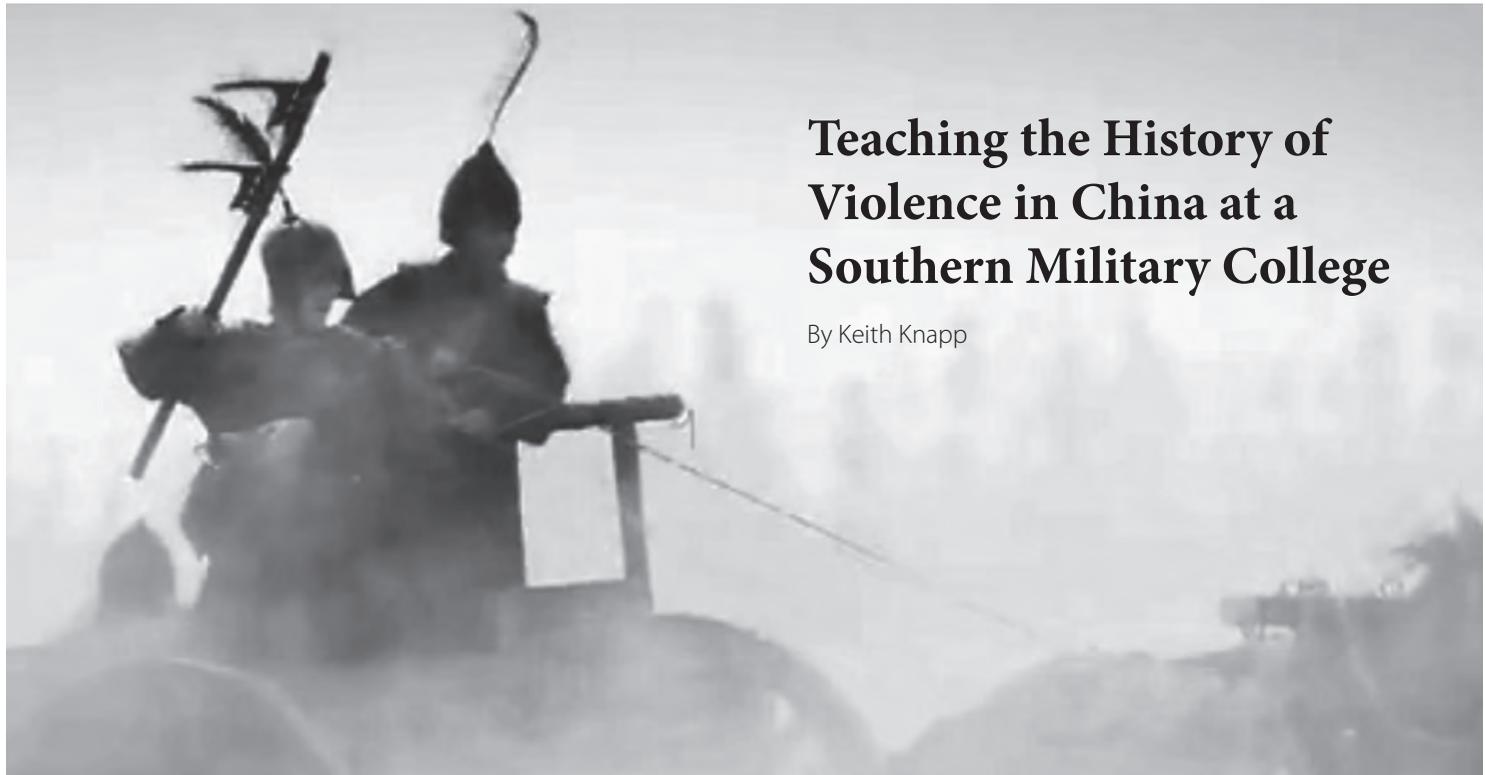


Editor's Note: Professor Knapp compiled an extensive resources list for the course he developed and taught that is published in the online supplements of this issue.



Teaching the History of Violence in China at a Southern Military College

By Keith Knapp

Source: Screen capture from PBS documentary *Chinese Chariot Revealed: Unearth the Archaeological Discoveries of China's Battle Chariots* (2017) at <https://tinyurl.com/yyojvkkt>.

Probably in my second year of teaching at The Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina, I attended a cadet's public lecture on Chinese politics. During the question-and-answer period, one of my English department colleagues, a former Green Beret, stated that the Chinese were an effeminate people who had no martial tradition. Some of the cadets in the audience happened to be active-duty soldiers from Taiwan. I was shocked and immediately told the English professor that China had a long and storied history of martial prowess and military glory. Due to American ignorance of the Chinese past, I realized that, sooner or later, I needed to develop a course on the long-neglected subject of Chinese military history. At that time, there was not much English scholarship to develop such a course, and obtaining tenure was a higher priority, so I put the project on the backburner.

Now, twenty-three years later, American ignorance of Chinese history remains unchanged, but there has been an outpouring of English-language scholarship on violence, both organized and unorganized, in China's past. There is also much more interest in China as both an economic and geopolitical rival to the United States. This year, our department started an online MA program in military history, so I decided to offer a new course titled *Violence, War, and Peace in Chinese History* as an upper-class history course for nonmajors. If teaching a military history course was not already hard enough for a cultural historian, during spring break, I had the added challenge of quickly transforming this new face-to-face course into an online one. Since this class met twice a week for seventy-five minutes each time, switching to an online format meant paring down its scale. Still, the results seem to have been successful.

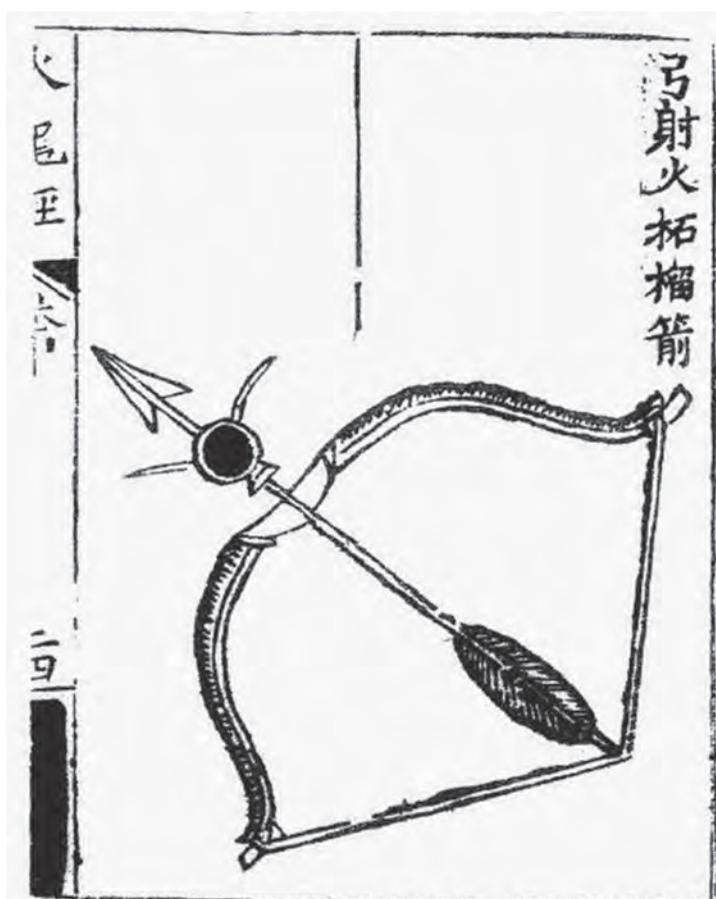
Before starting, I should first describe my unique teaching environment. The Citadel, which is in Charleston, is a state college founded in

1842. Our student body is primarily the South Carolina Corp of Cadets, which is composed of undergraduates who commit to living a military life: they all reside on campus, are organized into military companies, are subject to military discipline, and must take an ROTC course each semester. Upon graduation, about 30 percent become officers in all branches of the US military. Since a great emphasis is placed on graduating with one's class, nearly 75 percent graduate in four years—to do so, cadets usually take eighteen to twenty-one credit hours per semester. Students come from across the nation. Naturally, they have a strong interest in military history.

After fifty years, our college recently changed its core curriculum into a strand model. This was in part an effort to have students take general education courses throughout their four years, rather than just in the first two years. Each student must choose one of five strands (citizenship, conflict, sustainability, technology and innovation, or wellness) and then take five general education courses within that strand. The theme my course belongs to is, of course, conflict. Since it is a general education course, students who take it are from all different majors.

Designing the Course

I am not a military historian, so designing a straight-up military history course did not appeal to me. A more useful and flexible category of inquiry, I thought, would be violence. More than anything, violence seems to be a method of control. When nations want to possess certain resources but cannot do so through diplomacy or trade, they sometimes resort to violence. When parents cannot control their children, teachers their students, and husbands their wives, they sometimes resort to violence. When a person feels hopeless or powerless, she/he might try to assert power over her/his life through violently ending it. Thus, by framing the



A fire arrow utilizing a bag of gunpowder as incendiary as depicted in the *Huolongjing* (c. 1390). Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/y5drvmfv>.



A seven-barreled organ gun with two auxiliary guns by its side on a two-wheeled carriage from the *Huolongjing*. Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/y67evkyy>.

course around violence rather than just warfare, I thought we could look at a much broader array of social and cultural phenomena, such as crime, capital punishment, feuds, judicial torture, riots, human sacrifice, domestic violence, suicide, etc. As a result, students would learn not only about the military history of China, but also about its social and cultural history as well.

In my classes, I emphasize reading books; thus, selecting appealing ones is an essential part of my course design. If possible, I like to provide my students with a textbook with an overall narrative of what we will cover. For this class, I selected Peter Lorge's *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), which not only spans all of Chinese history, but also covers a broad and interesting range of subjects such as military history, martial arts, weapons, sports, and entertainment. In addition, in upper-division courses, I have students read five book-length primary sources. I do so because students should get in the habit of reading books; moreover, I want them to engage at length with non-Western authors. To make sure students read the books, they must take a quiz on each one. These quizzes (plus one on geography) constitute 20 percent of their grade (I drop the two lowest quiz grades). Since our grading scale has no pluses or minuses, if a student does well on the quizzes, she/he might jump from a C to a B, or a B to an A. This system has been successful in getting students to read. Of course, picking stimulating books is crucial too. For this class, I started off with *Master Sun's Art of War* (*Sunzi bingfa*). This is an obvious choice because the text has been enormously influential in China and across the world. It best embodies the Chinese view of warfare, which is why it is often com-

pared with Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*. It also has timeless insights on the importance of gathering intelligence, deceiving one's enemy, and the costliness of war. At some point in her/his career, every American military officer reads it. I have used *Master Sun's Art of War* so many times in so many classes that I am tired of it, but students love it. (If I read another bad essay on the *Nine Types of Terrain*, I will gouge my eyes out—kidding, sort of.) The second book was Burton Watson's translation of the *Records of the Historian: Chapters from the SHIH CHI of Ssu-ma Ch'ien* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969) because it is such a rich source that covers so many pertinent issues: civil war, revenge-driven assassinations, warfare against the pastoral nomadic Xiongnu, the oppressive policies of harsh officials, and the Han dynasty invasion of the Tarim Basin's city-states. For our third book, I wanted to use a translation of the vernacular novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* (*Shuihu zhuan*) so that students could learn about bandits and read something that was meant for a wider audience. Since so many of our sources for the history of premodern China were written by elite authors who ignored, if not slighted, military affairs, I wanted my students to read a work that actually celebrated martial prowess and proud warriors. The next book was Xiaobing Li, Allan R. Millet, and Bin Yu's (translators) *Mao's Generals Remember Korea* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2001), which unfortunately is only available in hardback. I thought this would work well for my students because it is straight military history and looks at a familiar event, the Korean War, through the lenses of the other side. Finally, we



The samurai Takezaki Suenaga facing Mongol and Korean arrows and bombs. Source: *Wikipedia* at <https://tinyurl.com/y35wnyzu>.

ended the course by reading Ji Xianlin's (translated by Chenxin Jiang) *The Cowshed: Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1998), which I believed would give students a broad look of the types of social violence that occurred during China's tumultuous Cultural Revolution. Students would need to write a short, analytic paper on either *Master Sun's Art of War* or *Records of the Historian*, and then a research paper on a topic of their choice.

Teaching the Course

Of course, designing a course and actually teaching it are two different things. The first day of classes, our bookstore informed me that the edition of *Outlaws of the Marsh* I wanted was unavailable, so I had to find a substitute. I decided to replace it with the famous vernacular novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Besides that slight hiccup, the first half of the course, right until spring break, went pretty much according to plan. Predictably, though, since I'm a premodern historian, I dwelled too long on China's early history. By the time the midterm examination rolled around, I had barely started talking about the Tang dynasty (618–907). There is now so much scholarship on violence in premodern China that there is a wealth of topics to address. Moreover, through preparing the lectures, I was learning so much about the importance of violence regarding the establishment and maintenance of governments that I was going into far more detail than the students probably wanted or needed. Of particular interest were the custom of human sacrifice in early China, varied Warring States (481–221 BCE) elite attitudes toward warfare, the prevalence of blood revenge, the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) wars against the Xiongnu, the heavy cavalry of the early medieval (220–589) northern non-Han people, and the Sui dynasty's (581–617) unsuccessful attempts to subjugate the Korean peninsula. Students loved *Master Sun's Art of War*. Its allure is probably because it appears to be a straightforward guide on how to wage wars both strategically and tactically. They were not equally fond of *Records of the Historian*. My students found this work confusing, in part because it has so many narratives and in part because it mentions so many people with unfamiliar names.

One of the great things about teaching Chinese military history is that it provides the opportunity to talk about the development of technology in China. The crossbow and its many permutations over time; the develop-

ment of gunpowder and gunpowder weapons, such as grenades, bombs, flamethrowers, cannons, and guns; innovations on ships, such as the use of compasses for navigation and ship-mounted guns, are all fascinating lecture topics, particularly for STEM majors. There are also some wonderful videos that talk about premodern Chinese technology, such as PBS's *Chinese Chariot Revealed: Unearth the Archaeological Discoveries of China's Battle Chariots* (2017) and History Channel's *Ancient China: Masters of the Wind and Waves* (2006). The former depicts how Chinese artisans

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improved upon these imports from the West and how chariots were actually used in battle. The latter program's focus is upon the many ways Chinese artisans improved the design of ships, adding innovations such as the stern-based rudder, the keel, watertight compartments, and segmented sails. China's development of kites, parachutes, and propellers aided in the development of the airplane and helicopter. My students enjoyed both these documentaries.

The Effects of COVID-19 Disruption

When the threat of the pandemic became apparent, all my classes needed to be changed to an online format by someone with no experience in long-distance learning. Having a hunch that our students would not be returning anytime soon, before leaving for spring break, I urged them to take all their books with them. The first adjustment made was giving up on having them write a term paper. Even though our students do have access to online databases and electronic books, I believed that without access to our library, which has a good collection of books on military history, they would not be able to get sufficient materials to do research. So instead, I assigned two more short, analytical papers on two of the remaining three book-length primary source assignments. As for subject matter, I had to scale down my ambitions. Instead of doing seventy-five-minute lectures on Zoom, I decided to tape fifteen-minute lectures on Screencast-O-Matic. Using this software, one can tape for free a quarter-hour lecture, which consists of about five or six PowerPoint slides. Since the PowerPoint slides are taped, you are just doing a voiceover. Of course, taping the lectures turned out to be a laborious process because each one requires several takes

before getting it right. This meant that I could cover a lot less territory than originally planned. Since military history interested my students most, my remaining lectures focused on that topic rather than other forms of violence. The subjects I taped lectures on were the Song-Yuan development of gunpowder weapons, the genesis of the Ming Great Wall, the Manchu conquest of Ming China, the Qing as China's greatest military empire, the "opening" of China and the Self-Strengthening Movement, the religious violence of the Taiping Tianguo, the Confucian militia's repression of the Taipings, the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the birth of the Red Army and its unlikely survival, the violence of the Cultural Revolution, and the military suppression of the Tiananmen protestors and their supporters. Fifteen minutes is just long enough to make a few important points. Obviously, there were many topics that I had to skip, such as the Mongol conquest of China, clan feuds in southern China, the rise of secret societies, the Ming fight against the Japanese invasion of Korea, the Boxer Rebellion, the military origins of the 1911 Republican Revolution, the emergence of warlords and their rule, the Nationalist Whampoa Military Academy and the Northern Expedition, the War of Resistance against Japan, and so on. Next time, I will add taped lectures on all these topics.

How did my students respond to these adjustments? Well. They seemed to like the fifteen-minute lectures. (I'm best taken in small doses.) I used Zoom sessions to discuss the contents of each mini-lecture. Students who made a comment that indicated they had watched the lecture would be given two extra credit points on one of their short papers. One Zoom failure I had was an attempt to discuss a document titled "Under the 'Blood Flag': Dutch and Chinese Views of the Battle for Taiwan" from Lynn Struve's *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in the Tigers' Jaws* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). This text is an account of two eyewitness accounts of Zheng Chenggong's (Koxinga) defeat of the Dutch: one from the Dutch commander of Zeelandia and the other from one of Koxinga's officers. For some reason, our online platform software only sent students the first page of the document. That was too bad, because the two accounts display radically different perspectives on the war—the Dutch commander goes into much detail in describing the battles, while the Chinese official barely mentions any of the military action; he is much more concerned with logistics and getting along well with the inhabitants in Taiwan. As for the books, very few liked *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It was a bit confusing for them, being an early fifteenth-century account of events that occurred in the third century CE. *Mao's Generals Remember Korea* and *The Cowshed* were big hits. The former puts the Korean War in an entirely different light and includes an extensive treatment of US armed forces' weaknesses. The generals admitted, though, how devastating American air power was and how unsuccessful the Chinese army was in eliminating surrounded US units that had much superior firepower. *The Cowshed*, which describes how a Beijing University professor was beaten, tortured, and imprisoned by his own students and colleagues, forcefully brings home the horror and brutality of the Cultural Revolution. Surprisingly, author Ji Shenlin describes his gut-wrenching ordeal in a wry manner. Students turned in excellent papers on both books. Part of the reason they liked these last two books so much probably is because they are much more interested in modern China.

How might I teach the course differently in the future? Since all my students are familiar with and many have already read *Master Sun's Art of War*, I might replace it with Andrew Meyer's *The Dao of the Military: Liu An's Art of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). This is a translation of the "An Overview of the Military" chapter from the second century BCE encyclopedic *Huainanzi*. It has the virtue of summing up all the wisdom of the previous military manuals, but it does so from a Daoist

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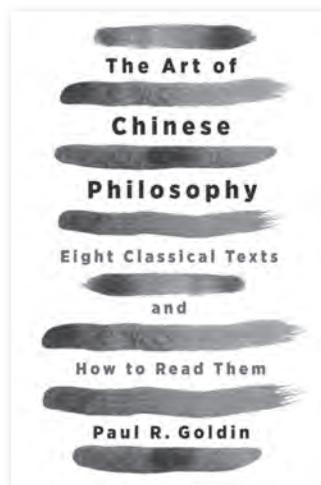
Source: Screen capture from the History Channel's 2006 documentary *Ancient China: Masters of the Wind and Waves* at <https://tinyurl.com/y5wxlp18>.

point of view that stresses, if at all possible, that military action should be avoided. Even though students find Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian* confusing, I will still keep it because it covers so many rich topics and provides us with actual glimpses of warfare in early China. I would replace *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* with either Nicola di Cosmo's *A Diary of a Manchu Soldier in Seventeenth-Century China* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001) or Xiaofei Tian's *The World of a Tiny Insect: A Memoir of the Taiping Rebellion and Its Aftermath* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013). The former is a rare first-person account by a warrior; the latter is a personal testimony of the ghastly devastation that warfare had on civilians. Another change would be to focus the course more on the modern era, which is what interests students most.

Switching a new course that I was still developing to an online format was difficult, time-consuming, and nerve-racking, but it was also rewarding. As much as possible, I will try to convert my lectures into the fifteen-minute format and tape them. That way, students can watch them whenever they want. That will free up class time to do other things, such as read and discuss primary documents or look at and discuss artifacts or historical sites. As for teaching about violence in Chinese history, that too was eye-opening. My survey classes on premodern China and modern China will now definitely include much more military history and information on how violence was used to effect change. For example, through teaching this class, in talking about the Tiananmen Square protests, I realized that even though the protesters were nonviolent, what really gained them national sympathy was violence—violence to the self through hunger striking. In short, violence was important because it was not the norm; since it was exceptional, it had a radical impact on people. It demanded their attention; could be used by the state or community to suppress criminals, dissenters, or outsiders; or could cause fundamental transformation by toppling the state or upsetting the status quo. Knowing about the various functions of

violence in Chinese history (and our own) is thus not only important for cadets at military academies, but for students at all colleges. ■

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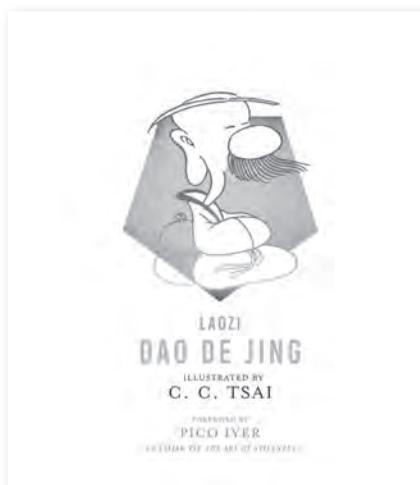


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