POLITICAL ANXIETIES AND MUSICAL RECEPTION: JAPONISME AND THE PROBLEM OF ASSIMILATION*

For the premiere of Madama Butterfly on 17 February 1904, La Scala spared no expense, hiring first-rate singers and the set-designer Lucien Jusseaume from Paris. The orchestra was enthusiastic, and gave the composer a standing ovation at the dress rehearsal. Puccini had never had such confidence in a work's success. The fiasco that followed, with so much laughter and hostility that «virtually nothing could be heard», came as a complete surprise both at home and abroad. Scholars have acknowledged problems with the score, particularly the length of the acts. But as the audience behaved «anti from the very beginning», according to contemporary observers, most have blamed the disaster principally on envious rivals who may have engineered the response with a «claque». Puccini's publisher, who encouraged this idea, may have been trying to deflect from problems with the work, but Puccini concurred. «Stunned by everything that happened» he was convinced that it was «the result of a pre-prepared Dantean inferno».

Yet, something is troubling in this unproven conspiracy theory. As Julian Budden points out, an eye-witness saw Mascagni, perhaps Puccini's greatest rival, «in tears before the curtain» and he was «never insincere». Budden clings to the conspiracy because he recognizes that the changes Puccini made in his

* This is an expanded version of the paper delivered at the centennial symposium. As the reader will see, the date marker, I come to this from the perspective of a scholar of French music and musical reception, a combination that lends itself well to the examination of this work. For the litany of problems that beset French critics, see, for example, the following sources:


opera subsequent to the Milanese they wrote certainly not enough to account for the choleric reception. But it is really a truism, as he asserts, that since the tone of the evening had been set by a claque, the rest of the public could be guaranteed to follow suit.8 In Paris, even reasonableness in Wagner’s tone, some of it motivated by wrangling nationalism hatred, meretriciously came apparent as an equal amount of zeal and insistence on hauling in. There Puccini was widely perceived as the iconoclast of the Milanese public and they were every well-disposed to advance?9 That this audience would turn against it from the starts should give us pause. What made those fans change their minds and not listen to a single notice, as Puccini observed? And why, after the pandemonium and the audience left the theater sharply as late [...], as if by a collective triumph, would Giulio Ricordi compare the situation to a real battle, as if the Russian army in its sortie thought had wanted to attack the stage to drive away all Puccini’s “Japanese”?10 Is it possible that Puccini’s adversaries egged on rather than instigated the hostile audience reaction and saw this as something they could use to their advantage? Negative criticism, much of it consisting of complaints already raised with the previous opera, may very well have been exaggerated, attempts to explain a choleric reception that birthed out of the reviews.11 The audience’s hostility may also have been exaggerated, as the reviews were not entirely negative. The “Germi” della sera reported occasion where “appiano presto ognuno” alzatosi, “citarinosi”.12

Another force, long ignored by scholars, may have contributed to the negative predisposition of the audience. A war had been brewing in the Far East since early February, in part because the Russians would take no concessions to the Japanese over Manchuria. Beginning on 9 February, only twelve days before the premiere of Madame Butterfly and after the performance had already sold out,13 the front page of the Milanese newspaper “Germi” della sera cited dispatches from Petrovskii and St. Petersburg (both delay of only one day) and reproduced reports from English, French, and American newspapers (also from the day before). These raised an continuous and insistent war between the Russians and the Japanese (see the bottom of Figure 1.

footnotes

1 “La Puccini” p. 194; Lines.

2 “La Puccini” 18 February 1918. This sentence did not mean a critique for the failure of the work.

3 “Germi” 18 February 1918.

4 For a discussion of Carmen’s claim, the audience was the Russian and Japanese in the exiled. “Germi” della sera, 18 February 1918, p. 139.

5 “Germi” p. 196.

6 “La Puccini” 18 February 1918, p. 196.

7 “Germi” della sera, 18 February 1918, p. 139.

8 “Germi” della sera, 18 February 1918, p. 139.
Fig. 1. «Corriere della sera», 5 February, 6 February, 8 February, 14 February 1904.
and read upward). Yet, even as a rupture in diplomatic relations was reported on the 8 February front page and the next day fears of this airlift of panic were ameliorated, no one expected the Japanese to attack three Russian military ships at Port Arthur, one of the strongest fortresses in the world. On 10 February, then, the Italian press stunned everyone in virtually recasting the great naval battle in Port Arthur that had taken place two days earlier. The victory of the Japanese, and their subsequent attacks, began the first naval battle between modern fleets.

The war continued to dominate the front pages of Italian newspapers, together with regular telegrams from abroad and telegraphic alla within Europe on internal pages, and inarguable discussion in the Camera dei deputati. Italy wished to remain proudly neutral. But then came the Japanese invasion of Korea, which with its huge running title in bold again took over the entire front page of the Gazzetta delle detta nera on 11 February, as well as much of the paper (Fig. 2). The heightened attention continued as Tur Nicola II declared war on Japan on 10 February and Russia attacked Japanese commercial ships off the Japanese coast on 11 February.

Although France, Russia's ally, and England, Japan's ally, both announced their neutrality, fear swept across Europe. Italians worried that the war would spread, as they had naval ships off Japan, Korea, and China. The Russians were totally unprepared, with only 90,000 troops in the Far East, while the Japanese seemed emboldened by their defeat of the Chinese in Korea in 1895. Recognizing that in thirty to forty years the Japanese had surpassed from ancient barbarity to the most advanced European institutions and now possessed an army and navy as good as their own, some saw this as the yellow race threatening the white race for the first time since Genghis Khan [...]. If the Chinese should join the Japanese, as some predicted, their joint would be colossal, a threat to the rest of the universe. (\[...\])

From early February (and for the next five years), the specter races of the Giappone's invasion a constant presence on the front pages of Italian newspapers, not only in Italy but also the United States. Also the second and fourth (i.e., last) page included a recurring column, Periscope (La gazzetta meridiana), that summarized press reports on the war in Paris, London, and St. Petersburg. The Japanese musical public could not have escaped knowledge of the war. The upcoming premiere of Madama Butterfly was an

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Fig. 2. «Corriere della sera», 15 February, 17 February 1904, pp. 1, 4.

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researched in the «Corriere della sera» on 14 February, directly next to a column on military matters (see the top of Fig. 1). This long preface article (more than two columns) recounted the story and included extended excerpts from the libretto, including the tragic ending. It provided enough information to alert audiences to the racial clash at the heart of the opera and, in the context of the war, may have planted seeds of resonance. On 15 February ticket prices and a list of foreign critics and musicians who would be attending the premiere (including Joly and Messenger from Paris) were again framed by the most recent news of the conflict: on two-thirds of the front page and other European responses to it in the «Corriere della sera» section. After a second Japanese attack on Port Arthur, the front page featured a map of the year zero on 16 February. That day too an Italian ship in Korea reported that all the telegraph stations in Korea were occupied by the Japanese military. On 17 February, the day of the opera’s premiere, the cast of singers appeared next to telegrams from Manchester on the severity of Japanese losses in Manchuria; «Le guerra russo-giapponese». The following day, a three-column notice of the opera showed news of more torpedo attacks by the Japanese and anxiety expressed by Italian soldiers (Fig. 9). Over the next few days, reports came in that the Pope was worried about Catholic missions in Manchuria; an Italian who had recently traveled to Japan announced that the Japanese were «fomenting enmity to the white race as a century earlier». Newspapers remained full of discussions about the Russian-Japanese war as the opera was removed from the stage and Puccini went off to make revisions. The initial reception of Madama Butterfly, therefore, took place surrounded by shocking news of the war and in the context of current apprehensions about East-West relations. I do not wish to suggest that the Maltese public had already taken a stand in the conflict when they entered the theater that fateful evening, but merely that a cloud of anxiety hung over everyone, as suggested in Giudea Ricordi’s battle metaphor, and that this may have affected their behavior.

With Madama Butterfly set in Japan and concerning intermarriage between an Eastern woman and a Western naval officer, the opera may indeed have distributed even more racist lessons. As Michele Girardi points out, Puccini and his librettists sought to «stage an individual tragedy caused by a very real conflict between races. In order that it not be understood as merely a psychological drama, the first act had to supply all those elements that would make the clash between two cultures comprehensible». Almost half of it, therefore, was dedicated to wooling Japanese colors, some of it...
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Fig. 3. «Corriere della sera», 18 February 1904, pp. 1-3.
with Japanese or Japanese-inspired melodies. But by February 1904, the western absurdity of the exotic other as child-like and charming, as represented in Pierre Loti’s novel, had turned into a nightmare worthy of the diabolical, demonic, insane, and bizarre as the opera that fateful night. The production’s attempts to match the drama with a menagerie of freak songs were unfortunate attempts to revitalize the promise of realism, even if similar sound effects in the original became that Puccini so deeply appreciated had originally helped make this score in a great theatrical success. Puccini’s incorporation of Japa

ese melodies, which a reviewer compared to photos, also seemed like an attempt to document reality without necessarily understanding it. A Milanese reviewer was right in asserting that Puccini’s enthusiasm for the tragedy of Cio-Cio-San did not extend to its first audience, but he would argue — not necessarily because the opera did not rise up to the authenticity of Japanese drama presented by Sada Yacco. If anything, the influence of Sada Yacco’s performances on Madame Butterfly — G晕e has pointed to Cio-Cio-San’s un
predictable alternation between exotically savage behavior and her ritual suicide — may have contributed to the Milanese public’s resistance to the work. Reality turned out to be not as depicted on Japanese fans and vases, but as in kabuki theater instead: the Japanese were unpredictable and danger
ous, capable of savage hostility.

With familiar racial stereotypes informing the first act, reviewers reported that Yacco and Hanau were reserved for the second act, when the curtain begins to break down. As an opium den, a house of ill-repute, and a brothel was unleashed when Cio-Cio-San introduced her son to the Cio-Cio San and parado
mons rushed in height during the vigil when the estranged father’s return. This response suggests that the Milanese public may have had their greatest difficulty in contemplating neither the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western cul

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The political context within Europe was complex, and Italy's position as yet unclear. No one knew who might be dragged into the conflict. Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary and had

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no political interests in the Far East, despite having ships there. Crispi, Italy’s Prime Minister, had seen Germany as an ally since Bismarck defeated the French in 1870. In 1896 the Italian army was defeated in East Africa, producing popular attention to colonial adventures for the next 15 years. With this defeat came the end of Crispi’s regime and a formal entente with France, strengthened by an economic agreement in 1899. At the same time, in 1896 France cemented a formal alliance with Russia and in 1898 Victor Emmanuel III, who had come to the throne in 1900 upon the assassination of his father Umberto, married Elena Petrovich, daughter of King Nicolas I of Montenegro, alias of their Romanian cousin. Seeking estrées with Russia in July 1902, Victor Emmanuel visited the tsar in St. Petersburg and returned with vague promises of collaboration. Even if these were ephemeral and thwarted by Italian sensational press the tsar to cancel his scheduled trip to Italy in October 1903, thereby ending efforts to reach an entente with Russia, institutional forces in Italy would have been pro-Russian, as conservative newspapers such as the “Corriere della sera” and “La Stampa” had long opposed an entente with Russia. newspaper also noted that a Russian loan in Siberia, who had helped finance the railroad, was in danger of defaulting. The tsar was induced to accept an entente with France, Russia’s ally, as important. In October 1903, Victor Emmanuel met with French leaders in Paris and invited the French President to Italy. In such a climate, the Japanese attack four months later had global implications. France had been a strong advocate for Japan since 1894, but as Russia’s ally it felt betrayed. The French middle-class had purchased the bonds that funded the Trans-Siberian railroad, imploding them in the attack on Port Arthur, the railroad’s terminus. Since Italy had borrowed most from France to address its economic problems in the latter part of the 1890s, Italy also had a financial tie with France. This would have encouraged concern for France’s position. Meanwhile, since 1896 Italy’s relations with Britain, Japan’s ally, had been at a low ebb, making it unlikely that Italy would side with the Japanese. Tensions were so great about the yellow peril and the potential for further hostilities by the Japanese that in April 1908, only two months after the year had begun, England and France, long anti-entente, signed their own Entente Cordial. With this, Italian critics and their foreign correspondents called for an extension to Italy as offense to enter into democracy and liberty.73

On 25 April 1904, the entire front page of the "Corriere della sera" was devoted to the exultant reception in Rome of President della Repubblica Italiana.

Italy's relationship with France was also deeply rooted in culture, reinforcing the political alliance and inevitably leading to sympathy with French interests. As one historian put it, 

"in the early years of the century French culture dominated educated Italians. The younger generation was marked by French influence. Paris was its centre. Italian democrats looked with admiration to the triumphant Dreyfusards, and the French quarreled with the Papacy, celebrating in the separation of church and state, strengthened the mutual sympathy between anti-clericals in the two countries." 1

On 25 April 1904, the entire front page of the "Corriere della sera" was devoted to the "grandiosa accoglienza in Roma ... nestrel", 14 February 1904; 29 May 1904, p. 173; 5 June 1904, p. 181.

Puccini, as we know, was among those who went to Paris to find inspiration. Of his twelve operas, five had libretti based on French sources and four were set in France, not counting the many French texts he started working on and later abandoned. 2 By 1903, Puccini had become so popular in Paris that La Schola and Tose dedicated the secondhighest receptor at the Opéra Comique, after Mascagni's operas but before Gershon, Thébault, Milhaud, Labor, and Pellegrini. 3

The French also had a close working relationship with Puccini's rival, Massenet, together with the Milanese publisher, Sonzogno, with whom they were in competition for promoting French opera in Italy. 4

On 14 February 1904, the Minister of Education announced Sonzogno's annual opera competition. In expression of their friendship with the French, Sonzogno appointed Mascagni as president of the jury. On 20 May they voted unanimously to give the prize to the unknown French composer, Gabriel Dupont, awarding him 50,000 francs, twice the annual salary of the director of the Paris Conservatoire. 5

By the end of May 1904 and the second performance of Madame Butterfly, tensions were abating somewhat, even if the war continued to dominate

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4 Edmondo De Amicis, "Sono un intento dei lettori del Corriere della sera", 13 October 1903, under the title "Ostia".
the front pages of Italian newspapers. The Japanese had lost some battles but triumphed once in late May, again making the headlines. Still, with the Russians in the midst of sending 250,000 more soldiers to Manchuria by the Trans-Siberian railroad, Europeans, while still fearful, at least began to feel that the situation was improving. Meanwhile, in the Camer, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs pointed out that the war was an occasion for Italians to extend their economic and commercial relationships with Russia.

With an audience a much smaller town and perhaps now more accustomed to the war and ready to listen to the music, Madama Butterfly’s return to the stage on 28 May in Brescia was a triumphant success. La Stampa gleefully reported that the composer had 7 pieces rearranged and 24 curtain calls. Perhaps because the French press had earlier blamed the problems on the music, they now credited Puccini’s revisions for the positive public reception, citing his shortening of the work, retouching of scenes and sections, and addition of a new arioso for the tenor. When Puccini was reviewing his opera, the political situation may again have played a role. As the war dragged on, some Italians began to sympathize with the Japanese. In early March, Italian socialists organized anti-Russian demonstrations. One historian explains this as a result of the Italians having been despoiled by the Russian war in 1878, another point in the rise of the French President to Rome in April 1904 and the Eleventh Congress with Britain, which aroused popular support, but also some alienation. The Japanese sale of the story may also have emerged, including their assertion that the Romans were responsible for the breakdown in diplomatic relations and had fired the first shot. Whether Puccini worked all of its responses to the Japanese-Russian con-

115. Giuseppe G. March and 29 May 1905, the war was discussed daily and the German def. at Bohemia.
117. "Madama Butterfly" (122), where Puccini and a smaller version would be every appreciated. Hadd of the stories would have been from the Italian and the revised opera would have been by the Parisian public.
120. "Giuseppe G. March and 29 May 1905, the war was discussed daily and the German def. at Bohemia.
122. (E. F. G. March and 29 May 1905, the war was discussed daily and the German def. at Bohemia.
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flirt or ignored it entirely, he took a very different attitude toward the East and the West in the opera. Whereas earlier he and his collaborators had taken pains to slight or play down the contrast between East and West, his retakes sought to emphasize these cultural differences. Besides shortening or deleting the Japanese sections, he omitted offensive comments about the Japanese, shifted attention to the tragedy of the central character, and softened some of his music. 

Butterfly's decision to cut references to the incompatibility of East and West resulted in a more sympathetic portrait of Cio-Cio-San, a tragedy of personal loss, at the same time as a greater emphasis on her desire for assimilation.

This argument is important, for it draws attention to a concept the Japanese court shared with many westerners at the time. To understand this, we need to look both at the French, for whose assimilation was a central policy of the French government after 1870, and at the Japanese Emperor after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. In the following sections, I will suggest an important inversion in the understanding of assimilation, a concept distinct from imitation, adoption, or appropriation, because it goes to the heart of assumptions about identity. In the 1870s assimilation signified a step yearning to learn from a foreign culture for the sake of progress. In the 1890s and early 1900s, those in power wished to insist on a dream achieved whose telling collaboratively and cooperatively they hoped to depict in their imperialist expansion. This included colonization and missionization. After 1900, problems with assimilation within France (as concocted by the Dreyfus Affair), anxiety over the possibility of racial degeneration, and failed experiments in assimilation in the colonies (particularly Indo-China) transformed the concept into a kind of wishful thinking that many rejected on the basis of irrefutable racial differences. This evolution has a backdrop for understanding not only the various intercultural narratives written in the years between 1897 and 1904, but also the attitudes audiences may have brought to Madame Butterfly. 

Because of these cultural interactions between France and the East at the time, and because what Italians knew about Japanese culture came largely from France, examining French attitudes toward Japan and Japanese music will help us grasp how Japaneseness may also have been construed in Italy.

4 Puccini, p. 374. 
5 Reflections on the Ryukyuans, p. 143.
6 Puccini, pp. 429-432 and ibid. 2.
7 “Madama Butterfly,” p. 69, has the words as a condition to enable the assimilation of her son into American society.
8 Japan. The French Problem, p. 136.
10 Japan. The French Problem, p. 136.
11 Japan. The French Problem, p. 136. It would be helpful for someone to undertake a more in-depth study of Japaneseness in the Italian musical world of this period.

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As divided as they were on how to accomplish their political goals when fighting the monarchists for power in the 1870s, most French republicans ardently believed in the potential of education to influence people and the ability of people, through education and reason, to adapt and change. They did not consider differences, whether cultural or racial, as categorically unbridgeable, believing that the attempt to assimilate provided access to a fuller range of experiences and could contribute to self-improvement. Such a belief was crucial to those who fought for free public education for the masses and upheld the notion of civilization as involving not only the reception of change that can occur in contact with the Other, but also the embrace of differences as a way to increase the scope and capacity of one’s own identity. Like Rousseau, they believed that civilized man is completed only through the Other.

For Saint-Simonians, some of whom came to power in the 1870s, this could go as far as racial fusion. Assimilation had been tried in Senegal, and for a certain period even intermarriage was encouraged, but most found this problematic. In an important treatise based on a study of Algeria, De la Colonisation chez les peuples modernes (1874), Paul Leroy-Beaulieu used the word rapprochement rather than fusion to describe his ideal of race relations in the colonies. By this he meant a «specific process of cultural change» rather than a «physical union». He advocated transforming living conditions through the introduction of railroads, hospitals, and private property. Thereafter assimilation came to be associated with bringing French rights and liberties to the unshackled at home and abroad. With the help of French laws, French education, and French culture, they hoped to turn people into French citizens.

Republicans who believed that this was possible deeply admired the Japanese. Whereas the Chinese tended to see themselves as the center of their own universe, the Japanese, beginning in 1868, seemed to mirror French Republican concerns. Rejecting feudalism and old myths about the shogun as a »temporal sovereign«, the new order radicalized education as the willingness to make changes, to seek knowledge wherever they could find it, and to appropriate the tools needed to effect such changes. Like French Republicans in

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government, the Japanese Emperor and his court were intent on progress and expansion, and sought to accomplish this in part through assimilating Western ideas. This led the Japanese to embrace not only modernization, but also universal education, military conscription, elected representative assemblies in each province beginning in 1870, and a constitution based on European models in 1889. To the extent that they were responsible for France’s real image and wished to assimilate important aspects of it, many French Republicans considered Japan one of the exotic peoples.28

This suggests that we take French Japanism seriously, and as a force in French culture somewhat different from the more general view, Orientalism. In the 1870s, what the French knew about the Japanese was admittably superficial. It came largely from what was depicted on fans and nets.29 Japanese decorative arts had been brought to Paris for the 1867 Exposition and taken many prizes at the one in 1878. By 1879 one could even buy such things at department stores. Yet this limited knowledge was not seen as a problem. While commencing very few new works each year, the better-established Opéra Comique and the Opéra wanted to support the fashion for Japan with works consisting of Japanese subjects. As its biographer will tell it, Du Locke, the director of the Opéra Comique, commissioned a one-act work from Saint-Saëns and the librettist Louis-Gallet. The two proposed a Japanese subject and Du Locke agreed. However, as putting Japan on-stage was yet to make him a big success, he suggested that they “emphasize this danger by setting the work half in Holland, half in Japan.”30 Le Prince de la mort, which premiered at the Opéra Comique in 1872, set to music a tale of a Dutchman who falls in love with a Japanese figure. In some ways the work is conventionally Orientalist: the main character, seeking to recover his lost youth, subdues the Oriental and conquers it in a disease induced by taking opium. In perhaps the first French work to explore the unconscious in music,31 he imagines this figure coming to life, and then continues with his beloved real life. To ask Japan as the domain mysterious, Saint-Saëns incorporates a pantomime scale which he had previously

29 See John Train’s book on Japan, Japan, and Japan’s influence on art and design in the West, John Train, Japan, and Japan’s influence on art and design in the West, 2004, University of Chicago Press, chap. 9, pp. 88-89. England’s Lord Palmerston wrote: “Japan, the Japanese government, did not a small portion of antipathy. The Japanese are a people perfectly different from all the others in the world. The Japanese are a people of peace.”
30 See E. Tournemire, La musique, op. cit., p. 454.
31 See E. Tournemire, op. cit., p. 454.

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In 1870 the Théâtre de la Renaissance mounted Charles Lecocq’s three-set opera-comique, Kosiki. An image of it is an illustration depicting a far coming to life (Fig. 4). The story and music revolve around the idea of embellishing pleasure and enjoying life after the imposed mourning following a ruler’s death. Kosiki, his daughter, both stand and then falls in love with an ascetic. To underscore the work’s Japanese, besides the costume and frequent mention of the Buddha, there is an operatic fusion in a Japanese dance. Fig. 4: LECOCQ, Kosiki: fan comes alive, “L’Illustration”, 28 October 1876.

In 1873 the Théâtre de la Renaissance mounted Charles Lecocq’s three-set opera-comique, Kosiki. An image of it is an illustration depicting a far coming to life (Fig. 4). The story and music revolve around the idea of embellishing pleasure and enjoying life after the imposed mourning following a ruler’s death. Kosiki, his daughter, both stand and then falls in love with an ascetic. To underscore the work’s Japanese, besides the costume and frequent mention of the Buddha, there is an operatic fusion in a Japanese dance. Fig. 4: LECOCQ, Kosiki: fan comes alive, “L’Illustration”, 28 October 1876.

Only a week after the première of Kosiki, the journal de musique published a short essay by the poet Théodore de Banville explaining the significance of Japanisme for French artists. It had given the French a coded translation, heralding them from the most horrific anxiety caused by the Meiji Decade, a political compromise between republicans and monarchists in France in the 1870s that prompted art expressing high ideals and grandeur. Remarking that not only men, but also women, dress increasingly in dark colors, and apartment décor is increasingly somber, Banville explains the appeal of a different notion of art:

“Japanese has conquered and ruled our old world, subdued and dazed [soiff] by that new word (Quodermes). Because of rational and beats...
we forbid color everywhere, even in paintings, imagining that harmony can only
be obtained by transpositions of grey [...]. Japanese art] a search for the beautiful;
the refined, and the charming does not exclude, as we have believed, the grandeur of a composition and the nobility of power.

Praising the Japanese as a very civilized people of «knights and poets», who have not yet become so knowledgable as to lose the sense of nature, he points out that they have not forgotten that a flower can be as terrifying as a lion, a monster as charming, as a rose. — 55 —
as an attack on history painting practiced the Academy—other design of a dress as interesting as the history of a people. Color and linear design might not be the same as costume and set, but the French felt they had much to learn from the Japanese in those domains.

It also did not matter to the French that they knew little of substance about Japanese music. Throughout the 1870s, the only discussion in the professional musician’s journal, *La Minette*, are two very short reviews. The first, in 1875, discusses four classes of performers, offers vague comments about instruments and modes, and concludes that, like Chinese music, it was ear-splitting (l’oreille creuse). Most significantly, *La Minette* asserts that the Japanese filmed European music even more well than we find those admirable. In 1878, the second column—*from a book on Japanese music by Alexandre Kremer, an aristocratic Italian instrument collector—mentions the pantomime scales as responsible for a new kind of color in music, however, it focuses on instruments. As the time, musical instruments were understood as emblematic of national identity and, along with dance, were collected by explorers and artists.

In 1879, the Opera scheduled Yedda, a three-act pantomime libretto by Philippe Gille, who later co-wrote the libretto for Delibes’ L’Abencérage, as the impressionable conductor Charles Marie, it attempted to bring together everything that was known about Japan from visual sources, particularly the prints of Japanese, the gardens, and the birds depicted in engravings and tales. A châtelain de musique translated called it a “journey to Japan in an oriental atmosphere, Resolution in two levels, a real treat of characters.” As in *Sacre-Soleil*, the story is essentially a pantomime’s dream, but in the case this dream is also that of a peasant to assimilate into the upper class through marriage. As such, it was a protest but wonderful thinking about change in France. Yedda, an inhabitant of Yedda, i.e., Tokyo, is engaged to marry but peasant boorfriend. Aquila Japanese from Act I—prominently Japanese in costume if not particularly in its music—would have been played by pantomime to suit the scene (II, 2). In Act II, Yedda learns to a magical spell change and marries the Mikado when he visits her village near Mt Fuji. Of course, there is a stumulation romance and they fall in

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50. *La Minette*, No. 3, December 1879, pp. 4-5. 51. This idea led to a major influence of Japanese art on French romanticism through the years of the 1860s.


55. Ibid.

56. An image of the man reproduced in *La Minette*, 25 January 1879.
love. Act III, by contrast, is set in the Mikado’s palace, where the courtiers perform a Dance of the Butterflies. When the fiancé kills himself, Yedda also dies — the price of adultery. Still, her fantasy might have found sympathy with French republicans, who only that month had won control of the Senate and forced the conservative President MacMahon’s resignation, finally making it possible to install a new republican orthodoxy that would make social mobility more possible. The ballet went on to sixty performances.

In Lakme, arguably more of a precursor for Madama Butterfly than Yedda and popular in Italy beginning in 1884, the librettists concocted a story in which an exotic beauty falls in love with a western soldier. This was based in part on Le mariage de Loti. When the British soldier Gerald has to return to his troops, Lakme kills herself, singing, “You have given me the sweetest dream... here, far from the real world.” As in Yedda, the assumption that the dream could be mutual was based on faith in the universality of love. The universality of character too, or at least the connection to Japan, was underlined when, in a Parisian salon soon after the premiere, Mlle Van Zandt performed the Bell Song from Lakme in Japanese traditional attire.

Ex. 2. ME´TRA, Yedda, Pas japonais.

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Japonisme and the Problem of Assimilation

This was part of a grand fete propaganda to benefit charity at the home of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Bisaccia in Paris. It also involved famous theatres of the day: the Opéra and Les Nations under Lemoine’s auspices. See L’Année mondiale, 37 Mars, 1883, p. 120.

See The Soldier and the Exotic: Opera and Nation in a Empire of Shared Universalities, opus 1, p. 9.

The connection to Japan, in the sense of the East as a zone of desire and fantasy, began with George Sand, then passed to the writings of Stendhal and Macready. See also Ch. 9, pp. 203-205.
With a republican majority in government for the first time and a new republican president, the French were searching for an alternative power base and claim to grandeur strong enough to replace the aristocratic diminution and gloom of the distant past. That same year they established a French Department of the Colonies and the next year annexed Aran and Cambodia as overseas French territory. Recognition that assimilation depended on recognition of some difference from the colonist’s perspective under assimilation de-

stabilized, as well as something shared with the exotic. Other to make assimila-
tion possible. This dream of colonialism, as expressed by Loti, was that the exotic Other desired them as much as they were desired by the West.

These works are important to any understanding of Japonisme. First, they suggest that Pierre Loti’s novel, Madame Chrysanthème, published in 1888, was written in the context of previous Japonaise subjects in western literature and more. Second, they tell us that Japonisme meant more than just a fash-

ion for the exotic. Certainly, Puccini had a taste for it in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as reflected in both works for the stage and various Japonais manuscripts in private collections. Such performances helped establish the

bility of Japanese culture, such as foxes, octopuses, Mt. Fuji, nightingale songs, and butterfly dances. But works such as Yèlè and Lâlèu, particularly with a westerner performing Lakme in a Japonaise kimono, also suggest that politics and the whole question of assimilation are part of the meaning of Japonisme.

**JAPAN TO FRANCE**

Japan could remain a function of French fantasies until Frenchman actu-

ally went to Japan and wrote about the experience. Well before Pierre Loti

shared the story of his visit in the form of a novel, Emile Guimet and the

lithographer Félix Brégane traveled to Japan in 1876. In 1879 they published

Promenades japonaises. On the title page is Mt. Fuji, a reference to Hiroshige’s

woodblock prints so popular at the time. In the first sentence the author

praises the Japanese for getting rid of the feudal Shogunate. This may have re-

minded the two die-hard republicans (Brégane was a friend of the radical left

Communist) of how republicans were on the verge of disempowering the mon-

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57 Himes, Lula, with Guimet, Emile, Promenades japonaises, p. 101, among others, who people also noted the tradition.

58 Along with publishing a series of books on Japan and its culture, Félix Brégane was also an author of Lithographs published ten years after his death in 1880, and woodblock re-

publications, a prime republican concern; one was a Japanese lyceé [high-school] and another on

how drawing was taught in the USA.
archists in France. Throughout the book, focus is on the present and the new Japan. Aspects of life that the Japanese assimilated from the West receive more attention than remnants of traditional society. First, they clarify that since the Mikado renamed the city, Yeddo is now called Tokyo. Then, riding by train from Yokohama to Tokyo, they comment on Japanese railroad. Later we learn that on the voyage from San Francisco, Guimet and Regamey met a Japanese man who was returning from studies in the United States where he had earned a degree in engineering. Even if they see cameras as «the most flattering specimens of European civilization», they disdain Japanese photographers who see nothing wrong with taking portraits in front of holy temples. Guimet and Regamey also document what they learned about Japanese theater and music, pointing out, perhaps surprisingly, that the public in temple theaters was composed mostly of women and children. With few exceptions, the musicians they encountered were women, drummers as well as shamisen players, perhaps because these provided the entertainment in tea houses the Frenchmen frequented. While they admit to understanding little about the «indecisive tonalities and incoherent rhythms» of Japanese music, they found it went well with the graceful gestures of the dances. Between describing the fourth and fifth courses of a meal, they include a transcription of two lines of music (Ex. 3), noting that it is only approximate («un peu juste»), since western notation cannot capture «Japanese intonations», especially when singers persist in indeterminate notes. To explain Japanese art, they point to differences of race, climate, and education – a conclusion that would have supported the monogenist theory of human diversity. Pierre Loti’s popular novel Madame Chrysantheme, published ten years later, takes a very different approach, casting its gaze on Japanese otherness and bringing a fascination with Loti’s own perceptions that comes in part from incorporating excerpts from the diary he kept during his 1885 visit. In many
years, his sensibility resembles that of Roland Barthes’ *Empire of Signs*. Everything is both ‘curious’ and familiar: ‘naturalness’ and familiarity, which I knew already from paintings of lacquer and porcelains (….) so exact a representation. He focuses similarly on his own preconception of their music.

Even to the woman’s melancholy voice, still to be heard behind the paper partition, was so evident the way they should sing, those musicians had so often seen pathetic scenes play in their eyes, half closing their delicate eyes in the midst of impossible fairy flower. Long before I saw so I had thought I joined this Japanvisit.

Loti knew the stereotypes that his readers would expect: the diminutive dancing girl compared to the bright butterflies who told her eyes like a timid kitten with a looking art of childrenness. When he met his first tamahiri, Mlle Jasmin, he exclaims: ‘Why I know her already! Long before setting foot in Japan, I had met with her not very far, so every surprise. When he sets up with Cheiroanthia, he describes their house as he had fancied it in many dreams of Japan before he arrived and imagined her new voices, so known to attract him, so have one thought whatsoever. Cheiroanthia brings along little, showing that our married life would be of short durations. The only thing he admits to liking about the country is its ‘shakushi’. By the end of the novel, he has figured out that he should refer to Cheiroanthia’s instrument as a shamisen instead of a guitar, and listening to her play, he feels monumentally alone at home. When he puts he kills her she had been ‘irresistible enough in her japonaise ways and that he afterwards may yet thinks of her at some points. Yet when pulling out of the harbor, he throws the direct film (perhaps a reminder of her) into the sea.** The relationship between them may have been of mutual consent, sex for money, but without love there is only marriage of convenience, not assimilation.

I recount the famous tale because it makes a strong argument against not only the durability of assimilation, but also the very possibility of it, despite the well-acknowledged Japanese appropriation of many aspects of western civilization documented by Gomme and Riegl. In an essay on Japanese women published in 1890, Loti expresses an explicitly polygenist perspective, writing that ‘the yellow race and our own are the two opposites.’

polish of the human species and that even can never fully penetrate the mind of a Japanese or a Chinese. Here he admits finding Tokyo full of Europeanized women, including the Princess (whom he met), and explains that to find a woman overcome by autism, he had to go far from the normaladdock and all the imports of modern civilization where the age-long immobility of the country has not been disturbed. Loti’s narrative thus represent a perspective on race and Japanism in the 1880s that is diametrically opposed to that of Gérard and Régis, even if both reflect direct experience of Japan. In 1888, the same year Loti’s novel was published, the Théâtre de l’Odéon put on La marchande des pierres, a four-act play by Jules Girand, another author who specialized in texts inspired by exotic places. It incorporated incolored music by Bizet, including charming ballets and nightingale songs. The prologue, written by the poet Armand Silvestre, announces a steriler drama, but also points out that it could take place in Paris. This time, however, it is not love that is universal, but women’s sexual and conquering powers, responsible for bestial and death across two generations. The prologue invokes the audience’s nostalgia for an older Japan before it raised every trace of its past that was so beautiful. The implication is that the story is in some ways authentic, to be embraced as the last flares of a dying people. Like Loti, Girand refuses to embrace this same Japan even as he dedicates the play to the Japanese Minister in Paris, a Marquis, his title, like others, Europeanized by the Emperor after 1868.55

Such Japonisme, dedicated to contemporary realities, cannot be understood without acknowledging the distance over French colonial and the policy of assimilation. Whereas L’Hôte was written during the height of imperialist expansion in 1887, these texts reflect the rising anticolonial sentiments that grew significantly after the French suffered heavy losses in Tonkin in 1884. In December 1884 the Duke de Broglie, Prime Minister under the Moral Order and one of the leaders of those hoping for a return to monarchist government, argued in a Senate that colonial policy was a luxury forbidden to a France weakened after the Franco-Prussian war. With another crisis in Tonkin came serious division among republicans, and in March 1885 a new government. The colonial expansion proved to be a difficult testing ground for the republican-

55. M. Fr. Marquis, 1817–1888; see G. Dumas, Armand Silvestre, p. 58, for the author’s life story. The episode that Dumas Monnet tells Silvestre about is different from that of Jules Girand’s. Girand’s play was not published by the Emperor, with the Emperor’s promise to meet the Emperor on the road and showing him her son.

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ory of «universalism». The notion of treating indigenous peoples as «equals», that is, of trying to assimilate them into the French system of government and create for them institutions and laws analogous to those of France, was neither simple nor evident. France’s «civilizing mission» tended to ignore national as well as racial differences, those very aspects to which Loti draws attention.

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, thanks to places like the Folies-Bergeres, Parisians were increasingly exposed to Japanese people (Fig. 5). Wishing to capitalize on French fascination with Japanese acrobats and ballet-pantomimes on Japanese subjects such as Dans l’inconnu by the Folies-Bergeres conductor, Desormes, composers again took to setting Japanese tales to music, among them Gaston Serpette’s 1892 hit Me´-´na-ka. Some also began to challenge Loti’s disdain for contemporary realities. A ballet-pantomime accompanied by music, Laurent Griffi and Marcel Demaille’s Papa Chrysanthe´me, subtitled «fantaisie japonaise et nautique» and parodied Loti’s novel at the Nouveau Cirque, as depicted in the drawings published by the populist newspaper, Le Petit Journal, 12 December 1892 (Fig. 6). The public loved it, in part because it featured their best clown, Chocolat, a black African
Japonisme and the Problem of Assimilation

Fig. 6. GRILLET, Papa Crysantheme, «Le Petit Journal», 2 December 1892.
who'd been with them for years, and Kiu-Fiu, a man dressed as a Japanese
woman. They are servants of a Japanese couple who has surrounded by a col-
lection of bizarre insects – an opportunity to make fun of humans and the
scale of the world they thought the Japanese inhabited. The couple explains
to an older visitor that they are creating the return of their son who has been
in Europe studying Latin and Greek, English and Spanish. When he appears,
we see he has brought back a girlfriend from Paris who, to gain their favor,
performs a samba in a dented bongo, a dance popular in Paris at the time.
The dressing in Le Petit Jour café makes her look like Loie Fuller, an Amer-
ican dancer who had just begun her wildly popular show at the Folies-Bergère
that fall. In the second tableau, the Mikado makes an appearance and, in a
kind of opium dream, his courtesans, joined by the ladies, dance a slow waltz
on water like floating on real water. Hôtel de Toulouse-Lautrec painted this
scene in his 1893 Au Nouveau Cirque: Five Stuffed Shirts, possibly making
fun of the elegantly dressed audience that frequented that circus. Papa Ciry-
seau décrochait later for months.48 Audiences apparently made no fuss about its
reference to the possible marriage of the young Japanese man to his Parisian
girlfriend, and seemed to enjoy the Flattery implied by their embrace of the
most recent Parisian fashion.

Andre Monnier, who had also written a ballet parodiant in 1895, like-
some focused his attention on a lyric comedy based on Loti's novel. Madame
Chrysantheme premiered on 26 January 1895, but was not well received. This
work is closer to Loti than Papa Cirencence; it makes significant changes.
However, in the libretto there are many mention of the same and fate to which
Loti so often compared his experiences, although the scene that a figure
selected to reproduce on 4 February 1895 was the very era in which Pierre
tacks to Japan, who land I've dreamed about. Whereas Loti forces Pierre's
birthplace vague; the Western Harman and Alexandra refer explicitly to
stationary Britanny, perhaps because for many French of this time Britanny
signified the oldest part of the country and its racial origins. The reference to
Wagner's Fliegende Holländer and Pierre's song from Britanny make the
work musically more in France than Japan, as does the depiction of Chry-
santheme. She resembles Ambroise Thomire's popular Mignon, a child of un-
born parents and abandoned, someone who documents the desire to pro-
tect her – some of this from Loti's novel. Perhaps the most significant
alteration in the attention this work, devoted to what was only mentioned in
Loti's novel – Pierre's judicious. This change not only humanizes Pierre, but

1895, Loie Fuller painted this painting for the annual glass company in Novaco Circus,
Also Chrysantheme: Paris, Musée d'Orsay. exhibited in Paris that year.
also force the authors to humanize Chrysantheme. The result is more predictable. Like Lakme, she falls in love with her exotic lover, although she is not forced to pay with her life. With the recent discovery of two texts by an eye-witness describing the origins of John Luther Long’s short story, we can see that some amount of reality lay at the base of Madame Butterfly. Loti’s novel indeed was less of a novel than we have assumed. Scholars have also found resemblances between Puccini’s opera and certain of Messager’s scenes. Puccini knew Messager and the latter was interested enough to attend the Bakunin premieres. That did Puccini know other critiques of Loti’s novel, in particular that of Bignani, who offers the most radical rending of the story, involvingLoti’s premiss: “Reagan takes Chrysantheme’s perspective through a diary she may have kept, unmasking his novel, Le culte vrai de Mme Chrysantheme.” The force here is on the woman’s suffering. As in Messager, it ends with her tears. As Mari Mannella points out, “Bignani’s Chrysantheme takes out a feminine role as the true Japan [...] she is a true woman, passionnée unto self-destruction [...] as well as the gauntlet of a shifting civilization.” To the extent that this also describes Madame Butterfly, it suggests that Puccini and his librettists recognized the Japanese assimilation of Western norms and emotions more in the tradition of Lebœuf than of critics of Loti’s novel.

**Racial distinction and national identity**

By the 1890s, it became no longer fashionable to refer to the Japanese as “natives” and “nuns”. When they took on the Chinese in a war over Korea’s independence and defeated them at Port Arthur in 1894, the Japanese showed that modern technology could be used to defeat a country previously thought to be far more powerful. Even those most resistant to accepting the results of their modernization had to admit that Japanese society had proven itself no longer stuck in the anachronism of tradition. Only months before they defeated the Chinese, *L’Illustration* depicted Japanese soldiers on the fields.

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67 *Leem*., p. 96.
68 *Leem*., p. 96.
69 This appeared in a special issue of *Vie Parisienne* (15 October 1910) dedicated to Lebœuf on Japan.
70 *Puccini*, p. 191. Once drove one into the character’s heroine’s sensual, passionate, and curvaceous.
playing bugles, instruments associated uniquely with the West and, for the most part, Western soldiers.

The musical world subsequently paid more attention to Japan than it had in the 1870s and 1880s. Popular magazines published musical scores and reviews based on Japanese subjects. In 1895 a family magazine, *Magasin des domes-
tades*, published a march, *Le Japonais*, whose four-measure phrases and four-phase sections could easily have been played by military bands. In trendy form, the opening material comes back fortissimo at the end, expressing a kind of triumph, albeit with limited materials. In the chic *Figure Bonniers*, the back-
ground of the opening lithograph of Le Reve* — a portrait* by Raffiner with music by Charles Malherbe, there are smoketakers, their following clouds blocking view of the palace and temples of the capital. One of two characters
in the story, the female, is blind, perhaps an insectant singer, giving the author a reason to ignore what was going on in the country and focus on love.

In March 1899, *Le Musard* published its first article on Japanese mu-
 sic, in part to flush out for their readers a 1920 report that the Japanese were
introducing western music in their schools and that the new Tokyo Conserva-
tory had been sending students to Europe to familiarize themselves in new musi-
cal arts. The short essay, again a book review, has two perspectives.** Like Gautier, the author recognizes the demise of traditional Japanese culture, em-
phasizing which instruments are specifically Japanese, not descendents of the
Chinese whom they saw in the midst of subjugation in the war. He suggests
that *true* Japanese songs are a product of the national spirit, which he or-
somatizes as native and exposing a feeling for nation. Included is a short
monophonic musical example, again in a very straightforward 4/4. At the
same time, he points out that Japanese military bands are organized as in
France, using drums and trumpets. When it comes to music performed on
the ships such as those that share (not given the Chinese a hard lesson,
he notes that traditional songs are forbidden in such contexts, replaced by
military music as on French ships.

In August 1899, *La Figaro* decided that since the Japanese were becom-
ing lawyers as warriors and diplomats in addition to artists, it was time the
French public became more aware of their music. (Ex. 41, Explaining that tra-
ditional music was never written down and thus the Emperor and most mod-
ern Japanese composers had taken to studying western harmony, they decided
to publish two kinds of music. The first is a hymn that school children sang
for the Mikado when he returned to the capital after signing the peace treaty

- O. P. de Magasin des domes-tades, 10 March 1895, pp. 76f. The time of King
  Le Musard, Mlle Smith, in summarizing the French.
with China. Its four-square rhythms and simple harmonies exemplify the ex-
tent of Japanese assimilation of western musical models. The second is a Ja-
apanese song by a famous Japanese poet-composer, an example of traditional
music but presented as a «Franco-Japanese collaboration» with an accompa-
niment by a professor from the Paris Conservatory.

The war had drawn attention to an issue that was increasingly important
to those focused on nation building: the validity of polygenism. Intellectuals
espousing this perspective rejected the idea that man is everywhere equal.
Those not interested in assimilation, like Gustave Le Bon, believed that the
nature of a people – its soul, or its «forms of thought, logic, and above all
character» – is both fixed and homogeneous, not alterable by education or
intelligence. Music, like language dialects, was increasingly brought in to sup-
port this theory as well as the categorization of races as primitive, inferior,
elegant, and superior. With the war, old essentialisms about the Japanese
returned, especially when examining indigenous popular song, a genre the
French took as emblematic of racial identity all over the world. 71

Since the French understood nearly everything associated with a culture
as the fruit of a civilization, by 1900 even its acrobatic exercises in the circus

70 Notre page musicale, «Le Figaro», 21 August 1895.
71 G. L. E. Bon, Les lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples (1894), translated as The
72 See my Race and Nation: Musical Acclimatization and the Chansons Populaires in Third Repub-
and music hall were seen as opportunities to contemplate performers as racial specimens – Russians, Americans, Romanians, and especially Japanese. The style of Japanese acrobats was so distinct, with its emphasis on horizontal and vertical exercises, that it comprised a category all its own. One reviewer noted:


explicitly to race as the reason this style remained stable for so long and thus why Japanese routines resembled one another. The Torikata troupe, famed on Folies-Bergère programs, was famous specifically for exercises in which they hung over the orchestra seats on their hands and feet without any protective net.

Direct encounters with Japanese musicians and dancers in performances by Sadō Yacó's troupe at the 1900 Paris Exhibition coincided with a shift among the French from focusing on similarities and what could be shared to acknowledging differences and racial distinctions. Building on Le Bon's theories, Léopold de Sainteny's Psychologie de la colonisation française dans ses rapports avec les sociétés indigènes (1899) examined criticism of the application of assimilation to education, institutions, and language. In an entire chapter on the case of Japan, he argues that although the French who promoted the doctrine of assimilation and the equality of the races often looked to Japan as a model example, the Japanese never assimilated to the same extent. Without these, there was only imitation, not true assimilation. And if the Japanese adopted some western customs, particularly in the military, it was to lessen struggle against the spirit and beliefs of the West. Japanese culture, then, is not assimilated, but a superimposition of modern civilization over a hereditary foundation of ideas absolutely opposed to ours. Attempts at assimilation, Sainteny concludes, have led to a civic-producing more hatred toward Europeans.

The gradual shift from assimilation to association in French colonial policy had a significant impact on colonial attitudes. The 1900 Colonial Congress, advocating anti-assimilationism, unanimously voted that indigenous institutions and customs should be respected and maintained as much as possible. The 1900 History of Music Congress called for an international society to gather popular models in all countries using the photographs to record them. The hopes of acquiring and understanding something authentic in a distant culture was thus tied to an acceptance of the near impossibility of true assimilation.

Turner's orthographic names from the 1900 Exhibition, published in La Minerve throughout that fall, reflect these changes. He claimed to be seeking a native not contaminated by European influences and instead to study assimilated the races most different from ours and the people most...
In 1900, he soon realized he understood almost nothing. His first analytical piece concentrates on two institutions, the lute and the shamisen, but his transcriptions capture none of the floating rhythms he otherwise tries to describe. He had to get permission to play selections for him summarily before he could grasp enough to execute. His second example portrays a butterfly dance with inscrutable and arcing lines resembling those in Lecocq’s Yéyé, but in a modal mixture of hypodorian and diman (Fg. 9).

In the spirit of letting the music speak for itself, he does not compose a Western accompaniment. Tiersot later discusses what the French had known about but tended to ignore, that is, the manner in which music was taught in Japanese schools following western models. Sada Yaco’s performances come in the last remnants of, to help the French understand the nature of the maqabitar represented, he compares them to the theater of ancient Greece — a high compliment indeed. He also refers to an 1869 study of Japanese theater by Gurney and Bujalance. After all this, Tiersot has to admit he finds Japanese music not as accomplished as the other Japanese arts and its dance much better than its theater.

In 1904, just after the war had begun and Puccini’s opera was premiered, Yacco minutely published frequent reports about Japanese music. In the spirit of the neutrality that France had declared, the journal interpolated news of reports on Japan with curios on Russia. On March 13, predictably, they note that more soldiers who have heard Japanese music find it barbarous or at least very primitive. Even the Japanese national anthem is confounding. They go on to cite the many warrior songs with roots oriented to inspiring soldiers to take on the Russians. On 20 March, they cite the perspectives of a Russian newspaper that likewise finds the music appalling.

On 1 May they describe Sada Yaco’s efforts to contribute to the war by traveling among the soldiers, ending them to create a series of military hymns that would inflame Japanese patriotism. In both Yokohama and St. Petersburg, audiences could go to the theater to see plays based on the battle of Port Arthur, obviously from two different perspectives. In November, with the Japanese winning, the topic of assimilation systems with the punch line that’s appropriated our music and look what they’re capable of. In Tokyo, the Japanese Beethoven Society was praised for its concerts of German classics as well as Liszt and Strauss. On one occasion, the principal Tokyo orchestra

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76 J. Tiersot, Ethnographie musicale, Notes pour à l’Emprunt universelle de 1900, (s.l. Ar- mante), 14 octobre 1903, p. 413.
JAPONIC AND THE PROBLEM OF ASSIMILATION

Ex. 5. Tiersot, Notes d'une ethnographie musicale, La Danse du papillon.

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set Japanese victory songs to triumphant music from Handel’s Judas Maccabaeus, and on another, emancipated Geisha’s Waltz, outing a European as Mephistopheles while Greer Garson, leaving behind the West, gives her hand to a victorious Japanese soldier returning from Manchuria. This appropriation of western music and western music for Japanese purposes points to the increased capacity for individual agency in Japan after 1900.

In many ways, Puccini’s opera sits on the liminal boundary between the old and new worlds, with Cio-Cio-San caught in the middle. As Gross points out, Puccini gives her a variety of introductory melodies, “signifying different possibilities for the construction of her character and her fate.” Her willingness to embrace Christianity and the west requires that she turn away from her Japanese group identity, that she act on her own volition. After 1872 the Japanese would define themselves in terms of family. Even to prepare for military conscription, “being Japanese” was legally defined through enrollment in the family registration system. But in 1899 Japan passed its first citizenship laws. Of course, these had a gender bias, since women were not expected to go to war and continued to have limited rights. Still, there was an awareness of such assimilation of western ideas in Japan (and perhaps the desire for citizenship among Japanese women) that affected the construction of Cio-Cio-San’s character, especially when she proclaims herself an American citizen, melodically reciting the “Star-Spangled Banner.”

When we examine its changing meanings in France, Japanese enigmas are far more than an innocent fashion. If Eliot looked to the French for most of their knowledge about Japanese culture, they easily were aware of changes in French attitudes toward Japan after 1899, especially their increased demand and hostility to the possibility of assimilation. Puccini, like Gautier, may have looked to the Japanese aesthetic to inspire an impressionistic approach to color and design, but he was not oblivious to what Japan had come to represent by 1900. His painful thematic tragedy may have been an attempt to humanize a people whose too many stereotypes undermined through caricature, their apparently passive, delicate women only as symbols. But with the war forcing audiences to come to grips with the consequences of Japanese assimilation of western industrial progress, the realities of assimilation suddenly nonassimilation from an ideal into a threat. Understanding the political context in this crucial to any full understanding of the conception, creation, and reception of the opera.

56 Gross, 114-45.
In reality, given the common practice of soldiers and merchants taking temporary respite while in Japan, there were probably many people on whom Madama Butterfly could have been based. One of these, Konku Tomi- sakura, did go to the United States in the early 1890s and spend two years studying at the University of Pennsylvania, reading the novel in Pino Gios- canovici's version. He returned to Japan without graduating and chose to expand his life in Nagasaki, albeit with a complicated mixed identity. "(20) Jenny Costello and her husband were brought in Nagasaki between 1892 and 1897 and may have known about him or others when they witnessed a similar affair that Jenny recounted to her brother John Luther Long upon his return to the States in 1897, adding an ironic wrinkle to the source upon which Puccini based his play and Puccini appears." (20) That both Belasco and Puccini decided to concentrate on the past and end the work by suicide suggests that after 1890 the utopian promise of assimilation idealized by missionaries and colonists such as the French was beginning to be questioned, and the possibility of its illusions unrevealed as a tragedy. That Puccini and his librettists chose to end the work in this way, rather than as in Long's short story or the Lotti novel, sug- gests that he was taking a stand on this problem in his Madama Butterfly.

It is likely that audiences were touched by the potential of Cio-Cio-San's dreams of assimilation into American society in particular. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thousands of Italians as well as Asians fled poverty at home to search for work in America, often helping to build the country's extensive railroad lines. In 1907, my great-grandfather was among them. Italian-Americans understood each other's trials and desires. They produced their own newspapers to help immigrants both stay connected to their homeland and integrate into the new community. Every issue of the newspaper, L'Italia, published in Chicago, listed the arrival or departure dates for dozens of ships coming to and from Italy (Fig. 7). (20) It seemed then...
full columns of «La Associazioni Italiane di Chicago» as well as three more of «gli avvisanti dell'Italia». There, new arrivals could find Italian doctors, pharmacists, clergymen, and even music teachers. Moreover, articles regularly addressed the state of immigration into the United States, reporting, for example, that it had decreased 15% in the first six months of 1904 as compared with 1903.44

Not surprisingly, in 1904 the Russian-Japanese war made the front pages of «El Italia». From 6 February until the end of April, «La Giornata» appeared in bold letters on the front page at the top of the first two columns. This feature not only drew the war, but also Italians’ response to it. The paper also underlined Italian immigrants’ love of opera and the role music could play in national pride. In January 1905, before international politics became so worrisome, Verdi and Mascagni made their front page. For the premiere of Madama Butterfly in Milan, «El Italia» cited from Belasco’s journal, «L’italiana a monterey», and excerpted the libretto. A few days later it announced the second performance in Brescia in May; it also informed Italian-Americans not only that Puccini would change the opera into three acts, but also what specific revisions he was making: «un atto maggiore sviluppa alla parte del tenore; sopprimendo l’episodio dell’ubriaco, accorciò la scena della cerimonia religiosa; nonché quella del figlio; variando, forse anche, la chiusa del dramma.»45 notes to which readers of the «Giornale della sera» were not privy.

What is even more remarkable, that very day, 19 March, the Grand Opera House of Chicago learned a Madama Butterfly by the Blanche Bates Company (top top of Fig. 7). The leader of this troupe, an American actress, specialized in the plays of David Belasco. Her first major success was as Cho-Cho-San in his Madame Butterfly (1900), then in his Der Ring der Göttner (1902), another Japanese melodrama based on a John Luther Long novella. Bates performed Blasco’s Madama Butterfly and Daruma of the Gods through early April. Chicago audiences could also see The Shio-Gun, a Japanese operetta, at the Studebaker theater that spring. This Grand Opera may have put aside opera and musical comedy to perform the plays both in re-
response to the western world’s preoccupation with conflict in the Far East and in anticipation of Puccini’s opera. Given Puccini’s international orientation and how closely Italian-Americans followed the Madame Butterfly, down to its revisions, we should not ignore that American immigrants were also part of the political subtext of the opera. We are only now beginning to come to grips with the difficulties American immigrants had in achieving assimilation.  

If Belasco and Puccini were aware of this, did they think, especially after anxiety about the Japanese calmed down, that Italian-American relatives in the United States and especially Italian-Americans might identify with Cio-Cio-San? Puccini’s character was exotic, but she was also like Italian immigrants and many others, who, while rooted to their culture’s traditions, wished to emerge like a butterfly, transforming one life into another and leaving everything behind for a new life abroad, even if they might meet devastating rejection and never achieve full assimilation. Cio-Cio-San reminded these immigrants of their difference, their otherness, and the cruel realities of contemporary life. As such, the opera is a metaphor for the modern diaspora. Its tragic ending suggests that, as with so many immigrants, actual assimilation often has to wait for the next generation.

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