

## **Lantern Slide Moments and the Taught Subject, 1906 and 2006**

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Lu Xun's lantern slide moment looms large in the history of modern China. As is well known, it occurred when Lu Xun was a student at the Sendai Medical Academy in Japan between 1904 and 1906. As Lu Xun tells it, he had nurtured the dream of becoming a Western medical doctor since the premature death of his father, whose life traditional Chinese medicine had failed to save. At the time, microbiology lectures were delivered using instructional images projected by a slide lantern in the classroom, and when there was extra time at the end of each class, the students were shown slides of scenic landscapes or current affairs. These included reportage images of Japanese victories in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War, which Lu Xun, as the only Chinese student in the room, said he felt obliged to join his Japanese classmates in applauding. One day, one of the slides depicted the imminent beheading of a Chinese spy for the Russians by Japanese soldiers,

an image that Lu Xun recalled for its sturdy bodies but blank and numb faces of the Chinese spectators who were photographed as witnesses to the execution. Lu Xun described the incident in two later autobiographical accounts (in the preface to *Outcry* in 1922, and in the essay “Mr. Fujino” in 1926), implying in both cases that this event was the catalyst for his decision to abandon his studies in Western medicine.<sup>1</sup> He turned instead to revolutionary literature, rationalizing that modern medicine could only heal the bodies but not the *spirit*, of a weak and backward nation.

Described as the “primal scene” of modern Chinese literature by the literary historian David Der-Wei Wang, the political and cultural reverberations of Lu Xun’s lantern slide moment in twentieth-century China are manifold.<sup>2</sup> And while efforts to verify the facts of the event or to identify the lantern slide image itself have both proven inconclusive, literary scholars such as Leo Lee and Lydia Liu have argued that neither the image nor proof of the facts alone would explain the rhetorical power of the story.<sup>3</sup> In this volume, Zhou Kui has revealed how widely Lu Xun’s accounts of his 1906 experience was noted by participants and observers of the 2006 Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Visualizing Cultures controversy. Indeed, the Lu Xun “slide moment” was invoked by both supporters and critics of the protestors, whether in Chinese cyberspace, in the official Chinese media, or in the “Open Letter to Chinese Students at MIT” by the Chinese historian Peter Perdue, who urged the students to follow in Lu Xun’s revolutionary example. This essay takes up that invocation, shared across divergent viewpoints on the 2006 student protest, and uses this common ground to reflect upon the reverberations of Lu Xun’s lantern slide moment in present-day transnational digital pedagogy.

Separated by exactly a century, the 1906 and 2006 events share striking similarities: In both cases, Chinese overseas students who were studying in a foreign educational institution of science and technology were shown, by their teachers, a reportage image of Japanese soldiers decapitating Chinese prisoners of war. In both cases, the displayed image visually marked the Chinese students’ equivalence with the victims depicted, thereby publicly objectifying their racial difference from their peers in the classroom. From the perspective of their teachers however, in both cases the “Chinese” stu-

dents classified as such were inadvertent viewers of the image—that is, the teachers had expected *all* students to “read” the image within a singular discursive context: the authoritative narrative provided by the instructional setting. Yet, in both cases, the transnational discourses of race, ethnicity, nationalism, and historical memory structured the viewing experiences of the students instead, calling into question the authority of the instructional lesson. Finally, like Lu Xun, the MIT students responded to their “slide moment” with words, and with the demand for new and different writing.

This article begins by examining the conditions of display that the two incidents share—the projection of an image of wartime execution in a pedagogical space using a new visual technology. In so doing, my analysis shares in the contention, touched upon by many contributors to the present volume, that the contexts in which images are displayed often play a far more significant role in their interpretation than the actual image itself. Yet while agreeing with the need to emphasize the importance of image contexts, I argue that there are ultimately no simple distinctions between contexts of display and perceptions of visual form and content. Rather, the argument I will forward is that given a particular context of display, particular images matter more. Thus my analysis takes up close analyses of Lu Xun’s textually described image and the 1894 woodblock print around which the MIT controversy was centered. In so doing, I show how both these execution images generate viewing “contexts” of their own, by naming and structuring Chinese viewing subjects as witnesses to civilizing violence. In demonstrating how the visual rhetoric of these two images function, I thus aim to show that problems of visual power are not to be left in the realm of unruly images alone. Rather, I argue that visual culture mobilizes rhetorics of historical interpretation just as literature, history writing, and street protest do. Thus the final part of this article reflects upon the authorial conventions and ethics of visual and digital online pedagogy surfaced by the 2006 MIT controversy, and it draws lessons from Lu Xun’s lantern slide-enabled classroom to provide us with a historical perspective on the present-day US university and its drive toward visuality, digitization, and online projection.

## Discipline and Display

Lu Xun's slide lantern moment inaugurates in a single scene the great historical transformation described more than fifty years later by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (*Surveiller et punir*, 1975). This was of course Foucault's analysis of the disappearance of spectacles of public execution and torture, and the corresponding birth of the modern institutions that concerned themselves with the discipline of the soul. In Foucault's account, the public executions of the past were marked by dramatic juridical excess: they were a "confused horror" that made the dismembered and tortured criminal an object of public pity and admiration; a frenzy that would extend from the criminal to the executioner and to the spectators themselves; and a spectacle that "would equal, if not exceed, in savagery the crime itself," all, "to accustom the spectators to a ferocity from which one wished to divert them."<sup>4</sup> Foucault went on to enumerate, in contrast, how the docile bodies of criminals, pupils, and the colonized were hidden away, partitioned, trained, and tested. In the prison, the factory, the barracks, and the school, each body was individualized by the disciplinary field of visibility, and all were simultaneously subjected to the classificatory eye of the master and the normalizing gaze of the examiner. "The soul," in Foucault's evocative phrase, becomes "the prison of the body."<sup>5</sup>

We can well imagine the provincial medical training classroom of Lu Xun's anecdote as just such a Foucauldian space: an educational setting in which pupils are ordered by class, age, rank, and subject; a self-surveilling environment where all students are either taught subjects or enlisted as assistants and "monitors"; an extracurricular slide show made possible by the "exhaustive use" of time; the teacher's display of the images with the most minimal instruction—provided only by a short caption typed on the slide; a silence interrupted by the students' clapping and cheering that made up a "system of signaling" containing within itself "the technique of command and the morality of obedience."<sup>6</sup> These hallmarks of Foucault's disciplinary setting are present in almost every detail in Lu Xun's scene.

Yet, the epiphany of Lu Xun's slide moment itself is entirely dependent on the implied barbarism of the public execution depicted on the lantern slide itself—that practice of the past that, by Foucault's schema, ought to

have been banished in modernity. In Lu Xun's story, the public execution is not only still present, it is magnified, amplified, and projected onto the authoritative scrim of the classroom. Rey Chow has argued that this magnification rendered the spectacle more spectacular and the demonstration more monstrous, but that, of course, this is not entirely where the trauma is situated.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in both his accounts, Lu Xun foregoes any direct remark on the emotional effect of the execution on himself but instead pauses to scorn the Chinese spectators pictured within it, who fail to acknowledge the implied barbarity of the execution scene. Notably calling them dumb, numb, or blank (*mamu*), though many have wondered why he couldn't just as well have described them as shocked, seething, or traumatized, Lu Xun visually judges the spectators by their facial expressions and bodily comportment. It is as though he has chosen to observe in those witnesses the very failure to assume what Foucault called the "docile-utility" of the modern subject, seeing in them an undisciplined subject condition that he, as the overseas student, would both acquire and deny in the medical classroom.<sup>8</sup> It is this appearance of blank and undifferentiated spectators, useless for the formation of a body politic, that Lu Xun the writer describes as a sickness and a weakness.

This choice of language, too, is an important part of the historical moment in which the lantern slide episode was set. In a study of European medical discourse and visual culture of China as the "sick man of Asia," Larissa Heinrich has pointed out that the execution slide that Lu Xun and his classmates saw came immediately after a series of lantern slides of microbes from their teacher's lecture. The ordering of slides that Heinrich emphasizes is important because it suggests that the execution image could be interpreted "as a continuation of the science lesson, as a picture of 'foreign elements' like the *burakumin* [部落民, untouchables] that eclipse all other content: an equivalency established in the classroom between the bacteria and the Chinese prisoners of war."<sup>9</sup> Though the juxtaposition of these images would seem at first random, by Heinrich's argument, it in fact allows for a continuity between the medical lesson and the current affairs lesson, tying together the truth-claims of science with those of a nation at war.

What thus initially appears as extra time and extracurricular news in Lu Xun's lantern slide moment would then be seen as part and parcel of the

continuous training of the modern subject, one in which the scientific classroom served as a component of the nation and of the international sphere of war, imperialism, and modernization. Embedded within the lantern slide anecdote, then, is the unspoken articulation of Lu Xun's later self as a modern subject, formed under the magnifying gaze of the classroom. Just as his unspoken disdain for the barbarity of the public execution spectacle requires no elaboration, so, within the classroom, were those differences and equivalences of race made compulsorily visible, rendering it possible for Lu Xun to identify the Chinese subject as sick and backward, and as a civilization still requiring that very training of the soul.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* famously opens with a vivid description of the public execution, which is then followed by his account of the matter-of-fact, coldly written prison timetable. Lu Xun's taut anecdote, however, places the execution spectacle *within* the school itself, reminding us how the slow Eurocentric experience of modernization was experienced in a single moment for a Qing subject in Meiji Japan. Looking back on that younger self, Lu Xun describes an epiphany founded on the presumption of linear historical progress—a presumption that frames the untrained Chinese subject as one out of joint with the time of global modernity. This is the punctum of the lantern slide incident, not the violence of the execution image itself. To the extent that there is a shock, it is in the young Lu Xun's realization that China lacked a "soul" as an ideological effect and a political anatomy.

### Visible Witnesses

Since the lantern slide from Lu Xun's story has never been satisfactorily identified, historians have only really been able to partially reconstruct Lu Xun's slide moment. We envision a grisly light show in a darkened classroom, a scene of internal medicine and distant violence brought together by a lighted technology whose ghostly presence interposes itself in the mechanistic form of the lantern projector in the center of the darkened room. That projector, which stands in place of the photographer's camera, takes us from that voyeuristic room to the brightened site of a killing. Yet the image itself we must imagine, extrapolating from Lu Xun's two barebones descriptions

the most basic facts: such as, whether the image was photographic (glass lantern slides were painted with images long before photographs could be transferred onto them); its scale, intensity, and size (magic lanterns varied widely in power sources for its light); and how indeed we might evaluate Lu Xun's own judgment of those pictured witnesses. We are fortunate, then, to have the beheading image that instigated the 2006 MIT controversy, an image that allows us to delve more deeply into how such an image might have functioned (fig. 1 in Benjamin Elman, "Optical and Cognitive Illusions," page 17 this volume).

Titled today by its inscription, *Illustration of the Decapitation of Violent Chinese Soldiers*, the woodblock triptych at the center of the MIT controversy was designed by the Meiji print artist Utagawa Kokunimasa (1874–1944) and published by Fukuda Hatsujirō. It purports to depict a Japanese military execution of Chinese soldiers in October 1894 during the "First" Sino-Japanese War (see Benjamin Elman in this volume), which predates by roughly a decade the Russo-Japanese War that took place during Lu Xun's studies in Japan. Sold as up-to-date "reportage" from the warfront, Meiji prints of both the Sino- and Russo-Japanese wars were copiously produced and highly popular, and they certainly presented a heroic and nationalistic image of military prowess.

The particular print in question is, however, a complex visual and textual object. In the left panel of the triptych, the Japanese executioner, buttoned up in sleek military dress and cap, stands ready to lunge with long sword drawn high. He is about to bring it down to slice off the head of a Chinese prisoner, shown in a disheveled state and forced onto his knees by a soldier who is wrenching his arms back. At the same time, another black-clad soldier is yanking the prisoner's hair forward to expose his neck, thus forming a blockless guillotine that requires no technology except the posture of the body. A pile of decapitated heads, tossed to the ground, tumble diagonally down the picture plane at the center of the image. The long braided queues of the severed heads lie limp, and the victims' eyes are exaggeratedly slanted closed. Headless bodies are strewn behind the victim, in a desecrated heap of shapeless clothing. In the background, two long rows of bound Chinese prisoners are made to watch the execution in the same crouch of submission the condemned has been forced to adopt for his death. Two commanders'

relative ranks are demonstrated by the fact that one sits on a chair and the other sits high on a horse with the imperial flag waving vigorously behind him. He too raises his sword with an outstretched arm, perhaps giving the signal to proceed with the execution. The two swords, one held aloft to signify authority, and the other just about to commit the act itself, exemplify militaristic command and its hierarchal order. In the lower right corner, the angle of the drawn swords is echoed in the outstretched arm and pointed finger of a soldier who has assumed a pedantic stance to explain the scene to another. The rest of the soldiers encircle the outer round of the scene, watching the execution or the prisoner-witnesses, while from the far edge of the composition, yet others are bringing onto the scene the next victim. Their glossy black uniforms mark out an otherwise undifferentiated space and set by their very presence the stage of the execution scene.

Lest the beheading taking place at the center of the composition be interpreted as barbaric or unjustified, the tip of the commander's sword also ingeniously directs us to the beginning of the calligraphic inscription running above the depiction and across all three panels of the triptych. In imperialistic rhetoric, the inscription takes pains to proclaim the civility of the act, citing it as an example of the "justice" and "mercy" of the Japanese army that "has been said to even exceed" that of the civilized countries of Europe and the United States. The inscription explains that it was instead the Chinese whose violent and barbaric nature had "seeped deep into their military minds," provoking them to steal the swords of their "protectors" (i.e., their captors). For this "barbarous" act of attempted escape, the inscription goes on to explain that thirty-eight prisoners were executed in front of the others. The inscription ends, as with Lu Xun's anecdote, with a notable focus on the spectators as the intended subjects of this act of "military discipline": "It is said that the prisoners all wept with emotion, profoundly moved by the justice and mercy of our imperial army. Truly it is said that mercy and punishment must go together."<sup>10</sup> In other words, the inscription claims that the killing is a merciful civilizing act that *needs* to be displayed and witnessed in order to impose its effectiveness. Signed only with a pseudonym (Ōka-sei, perhaps "Mr. Cherry Blossom"), the inscription is given an author but only the veneer of authorial responsibility.

Taken together, the graphic image and inscription on the woodblock

print demonstrate how text and image can work together to produce a wholly different effect than what might be presumed to be carried out by either image or text alone. While the drawing itself appears to relish in guts and gore, the inscription frames that violent excess with a merciful morality. This particular juxtaposition of civilized text and barbaric image might seem facetious or hypocritical from our perspective today, but we might reconsider our own “civilized” position: Foucault’s model for the modern transition from execution to imprisonment is obviously contradicted by the continued practice of state executions (including those conducted by the Chinese, Japanese, and US states). While these contemporary executions are always hidden away in the prison or conducted on unseen foreign zones, carefully regulated private witnessing alongside public reportage continue to provide both the moralizing frame and the justification for the punishment that deters criminals or comforts victims’ families. In the 1894 triptych, the Chinese witnesses (potential “criminals”) are made to prove the civilizing function of the demonstrated execution at the warfront: their obedience becomes the moral measure of the image and the justification for its visual excess. In that sense, the Chinese student who witnesses *Illustrations of the Decapitation of Violent Chinese Soldiers* is, like Lu Xun, not an *accidental* viewer but the most *intended* viewer of all: the one whose witnessing justifies the civilizing mission claimed by the moral framers of the image itself.

Of course, such a visual rhetoric is primarily active for the viewer literate in Japanese language, those who make up the print buyers to whom the image was initially marketed, and certainly as well, many web users who might today see the image digitized online. For those unable to read the Japanese text, its content or function is perhaps only implied by the composition of the scene itself: the Chinese witnesses are depicted in order to stoke the civilizing gaze and sensory thrill found in watching the subjugation of spectators, disempowered subjects who are compelled to watch the violence. This particular pleasure (or cruelty) is then safely wrapped in a text that announces its civilizing mission. Text and image thus work together to make a spectacle out of the discipline of witnessing itself: upon seeing the execution, how will the “Chinese” react? As the inscription tells us, their obedient spectatorship proves that the civilizing killing is not unwarranted but indeed effective (even “compassionate”). When such a “demonstration”

is projected in a classroom to a student also named and visualized as “Chinese,” the classroom became an extended civilizing frame in which Lu Xun found himself a witness-prisoner too.

The particular print from which the digital image of *Illustration of the Decapitation of Violent Chinese Soldiers* was taken is held in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, part of a large gift of Meiji-era prints from Frederic A. Sharf, a trustee of the museum who assembled his collection between 1985 and 1999 through private dealers in New York and London. Though generally categorized as “war propaganda” by historians, Meiji triptychs of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars thus also function as objects of cultural and historical value, circulating in various contexts of reception, particularly the art historical.<sup>11</sup> As such they have been exhibited in art museums several times before. Many depict graphic scenes of battle action, and the current MIT Visualizing Cultures web page *The Devil in the Details* shows over thirty cropped and zoomed-in details from prints of Japanese soldiers skewering and crushing their Chinese, Manchu, Korean, and Russian victims.<sup>12</sup> As artistic objects, such prints had been exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 2001 and 2006, and at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1983 to little controversy, but *Illustration of the Decapitation of Violent Chinese Soldiers* itself appears not to have been exhibited in a US public context until its worldwide posting on the MIT website in 2006.

The strong reaction that the image provoked among Chinese overseas students at MIT puzzled and confused many observers. Graphically, the Kokunimasa image is hardly commensurate with visual depictions of real or imagined violence in the twenty-first century, nor is it even close to the state-of-the-art illusionism that would presumably fool the naive youngsters usually accused of being weaned on Hollywood. Where then does the “shock” among the Chinese university students lie? As with Lu Xun’s lantern slide, it certainly cannot be the “graphic” violence of the Kokunimasa print from which the incident derives its force. On the contrary, just as the pedagogical display of the spectacle in Lu Xun’s classroom replicated the disciplining of the Chinese witness-prisoners in the 1906 slide, the MIT teaching website’s display of the 2006 print interpellated a specific set of foreign students *named* as compulsory witnesses to the civilizing violence of the image itself.

Not unlike Lu Xun’s classroom, *Illustration of the Decapitation* was put on

view as part of an extracurricular activity, through an apparatus that extends invisibly from the projector-enabled classroom into the screen-centric living and studying spaces of the virtual campus. Like Lu Xun, an MIT student would have been shown the image within the pedagogical regime of the educational institution, while clicking through from the school's indispensable and quotidian home-page portal, [web.mit.edu](http://web.mit.edu). It was displayed, then, as part of a visual regime that began with the training of a universal subject in the progressive and nationalistic practices of the scientific and technological self (which is the stated mission of the MIT Institute), and rounded out its extra time with the visual projection of images of war, race, and imperialism. The deployment of this particular image within the enterprise of schooling impeccably demonstrates the Foucauldian vision of the school as a classificatory machine that marks out the distinct racial, ethnic, national, and civilizational essences of the taught subject. But, even without Foucault's analysis, it is clear that this is also the technique of war (the demonstration of civilizing violence to compulsory witnesses) composed in *Illustration* itself. Unwittingly subjected to this visual lesson, Lu Xun responded with the normative behavior of cheering along with his classmates. It was only later that he resigned from his school and turned to revolutionary literature. Subjected to the compulsory visibilities of the hypervisual digital classroom, many of MIT's Chinese overseas students did not applaud and wrote letters of dissent.

To be sure, although it was *words* that the organized students at MIT insisted was the target of their protest, and though it was an *image* that their critics charged them with "taking out of context," those words were, in essence, word-pictures of images. In other words, description—not visuality—was the issue around which protestors and critics were talking past one another. The sentences posted on the website that the students cited and objected to included, "There was tension, danger, huge risk in all this—and certainly as the artists conveyed it, exhilarating beauty as well."<sup>13</sup> A caption for a print depicting a battle at sea read, "The spectacle of modern warships engaged in furious battle offered a stimulating new subject for woodblock artists to celebrate."<sup>14</sup> Another paragraph began, "When all was said and done, what they visualized was a beautiful war."<sup>15</sup> Understood as descriptive captions on an image-centric webpage (which is characterized as conventional digital

“viewing” by defenders of the students but irresponsible “reading” by their critics), these individual aestheticizing statements make sense of the *artistic* discourse around which these images were made and today collected in art museums (as “beautiful” or “stimulating” images of subjects once “celebrated” in the past). However, as descriptions they gave little hint that the author John Dower disapproved of the images’ *political* meaning. In fact, in utilizing descriptions that seemed to take the intentions of the historical artists as the sole interpretation of the image, such “descriptive” sentences can be seen as an implied demonstration of propaganda’s affect: the (false) claim that depiction is truth.

Dower’s actual argument was revealed a few sentences, and sometimes, several paragraphs or webpages (or scrolls and clicks) later, for example, in one paragraph that began, “Even today, over a century later, this contempt remains shocking.” Describing the “racial stereotyping” of the prints “as disdainful,” he concluded, “This poisonous seed, already planted in violence in 1894–95, would burst into full atrocious flower four decades later, when the emperor’s soldiers and sailors once again launched war against China.”<sup>16</sup> Here Dower utilized a narrative voice that condemned the historical racist and militaristic context in which the Sino-Japanese war prints were produced, while providing his interpretation of this Meiji visual culture through the metaphor of a grotesque organicism, as the “atrocious flower” that “blooms” as the Second World War. In demanding that those earlier aestheticizing sentences be modified to take into account their “historical context,” the students were in essence questioning the rhetorical practice of objective description, even when intentionally (or perhaps ironically) embedded within a larger, multipage website with a political counter-argument.

Does description reenact violence? Does display? Does criticism? There are certainly entire intellectual traditions devoted to pondering such questions. Meanwhile, the discursive relationship of images and texts, and the social and political ramifications of their signification, are indeed central to the field of inquiry we call “visual culture.” Thus, when the student protestors raised such questions of image, text, and context, they stood well within the bounds of intellectual inquiry. Yet they were publicly reprimanded by sixty faculty members of their school for attacking the values of “academic freedom and scholarly integrity” because they had “fomented an email cam-

paign directed against MIT's educational mission."<sup>17</sup> These faculty members' decision to not see any intellectual grounds for the student protest is underlined in their letter by their concern for the inviolability of the scholarly work (in this case, the website, which had to be read "in its entirety") and their call for its protection under the institutional mission. It is a testament to Foucault's diagnoses of the modern institution that the political and intellectual questions that the university faculty immediately took up were not those of visibility and its cultural effects but instead the proper discipline of its foreign subjects.

### Visual Lessons

Does a digital work consist of the entire website, its individual pages, its fragmentary components, the entire platform that structures its viewing/reading modes, the institutional corpus that hosts it, or the participatory community making up its users? At the time of the MIT controversy in 2006, the Foucauldian figure of the panopticon had receded in cultural and academic popularity, as that other Foucauldian figure, heterotopia, had gained ground. Indeed, digital open-access projects then populating the Internet with all kinds of newly digitized material were valorized precisely because they were thought to bring difference and multiplicity to the public sphere. Likewise, the visual projection of social reality enabled by the World Wide Web and the digitization of the entire visual world were seen as part and parcel of a digital revolution, one comparable to the visual and communication technologies (like the glass lantern slide) that had transformed modern life at the turn of the past century.

Here it is useful to return to Lu Xun's microbiology classroom as a technologized site on which to ground the changes of our own time. The invention of the glass lantern slide in 1851 enabled the transfer of photographic images onto a transparent glass plate and thereby their projection, using the long-existing "magic" lantern, to larger and more public audiences than ever before. Similarly, the digital technologies of the late twentieth century spurred the remediation of lantern slides, daguerreotypes, stereoscopic images, photographs, paintings, postcards, books—in short, all print material from all past eras and media—for the express purpose of circulating

and projecting them into an exponentially expanding public sphere. At the time, the formation of a global imagined community joined by seamless digital visual communication seemed limited only by the infrastructural conditions of the Internet and even suggested the possibility of universal emancipation from singular, centralized, or authoritarian structures of power and knowledge. Precisely contesting the panopticon effect enacted by institutions of censorship and surveillance, the user-centric Internet seemed to offer, and even produce, a heterotopic space.

This utopian vision for the Internet seems hopelessly naive today. But the small controversy at MIT and its rehearsal of Lu Xun's lantern slide moment illuminates the long and continuing legacy of such ideals, ideals that educators and educational institutions expect to be achievable through the appropriation of popular visual technology. MIT's Visualizing Cultures website was but one component of MIT's much larger OpenCourseWare initiative, which was itself the precursor to edX, the \$30 million massively open online course (MOOC) platform that was jointly created with Harvard University in 2012. In 2013, serious critiques were raised about both edX and its competitor Coursera, specifically questioning whether the participatory and egalitarian ideals of the digital revolution would in fact be fulfilled as these initiatives promise. Both Robert Meister at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the philosophy faculty of the San Jose State University have eloquently warned that the same ideals of social justice upon which free and open-access digital courseware were founded can well be betrayed (if not seriously undermined) by its deployment within existing institutional and market frameworks.<sup>18</sup> Theirs was a powerful reminder that these education platforms, despite being free, open, and global, may not actually address the social inequalities of class, location, and race in either the United States or the world. Instead, Meister and the San Jose philosophy faculty pointed to how humanistic discourse itself could be destroyed by the global corporatization of elite educational institutions via these new platforms. The serious questions that they have raised deserve a substantive debate.<sup>19</sup>

As with the MOOC-driven university, Lu Xun's 1906 classroom appropriated a popular technological trend to reanimate pedagogy. Lu Xun was taught microbiology from projected lantern slides because both anatomical and microbiological slides were being produced by scientists and science

departments.<sup>20</sup> But long before that, lantern slide sets of popular topics and projectors were manufactured and packaged with scripts for commercial showmen and amateur lanternists to give quasi-educational illustrated lectures. Furthermore, around the turn of the century, governments at war (including the British in the Anglo-Boer War, Americans in World War I, and Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War) also appropriated the popular lantern slide show for wartime mobilization campaigns.<sup>21</sup> This diverse range of available lantern slides, as well as technologies reducing their production costs, made it possible for Lu Xun's teacher to fill the extra classroom time with images of natural scenery and current events.<sup>22</sup> Thus the seemingly schizophrenic slide show of microbiology, armchair travel, and war propaganda in Lu Xun's classroom actually reflected a representative sample of lantern glass slides available for popular use at the time, as well the wider social and political context of the deployment of that technology long before its adoption in the classroom.

Both the lantern slide and digital online pedagogical revolutions entailed the projection of visual images with the expectation that visuality alone mobilizes truth-values for its enlarged audiences. The presumption is that, since the public is so enamored with images, they do not question how they function. But of course, the opposite has proven to be the case: publics question images because they are so sophisticated about their uses and their abuses. As Lu Xun's lantern slide moment demonstrates, the classroom's new pedagogy brought with it a technology that already carried its own images, and these images already carried their own agendas. Similarly, online digital pedagogy simultaneously remixes and competes with the visual online world. As a result, images could never simply "illustrate" the authoritative discourse that was being taught in the classroom. Rather, both these technological practices and visual objects brought with them ideological problems of their own.

The projected classroom slide lecture pioneered in the late nineteenth century endured well into the late twentieth century, over a period in which Agfa color slides, the Kodak 3.5-mm slide, and the overhead projector were all introduced without prompting dreams of pedagogical revolution. But the analog projection of slides in classrooms ended definitively with the halt of slide projector production in 2002. Those professors who had once mastered

slide camera stands, taken their film to specialist labs, fiddled with paper labels, built substantive slide libraries, and sequenced their slide trays, had finally to learn the techniques of scanning, digital photography, file management, Powerpoint, file transfer, display adaptors, and so on. Around that time too, comprehensive visual digitization efforts in university and museum institutions, including the MIT Visualizing Cultures project, commenced. Such projects were part of the far larger and ongoing digitization initiatives among educational, archival, and museum institutions, for whom digital images were imagined to simply realize existing educational goals, rather than setting forth new ideals of digital access and participation. Few indeed were the institutional digital projects that did not replicate traditional notions of authorial power.

These visual digitization projects compressed the history of image production found in the material nature of prints, slides, paintings, and photographs into a single, seemingly invisible, and infinitely reproducible technology. They recall the grandiose dream of Oliver Wendell Holmes, who proclaimed in his famous 1859 essay on the stereoscope, “The time will come when a man who wishes to see any object, natural or artificial, will go to the Imperial, National, or City Stereographic Library and call for its skin or form, as he would for a book at any common library.”<sup>23</sup> Today, stereoscope images, along with glass lantern slides and 35-mm slides, are quietly being thrown into library trash bins, but Holmes’s utopian call for a total visual archive of the world remains the primary metaphor for those digitization projects. In practice, so many aspects of this totalizing metaphor would fail.

As with the gradual deployment of lantern slides in the nineteenth-century classroom, twenty-first-century visual technologies were already ubiquitous as commercial entertainment (in gaming, gambling, sports, and pornography) when they were adopted for educational projects. When nineteenth-century educators appropriated the popular magic lantern slide show, they tried to introduce more sober-sounding names like the “stereopticon,” or even “the scientific lantern” for the technology.<sup>24</sup> Such modest attempts to rebrand an already popular practice could not of course undo the fact that cultural and educational institutions were seeking entry into a social world long after basic protocols and expectations had been formed. One example of this conundrum occurred in the MIT controversy, in which

the long-standing Internet custom of digital authors to provide e-mail addresses for correspondence with web users was not observed by the MIT webpage. So, moreover, was the then-growing practice of providing a comments section or discussion forum for users' questions and responses. Protestors at the time noted these failures and interpreted them as an unwillingness of the webmaster to hear alternative points of view, or even as an attempt to hide authorial responsibility under an impenetrable institutional authority. If participatory spaces and modes of interaction had been offered on the MIT Visualizing Cultures website at the time of the 2006 controversy, might the protest have moved onto other online spaces (with their own community interests, conventions, and practices), offline (in the form of telephone calls), or to the US and Chinese news media (each with their nationalistic biases) so quickly, so far afield, and with so many contradictory accounts of the events themselves?

What might have happened had the authors of the site adopted the conventions and possibilities of the technology they were appropriating cannot be known in retrospect, but the 2006 event was prescient in showing educators that the participatory technologies of the Internet are not only tools but also practices fraught with new expectations and responsibilities. In the recent debate on MOOCs, the San Jose philosophy faculty have questioned the utility and justice of having their students watch—but not question—Harvard professor Michael Sandel as he is engaging his own students in videos, teaching a course that also happens to be entitled, “JusticeX.” As the San Jose faculty asked, what kind of “justice” is it to broadcast to students only the claims of an authority without giving them the possibility of engaging that authority in debate? Since digital media does offer such unprecedented tools for direct communication, the lack of opportunities for basic interaction with online teachers would be counter to the logic to the mission itself. The promise of the digital classroom seems quite obviously to reside in increasing participation in humanistic discourse and not in turning websites into proxies incommunicado for professors.

What might a truly “engaging” image-first pedagogical world, which teaches images not only as uncomplicated appendages to texts, look like? In historical terms, the longest-running example we have is the art history lecture, which, with slide projector, darkened room, and visual narrative,

crystallized the nineteenth-century lantern slide show into a disciplinary form unto itself.

In art history, the lantern slide was first adopted in Germany at the Polytechnic Institute of Karlsruhe and the University of Berlin, where in 1901 it was taken up by Heinrich Wölfflin, whose legendary lecture style became seminal to a discipline that remains today centered around the illustrated lecture.<sup>25</sup> Wölfflin's lectures famously inaugurated the "dual slide" format of art history lectures, enabling the constant and direct visual comparison of images from which art historical narratives are motivated. In addition to being a central component of Wölfflin's scholarship on stylistic transitions in the history of art, the dual slide lecture form enabled visual modes of argumentation, allowing the art historian to make claims of reference, continuity, difference, and progression through the selection of images alone. Rather than relying on texts to explain images, in other words, selection produces visual chains of historical narrative that are made to seem self-explanatory—as if motivated by the images themselves. Art history pedagogy has thus made image comparisons the driving force of diegesis, the very opposite of rendering them illustrative appendages to a textual narrative. In this form, and indeed in art historical practices from the lecture to the museum exhibition to the collection, it is firstly the sheer selection of images, secondly their ordering, and only thirdly their oral and written texts that generate narrative. It is selection alone, for example, around which canonical legitimacy and collecting is preoccupied. It is ordering (or "organizing") that is the public education concern of curators and museum educators. And it is also ordering, in the form of instrumentalization and rationalization, that historians of photography such as John Tagg and Allen Sekula have effectively shown to function most powerfully in institutional regimes of visibility.<sup>26</sup>

In his analysis of the techniques of the art history lecturer, Robert Nelson argues that art history professionals developed performative conventions of eliding the image with the art object it depicts, to create a seamless "performative triangle of speaker, audience, and image."<sup>27</sup> Of the lectures of Heinrich Wölfflin, Nelson describes how vividly, "by his gaze and voice, the professor drew together audience and object, first looking with them at the object and then seemingly speaking to the audience on behalf of the

object.”<sup>28</sup> Nelson, in other words, points out how the visual-object expert learned to efface himself, seemingly transferring authority to the images themselves. Whether it is viable, or even possible, to continue in such a mode of lecture hall performance is the question prompted by online visual pedagogy today.

The visual world in which mobile photography, social media, and micro-blogs reign supreme similarly privileges selection, while, at the moment, it maintains vibrant contestation over its ordering. In this sense, the hyperlink or relational tools of the early Internet and their Web 2.0 successors continue to enable significant departures from authority-centered modes of knowledge culture. For instance, Internet conventions for “reblogging” images habitually deemphasize (or indeed erase) the “original contexts” that images may have first been posted under, because protocols for “trackbacks” enable the maintenance of these chains of transmission in digital culture. The reblogging of images would be seen as “decontextualization” or even a literal “ripping off” in print culture, which was what the MIT protestors were accused of doing when they “reposted” the Kokunimasa image. In more recent forms, Web 2.0 tools for tagging and sharing images continue to hold potential for continuously altering the relationship between roving visual images and the static archive or catalogue, while social media networks and mobile photography have further deconstructed stable relationships between origin, image, and authority. To the extent that no single ordering system is able to claim authority in all the distinct spaces of the Internet, there would remain no single text—nor context—that can exclusively lay claim to those chains of transmission. This we can see in the unexpected connections viewers could draw between Lu Xun’s teachers’ microbial lantern slides shown minutes apart from the execution lantern slide, or those of an historical execution woodblock print found clicks away from MIT’s institutional home page. Among many, many other Internet controversies sparked by wayward images, the MIT debate reveals how pedagogical display on the World Wide Web of the 2000s entered into a diegetic space already infused with interpretation, selection, and reordering.

In such a visual regime, we might have to make do with the fact that no caption or inscription can contain the meaning of the image with as much authority as the image that preceded it, or that comes after. Like the anony-

mous caption of Lu Xun's slide (justifying the beheading of the Chinese because he was a spy), or the text penned under a pseudonym running along *Illustration of Decapitation* (justifying the beheading of Chinese prisoners because it was civilizing), or John Dower's text (arguing that the print was militaristic propaganda), the words attached to an image can only temporarily and incompletely speak for images that already function in multiple discourses and languages, and that already imply alternative modes of viewing. Such textual articulations are made subordinate to the operations of virtual viewing but also of the history, selection, and ordering of images themselves. What we have are all the images that come before these iconic executions, of microbes (magnifying the "foreign"), of the front lines (assuring the truth-value of the "reportage"), and the familiar institutional home page (giving the imprimatur of institutional advocacy).

Does the emancipatory potential of digital technology and the World Wide Web provide a means for the educational institution to reframe its mission, particularly in light of the critique of power so influentially put forth by Foucault? How can the global immediacy of these technologies serve as a buttress against the "provincialization of public knowledge" facing the university?<sup>29</sup> Seven years since the 2006 controversy, it has become abundantly clear that the early twenty-first-century Internet is as much a heterotopic space of participation as it is one of unsurpassed authoritarian surveillance and censorship. Should the university wish to address its students as global political citizens (and not merely as "patriotic" foreign children), its own digitization of pedagogy will require more careful consideration of the international dynamics of digital power and dissent (addressed by Jack Qiu, Zhou Kui, and James Farrer in this volume). In a visual realm replete with ideological collisions and manipulation, "participation" is easily turned to the purposes of surveillance, just as "propaganda" has become as contestable a historical construction as "objectivity."

The "truth" aside, between the two slide moments set a century apart, we have at least some historic continuities to learn from: images construct visibilities and legibilities, as they construct their viewers, and the contexts in which they are displayed can reinforce and reify many supposed truths. An execution for the purposes of moral demonstration requires the obedience of compulsory witnesses, and its visual rhetoric can be extended by

the power of remediation across historical time and national boundaries. If the visual classroom is to be a heterotopic space, and not the draconian one portrayed by Foucault's topos of discipline, these visibilities and possibilities, subtexts and interpellations, need to be accounted for and addressed by the redeployers of images.

At the time of the MIT controversy, many critics of the protestors argued that MIT's overseas Chinese students had "misread" the original Visualizing Cultures website. That is to say, they were criticized for failing to understand the authored text to which images were intended to be permanently attached and subservient. One of the reasons for their misreading was presumed to be MIT's overtraining of the scientific self, and the belief that they were untrained in humanistic reasoning, English language, and proper American university discourse. As a graduate teaching assistant in art history at MIT that same year, 2006, I have my own contradictory anecdote. In our introductory art history class filled almost entirely with science majors, a freshman in bioengineering and for whom that semester was his very first in the English language began our discussion by asking, "Do images reflect history or is history created by images?" It is the openness of this student's question, his intelligent invitation to think over the relation between the power of visuality and the power of writing, that the MIT controversy should invite us to reconsider.

## Notes

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1. See the translation of "Mr. Fujino," in the preface of *Outcry* by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in *Lu Xun: Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), 34–35:

I have no idea what improved methods are now used to teach microbiology, but in those days we were shown lantern slides of microbes; and if the lecture ended early, the instructor might show slides of natural scenery or news to fill up the time. Since this was during the Russo-Japanese War, there were many war slides, and I had to join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a news-reel slide of a number of Chinese,

one of them bound and the rest standing around him. They were all sturdy fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians who was to be beheaded by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the Chinese beside him had come to enjoy the spectacle.

Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because this slide convinced me that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they might be, could only serve to be made examples of or as witnesses of such futile spectacles; and it was not necessarily deplorable if many of them died of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit; and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement.

2. David Der-Wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 10.
3. Lydia Liu, "Translating National Character: Lu Xun and Arthur Smith," in *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity: China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 63.
4. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1977; repr., New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), 9.
5. *Ibid.*, 30.
6. *Ibid.*, 166.
7. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 6.
8. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 137–39.
9. Larissa Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 156.
10. A Japanese transcription of another edition of the print in the Waseda University Library is available at [www.f48.aacafe.ne.jp/~adsawada/siryou/062/66g.html](http://www.f48.aacafe.ne.jp/~adsawada/siryou/062/66g.html) (accessed October 7, 2014). A translation of this transcription follows:

Picture of the Beheading of Violent Qing Soldiers

The justice and mercy of our army is not only something not to be ashamed of in comparison with the civilized countries of Europe and America, it is already widely reputed for even exceeding them.

In contrast to this, the cruelty and barbarity of the Qing soldiers arouses the anger of heaven and men, as witnessed in such incidents as when they broke into a Red Cross hospital and killed injured men in their beds whose arms and legs could not move freely.

In the case of prisoners of war this time, our army has treated them with the utmost generosity, naturally not treating them severely. Yet since the brutal manners of their nation have seeped deep into their minds, when caught Qing soldiers think they will be killed. So they commit acts of violence toward the guards protecting them, and since some stole the swords hanging at the guards' sides and attacked them, however magnanimously one may handle them, these soldiers inevitably had to be treated according to military discipline. So thirty-eight who had been violent were taken out and their heads cut off in front of the others. [The officer] turned to the remaining prisoners and advised them: "Our army never kills you without reason. When the war is over we will treat you well and send you back to your home country, but those who commit violent acts against us we must punish in this way. You must follow my orders obediently." It is said that the prisoners all wept with emotion, profoundly moved by the justice and mercy of our imperial army. Truly it is said that mercy and punishment must go together.

Winter of 1894, tenth month

Recorded by Ōka-sei

11. Louise Virgin, "War Triptychs," in *Japan at the Dawn of the Modern Age: Woodblock Prints from the Meiji Era, 1868–1912* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001). See also Donald Keene, "Prints of the Sino-Japanese War" in Shumpei Okamoto, *Impressions of the Front: Woodcuts of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–95: Philadelphia Museum of Art, April 23 to June 26, 1983* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1983).
12. MIT Visualizing Cultures, [http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/throwing\\_off\\_asia\\_02/vis\\_nav\\_ii\\_h.html](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/throwing_off_asia_02/vis_nav_ii_h.html) (accessed October 7, 2014).
13. "Throwing Off China," [www.web.archive.org/web/20051021062024/http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027j/throwing\\_off\\_asia/toa\\_core\\_02.html](http://www.web.archive.org/web/20051021062024/http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027j/throwing_off_asia/toa_core_02.html) (accessed October 16, 2014).
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. "Old China, New Japan," cited from [www.web.archive.org/web/20051021062247/http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027j/throwing\\_off\\_asia/toa\\_core\\_04.html](http://www.web.archive.org/web/20051021062247/http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027j/throwing_off_asia/toa_core_04.html) (accessed October 16, 2014).
17. "MIT Faculty Statement on the Visualizing Cultures Web Site," *Tech*, June 9, 2006, [tech.mit.edu/V126/N27/facultyletter.html](http://tech.mit.edu/V126/N27/facultyletter.html).
18. See "An Open Letter to Professor Michael Sandel from the Philosophy Department at San Jose State U" (April 29, 2013), *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 2, 2013, [www.chronicle.com/article/article-content/138937/](http://www.chronicle.com/article/article-content/138937/); Bob Meister, "Can Venture Capital Deliver on the Promise of the Public University?," *n+1 magazine*, May 17, 2013, [www.nplusonemag.com/can-venture-capital-deliver-on-the-promise-of-the-public-university](http://www.nplusonemag.com/can-venture-capital-deliver-on-the-promise-of-the-public-university).
19. See "Letter from 58 Professors to Dean Smith Addressing edX," *Harvard Crimson*, May 23, 2013, [www.thecrimson.com/flash-graphic/2013/5/23/edx-faculty-letter-smith/#](http://www.thecrimson.com/flash-graphic/2013/5/23/edx-faculty-letter-smith/#).

20. Robert Spindler, "Windows to the American Past: Lantern Slides as Historical Evidence," *Visual Resources* 5, no. 1 (1988): 2.
21. Clayton Funk, "Popular Culture, Art Education, and the Committee on Public Information during World War I, 1915–1919," *Visual Arts Research* 37, no. 1 (2011): 67–78. Denis Condon, "Receiving News from the Seat of War: Dublin Audiences Respond to Boer War Entertainments," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 9, no. 2 (2011): 93–106. See also Simon Popple, "'Fresh from the Front': Performance, War News, and Popular Culture during the Boer War," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8, no. 4 (2010): 401–18, esp. p. 402. Naoko Shimazu, "Patriotic and Despondent: Japanese Society at War, 1904–5," *Russian Review* 67 (January 2008): 34–49.
22. A popular series of slide sets with accompanying narrative was *Wilson's Lantern Journeys*, published by the author Edward L. Wilson (1879–84). An advertisement for an English firm offering its £3 lantern and slide kit, and boasting that its products were already in use in "America, China, India, Japan, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Ashantee, Abyssinia, Diamond Fields, &c. &c.," also appeared in Edward L. Wilson, *Wilson's Photographics: A Series of Lessons, Accompanied by Notes, on All the Processes Which Are Needful in the Art of Photography* (New York: Edward L. Wilson, 1878).
23. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1859, [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1859/06/the-stereoscope-and-the-stereograph/303361/](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1859/06/the-stereoscope-and-the-stereograph/303361/).
24. Spindler, "Windows to the American Past," 2. Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 475. See also Colby Chamberlain, "Mont Blanc Montage," *Cabinet* 27 (Fall 2007), [cabinetmagazine.org/issues/27/chamberlain.php](http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/27/chamberlain.php).
25. Christopher L. C. E. Witcombe, "Using Technology to Teach Art History," paper presented at the Southeastern College Art Conference, Louisville, Kentucky, October 2000, [arthistoryresources.net/arth-technology/](http://arthistoryresources.net/arth-technology/).
26. See John Tagg, "The Archiving Machine; or, The Camera and the Filing Cabinet," *Grey Room* 47 (Spring 2012): 24–37. Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3–64.
27. Robert S. Nelson, "The Slide Lecture, or the Work of Art 'History' in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 3 (2000): 415.
28. *Ibid.*, 420.
29. Michael Burawoy, "Redefining the Public University: Developing an Analytical Framework," *Academia and the Public Sphere*, August 5, 2011, [publicsphere.ssrc.org/burawoy-redefining-the-public-university/](http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/burawoy-redefining-the-public-university/).