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# WHERE DOES THE “LION” COME FROM? ON THE ORIGIN OF LIANG QICHAO’S “SLEEPING LION” SYMBOL\*

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*Recent studies have shown that it was Liang Qichao, not Napoleon Bonaparte, who first said that “China was a sleeping lion.” However, the question of why Liang came to choose the image of a lion to symbolize China remains to be a puzzle. This study argues that a Japanese article on China, by Osawa Ryū and translated into Chinese in 1898, was the key factor in inspiring Liang’s use of the “Sleeping Lion” metaphor. The sleeping lion metaphor was actually initiated in Meiji Japan and later adopted by Liang Qichao.*

KEYWORDS: *Liang Qichao, Zeng Jize (Marquis Zeng), Sleeping Lion, Osawa Ryū*

## THE PROBLEM

In March 2014, during his state visit to Paris, China’s President Xi Jinping made the following statement to his French audience: “Napoleon said that China was a sleeping lion and when this lion awoke, it would shake the world . . . . The lion that is China has awoken, but it is a peaceful, amiable and civilized lion.”<sup>1</sup> Obviously, Xi’s statement aimed to deliver a message to the West: Don’t worry! The rise of China won’t be a threat to the rest of the world. Xi was apparently trying to put a spin on the famous statement allegedly made by Napoleon, when he proposed that the awakened China is a peaceful and civilized lion.

Whether Xi’s vision of the rise of China is convincing or not is not our concern here. But his usage of the lion symbol is indicative of the popularity of the sleeping lion image. Current scholarship has reached the following three conclusions regarding the “China as a sleeping lion” metaphor: 1. Contrary to popular belief, there is

\* This essay is an abridged version of my paper “Cong ‘mianshi’ dao ‘shuishi’—Liang Qichao *shuishi* shuo yuanyuan xinlun” [From “Minshi” to “Shuishi”: On the Origin of Liang Qichao’s “Sleeping Lion” Discourse], *Si yu yan*, 54.1 (2016): 23–65. I have benefited enormously from previous scholarship (see footnote 2 for the list) on this issue, especially from Professor Ishikawa Yoshihiro’s work. Even though my research has pointed to a different direction in examining this issue, I am very grateful for their efforts and insights. Without them as the foundation, this study would have been impossible.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed report and analysis of Xi’s visit to France in the context of international relationships, see Isaac Stone Fish, “Crouching Tiger, Sleeping Giant: The 120-year-old cliché that explains the Chinese-American relationship,” accessed November 30, 2016, [http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/19/china\\_shakes\\_the\\_world\\_cliche](http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/19/china_shakes_the_world_cliche).

no solid evidence that can prove that Napoleon ever used the “sleeping lion” phrase in describing China; 2. It is very likely that modern discourse viewing China as a sleeping lion was initiated by Liang Qichao (梁啟超 1873–1929) who, at the end of the nineteenth century, clearly used the sleeping lion image in his bitter depiction of the declining Qing China; 3. Unfortunately, Liang Qichao has left no explanation of why he came up with this animal image in describing China.<sup>2</sup>

One important scholar exploring this topic, Ishikawa Yoshihiro of Kyoto University, concludes his article on this issue as follows:

Moreover, since he (Liang Qichao) was even presented with a bronze lion by the Awakening Lion Party, it is possible that he gave some thought to the origins of the image of the “sleeping lion” which he himself had come up with in his younger days. Had he on this occasion written something like “On the Awakening Lion,” then the circumstances of the genesis of the image of the “sleeping lion” in China would have been clarified by its original creator. But regrettably no such essay has survived. Thus, the images of “sleeping lion” and “awakening lion,” with the truth of their origins remaining unrevealed, have since then continued to grow and take deeper root right down to the present day.<sup>3</sup>

In the following analysis, I will try to solve the puzzle of Liang Qichao’s use of the lion symbol as an analogy for China. I will closely examine Liang’s writings to demonstrate the key changes of his images of China. More importantly, by introducing a new piece of textual evidence, I will argue that Liang did not come up with the lion image out of the blue. I will furthermore demonstrate that the traces of the lion image actually illustrate the complicated transcultural and trans-lingual phenomena of idea exchanges taking place between late imperial China and Meiji Japan.

### THE EVOLUTION OF LIANG QICHAO’S SLEEPING LION DISCOURSE: WHAT DID MARQUIS TSENG (ZENG JIZE 曾紀澤 1839–90) SAY?

I will begin my analysis with a list of a number of most important statements made by Liang Qichao from three sources (A, B and C below). These statements are closely related to the sleeping lion symbol that he used at the end of the nineteenth century:

<sup>2</sup> See these conclusions in the following works: John Fitzgerald, “‘Lands of the East Awake!’: Christian Motifs in Early Chinese Nationalism,” in *Gong yu si: Jindai Zhongguo geti yu qunti zhi zhongjian* [Gong and Si: reconstructing individual and collective bodies in modern China], ed. Huang ko-wu and Chang Cha-chia (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2000), 361–410; Jui-sung Yang, *Bingfu, huanghuo yu shuishih: “xifang” shiye de Zhongguo xingxiang yu jindai Zhongguo guozu lunshu xiangxiang* [Sick Man, Yellow Peril and Sleeping Lion: Chinese Images from “Western Perspective & the Discourses of Modern Chinese National Identity] (Taipei: National Chengchi University Press, 2016), 109–37; Rudolf G. Wagner, “China ‘Asleep’ and ‘Awakening’. A Study in Conceptualizing Asymmetry and Coping with It,” *Transcultural Studies*, 1 (March, 2011): 4–139; Ishikawa Yoshihiro, “The ‘Sleeping Lion’ and Liang Ch’i-ch’ao: An Image of ‘Frankenstein’s Monster’ in China,” *Acta Asiatica*, 102 (February, 2012): 69–88; Shan Zhengping, *Wanqing minzu zhuyi yu wenxue zhuanxing* [Late Qing Nationalism and the Transformation of Literature] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), 113–45.

<sup>3</sup> Yoshihiro, “The ‘Sleeping Lion’ and Liang Ch’i-ch’ao: An Image of ‘Frankenstein’s Monster,’” 86.

- A. Zeng Jize (Marquis Tseng) wrote an article “China, the Sleep and the Awakening.” (On the other hand,) the British man Worseley depicted China as a monster like Frankenstein’s that sleeps peacefully if not being disturbed, but bares its fangs and waves its arms with sharp claws if being provoked. This indicates that both Zeng and Worseley believe in China’s potential . . . . There will be a time when Frankenstein’s monster eventually awakes. The depiction of Zeng and Worseley’s (final triumph of China) will be realized. (April 21, 1898)<sup>4</sup>
- B. I once visited the London zoo. There was a manmade monster, which looked like a lion, but lies down sluggishly. Yet, someone told me not to look down on it. It has a mechanism inside. Once the mechanism is triggered, the monster will bare its fangs and wave its arms with sharp claws, becoming very aggressive and powerful. I asked about the name of the monster and was told that its name is Frankenstein in English. Marquis Tseng has translated its name into Chinese as “Sleeping Lion.” He also called it a giant, which sleeps first and then awakes. I had tried to activate the monster. But it collapsed and hurt my hands before making any moves. I then realized that it had become rusty for quite a long time and got jammed with foreign objects. Without thoroughly renovating its mechanism inside, this Frankenstein will be sleeping forever. What a pity! (April 30, 1899)<sup>5</sup>
- C. (The World) does not know the real situation of China’s serious problem with corruption, assuming only that this giant sleeping lion is going to triumph one day. Yet, the fact is that up to now China has failed time and again. There is no hope for reform as the internal problems are deeply entrenched and hardly curable. China’s decline is inevitable. (May 20, 1899).

China has been weak due to its lack of change. Before, the lack of change was due to its obliviousness. Still, there is hope. Today, China is aware of the necessity of change but won’t change, or they will terminate the change halfway. Thus the situations became hopeless. Marquis Tseng had boasted before to the Englishmen, saying of China that it is like a giant who sleeps first and then awakes. That is why the Englishmen came up with the Frankenstein analogy . . . . Last year the giant (China) woke for a while, but soon slept again. Worse still, it was drugged to sleep more deeply. Even though there are some who care, nothing can be done to change the situation. (August 6, 1899)<sup>6</sup>

Before we began our detailed comparative analysis of these statements, a brief explanation of some key terms, as well as the historical context of each statement, is called for.

First of all, the article “China, the Sleep and the Awakening” by Zeng Jize (Marquis Tseng), mentioned by Liang in the very beginning of statement A above, was a very famous article first published in English in 1887 when Zeng was

<sup>4</sup> Liang Qichao, “Baoguo hui yanshuo” [Speeches in “Defending the Nation Association”], in *Zhixin bao* [Updating News], 9 June 1898 (Shanghai: Xinhua, 1996), vol. 55, 718–9.

<sup>5</sup> Liang Qichao, “Dongwu tan” [On Animals], in *Qingyi bao*, 30 April 1899. See the quotation in Liang Qichao, *Liang Qichao quanji* [The Complete Works of Liang Qichao], ed. Zhang Pinxing (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), vol. 1, 361.

<sup>6</sup> Both statements derive from the following article: Liang Qichao, “Guafen weiyan” [The Admonition of Dismemberment], in *Liang Qichao quanji* [The Complete Works of Liang Qichao], vol. 1, 289, 301.

about to return to China after being an emissary to Britain.<sup>7</sup> As the son of Zeng Quofan, Zeng had been a very well-known Qing diplomat in the West and highly praised for his diplomatic skills. In this article, Zeng argued that for centuries China was asleep but was not about to die. Zeng pointed out that, because of the challenges from the West, especially the burning of the Summer Palace (Yuanmingyuan), the West had awakened China and forced her to try to recover its strength. However, Zeng assured his audience that the revived China had no desire to get revenge against the Western powers. The awakened China was instead willing to deal with international affairs through peaceful means.

The immediate reactions to this article in the West were mixed. Some commentators appreciated Zeng's defence of China's seemingly successful reform efforts. Others were more skeptical of Zeng's optimistic view about the revival of China.<sup>8</sup> Yet, how influential or convincing Zeng's arguments may have been to a Western audience are not our main concern here. But one important thing needs to be clarified here is that Zeng did not use any animal analogy/symbol in his depiction of China. He did use images of sleeping and awakening. But why Zeng was later on associated with the sleeping lion analogy?

Another famous figure alluded to in statement above is Lord Worsley. Liang credited him with using the image of Frankenstein to analogize China.<sup>9</sup> In reality Lord Worsley had never used the metaphor of Frankenstein to describe China. In fact, as Ishikawa has pointed out, very likely Liang got the idea of Frankenstein by reading a translated article from English in the daily newspaper *Guowen bao*.<sup>10</sup> In that article Frankenstein was invoked by the author to portray China. It is true that the article also mentions Worsley as an insightful observer of China, who was convinced of China's great potential. However, Worsley had nothing to do with the Frankenstein analogy in the article.<sup>11</sup> It is Liang who lumps together Frankenstein and Worsley in his own speech, and therefore, in a way, puts Frankenstein into Lord Worsley's mouth.

Thirdly, in terms of the historical context of each statement, statement A was initially a part of the speech made by Liang to encourage his supporters to devote themselves to the reforms, which Liang and his mentor Kang Youwei (康有為 1858–1927) were advocating. The general tone of that speech is optimistic. Both Zeng's and Worsley's depictions of China are quoted by Liang to enhance the vision of a promising China full of potential as long as the reforms could be carried out. On the other hand, both statements B and C derive from two famous

<sup>7</sup> Tseng, Chi-Tse Marquis (Zeng Jize), "China, the Sleep the Awakening," *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, 3 (January 1887): 1–10.

<sup>8</sup> See more detailed discussions on the reactions toward Zeng's article in my book, *Bingfu, huanghuo yu shuishi*, 117–20.

<sup>9</sup> Technically it should be Frankenstein's monster, not Frankenstein the scientist that Liang was referring to. However, in this regard, Liang was just following Yan Fu's 嚴復 (mis)understanding of this term. In Yan Fu's annotation to the article "Ru houhuan he" (see below), Yan had already taken Frankenstein to be the name of the monster created by the scientist. See *Guowen bao* [*National News*], 22 March 1898, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Yoshihiro, "The 'Sleeping Lion' and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao: An Image of 'Frankenstein's Monster,'" 72–75.

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, "Ru houhuan he" [How to Deal with Incoming Troubles?], trans. Wang Xuelian, *Guowen bao* [*National News*], 22 March 1898, 1–2.

articles "On Animals" and "The Admonition of Dismemberment" respectively. Both articles were written by Liang a few months after he was forced to escape to Japan, after the short lived Hundred Days' Reform in 1898 was crushed by conservative forces in the Qing government. Needless to say, the pessimistic feelings expressed by Liang in statements B and C contrast sharply with the mood in statement A. Nevertheless, more important to our investigation here is the emergence of the "sleeping lion" image, which first appeared in statement B in 1899, and repeated later again in statement C as well.

In order to clearly show how some key figures and symbols relevant to our investigation appears in these three statements, I will list their appearances in each statement as follows:

1. Marquis Tseng/Zeng Jize    A, B, C
2. Frankenstein    A, B, C
3. The phenomenon of "sleeping and then awakening"    B, C
4. Giant    B, C
5. Sleeping lion,    B, C
6. "China, the Sleep and the Awakening" article (by Zeng)    A

From the above list, we can discern a number of interesting and important issues:

1. The key image of "sleeping lion" first appears in statements B and C in 1899 but is not mentioned at all in statement A in 1898.
2. Marquis Tseng (Zeng Jize) appears in all three statements. But in statement A he is mentioned mainly because he is the author of the article "China, the Sleep and the Awakening." However, in statements B and C, Zeng is closely connected to the sleeping lion image either because Zeng translates the monster Frankenstein as "sleeping lion" in Chinese to symbolize China (statement B), or reversely, because Zeng first boasts of China as being like a sleeping and then awakening lion, to which some Englishman later on uses Frankenstein image to analogize.
3. In statement A, even though Liang compares Zeng's "sleeping and then awakening" depiction of China to Frankenstein's monster to depict China's potential, there are no concrete images such as a lion or a giant being used to correspond to the Frankenstein image.

In light of these findings, we may wonder what factors prompted Liang to come up with the lion image in 1899. Or, more precisely, why he came to have a new understanding of Zeng Jize's depiction of China, especially given that Zeng himself never used a lion or giant image in describing China?

Zeng never used any concrete images like lions or giants in his 1887 "China, the Sleep and the Awakening" article. Nor is there any textual evidence showing that Zeng ever used such images in his other writings regarding China. So how did Liang come up with a new understanding of what Zeng had said about China? Or, to put it bluntly, why would Liang put words into Zeng's mouth?

A number of attempts to answer this question have been made. Shan Zhengping, who has suggested that Liang, rather than Napoleon, should be credited as the first thinker linking China with the sleeping lion image, was quite confused by Liang's claim that Zeng Jize has translated Frankenstein into Chinese as a sleeping lion.

Shan has tried hard to find anything that might explain why Liang associated Frankenstein with the sleeping lion image. Shan first surmises that while in England Zeng did translate Frankenstein into Chinese as “sleeping lion” (a “fact” which Shan soon frankly admits no available documents can verify). Noticing that Liang began to use the sleeping lion symbol only after he exiled to Japan, Shan suggests that Zeng’s translation of Frankenstein as a sleeping lion was later introduced into Japan. There, Shan suggests, Liang was somehow informed by his Japanese friends about Zeng’s sleeping lion translation, which became Liang’s new understanding of Frankenstein. However, Shan quickly admits that the whole process aforementioned is purely his own speculation.<sup>12</sup>

There are no English or Japanese materials that can verify Shan’s speculation. However, his suggestion of the Japanese factor in Liang’s idea is not entirely misguided. The main problem of Shan’s approach is that it focuses painstakingly on the linkage between Frankenstein and the lion image.

Since examinations of Liang’s ideas on this issue have mainly focused on the evolution of Frankenstein into a sleeping lion, the changing statements from another subject Liang’s discourse, i.e., Zeng Jize, have received much less attention.

I argue that a short journal article, which has long been ignored by researchers on this issue, proves to be a very important piece of evidence that might be the key to understanding the source of Liang’s sleeping lion symbol. On May 1, 1898, approximately 10 days after Liang delivered his speech containing statement A, an article translated from Japanese was distributed in *Zhixin bao* published in Macau. Its title is “The Japanese Osawa Ryū on China’s Condition.” The author is not famous, but there is one statement in the article that is quite relevant to our investigation here:

Zeng Jize had once compared China to a sleeping lion. At that time, because the Western powers did not realize the true condition of China, they all agreed with Zeng’s idea. But after the first Sino-Japanese War, being defeated time and again, China exposed her weakness completely to the whole world. Therefore, those who were intimidated and reluctant, are now competing with each other to bully China, such as England, Russia, France and Germany.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of its depiction of China’s changing international status before and after the first Sino-Japanese war, this statement is commonplace for the period. However, the sentence “Zeng Jize had once compared China to a sleeping lion” is very significant. It is roughly the same as Liang’s statements about Zeng in his 1899 articles, yet it appeared almost a year before Liang’s statements.

Most importantly, this sentence is very likely the first one to appear in China that clearly links Zeng Jize to the sleeping lion image and China. Yet, one thing that needs to be clarified is that the exact term used in this article and its original Japanese text (which was published earlier in Japan on February 10, 1898) to express “sleeping lion” is “*mianshi*” 眠獅 (*minshi* in Japanese), which is slightly different from

<sup>12</sup> Zhengping, *Wanqing minzu zhuyi yu wenxue zhuanxing*, 113–45.

<sup>13</sup> Osawa Ryu, “Riren Dazelong lun Zhongguo qingshi” [The Japanese Osawa Ryu on China’s Condition], *Zhixin bao*, 1 May 1898 (Shanghai: Xinhua, 1996), vol. 51, 661. The original Japanese version is Osawa Ryu, “Shina-ron,” in *Chugai jiron*, 2 (1898), 8.



“*shuishi*” 睡獅 used by Liang, though both terms share the same meaning. Since “*mianshi*” is also understandable to the Chinese readers in expressing a sleeping lion image, the translator did not bother to change it in his translation. Moreover, it should also be pointed out that the translator did not bother to change “*mianshi*” into “*shuishi*” in his translation, a gesture which might well indicate that the term “*shuishi*” was still not available in China then.

Because this sentence has clearly attributed the sleeping lion image of China to Zeng Jize, it is not unreasonable to deduce that Liang might have gotten the sleeping lion image associated with Zeng from this article. Furthermore, in the Japanese article, Zeng’s idea of China as a sleeping lion (full of potential) is ridiculed as a brag. This judgement is also consistent with Liang’s negative attitude toward Zeng’s optimistic idea about China’s future in his “On Animals” and “the Admonition of Dismemberment” in 1899, an attitude which is quite different from his much more positive attitude regarding China’s potential power in 1898.

One important reason for arguing that Liang might have gotten Zeng’s sleeping lion analogy from Osawa Ryū’s article is Liang’s close association with *Zhixin bao*, a popular forum for the reform-minded intellectuals in the late Qing. It had published many articles advocating reform causes, including a number of Liang’s works. Liang’s aforementioned 1898 lecture was indeed later published by *Zhixin bao*. Although Liang himself was too busy to take editorship of this journal, he kept close relations with its editors and affiliated writers. Therefore, it is very likely that Liang got the information about Zeng’s sleeping lion analogy from the translated article by Osawa Ryū.<sup>14</sup>

Another reason for arguing that Liang might have gotten the idea of Zeng’s statement about sleeping lion and China from *Zhixin bao*, and was so taken by it, is that Liang probably had never read the original text of Zeng’s “China, the Sleep and the Awakening” article and thus had only vague ideas of what Zeng had said. Zeng’s article was originally published in English in February 1887, and later translated into Chinese and published in *Shenbao* in June 1887. It was not until 1901 that the article was re-printed in an anthology. We have no clues to discern if Liang, 14 years old in 1887, got a chance to read the article or not. Nevertheless, when Liang first mentioned Zeng’s article in his speech in 1898, he did not go into the details of Zeng’s argument, but rather focused on the “sleeping and then awakening” metaphor. When he made statements about Zeng’s sleeping lion analogy in 1899, Zeng’s article was still not available as a formally published and widely circulated document. In view of this circumstantial evidence, we may conclude that Liang’s understanding of Zeng’s sleeping lion analogy was probably based on hearsay (the information from Osawa Ryū’s article), rather than his own reading (or misreading) of Zeng’s article.

It should be noted that in Osawa Ryū’s article, there is no mention of Frankenstein at all. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in the following discussion, Frankenstein was rarely alluded to in the Japanese discourses on China’s condition. In contrast, Zeng’s ideas about China were mentioned in a number of famous Japanese discourses on China during the Meiji period. In light of all these findings, we may say that the Japanese factor did play an important role in Liang’s sleeping lion

<sup>14</sup> For information regarding Liang’s close relationship with *Zhixin bao*, see Yu jie, *Panghuang yingxionglu: zhuanxing shidai zhishi fenzi de xinlingshi* [The Reluctant Way of Heroes: The History of Intellectuals’ Minds during the Transitional Era] (Taipei: Lianjing, 2009), 341–96.



symbol. But this Japanese factor has little to do with Frankenstein, but was related to the Meiji Japanese reading (or misreading) of Zeng's depiction of China.

### ANIMAL ANALOGY IN MEIJI JAPAN

While the Osawa Ryū article is a new and important clue that takes us one step further in understanding the possible source of the sleeping lion analogy, it also brings up another thorny issue: how and why this kind of misreading or misrepresentation of Zeng's idea of China occurred within the Meiji Japanese intellectual universe?

One obvious obstacle for this inquiry is the lack of personal information regarding Osawa Ryū. It seems that he was only a very minor figure in the Meiji Japanese intellectual and cultural universe. Aside from the fact that he was the author of an article on China, which, as I have argued, probably incidentally became a very important historical document introducing the idea of the "sleeping lion" metaphor into modern China, there is little we can find about his social background or cultural and intellectual connections. On the other hand, there are no other Japanese articles in this period, especially from famous thinkers, that clearly articulated Zeng's idea of China in the way Osawa Ryū's article did.

Despite the aforementioned obstacles, there were some important clues that might shed light on why a statement like "Zeng Jize had once compared China to a sleeping lion" could have emerged in the discourse of Meiji Japan. We should ask what in the cultural and intellectual background of Meiji Japan that might make such "misreading" of Zeng's vision of China possible. I will examine several Japanese works that might furnish us with some clues to the missing link regarding "China as a sleeping lion" analogy.

First of all, as early as the early Meiji period, it was not uncommon in the Japanese public discourse to invoke animalistic images in describing Qing China. For example, as the study of Ishikawa has clearly pointed out, as early as 1880 a famous journalist, Kishida Ginko (岸田吟香 1833–1905) had already made such a comments on the condition of Qing China<sup>15</sup>:

If the ideas of Li Hongzhang (李鴻章 1823 ~ 1901) and his colleagues could be realized, and therefore (China) began to establish telegraph and railway networks, to mine its natural resources, to follow the Western rules to regulate its society, then the phenomenon would be like as if an elephant is suddenly awakening from its slumber, and the surrounding tigers would feel intimidated and flee away.<sup>16</sup>

As this example shows, long before Zeng Jize's 1887 article was published, the image of China as an elephant full of potential and capable of becoming very powerful after awakening, was already present in Japan. Indeed, there are many examples using the same analogy of an elephant to describe China in Meiji Japan. Indeed, it is not unreasonable that in the eyes of Japanese intellectuals, Qing China, as a

<sup>15</sup> Yoshihiro, "The 'Sleeping Lion' and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao: An Image of 'Frankenstein's Monster' in China," 79.

<sup>16</sup> Kishida Ginko "Ginko-okina shotoku no zoku [A Letter from Mr. Kishida Ginko (contd.)]," *Choya shinbun*, 23 May 1880, 3–4.

continental empire with its vast territory and population, is like the greatest animal on earth (elephant) and full of threatening potential. However, although large, elephants are not brutal beasts, nor predators. Therefore, the China as an elephant analogy does not necessarily suggest that China is naturally a powerful nation. In short, even as huge as an elephant is, China, with its potential, is still not regarded as a terrifying power compared to a lion, which, in the Japanese cultural tradition, is regarded as a very powerful animal. In daily life, people were often admonished by a popular saying originating from Buddhist texts, “Insects inside a lion eat the meat of the lion,” which means that even a man as powerful as a lion is still vulnerable to his own weaknesses inside.<sup>17</sup>

Considering this cultural background, it is not surprising to see that during the First Sino-Japanese War, a sarcastic piece of Japanese propaganda contained the following comment:

If we use animalistic analogy to compare (Japan with Qing China), Japan would be a lion, Qing an elephant. No matter how inflated and big an elephant becomes, once it irritates a lion, it will be torn apart.<sup>18</sup>

As this statement was aimed at young Japanese children, it was accompanied by an illustration (see [Figure 1](#) below). Significantly, here the lion image is applied to Japan, which has transformed into a powerful nation through its political and military reforms. In contrast, a weak Qing China is not entitled to be associated with a powerful animal, such as a lion.

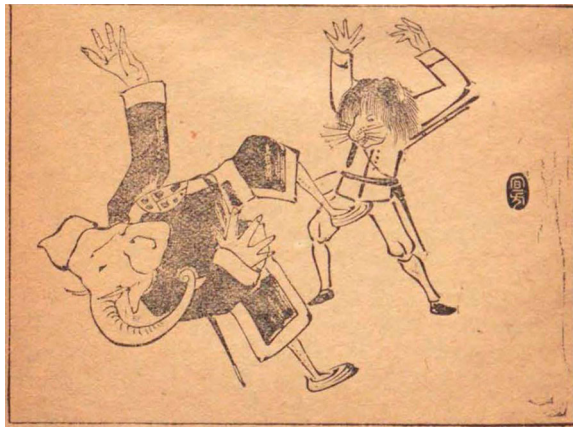


FIG. 1. “Japanese Lion vs. Qing Elephant.” Source: Minowa Tetsutaro, “Nisshin-sensō no hiyu” [The Analogy of the First Sino-Japanese War], in *Kodomo shinenzetsu* [New Speeches for Children], ed. by Kijidō Shujin (Tokyo: Chikazono shoten, 1895), 47.

<sup>17</sup> See full explanation of this Buddhist metaphor in, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://kotowaza-allguide.com/si/shishishintyuunomushi.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Minowa Tetsutaro, “Nisshin-senso no hiyu” [The Analogy of the First Sino-Japanese War], in *Kodomo shinenzetsu* [New Speeches for Children], ed. Kijido Shujin (Tokyo: Chikazono shoten, 1895), 46–47.

To be sure, even though the elephant image was the most popular symbol in analogizing China in Meiji Japan, and the lion image was essentially a symbol representing power, like the rising Japan in the late nineteenth century, there were some exceptions that used the lion image in depicting China. For example, Fukuzawa Yūkichi (福澤諭吉 1835–1901), in his 1882 “On military”, warned against of China’s potential military threat:

The physical strength of the Chinese is not inferior to the Japanese. But why are the Chinese soldiers so spineless? The problems lies not in the cowardly nature of the Chinese people but in the poor military system of China. If we analogize the situation, today’s China with a poor military system is similar to a lion with no claws. Once its claws have grown and are polished, no countries in the East will be able to fight against it. It will be then viewed as an elephant with a lion’s claws. It has now polished its claws partially. Can we still regard it as timid and despise it? We should not feel comfortable anymore!<sup>19</sup>

It is quite interesting to see how Fukuzawa cleverly used the lion and elephant symbols simultaneously in analogizing China’s changing conditions. Whereas “a lion with no claws” was used to describe a powerless China, “an elephant with lion’s claws” was utilized to depict a possible rising and powerful China. It may be argued that by following the common way of using animal images in analogizing China, Fukuzawa unwittingly endowed China with the lion symbol, albeit a lion without claws. In other words, while a lion as usual is the symbol for power, it can also be used to describe China, as long as some derogatory terms are attached (such as “no claws”).

Another similar use of the lion image in depicting China can be gathered from a very popular work, *Chance Encounters with Beauties* by Shiba Shirō 柴四郎 (a.k.a. Tōkai Sanshi 東海散士 1853–1922). This novel was among the best sellers of Meiji period. Elsewhere I have argued that this novel probably played a key role in introducing the modern meaning *tongbao* 同胞 as compatriots of a nation into China by way of Liang Qichao.<sup>20</sup> It might have also indirectly inspired Liang to use the lion image to symbolize China. In vol. 10 of this novel, which was released in late 1891, Shiba portrayed how the Qing government successfully intervened in the political struggles in Korea, and was able to challenge the French military in Vietnam. Regarding such a seemingly renovated China, Shiba had the following sarcastic commentary:

The people of the Qing Empire become very arrogant day by day. As a result, they boast: “We have fought hard and defeated France, which is a European power, and also earned a victory over another strong nation in the East, i.e., Japan. Because of that victory, we are able to restore the old regime in Korea.

<sup>19</sup> Fukuzawa Yūkichi, *Heiron* [On Military] (Tokyo: Iida Heisaku, 1882), 29–31.

<sup>20</sup> Jui-sung Yang, “Cong ‘min wu tongbao’ dao ‘wo siwanwan tongbao zhi guomin’: chuantong dao jinxiandai ‘tongbao’ fuhao yihan de bianhua” [From “People Are My Siblings” to “My Four Hundred Million Siblings as Compatriots”: The Changing Symbolic Meanings of “Tongbao” from the Past to the Present], *The Journal of History, NCCU*, 45 (May, 2016): 109–64.

There seems to be no one that can compete against us now in the world!” The phenomenon is just like a sick lion with much inflated courage howling in the wind!<sup>21</sup>

Since Shiba specifically used terms such as “arrogant” and “boast” to describe the Qing people’s reaction to their success, it is clear that Shiba did not think that Qing China was truly becoming a powerful nation. Indeed, in his concluding remark, his analogy of China as a “sick lion” vividly conveys his ultimate judgement about China’s true condition: China is still in a “sick condition,” even though it becomes self-congratulatory and overconfident because of some short-term successes in international affairs.

Nevertheless, the most significant part of Shiba’s depiction of China is his use of the lion analogy, albeit a sick one. Not only because it, like what Fukuzawa had done before, provides another piece of evidence suggesting the possible association of China with a lion image in the Meiji intellectual and cultural fields, but also because, there is solid evidence showing that Liang Qichao in late 1898 did come to know this kind of connection between China and the image of a lion. As previously mentioned, Liang did read the novel *Chance Encounters with Beauties* for the first time in late 1898 on his flight to Japan. During the long sea journey, the captain of the Japanese naval ship gave him the novel to kill time. With nothing else at hand, Liang was soon very intrigued by the episodes in the novel and finished the whole novel before he arrived in Japan.<sup>22</sup> His enthusiasm about this novel was so great that he went on to translate it into Chinese and had it published in *Qingyi bao* after he settled in Japan in 1899. Since the sick lion part was included in Liang’s Chinese translated version, therefore, it is obvious that Liang must have learned of Shiba’s analogy of China as a sick lion.

The above examples illustrate that it was possible to have a lion image (usually a negative one) associated with China in the Meiji discourse. But how did the lion symbol become associated with Zeng Jize’s sleeping China analogy? In order to answer this question, we need to probe into the question of how Zeng’s discourse on China, in particular his sleeping and awakening China analogy, was received and understood in Meiji Japan. As is well known, the First Sino-Japanese War had a tremendous impact on the Japanese elites’ attitudes toward China. Many of them came to openly question Qing China’s capability to revive, or even to survive in the new international order. In short, in the eyes of many Japanese elites, the defeated Qing China was no longer the advancing empire as envisioned by Zeng Jize in 1887. At that time, the military and political modernization of the Self-Strengthening Movement appeared to make Qing China much stronger in the face of the Western powers, outshining Meiji Japan’s reforms. However, after the war, Qing China came to be perceived as a “Sick Man” and was in danger of being further encroached upon by the Western powers as well as the rising Japan.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Shiba Shirō (Tōkai Sanshi), *Kajin no kigu* [Chance Encounters with Beauties] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2006), vol. 10, 505.

<sup>22</sup> See descriptions of this episode in Ding Wenjiang, ed. *Liang rengong xiansheng nianpu zhang bian chugao* [First Manuscript of Chronological Biography of Mr. Liang Qichao], Part 1 (Taipei: Shijie, 1959), 80–81.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed analysis of “Sick Man” analogy, see Yang, *Bingu, huanghuo yu shuishi*, 17–67.

Ozaki Yukiō (尾崎行雄 1858–1954), a famous politician and thinker during the Meiji period, in his *On the Management of China*, specifically mentioned Zeng's talk about China's awakening after a long slumber. Ozaki ridiculed Zeng's idea as a self-congratulatory boasting and pointed out that the real condition of China was that China has actually long been in a deep slumber. In Ozaki's opinion, since Zeng's idea of China did not correspond to reality and Qing China was doomed to fail, Japan should be well prepared to deal with this new situation.<sup>24</sup>

Although Ozaki dismissed Zeng's idea of China's potential, Ozaki did not go into the details of Zeng's arguments, nor did he refer to any animal analogy or symbols in refuting Zeng's ideas. In contrast, another comment on Zeng's opinion by Takekoshi Yosaburō (竹越與三郎 1865–1950), a famous writer and thinker in Meiji Japan, deserves our special attention for its much more detailed discussion and rebuttal of Zeng's ideas regarding China.

Unlike Ozaki's brief mention of Zeng's sleeping and then awakening China, Takekoshi's gave a detailed description of Zeng's ideas, it is very likely that he had read Zeng's article, rather than just dismissing Zeng's ideas about China based on the title of Zeng's article.

The most intriguing part of Takekoshi's argument against Zeng is how he introduced the popular animal analogy and his concluding remarks on Zeng's vision of China:

Somebody [referring Zeng Jize] had said that the Qing Empire is not dead, but only sleeps. Yet, the burning of the emperor's beloved palace has awakened it from slumber. In contrast, we don't view the Qing Empire as a dead thing, nor a being in sleep. Therefore, we don't regard it as a being awakened from a deep slumber. Indeed, it is a giant animal like an elephant. It grows up slowly and unremarkably. Yet, in the long periods full of rebellions, invasions, brutal governance, strict laws and recessions, it never stops growing. However, we think that it only grows up in size rather than makes any true progress. Why do we think so? Because it only increases its size with quantity added, but makes no advancement in terms of its quality. Still, even without making any progress, it indeed becomes bigger and bigger. In the face of a huge animal gaining size ceaselessly, the world is nevertheless overwhelmed. What will the future of the Qing Empire be?<sup>25</sup>

The significance of this statement is that it shows that Takekoshi has accurately grasped Zeng's key arguments, even though he dismissed Zeng's optimistic view of China's revival while also disagreeing with Zeng in terms of their visions and analogies of China and the Qing Empire. He dismissed Zeng's sleeping/awakening analogy, and used the elephant symbol to analogizing China instead. In doing so, Takekoshi was using an animal symbol already popular in Meiji Japan, i.e., an elephant, in association with China to depict a growing but sterile Empire. As a result, Takekoshi did not put his own words into Zeng's mouth, such as claiming that Zeng has said that China is a sleeping elephant, in his criticism of Zeng's view. However, in

<sup>24</sup> Ozaki Yukiō, *Shina-shobunan* [On the Management of China] (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1895), 16, 44.

<sup>25</sup> Takekoshi Yosaburō, *Shina-ron* [On China] (Tokyo: Minyusha, 1894), 40.

terms of his textual representation of Zeng’s vision of China, the Japanese way of using animal imagery to analogize China is remarkably and closely juxtaposed with Zeng’s sleeping/awakening analogy of China. It is therefore not unthinkable to say that Takekoshi’s discourse might unwittingly impress his (careless) readers that Zeng Jize did say something like “China is a sleeping elephant.” Actually, this was exactly what happened a few years later in a political commentary in *Tokyo Daily News*, which has the following statement:

Before, the Qing Emissary Marquis Zeng has even said that China is a sleeping elephant. Though being long in sleep, once it awakes, it will terrify everyone around. How come Zeng’s warning has been forgotten by the world?<sup>26</sup>

This is the first time use of the image of a sleeping elephant associated with Zeng to describe China in Japan. The “marriage” of these two analogies suggests that in the development of ideas, some possible “rearrangements” and “combinations” occur due to careless or even conscious misreading or misrepresentations. Takekoshi’s close juxtaposition of his own elephant analogy and Zeng’s sleeping/awakening analogy might be a possible source for such kinds of misreading/mis-representation. To be sure, the statement “Marquis Zeng had once compared China to a sleeping elephant” is not the same as the statement “Marquis Zeng had once compared China to a sleeping lion” made by Osawa Ryū and Liang Qichao. But it does indicate that some Meiji Japanese discourses did provide a fertile ground for a possible association of Zeng’s analogy with an animal image, such as an elephant. Therefore, it is only one step away from an association with an elephant to change into an association with a lion in alluding to Zeng’s sleeping China analogy.

So far I have highlighted some important Japanese discourses during the Meiji period regarding their relevance to the China as a lion analogy. Although during the Meiji period the most popular animal image for China was an elephant, we can see some significant exceptions, such as those available in Fukuzawa’s and Shiba’s analogies of China, where a lion symbol, albeit a weak or sick one, is utilized to depict China. These exceptions indicate the possibility of regarding China as a lion in the Meiji period. On the other hand, as far as the relationship between Zeng Jize’s sleeping/awakening vision of China and the lion symbol is concerned, there were no other popular writings by the end of the nineteenth century in Japan clearly claiming that Zeng ever said China is a (sleeping) lion, except for Ozawa Ryū’s article. However, as Takekoshi’s case shows, a commentary on Zeng’s vision of China might unwittingly superimpose an animal analogy on Zeng’s own analogy, leading readers to get the impression that Zeng himself did use an animal image in his original sleeping/awakening analogy. Thus, something like “Zeng had said China is a sleeping elephant” did appear.

Furthermore, it is not too much of a stretch to imagine that some Japanese readers, especially those readers who happened to get the China as a lion analogy proposed by Fukuzawa and/or Shiba, to consciously or unconsciously replace the “elephant” image with a “lion” image, in their “creative reading” of commentaries

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, “Obi to shinkoku” [Europe/America & Qing China], *Tokyo nichimichi shinbun* [*Tokyo Daily News*], 12 February 1906, 2.

about Zeng like Takekoshi's, and therefore come up with the idea that "Zeng had said China is a sleeping lion." Given that Osawa's article has been translated and published in China during the period when Liang changed his descriptions of Zeng's vision of China, and that it is very likely Liang did have access to this article, therefore Osawa, a minor figure in the Meiji period, might have served as a historically important channel through which the "sleeping lion" symbol born in Japan came to China. After that, with the promotion of it by the leading thinkers like Liang Qichao, the "sleeping lion" symbol soon became much more popular in the Chinese and Japanese discourses of China since the turn of the twentieth century.

### THE SLEEPING LION: MADE IN JAPAN, GROWN UP IN CHINA

In light of what we have discussed above, we may make a number of conclusions:

1. By the time Liang began to use a lion symbol to analogize China in 1899, he had already read Shiba's depiction of China as a sick lion on his way to Japan in 1898.
2. Earlier, in 1898, he may have gotten the information about Zeng Jize analogizing China as a sleeping lion from the Osawa Ryū article translated and published in Macau's *Zhixin bao*.
3. Given that Liang's own depiction of Zeng's statement about China as a sleeping lion is very similar to what had been said in Osawa's article, it may be argued that Liang was truly inspired by the information regarding Zeng from Osawa's article, thus, furthering this misreading of Zeng's analogy without critically double checking it with Zeng's original text.
4. The sick lion image of China advocated by Shiba might enhance Liang's determination to adopt the statement regarding Zeng from Osawa's article to dramatically depict China as in a condition of lethargy with little hope for recovery after Liang was forced into exile into Japan due to the tragic failure of the Hundred Days of Reform.
5. With this "new" analogy (China as a sleeping lion) allegedly from Zeng Jize, Liang gave a new alternative image of Frankenstein. In other words, Frankenstein depicted by Liang in his 1898 speech came to have an alter ego.
6. Because of the dramatic association of Frankenstein with a lion in Liang's new analogy of China, many studies have been trying hard to find any possible linkage between Frankenstein and the lion image as the source for Liang's discourse. However, as I have argued here, it is after Liang got the sleeping lion analogy allegedly from Zeng then he came to associate it with Frankenstein, literally giving Frankenstein a new image in China.

In short, previous studies aiming to find any documents containing possible connections between Frankenstein and a lion image before Liang's discourse as the key to understanding why and how the lion image appears in Liang's analogy of China are mostly misled by Liang's dramatic association of these two "monsters." In fact, as I have argued, Liang got the lion image elsewhere, and it is in his hands that the combination of Frankenstein and a lion take place. Moreover, the true inspiration for Liang's usage of the lion image was actually from the Meiji Japanese discourse, and very likely from some misreading or misrepresentations of Zeng's analogy of China, which took place at the end of the nineteenth century Japan.



Once the sleeping lion symbol, which can be said to be born in Japan, was introduced into China’s intellectual and cultural universe by way of Liang’s promotion, it took on a life of its own. For example, in the anti-Manchu propaganda during the early twentieth century, it became a national symbol for mobilizing the Han Chinese to take arms. And more often, it has been invoked time and again by modern national discourse to assure the Chinese people of China’s great potential, an invocation which is quite different from Liang’s pessimistic prophecy for China at the end of the nineteenth century. The “true” inventor of this symbol, Zeng Jize was soon to fade away. He has been replaced by Bismarck in some discourses, and most commonly today, by the famous Napoleon. This intriguing phenomenon very likely reflects the psychological need of the Chinese people to see China’s power reckoned and endorsed by a famous and powerful Westerner, rather than a dated Qing diplomat.<sup>27</sup>

Needless to say, it would be another tremendous and difficult task to figure out how these “rumours” surrounding the sleeping lion originated and circulated. But for our purposes here, the dramatic “birth” and development of this national symbol might illuminate to us how trans-lingual and transcultural exchange of ideas might proceed in some “irrational/illogical” and random ways and eventually lead to some surprising and unexpected syntheses. As I have argued here, the statement of “Zeng Jize had once compared China to a sleeping lion” might be a product of a trans-lingual and transcultural process of misreading/misrepresentations. The Japanese way of using animals in analogizing nations became mixed in with the Japanese criticisms of Zeng’s sleeping China analogy. Indeed, Liang Qichao’s way of reading and transmitting the messages of the aforementioned article in *Guowen bao* is a perfect example of such a misreading and misrepresentation. In claiming that Lord Worsley had said that China was like Frankenstein, Liang was actually putting words into Worsley’s mouth by lumping together different messages from an article that he had read. This example illustrates how a reader, even one as thoughtful as Liang, might carelessly associate different messages in an article that he has read to meet his own agenda and come up with some quite different information and understanding from the original. Likewise, somewhere, sometime within the flow of information regarding Zeng Jize’s vision of China at the end of nineteenth century Japan, a similar kind of “misreading/misrepresentation” of Zeng’s sleeping China took place. Although the “China as a sleeping lion” analogy born in Japan did not immediately “terrify” the world then, it soon took root in China and grew up to become a very famous and greatly influential national symbol, even with its unknown and “mysterious” origin.

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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<sup>27</sup> See the analysis of these changing meanings and inventors of the sleeping lion symbol in Yang, *Bingu, huanghuo yu shuishhi*, 125–35.