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Satirising imperial anxiety in Victorian Britain: Representing Japan in *Punch* Magazine, 1852-1893

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ABSTRACT

Japan's opening to global trade during the second half of the nineteenth century aroused much interest from Western nations. Attempts to understand the nation were made by classifying Japan and its people within the racial and political hierarchies known at the time, which were frequently contradictory in attitude. By focusing on the popular British satirical magazine, *Punch*, this paper explores the ways in which Japan was used as a satirical "other" between 1852 and 1893. The fluctuating representations reveal socio-political anxieties during a period of heightened consciousness towards ideological and geopolitical power dynamics.

In 1852, the British satirical magazine *Punch* published an image depicting Japan's encounter with America (Figure 1). The image was published when British interest was aroused with news regarding the United States' planned expedition to Japan. The caption references the country's long seclusion policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate that came to an end after pressure from Commodore Matthew Perry's expedition. The cartoon is both textually and visually interesting; the caption puts forward the notion of free trade forced upon nations at gunpoint, a recurring criticism that appeared in *Punch* during the Victorian era. The image of the Japanese figure suggests a lack of knowledge about Japan and what its inhabitants looked like. Depicted as a caricatured African figure, cartoon representations of the Japanese changed as more information on and about Japan made its way to Britain during a time of British global expansion.

While seemingly light-hearted, *Punch*'s employment of Japan in its satirical cartoons underscore the complex connection between these images and Britain's geopolitical vision. This paper explores *Punch*'s textual and visual representations of Japan between 1852 and 1893. It begins with the "opening" of Japan and ends before the First Sino-Japanese war of 1894–1895, an event that dramatically altered the playing field between nations in the global arena (Matthewson, 2018). This paper argues that *Punch*'s use and manipulation of Japan as a satirical "other" not only contributed to constructed imaginaries of the Japanese, it also reflected a consciousness and anxiety towards racial and political power dynamics. The representations oscillated between unacknowledged desire and contemptuous ridicule; a paradox that "simultaneously confirms and denies

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TWO WORDS TO A BARGAIN.

JAPANESE. *" We won't have Free Trade. Our Ports are closed, and shall remain so."*

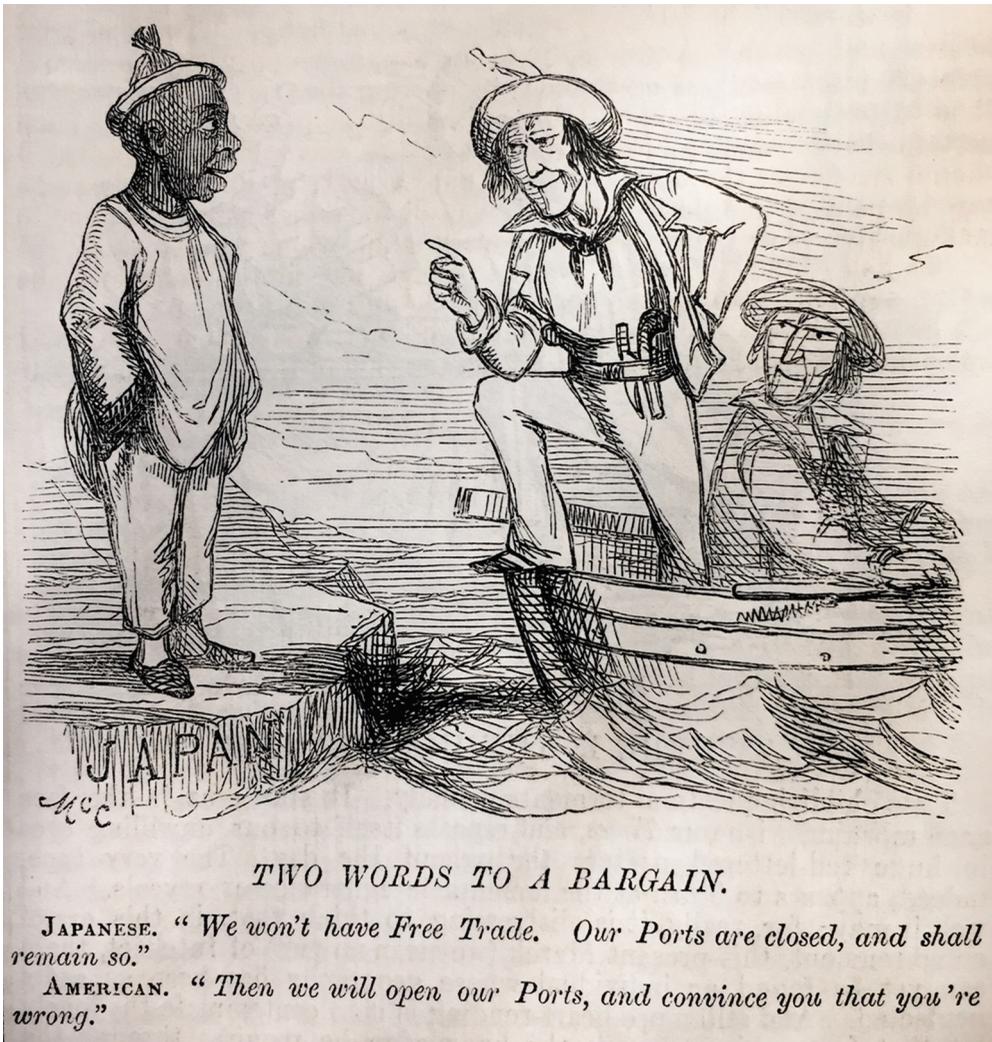AMERICAN. *" Then we will open our Ports, and convince you that you're wrong."*

Figure 1. *Punch*, Vol. 22, 1852, p.187.

both the possibilities of empowerment through laughter and of devaluation through derision" (Richter, 2005, p. 65).

This paper begins by situating *Punch* magazine along with members of staff within their historical frameworks of understanding. It takes a brief look at the various personalities and places them alongside Japan's changing socio-political relationship with the international community. As national concerns over social order and wider geopolitical relations fluctuated and shifted, so too did *Punch*'s representations of Japan. The next section explores humour and laughter from a post-colonial perspective. It considers power dynamics and ambiguity of the "other" within colonial discourse and asks whether humour and laughter, as derision or as desire, colludes and maintains social and racial hierarchies.

The following section investigates Japan as an "Oriental observer," a long-standing tool employed to satirise national foibles. Although it is British manners and social ills that are the target of attack, *Punch*'s exaggeration of Japanese physiognomy played a crucial role in fixing a representational system of "othering." The paper moves on to examine perceptions of Japanese women. The extremity of contradictory attitudes and opinions highlight the ambiguous position of "otherness" expressed in stereotyping. The final section analyses fashion by exploring sartorial visual cues on British and Japanese bodies.

On British women's bodies, clothing was significant in showcasing Britain as a civilised nation, whereas *Punch*'s depictions of the Japanese in western attire engendered indignation at Japan's disruption of established geopolitical and racial hierarchies. This anxious indignation encapsulates *Punch*'s treatment of Japan throughout the period studied. When considering the series of representations of Japan, *Punch* reveals an acute awareness and anxiety not only of who had the right to claim "civilised" status, but also of Britain's position and authority in the global arena during a time of heightened geopolitical tensions between rival imperial powers.

Punch and Japan, 1852-1893

Scholars often refer to *Punch* as a national institution in the Victorian era, and its circulation numbers, global influence, and longevity mark the magazine as one of the most successful magazines of the English-speaking world from its inaugural issue in 1841 until its last publication in 2002 (Leary, 2010, pp. 1–2; Hans, 2013, pp. 1, PUNCH, n.p.). The magazine boasted an impressive readership that included Henry James, Thomas Carlyle, and C.S. Lewis as well as Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, Kaiser Wilhelm and Tsar Nicholas (Altick, 1997, pp. xvii-xx). Although *Punch* was enjoyed by such distinguished figures, the magazine catered to its primarily conservative middle-class readers. In regards to actual numbers of readers, scholars on Victorian periodicals give a conservative estimate of the ratio of readers to copies as five to one (Altick, 1997, p. 38). For *Punch*, this would mean:

The above table (Table 1), however, does not record how many subscribers shared their issue with friends and family members nor does it reflect circulation of the magazine in public places such as coffee houses or gentlemen's clubs (Altick, 1997, p. 39).

In the case of this paper, the magazine provides an interesting case study in understanding a particular section of Victorian society, namely, the middle class, and how "othering" functioned as a way of maintaining distance and hierarchies through stereotypes that rendered the unknowable familiar. Between 1852 and 1893, the magazine had several editors at the helm, each with their own personal biases and worldview. In 1841, co-founder and co-editor Mark Lemon worked alongside Henry Mayhew before becoming

Table 1. *Punch* circulation table.

Year	Total Copies	Total readers
1844	22,795	113,975
1845	43,220	216,100
1846	48,990	244,950
1847	39,335	196,675
1848	37,535	187,675
1849	33,255	166,275
1850	33,180	165,900

sole editor from 1845 until his death in 1870. Lemon famously kept a close watch over the contents and tone of *Punch*, ensuring that the magazine's humour aligned with middle-class Victorian notions of propriety and respectability. The distinguished art critic Marion Spielmann asserts that Lemon understood "public feeling" and "had an unerring instinct as to what should and what should not appear in the paper" (Spielmann, 1895, p. 263).

During Lemon's time as editor, the most powerful influences at the magazine were his and Douglas Jerrold while John Leech supplied the visual tone of the cartoons. During these years, *Punch* experienced a clash in political opinion; Jerrold gave the magazine a "radical" edge, frequently railing against the rich and powerful, and this stance was challenged by Leech, whose popular illustrations were crucial to the success of the magazine. Leech was a vocal Tory who despised the working class; he was supported by Cambridge-educated William Makepeace Thackeray, *Punch*'s second most popular writer. Between 1855 and 1857, the magazine changed its tone and outlook, beginning with the resignation of Thackeray and then in 1857, the death of Jerrold (Leary, 2010, pp. 24–26).

Two figures already working at *Punch* became central members of staff: the conservative Shirley Brooks became editor in 1870 and the classically trained painter and illustrator John Tenniel became the key artist after the death of Leech in 1864. The art critic Marion Spielmann records a conversation with Tenniel in which the artist declared, "As for political opinions, I have none; at least, if I have my own little politics, I keep them to myself, and profess only those of my paper" (Spielmann, 1895, p. 463). Brooks, on the other hand, was a staunch Conservative and when Lemon died in 1870, Brooks became editor and exerted his political leanings to the tone of the magazine. Patrick Leary describes the man as follows:

> [Brooks] distrusted most members of the working class on principle, applauded the imperialistic gusto of Palmerston ('a true Englishman'), disapproved of Catholics (especially Irish ones), was outraged by the disestablishment of the Irish Church in 1869 (although utterly without religious feeling himself), felt a reflexive suspicion of Jews, [and] thought the dark races irremediably inferior. (Leary, 2010, p. 121)

In 1874, Brooks died and the editor post was taken up by distinguished academic Tom Taylor, who held that position for the next six years. Moving away from Brooks "imperialistic gusto," Taylor imparted an "anti-Imperial turn" (Spielmann, 1895, p. 99), being Liberal in politics, although hesitant to further the suffrage cause (Leary, 2014, n.p.). Unfortunately, his time as editor is remembered as turning *Punch* into dullness itself as Taylor lacked both a sense of humour and management skills (Leary, 2010, p. 174). When he died in 1880, Cambridge-educated Francis Burnand became editor and remained in the position until 1906. Under his editorship, political coverage was Liberal and with an excellent array of artists – such as the continued presence of Tenniel as well as newer member Harry Furniss – *Punch* was revived to its former reputation (Leary, 2010, p. 174).

There were also significant contributions from Percival Leigh, nicknamed "the Professor" because of his initial education in the medical profession and his solemn manner, who proved to be a steady contributor to the magazine for decades (Leary, 2010, p. 22). Artistic contributions included Charles Keene who, despite his shy mannerism, declared himself "a hot Tory" with strong aversion towards Liberal tendencies (Spielmann, 1895, p. 481). He shared artistic responsibilities with others, including

George du Maurier, who, unlike Keene, enjoyed and mingled with Society where he found most of his satirical subjects and delighted in lampooning English male and female sartorial choices and social etiquette (Spielmann, 1895, p. 506). These varied personalities came together each week to discuss, debate, and argue over topical subjects that should be covered by the magazine.

Despite being a satirical magazine and not a "serious" work, *Punch* offered its readers a way of understanding their fast-changing world through their textual and visual satirical commentaries. Mid-nineteenth century Britain experienced shifts in established hierarchies of class and race and new notions of progress and civilisation shaped ideological perspectives. *Punch* engaged with dramatic events in a way that allowed for the "strange" and unfamiliar to become knowable in a palpable, light-hearted, albeit stereotypical, fashion. With the so-called "discovery" of a civilised society in Japan after its seclusion policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate came to an end at the turn of the 1850s, trade with the West began and information on and about Japan made its way through the media, travelogues, and the illustrated press.

The rapid development of Japan, its rise as an imperialist power, and its relationship with the international community remains a matter of interest. Toshio Yokoyama's study on the representations of Japan in late nineteenth-century Britain, *Japan in the Victorian Mind*, includes a discussion on performing arts and public exhibitions, however, the focus is again primarily on textual sources. Satire and its relationship with "otherness" are not a prominent feature in Yokoyama's research. An interesting recurring theme throughout his book is the frequency of Victorian writers connecting Japan with "civilisation" and the Japanese with "civility" (Yokoyama, 1987, pp. 60–61). Japan certainly gained respect and international standing after its rapid victory over China in the First Sino-Japanese war (1894–1895) and as the first Asian nation to defeat a Western nation in the Russo-Japanese war (1904–1905).

During the period under study in this paper, Japan functioned not only as an "Oriental Other" to Britons but also as a distorted mirror image to British notions of polite society and respectability. *Punch* utilised knowledge of Japan to create its satirical commentaries, which cut both ways; the magazine lampooned British social manners and at the same time, it ridiculed the Japanese and underscored their "foreignness" and racial difference. While the magazine raised unsettling questions about the claim to civilised status, it nevertheless sided with Britain's imperialist agenda. The jabs against British social norms were meant to produce a chuckle while foreign manners and racial differences were firmly, and safely, established as "other" (Banta, 2003, pp. 32–34).

In general, Victorian writers described Japan as a "singular country" populated with amiable people and by the 1860s, this favourable view extended to products and interest in the arts of Japan, which culminated in the "Cult of Japan," in which things Japanese, such as fans, woodblock prints, and screens, played a significant role in the artistic life and tastes of High Victorian England (Lambourne, 1996, pp. 28–47). *Punch* recognized the importance of Japan in this aesthetic movement and responded by lampooning a series of cartoons entitled "Our Japanneries" between 26 May and 10 November 1888 to ridicule the rage for all things Japanese. The

Figure 2. *Punch*, Vol. 94, 2 June 1888, p.263.

illustrator Harry Furniss, under his pseudonym Lika Joko, created the series satirising British social and political life in the "Japanese style" of art (Figures 2 & 3).

What was ultimately admired was the "simplicity" of a remote Japan with its old-worldliness that engendered nostalgic sentiments in a rapidly changing industrial Britain. Japan was, like Britain, an island nation and quickly modernising along Western ideas of progress. The difficulty in classifying Japan within established racial and national hierarchies caused anxiety and confusion. The repeated descriptions of a "civilised" island nation positioned Japan as a suitable counterpart to Britain, which would have heightened an awareness and consciousness of notions of "civilisation" as well as nationhood and hierarchies among the global community. It is in this contested space that *Punch*'s

THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

Figure 3. *Punch*, Vol. 95, 7 July 1888, p.11.

editors, writers, and artists made the unfamiliar and "foreign" both familiar and graspable to its British readership.

In 1895, Spielmann published *The History of Punch* and it arguably remains the most comprehensive study on the magazine to date. Spielmann was clearly an admirer and his massive volume drips with praise for *Punch*; nevertheless, his research is invaluable as it offers a unique perspective into the inner workings of the magazine, drawn from Spielmann's interviews with *Punch* members of staff and his access to material that is no longer available. For Spielmann, one of the commendable qualities of the magazine was that it stayed away from vulgarity, offering instead a sanitised version of humour that coincided with Victorian middle-class sensibilities and notions of respectability. He was not alone in this assessment. Thackeray declared, "that there never was before published in this world so many volumes that contained so much cause for laughing, and so little for blushing; so

many jokes, and so little harm" (Spielmann, 1895, p. 5). Indeed, one of the key contributing factors for the success of *Punch* was its ability to provide clean and "harmless humour" that the entire family could enjoy. But was it harmless?

Harmless humour?

Views on humour parallel its political and social environments; what one finds amusing reveals wider moral, aesthetic, and political themes and is further dependant on an individual's cultural background, identity, tastes, politics, and state of mind (Billig, 2005, p. 38; Keith-Spiegel, 1972). The representations of Japan that are explored in this paper were created at a time when particular notions of progress and civilisation shaped ideological perspectives of other nations and their people. *Punch*'s depictions were an important vehicle of disseminating ideas and it not only played on shared stereotypes of non-Europeans, but also created for the British a worldview, which was fundamental to their perception of themselves in and among the international community. As a political satirical magazine publishing during heightened geopolitical tensions, its humour could hardly be seen as completely harmless.

Thomas Hobbes believed that ridicule lies at the heart of humour and he cautions against smiles and laughter. "Sudden glory" he argues,

> is the passion which maketh those *grimaces* called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. (Hobbes, 1998, p. 38)

For Hobbes, laughter was primarily an act of derision and was indicative of inner scorn. Feelings of superiority thus arise through laughter as "men laugh at the infirmities of others, by comparison of which their own abilities are set off and illustrated" (Hobbes, 2017, p. 54). Laughter thereby derives from the pleasure of ridiculing the weakness and "infirmities" of others and we need to carefully consider what lies behind the smiles and jokes (Billig, 2005, p. 52).

Centuries later, Sigmund Freud would take Hobbes' idea of superiority further by describing jokes as symbolic victories over an enemy (Richter, 2005, p. 63). Laughter, he states, has aggressive components by allowing us to enjoy the unacceptable and thereby providing a socially acceptable outlet for pent-up aggressive impulses. The most pleasurable jokes are tendentious, which he describes as hostile or obscene and intended to humiliate (Freud, 1905, p. 71). The American essayist Agnes Repplier echoed these sentiments, declaring that "Humour which has no scorn, wit which has no sting, jests which have no victim, these are not the pleasantries which have provoked mirth" (Repplier, 1920, p. 276). She quotes William Hazlitt, "One rich source of the ludicrous is distress with which we cannot sympathize from its absurdity or insignificance" (Repplier, 1920, p. 263). For Repplier, "Whatever we laugh at, we condone" and "laughter quiets our uneasy scruples and disposes us to simple savagery" (Repplier, 1920, p. 276).

The theories that expound the idea of humour as centred on notions of superiority and/or hostility beg the question as to whether or not "laughter can itself collude with power, i.e. whether the ridicule can be a means of oppression" (Richter, 2005, p. 62). If structures of power cannot be separated from the politics of humour, what and who we choose to mock or deride can never be innocent and this is particularly so when the

target of the joke is directed against marginal and minority individuals and groups. In Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism*, he argues that Western discourse represented and managed societies and peoples of "the Orient" through homogenised repetitive patterns of representations in and across various hegemonic institutions, which produced and disseminated an imaginative historical narrative. Said questioned who had the power and authority to represent other cultures and for what purpose, and he underscored the relationship between dynamics of power and the production of knowledge. The act of making something or someone visible is to gain knowledge and power, however illusory.

Punch's role in disseminating – or as Said asserts, in distributing "geopolitical awareness into aesthetic" texts and images positioned the Orient as the antithesis to the West (Said, 1994, p. 12). "European culture" Said argues, "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said, 1994, p. 3). *Punch*'s power to textually and visually represent Japan, with no reciprocity in the British media, reveals socio-political inequalities and geopolitical hierarchal relations; the magazine had the power to produce frameworks of understanding a foreign "other," thereby underscoring Said's argument. *Punch*'s satires, however, extend beyond a simplistic and problematic binary reading that Saidean theory offers. A more profound understanding of the magazine's representations is better illuminated by Homi Bhabha's discourse on ambivalence in colonial stereotype.

Bhabha states that "otherness" is "at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity" (Bhabha,, p. 67). Stereotypes require an endless cycle of repetition, oscillating between desire and rejection, in order for its continued success in fixing meaning and maintaining illusions (Bhabha,, p. 77). What is significant is not replacing "bad" stereotypes with "good truth" but in understanding the ambivalence in colonial stereotypes (Richter, 2005, p. 64). For Bhabha, it is only through a careful investigation of desire and derision that we are able to better grasp colonial discourse and potentially dismantle it. The following sections will take a closer look at the ways in which Japan functioned as familiar stereotype, at once recognisable and fully knowable to the Victorian audience, while at the same time, a clear indicator of "foreignness" and difference. While impossible to know the extent to which readers in the past laughed at specific *Punch* jokes, Hobbes, Freud, and Repplier are indispensable in considering humour and laughter alongside the postcolonial perspectives of Said and Bhabha.

Japan as an "Oriental observer"

The employment of a "foreign other" has been a popular and long-standing tool used by satirists to explore and challenge national cultures, values, and principles. In the eighteenth century, Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World* used fictitious Oriental observers as vehicles to evaluate claims of universal truths, highlight a nation's social foibles and ills, as well as question values and beliefs. While it is the satirist's own nation that is the obvious subject of attack, the ideological use of "Orientals" perpetuated stereotypes and highlighted racial difference. *Punch*'s depictions of Japan as the foreign "other" reveal what was known – and unknown, about the Japanese in late nineteenth-century Britain. In December 1858, a small Japanese figure

Figure 4. *Punch*, Vol. 35, 18 December 1858, p.251.

with fan, samurai sword, and topknot decorates a page of *Punch* (Figure 4). Unlike the earlier cartoon of 1852 (Figure 1), this small figure demonstrates that by the end of the 1850s, there was more information about Japan, thereby enabling *Punch* artists to depict a more recognisable Japanese caricature.

The emphasis of these figures is their racial "otherness" and this provided readers with a sense of national identity through a clear demarcation of differences in physiognomy. However, these cartoons should not only be read within a straightforward "us" versus "them" framework of understanding; *Punch* was notorious for its contrasting and contradicting stance on numerous issues. Despite Spielmann's assertion that "[f]rom first to last, *Punch* has always been an Imperialist" as well as "an Englishman of intense patriotism" (Spielmann, 1895, pp. 120, 110), the magazine did not shy away from criticising some hegemonic values while maintaining, even promoting, others.

Punch devoted many of its satirical commentaries to parodying Victorian notions of civilisation and challenging readers to question who had the right to make that claim. In 1872, Tenniel illustrated "Jeddo and Belfast; Or, a Puzzle for Japan" representing Japanese figures as ambassadors to Britain (Figure 5). The depiction utilises familiar stereotypes of "Japaneseness"; exaggerated features on the figures who are attired with fan and samurai sword. The target of ridicule, however, rests not on the distorted Japanese figures but on the hypocrisy of religion and the behaviour of devout followers, as represented by the Protestants and Catholics fighting in the background. "Then those people, your Grace,

JEDDO AND BELFAST; OR, A PUZZLE FOR JAPAN.

JAPANESE AMBASSADOR. "THEN THOSE PEOPLE, YOUR GRACE, I SUPPOSE ARE HEATHEN?"
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY. "ON THE CONTRARY, YOUR EXCELLENCY: THOSE ARE AMONG OUR MOST *ENTHUSIASTIC RELIGIONISTS!*"
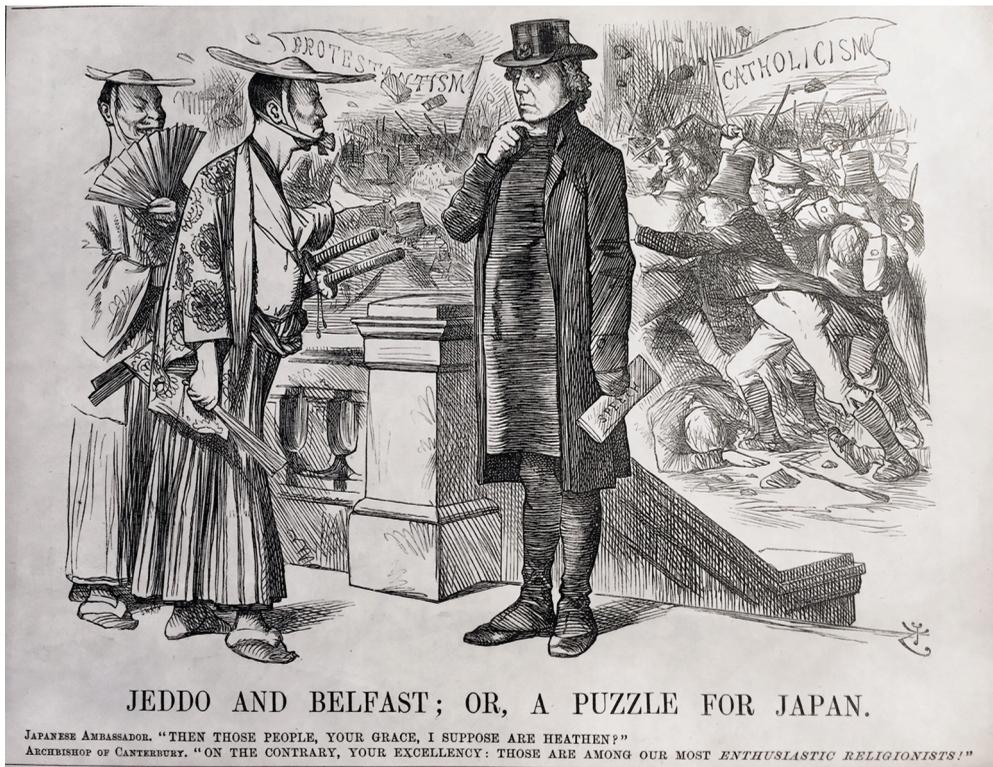
Figure 5. *Punch*, Vol. 63, 31 August 1872, p.89.

I suppose are heathen?" asks one of the ambassadors gesturing towards the violent disturbance.

The use of an "Oriental observer" was used again in 1885. The magazine published a satirical report of an exhibition at Knightsbridge where a Japanese Native Village was on display to showcase Japanese culture. The exhibition caused much excitement and curiosity; it was constructed to resemble a traditional Japanese village and employed artisans and workmen to work on their trade for an observing Victorian public, who strolled through the various scenes (Cortazzi, 2009, pp. 15–18). *Punch* satirised the event by inverting the people and culture on show. In Furniss' representation of "An English Village from a Japanese Point of View," "English life" is put on display and the image includes drunken men staggering out of a pub as well as a clergyman enjoying a game of tennis with a bevy of young women (Figure 6). Japanese observers amble through the

Figure 6. *Punch*, Vol. 88, 24 January 1885, p.47.

various exhibits and view the unsavoury displays of "English life", with varied reactions to these human displays of an "alien" culture.

These images underscore differences in race and geographical origin and tastes while simultaneously questioning supposed universal notions of civilisation and civilised behaviour. On the one hand, it is apparent that Britain is the target of attack. Even before Tenniel's and Furniss' visual representations, indeed, since its inaugural issue, *Punch* remained critical of Britain's civilising missions abroad as well as free trade forced onto nations at gunpoint. The 1858 article "No Strangers Admitted." predicted Japan's fate when "civilisation" entered their shores. At that time, the Japanese people will be "drugged to death" by being "put under a strong course of opium" and "their simple manners almost poisoned by the contact of civilisation" (*Punch*, Vol. 35, 18 December 1858, p. 251). On the other hand, Tenniel chose to depict the Japanese ambassadors, and not the Archbishop of Canterbury, as grotesques thereby visually demarcating "otherness" by disfigurement. More unsettling to readers, perhaps, is the notion that the Japanese, a strange, far-away Asian race represented with exaggerated "alien" features, may prove to be more civilised than the British (Banta, 2003, pp. 32–37).

The Japanese woman: desirable or deridable

In a collection of articles published for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Daily Telegraph*, Henry Norman praised Japanese women for being "fascinating at first sight and grow[ing] only more pleasing on acquaintance" (as cited in Kawaguchi, 2010, p. 12). Norman's complimentary view was not an anomaly and while British reports were not in favour of married Japanese women's practice of plucking their eyebrows, thickly coating their faces with powder, and blackening their teeth, descriptions of Japanese women tended to be positive. Travellers and reporters emphasised Japanese women's devotion as wives and mothers as well as their beauty, charms, and elegance (Yokoyama, 1987, pp. 8, 25, 56). These writers presented a view of Japanese women that was both shaped and informed through Western cultural frameworks put forward by the popular periodical press.

Intrepid Victorian, Isabella Bird, coincided her views with the trope of Japanese femininity that was prevalent in writings of Japan at the time (Tange, 2019, p. 257). In *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, Bird notes:

> The habit of painting the lips with a reddish-yellow pigment, and of heavily powdering the face and throat with pearl powder, is a repulsive one. But it is hard to pronounce any unfavourable criticism on women who have so much kindly grace of manner. (Bird, 1911, p. 31)

The prolific writer Lafcadio Hearn provided his view on Japanese women that reiterated fantasies of a strange and "exotic" East rooted in tradition. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he notes that Japanese women were "prepared and perfected by the old-time education for that strange society" which emphasised moral charm in "her delicacy, her supreme unselfishness, her child-like piety and trust, her exquisite tactful perception of all ways and means to make happiness about her." Hearn's admiration was, however, restricted to women. He writes, "How frequently has it been asserted that, as a moral being, the Japanese woman does not seem to belong to the same race as the Japanese man!" (Hearn, 1904, pp. 393–395).

Hearn was not alone in this belief and indeed, negative stereotyping was reserved almost exclusively for Japanese men (Townsend, 2015, p. 180). *Punch*'s references to Japanese women were limited and when represented, the magazine provided competing interpretations. As early as 1858, *Punch* was publishing parodies of the stereotypical attentive and doting Japanese women. For example, *Punch* published its own response to a *Times* article which describes a Western traveller in Japan, wearied from "the noonday heat," and returning to his lodgings where he "resigns himself to the ministrations of a bevy of fair damsels, who glide rapidly and noiselessly about, the most zealous and skilful of attendants." *Punch*'s take of the account, " – And by all means, let us have Japanese manners and customs here" depicted a man being doted on by six Englishwomen (Figure 7).

Punch satirising Japanese women indulging men reveals the extent to which this idea was widespread in Britain. As mentioned, the magazine was careful to ensure its topics were familiar in order to ensure its readers understood the joke; however, whether the cartoon was viewed as positive or negative would depend on the observer. While some undoubtedly read this as admirable traits of Japanese women, others could perceive Japanese women in a state of servitude and argue that British women enjoyed more equality between the sexes. In the years leading up to the fight for women's suffrage, comparisons with the conditions of foreign women were used to buttress political agendas.

Among these glowing reports of Japanese women were contrasting perspectives, especially with regards to the treatment of lower-class Japanese women. Thousands of poor families sold their girls to textile mills where the workers were badly treated; other

Figure 7. *Punch*, Vol. 35, 13 November 1858, p.196.

women ended up as prostitutes (Townsend, 2015, p. 182). Western writers were shocked by the Japanese custom of *harimise*, in which the women sat behind wooden, slatted windows in full view of the street and on display for potential customers (Kawaguchi, 2010, p. 20). To many former Japanese prostitutes, this practice of being displayed in "cages" was humiliating (Garon, 1993, p. 717).

In 1893, *Punch* published a poem entitled "O Sino San! A Truthful Japanese Idyll" (Figure 8) written by an anonymous Yokohama correspondent. The poem is accompanied by an image of a Japanese woman dressed in traditional Japanese clothing. It is a visually attractive representation, unlike the previous depiction of the grotesque Japanese ambassadors (Figure 5). The surrounding text, however, is ferocious in its attack. The scathing account counters notions of idealised Japanese women describing them with "little piggy eyes," a "senseless pudding face" and "too brainless to be witty."

The text launches into a spiteful declaration on how, now that Japan is open and known to the world, previous positive descriptions were false and that "We read of thee in tea-house neat, in cherry-blossomed pages, But find a girl of gin-saloon and Yoshiwara cages." Indeed, the anonymous author continues, the only interest Japanese women had in European men were "invariably his dollars." It ends by claiming that British and American women are far superior to the "disgusting creatures" that are Japanese women (*Punch*, Vol. 104, 27 May 1893, p. 249).

This poem in *Punch* stands out because of its virulence and in some respects, it is reminiscent of Pierre Loti's popular *Madame Chrysanthème* that came out in 1888 and was widely successful (Metzler, 2018, n.p.). Written as a fictionalised diary, the novel is partly biographical, and tells the story of a French naval officer and his temporary purchased bride, Chrysanthème, during his time in Japan. The novel depicts Japanese women devoid of any feelings or real affection and has Chrysanthème joyfully counting her silver dollars at the departure of her French "husband".

Treaty port marriages such as the one described in Loti's novel were common between Japanese women and foreign men, with Yokohama providing the most extensive organised prostitution. During the 1860s, 15 brothels known as "tea-houses" sprang up to service foreign men, employing about 1000 women by 1867 (Leupp, 2003, p. 151). The poem in *Punch* may have been written as a moralistic outcry against the perceived social evil of Yokohama's wide-scale prostitution; or perhaps, it simply should be viewed as the work of a misogynist. Either way, what is being unintentionally highlighted was the harsh treatment of lower-class Japanese women as thousands of girls from poverty-stricken families were sold to brothels, bathhouses, or bars (Townsend, 2015, p. 182).

With aspirations to Western modernity, the Meiji government moved to align with broader global developments that were occurring among human rights groups, such as demands to end sex slavery and coerced prostitution (Davis, 2019, pp. 127–128). Consequently, the Japanese government was pressured to outlaw licensed prostitution, and in 1916, the displaying of prostitutes behind *harimise* came to an end (Townsend, 2015, p. 182).

Sartorial and satirical

Clothing is an easy satirical target. The style of dress in most societies is a recognisable visible cue displaying status and when encountering peoples and cultures outside one's

"O SINO SAN!"

A TRUTHFUL JAPANESE IDYLL.

O SINO SAN! O SINO SAN! Who waketh me at morn!
Why is it that I feel of thee unutterable scorn?

When I behold thy greasy poll and little piggy eyes,
I fear that they have told of thee unwarrantable lies!
They told me when I wandered forth to seek thee in Japan,
That I should find a priceless girl, too beautiful for man.

They told me of thy cherry cheeks,
    thy hair of night-dark sable,
And how you squatted on the floor—
    the Japanese for table;
They gushed about your merry ways,
    your manners without flaw,
In thee, the girl idealised, you little
    fraud, we saw.

But now in wind-swept bleak Japan
    as our sore throats we muffle,
We see thy senseless pudding face
    and irritating shuffle;
As you go slopping thro' the streets
    of your foul-smelling city,
You're far too common to be rare,
    too brainless to be witty.

Your senseless, everlasting grin,
    your squatting monkey shape,
Proclaim your Ma marsupial, your
    ancestor an ape!

A curio they promised us to drive a
    lover crazy,
With little soft canoodling ways,
    and sweetness of a daisy.
We read of thee in tea-house neat,
    in cherry-blossomed pages,
But find a girl of gin-saloon and
    Yoshiwara cages.

You lure the European on, admire
    his rings and collars,
But never really love his lips, invariably his dollars;
We'd all forgive thy grin, guffaw, and rancid-smelling tresses,
If we could trace thy fraud, O SAN, in half-a-dozen guesses.
It's lasted long, it's lasted strong, it cannot last much longer,
For if the crank be competent, my common sense is stronger.

The English woman flashes scorn from all her comely features,
To be compared by any man with such "disgusting creatures."
And all the fair Americans, who roam the wide world over,
Will trample down this windy chaff and Japaneesy clover.
'Tis not thy fault, O SINO SAN—we find the truth and strike it,
Farewell, thou AUDREY of the East—grin on then "As you
    Like It!"
But never more by writer bold be canonised or sainted,
Deluded Doll! O SINO SAN, you're blacker than you're painted!
    Yokohama, April 1, 1893.

Figure 8. *Punch*, Vol.104, 27 May 1893, p.249.

own, sartorial tastes are clear demarcations of difference. *Punch* writers and artists satirised fashion choices to express disapproval in disruptions of social and racial hierarchies. Within a geopolitical framework, fashion became an important marker of civility and national identity and this was expressed in two significant ways: first, *Punch* was critical of British women and their fashion preferences, specifically, for the caged crinoline. Through the use of an "Oriental Observer," these satires extended beyond perceived British follies and reflected wider concerns as British women's bodies became symbols of the nation's civilised status within the international community. Second, there was a derision of Western clothing on Japanese bodies, which blurred national and racial distinctions. Attempts by the Japanese to visually demonstrate their nation's equal status with Western powers through fashion evoked an outpouring of disapproval and ridicule from British writers, including *Punch* members of staff.

British women: fashion follies & civility

Introduced to England in the late 1850s by Empress Eugénie, the caged crinoline was a stiff petticoat that consisted of a flexible structure of hoops joined with fabric tape and worn under dresses. This fashion item required adjusting the light metal in the shape of a pyramid and eventually, the style evolved (Mitchell, n.p.). *Punch* ridiculed the balloon effect the crinoline had on women's dresses, creating light-hearted comical textual and visual commentaries on this fashion fad of the upper and middle classes. However, when employing the use of the "Oriental observer," the magazine determined that British women's fashion choices had serious consequences on Britain's standing in the international arena.

In December 1858, Horace Mayhew's "Prize Petticoats," declares that, "In Japan, we hear the ladies blacken their teeth and shave their eyebrows. In England, they content themselves as yet with wearing Crinoline. Personal disfigurement is in either case submitted to, because it is the fashion" (*Punch*, Vol. 35, 11 December 1858, p. 241). While superficial, the criticism reveals that more information about Japan and its people was circulating in the late 1850s, only a few years after Japan's opening to global trade. By 1862, the International Exhibition opened in London and Japan featured as one of its exhibits. The same year, Japanese diplomats were sent abroad to acquire knowledge of Western technology and civilisation and the Bakufu Mission visited London. British women's appearance became important in showcasing the nation's civility to Japanese observers.

Tom Taylor used a fictional Japanese ambassador in London to condemn the use of caged crinoline. He likened the crinoline with instruments of torture and his "Oriental observer" comments that British women were "forced to wear" this, which made them "unhappy victims" that "move about very much as malefactors do among us, under the punishment of the *canje* or perforated cask." He muses whether the "women are ever let out of their cages" and concludes that "they are condemned to this torture night and day" (*Punch*, Vol. 42, 7 June 1862, p. 225). Percival Leigh makes this same connection in "Costumes of Female Natives." He notes that the "Japanese Ambassadors are coming over here" and asks, "what will they think of our position in the scale of humanity, when they find that the women of England have also the bad taste to screen their fair proportions with a mechanism of steel?"

In case readers are left puzzled, Leigh provides the answer:

> Of course they will look upon the natives of this island as a race still more degraded than the neighbours from whom our most fashionable ladies have borrowed a barbarism. Accustomed as they are to regard 'Happy Despatch' as a civilised institution, they will surely wonder that we do not adopt that practice, inasmuch as, in tolerating the cages of our wives and daughters, we suffer female grace to commit suicide (*Punch*, Vol. 42, 3 May 1862, p. 175).

"Costumes of Female Natives" reveals anxieties in national hierarchies. Japan may view the British race as inferior to the French due to women's adoption of "a barbarism;" however, the Japanese were placed below Britain and France as they practiced the "Happy Despatch," a term by the Victorians that referred to the custom of self-disembowelment by a samurai. Britain's position in the unilinear course of evolution of civility is transposed onto women's sartorial choices as fashion became significant of a much larger geopolitical project.

Japanese in Western Attire: nonsense & nationhood

In 1871, the Japanese Emperor Meiji issued a decree proclaiming European attire for himself, his Court, and his officials; the Empress would follow suit in 1886 (Kramer, 2013, p. 3). This proclamation was significant in Japan's attempt to visually align itself with modern, Western nations and thus be respected as a "civilised" nation among the international community. Western clothing was, however, mainly adopted by Japanese men, with most women wearing the kimono until at least the end of World War II (Green, 2017, n.p.). Japanese social reformers recognised the significance of clothing in shaping perceptions of Japan in the international community.

In his autobiography, Fukuzawa Yukichi reflected on the time he joined the Japanese delegation travelling around Europe. He remarked, "We all wore Japanese dress with a pair of swords in our girdles, and appeared on the streets of London and Paris in such attire. A sight indeed it must have been!" (Fukuzawa, 1960, pp. 126–127). Fukuzawa was acutely aware of distinctions made by his and his travel companions' clothing compared to those of the British and the French and argued that in order for Japan to be considered equal, the Japanese must look the part by adopting European-style clothing.

By wearing Western dress, Japanese men aspired to enter the global arena as equal participants, but their sartorial assimilation was not greeted by Western observers as they had hoped. British writers responded with severe criticism, emphasising the "ridiculous" appearance of Western garments on Japanese bodies, both male and female. The renowned industrial designer Christopher Dresser reported his impressions of his encounters with Japanese nobles wearing "ordinary English evening attire" during his stay in Japan. He commented that it was "indeed absurd to see the ridiculous appearance of some of the nobles owing to the strange cut of their European habiliment" (Dresser, 1882, p. 30).

Isabella Bird remarked how the Japanese appeared "diminutive" in western-style clothing and stated, "each garment is a misfit, and exaggerates the miserable *physique* and the national defects of concave chests and bow legs" (Bird, 1911, p. 11). Other British writers gave similar accounts, providing a most unflattering picture of the Japanese in

Western attire, stressing awkwardness and underscoring the ridiculous or comedic effect, with some using racist terminology. What was not considered was that the ill fit of the garments was due more to tailoring, an expensive and relatively new skill during the Meiji period as it was not necessary for Japanese clothing (Kramer, 2013, p. 11).

Japanese clothing in the British imagination was more than simple garments; they not only represented "Japaneseness" and served as powerful symbols of racial difference but they were also associated with a nostalgic and traditional Old Japan before disruptions of modernisation and industrialisation. The kimono in particular was linked to national identity and admired for being both "exotic" and foreign. Participants of the late nineteenth-century New Aesthetic Movement admired the kimono as an easy-to-wear garment with traditional motifs, such as the chrysanthemums, the national flower of Japan (Lambourne, 1996, pp. 40–44). The kimono represented old-worldliness, a distant and far away land rooted in traditions and thus, a move away from the kimono symbolised a break with an idealised past (Kramer, 2013, p. 14).

The kimono also represented the feminine and thereby allowed for a simplistic positioning of Japan as the effeminate East in opposition to a strong West. When the Bakufu Mission visited, their clothing was scrutinised and commented upon. One local paper in Newcastle upon Tyne reported that, "All were dressed in the most outlandish garments, resembling somewhat those of Chinese women … [T]he chief ambassador['s dress] … bore a very strong resemblance to that of a woman" (as cited in Kramer, 2013, p. 6). This association of Japan as effeminate eliminated any challenge to British authority and laughed away the possibility of considering Japan an equal nation. When Japanese people started to wear Western-style clothing, this contestation to established racial demarcations aroused a torrent of ridicule from British writers.

In "Putting His Foot In It," George du Maurier depicts a Japanese man in Western eveningwear, standing awkwardly as he talks with a seated woman who asks if "ladies' feet" in Japan are "still squeeze[d] up" (Figure 9). He explains how footbinding is a Chinese custom and thereby Japanese women could grow their feet "to quite their full size." He then blunders into an unintentional backhanded compliment by telling her, "Not that any would ever rival *yours*, Madam!" (*Punch*, Vol. 93, 10 December 1887, p. 267).

Du Maurier was famous for lampooning the ludicrous in rituals of behaviour and etiquette in upper- and middle-class societies while simultaneously mounting attacks on bad manners, lack of social graces, and all those who do not belong and are out of place. While the woman in the cartoon was mocked for her ignorance, it was the Japanese man, with his awkward stance and clumsy "compliment," that truly stands out. He may be able to put on Western clothing and learn British etiquette, but in reality, he could never be mistaken as British. In this cartoon, du Maurier succeeded in what he does best: he created an entertaining and fun cartoon while still raising fears "that unfamiliar things crouch next to the familiar ones" (Banta, 2003, p. 75). Indeed, du Maurier invited readers to ponder, what happens when things move beyond their assigned categories?

Du Maurier's series of nightmarish cartoons, such as "The Keeper's Nightmare" (Figure 10) depicts a selection of terrifying beasts. Illustrated as a response to the Acclimatisation Society, which promoted the acclimatisation of animals and plants brought to Britain from other countries, the image is a horrific fantasy of animals mixing and breeding to produce weird and beastly creatures and illustrates what *could* happen if Britain allows
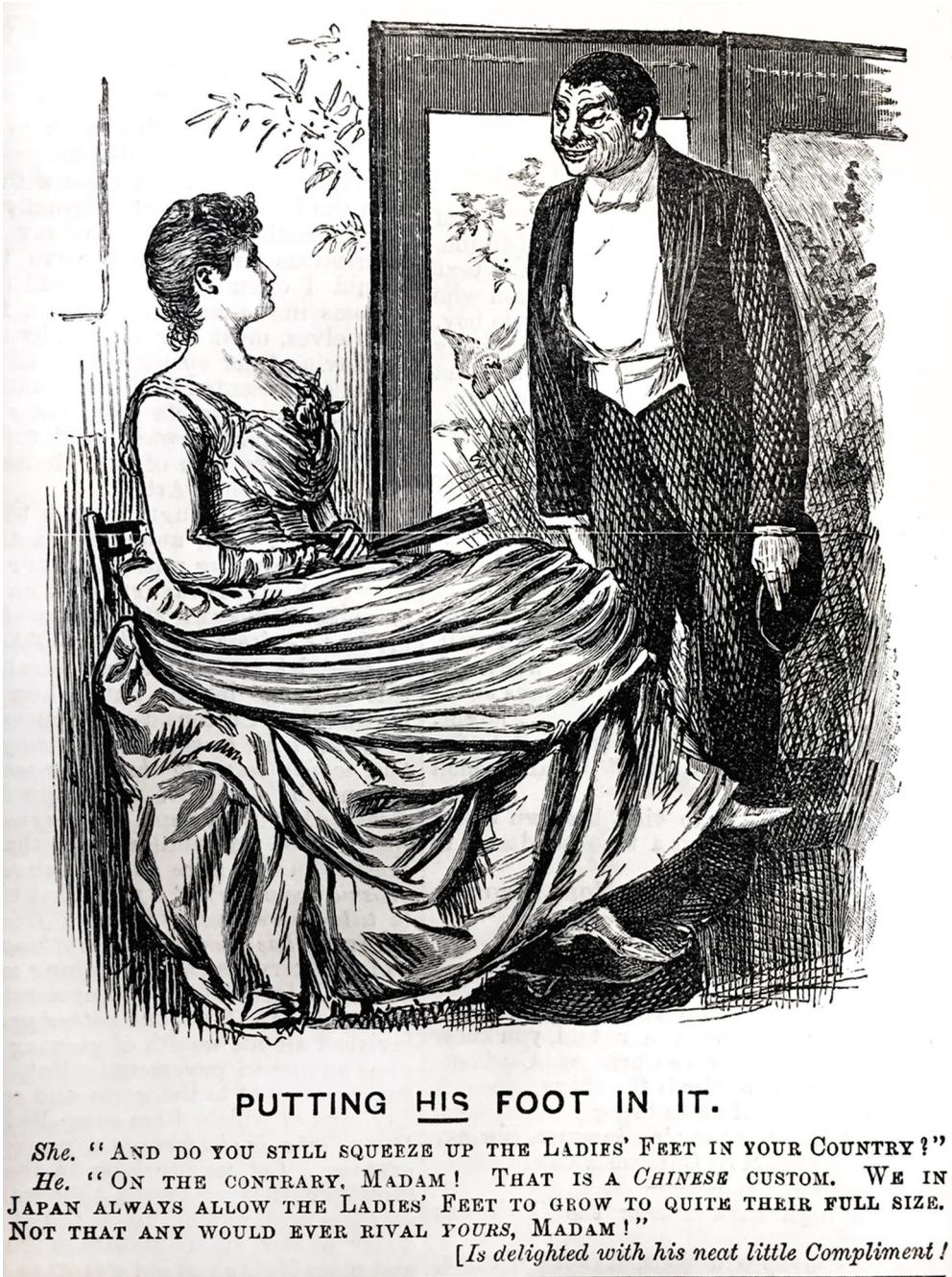
PUTTING HIS FOOT IN IT.

She. "AND DO YOU STILL SQUEEZE UP THE LADIES' FEET IN YOUR COUNTRY?"
He. "ON THE CONTRARY, MADAM! THAT IS A *CHINESE* CUSTOM. WE IN JAPAN ALWAYS ALLOW THE LADIES' FEET TO GROW TO QUITE THEIR **FULL SIZE**. NOT THAT ANY WOULD EVER RIVAL *YOURS*, MADAM!"

[*Is delighted with his neat little Compliment!*

Figure 9. *Punch*, Vol. 93, 10 December 1887, p.267.

strange intrusions. Although du Maurier himself was part Parisian, he nevertheless defined what was "wrong" in British, more specifically, English society and that included those that defied assigned categories and attempted to move beyond established hierarchies (Banta, 2003, pp. 80–88).

Figure 10. *Punch Almanack for 1871*, 1871, n.p.

In 1893, *Punch* published a work by H. Devey Browne, who made a connection clear between Japanese adoption of Western clothing and progress that would position Japan as an equal to Western nations. "Women's Wrongs in Japan," refers to an article published in the *Daily Graphic*, which reports a Japanese Press Bill that prohibits women from becoming publishers or editors. The "poem" begins with Japan, "A Land of flowers and of Art" where people dressed "In silken robes of dainty hue." This period is described as "the good, the beautiful, the true," that is, an ideal era when Japanese people kept their traditions and dressed in Japanese clothing. Things changed, however, when Japan adopted "Boots, trousers, frock-coat." Japanese people became "a sight, dressed *à la mode*" with men in particular being singled out as "dress[ing] like frights;" and yet, despite attempts at looking the part of a modern and progressive nation, Japan could not be considered an equal due to their discrimination against "Women's Rights" (*Punch*, Vol.104, 11 March 1893, p. 117).

The criticism of women's rights in Japan, especially criticism found within the pages of *Punch*, is interesting. Around the same time the "poem" was published, the women's movement in Britain was challenging established gender ideologies that placed women firmly within the domestic sphere. Feminists demanded rights such as economic independence as well as freedoms and equality with men; however, they were fighting against strong opposition. *Punch*'s depictions of the New Woman signified anxieties over *fin de siècle* female threats to patriarchal conventions, and the general tone and attitude of the magazine was "misogynistic, sexist, and traditional in its stereotyping of women" (Collins, 2010, p. 311).

The anxieties illustrated by du Maurier of monstrous beasts emerging from the dis-solution of established categories are represented by the New Woman, who was accused of degenerating the English race in the destruction of fixed gender roles, as well as by the Japanese, who were perceived to be creating chaos in blurring visual cues that not only identified and differentiated them, but also "lock[ed] them into a cultural and political hierarchy that favoured the British viewer" (Kramer, 2013, p. 7). Much like the criticisms placed upon British women and their sartorial choices discussed earlier, the Japanese adoption of Western attire was strongly frowned upon as fashion became symbolic of racial categorisation and global hierarchies.

Conclusion

Punch's use and manipulation of Japan between 1852 and 1893 reveal Britain's changing consciousness and anxieties in Anglo-Japanese relations. Said's and Bhabha's post-colonial approach to constructions of knowledge and the ambivalence of "othering," alongside theories of laughter and humour provide tools in understanding Victorian, specifically middle-class, notions of social and racial hierarchies. The exploration of representations of Japan within *Punch* reveal the seriousness of unassuming and apparently "harmless" humour in producing, disseminating, and circulating constructed imaginaries to a wide audience.

The narrative constructed in the magazine was in a constant state of fluidity as *Punch* continually re-negotiated its position on how to represent the Japanese according to frequently contradictory socio-political conditions. Depictions oscillated; Japan was either idealised when the magazine sought to critique British social ills or condemned if the Japanese attempted to challenge Britain's perceived notions of superiority. As a series of representation, *Punch* not only demonstrates the intricate interrelations between notions of civilisation and conceptions of racial systems, but also exposes fears and anxieties within highly charged geopolitical circumstances.

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Disclosure statement

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