"PHOTOGRAPHY/REALISM/WAR: THE CASE OF THE FIRST SINO-JAPANESE WAR, 1894-95"

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The First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) was the first Japanese war with embedded photographers to document the conflict. The crisp photographs, once they had been developed and printed in Japan, seemed to testify to what an Illustrated London News reporter called the “essentially modern and business-like method” of the Japanese offensive.1 Shortly after the war’s conclusion, the Japanese government sent a monumental hand-woven tapestry of the Aoi Matsuri (Aoi Festival) to the widow of Secretary of State Walter Q. Gresham, the American diplomat who had facilitated the treaty negotiations with Qing China. While the tapestry and the surviving corpus of war photographs might seem to represent opposite ends of the spectrum of art of the Meiji era (1868-1912), together they help us evaluate the “truth claims” and political agendas of late nineteenth-century Japanese art.