

PROFESSOR: Visualizing Cultures is a web-based history program which John Dower and I started in year 2001. John Dower is an eminent historian of modern Japan. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1999 for his book *Embracing Defeat*.

I approached John in 2000 when I knew that OpenCourseWare was about to go up. And I told John that I thought that this would be a great platform to do something new with history, specifically to look at history, not just from text, which is what historians do, but from looking at images, visuals that have been produced by people from the historical era, and to try to understand what was going on.

John surprisingly said yes, and so we started. We didn't quite know what we were doing at first, but we got very lucky with our first unit, which is Commodore Matthew Perry's arrival in Japan in 1853, to open up Japan, which had been essentially isolated, closed, for 250 years. And so you have America and Japan come clashing together in this one moment in history.

And from that, this explosion of images from both sides-- Americans depicting the Japanese, and Japanese depicting Perry and his men and his ships. It's just wonderful. And what's really interesting is that when you look at images, you get to see things that you cannot get from written material.

We found lots of images where the Japanese were really curious about Perry's men and drawing costumes, instruments, weapons in minute detail, and with notes to go along with them, showing just sort of sheer curiosity. Who are these people? How do they live? How do they talk?

And you saw the same thing on Perry's side. Perry brought his own artist, Heine, who was a 26-year-old artist trained in Germany in sort of the romantic style. He just fell in love with Japan. You can tell that in the images. He absolutely fell in love with this beautiful country, so much so that he would sometimes paint himself into the picture, interacting with the Japanese.

And so what you got was this one artist depicting Japan in a very beautiful, very affectionate way. And that's what Americans saw of Japan for the first time. This is why even to this day, in this country, you have this image of Japan as very beautiful, very beautiful nature. It really originates with Heine's paintings.

And so we very much follow the OCW principle of not only making it available and open and free, but that everything is licensed under Creative Commons so that these images, which we got from about 200 museums-- and these are major museums. Boston MFA, Sackler in Washington, Hong Kong, British Museum-- we asked all of them to sign an agreement that we could present their images on Visualizing Japan on OpenCourseWare under Creative Commons.

And so anyone coming in and studying Visualizing Cultures can take images and copy them, distribute them, alter them into their own material and use them however, they wish. One of the populations that we really wanted to work with were schoolteachers. And so we did many, many workshops over the years, and we trained face-to-face around 2,000 teachers.

I say we. We worked with a wonderful group out of University of Colorado that specializes in creating East Asian curriculum and working with teachers directly to help them to incorporate them into their classroom. And so they ran these series of workshops all over the country. And as far as I know, it's still being used.

So high school teachers, university professors tell us that they're using it on a regular basis. A couple of years ago, a university had an opening for assistant professor in Japanese history, and they had four finalists. And they asked them how do you teach Japanese history. And three of them apparently said they used Visualizing Cultures.