

Interview script of the email interview we had with Peter Duus, a professor on Japanese History from Stanford.

Question: How did the war affect China, Korea, and Japan? How did it change how other countries viewed them?

Answer: The war weakened the Ch'ing government and led to the rise of revolutionary movements to overthrow it; it paved the way for new Western intrusions (the so-called "war for concessions"; it allowed Japan to increase its influence in Korea, promoting reforms but also alienating many Koreans; and it was the first step toward the emergence of Japan as an imperialist power.

Question: In your opinion, why did Japan win the war?

Answer: Japan won the war because it had a unified government and fought with better equipped and trained military and naval forces. China lost because its administration was corrupt and divided, it lacked a unified army and navy, and the forces it did possess were no match for the Japanese in technology and training.

Question: What were some of the strength and weaknesses of each country?

Answer: See the answer above. The weakness of Japan was that it was a much smaller country than China and that few foreign powers expected it to win.

Question: What were some of the leading causes that started the war? What was the main "spark"?

Answer: The main issue was which nation would have paramount influence in Korea; the Ch'ing government was trying to shore up its traditional tributary relations with Korea with techniques borrowed from the Western countries; the Japanese government feared that a weak Korea under the influence of a weak China would leave the peninsula open to a takeover by the Russians or some other Western power – which would be a threat to their national security.

Question: How did the citizens of each country view the war? How did they react with the result?

Answer: Many anti-Ch'ing reformers like Liang Chi-chao and Sun Yat-sen looked at Japan, which had built up its national strength and wealth since the Meiji Restoration, as a model for China's self-strengthening. Some Japanese leaders and intellectuals also thought that Japan should play a role in reforming China but the reaction of the general population was to view China as a weak and backward country inferior to Japan.

Question: What were some of the turning points of the war?

Answer: The Japanese victory was assured when the Japanese fleet easily beat the Chinese fleet in the battle of the Yellow Sea (Sept. 1894).

Question: How did this war lead up to and affect the Russo-Japanese War and the Second Sino-Japanese War?

Answer: After the war ended, the Russians tried to build up their influence in Korea (an extension of their new influence in Manchuria); the Japanese failed to reach an agreement with the Russians to share influence in Korea; instead it signed a defensive alliance with Great Britain and then went to war with Russia.

Question: How did the Koreans play a part in the war?

Answer: The Korean government, like the Ch'ing govt, had not modernized as the Japanese had; it was weaker than any of the powers contending for influence. Although many Korean reformers suggested allying with Japan and modelling itself on the Japanese reforms, the Korean govt tried instead to play all the outside powers – China, Russia, Japan, the US and Great Britain – against each other. As a result the Koreans were either spectators or victims during both the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese as foreign armies fought on their territory.

Question: What kinds of weapons were used in the war? How did this affect the war?

Answer: Both countries had modern warships bought from Europe or the US but the Chinese navy did not have well-trained and compete officer corps as the Japanese did; in land battles the Japanese army fought with modern weapons – including rifles invented by a Japanese army officers and manufactured in Japan; the Chinese army fought with hodgepodge of modern and traditional weaponry

Question: To sum it up, how would you describe The First Sino-Japanese War in a sentence?

Answer: The war ended China's long history as the most powerful expansionist country in East Asia, and it began Japan's half century of colonial expansion.