Chi-
20 nese online citizenship as well as the unprecedented rise of Chinese overseas
21 students enrolling in North American, British, Australian, and European
22 postsecondary institutions. Together, these factors produced a potential
23 for dynamism but also a number of ethical and intellectual questions that
24 had not been faced by US academics before. What the 2006 events at MIT
25 raised about the global and local contexts of reception are problems not at all
26 unique to the 2006 controversy nor to the power dynamics of China, Japan,
27 and the United States. Neither is the larger project of digital, open-access,
28 and globalist humanities without its pitfalls. We thus ask readers to consider
29 how an incident like the 2006 controversy might foreshadow future debates
30 in which we might all be engaged.

31 Even in 2006, it would have been hard to imagine the extent to which our
32 everyday lives have now moved online, nor the extent to which social media
33 has integrated once-distant users. Teaching, research, and the digital publi-
34 cation of scholarship are far from exempt from this vast and ongoing trans-
35

1 formation. As the humanities moves inexorably toward digital frameworks
2 as the basis of its scholarly activities, an incident such as the 2006 controversy
3 spurs us to address many fundamental questions: To what extent should or
4 could the norms of scholarship, pedagogy, and student (and public) inter-
5 action be altered by the digital turn? Are there rules of choosing what to
6 digitize, as Guobin Yang poses in his piece on “reflexive digitization”? Can
7 traditional scholarly and pedagogical activities contribute critically to the
8 formation of this new digital world? In what ways can the emancipatory
9 potential of digital technology help educators renew our pedagogical energy,
10 a process that necessarily involves reckoning with public dissent and turn-
11 ing such dynamics into participatory knowledge production? Whether we
12 answer James Farrer’s call of “returning to the classroom” or confront the
13 question of the digital head-on at the editors’ bidding, this controversy pro-
14 vides many valuable teaching moments as well as provocative challenges to
15 scholarship. The authors in this volume have all made contemplations on
16 how we as teachers have learned from the Visualizing Cultures controversy.

17 The Internet contains sites with all kinds of repulsive content, including
18 intentionally inflammatory and hate-inciting visual content targeting practi-
19 cally every identifiable group and minority. There will always be disagree-
20 ment, and in some cases, righteous indignation, but in others, conscientious
21 calls for social justice. Regardless of whether it is possible to develop digital
22 open content that is accessible and acceptable to all, our call for contextu-
23 alizing and examining digital global reception complements, rather than
24 eliminates, the issue of freedom of expression. It is our hope that this volume
25 will provide all of us an opportunity to reflect upon some of the challenges,
26 limits, and possibilities that we have already faced in this globalizing digital
27 sphere.
28

29 Notes

- 30
31 1. Benjamin P. Gleitman, “Image Spurs Debate on Censorship versus Sensitivity,” *Tech* 126,
32 no. 21 (2006): 1, 15, tech.mit.edu/V126/PDF/N21.pdf. Also see Peter Monaghan, “Open
33 Doors, Closed Minds?,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 19, 2006, [www.chronicle.com](http://www.chronicle.com/article/Open-Doors-Closed-Minds-/16550/)
34 /article/Open-Doors-Closed-Minds-/16550/.

- 1 2. For example, two very cogently written, but diametrically opposed, characterizations of the
2 protest can be seen in the CSSA's summary of its role and actions: MIT Chinese Student
3 and Scholar Association, "On the 'Visualizing Cultures' Controversy and Its Implications,"
4 *MIT Faculty Newsletter* 18, no. 5 (2006), www.web.mit.edu/fnl/volume/185/cssa.html, and
5 Peter Purdue's account, "Reflections on the 'Visualizing Cultures' Incident," *MIT Faculty*
6 *Newsletter* 18, no. 5 (2006), www.web.mit.edu/fnl/volume/185/perdue.html. See also Qin
7 Shao's discussion on the debate on the H-Asia e-mail Listserve, which represented opposing
8 viewpoints on the controversy.
- 9 3. Huan Zhang, see his response to the editors' interview in this volume. We quote his answer
10 to the questionnaire, "Can you still remember the image and describe it? What about it is
11 most objectionable?"
- 12 4. We similarly hoped to interview John Dower and Shigeru Miyagawa on the controversy.
- 13 5. See CSSA, letter to the editor (official letter to MIT administration), *Tech* 126, no. 21 (2006),
14 tech.mit.edu/V126/N21/letters21.html.
- 15 6. In the immediate wake of the controversy, several attempts were made by MIT authori-
16 ties to hold panel discussions focusing on visual imagery. Jing Wang was invited to one
17 such event during which panelists were asked to discuss "how easy it is for images to be
18 misunderstood."
- 19 7. To quote the CSSA protest letter describing their reading: "The only circumstance under
20 which these very racially-charged statements might be possibly acceptable is if they are
21 being used to describe the depictions of the images. Yet at first glance, that purpose is far
22 from obvious; instead, the text seems to suggest that it is reporting history itself. The issue
23 of the blatant racism so prominently exhibited in these images and descriptions is not
24 addressed until much further down the page, almost at the end of the article" (CSSA, letter
25 to the editor).
- 26 8. John Dower and Shigeru Miyagawa, "Statement from Professors Dower and Miyagawa,"
27 *Tech* 126, no. 21 (2006): 15, tech.mit.edu/V126/PDF/N21.pdf.
- 28 9. The editors should note that there was no consensus among the MIT alumni to condemn
29 the CSSA action. Since opinions were split, the MIT Alumni Association encouraged mem-
30 bers to express their support individually to the professors, thus avoiding going through the
31 motion of issuing a collective statement of condemnation of the students.
- 32 10. This quote was taken from a protest letter sent by a Dr. Shen from the University of Texas
33 at Dallas, sent on April 28, 2006.
- 34 11. See Peter Purdue's account of this meeting, "Reflections." A video of the incident was
35 recorded by an unidentified participant and posted online for several years.
12. In an effort to integrate the discussion of this controversy into her class in April 2006, Jing
Wang asked her students to submit comments and opinions on the ongoing debate. This
quote was submitted by one student to the discussion forum on May 1, 2006.

- 1 13. Several colleagues in foreign languages and literatures of MIT echoed that sentiment.
- 2 14. We quote an alumnus from Houston, "In my eyes, these things certainly are NOT arts, and
- 3 I feel they are insults and humiliations to the ART and, more importantly, they are huge
- 4 disrespects and insults to millions of the victims and their families and offspring. I cannot
- 5 believe that MIT, one of the most prestigious universities in the world, could allow to post
- 6 such webpages with an appreciation of the war violence and discrimination over a whole
- 7 race."
- 8 15. Monaghan, "Open Doors."
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