In 1894 Beijing held a sixtieth birthday party. A few months later, the Beiyang Fleet was gone.

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Begin with two things in Beijing,
in November 1894. On the seventh of November
the tenth day of the tenth month,
in the twentieth year of the Guangxu
reign — Empress Dowager Cixi turned sixty.
The court had been preparing for two years.
The plan was to receive the congratulations
at the Summer Palace, with decorated shelters,
scripture platforms and opera stages set up
all the way from the palace to
the garden. According to the Celebrations for
the Empress Dowager's Sixtieth Birthday archives,
on two headings alone — funds drawn from
the Board of Revenue and contributions coordinated
outside the capital — the silver that can
be verified comes to more than 2.98
million taels, contributed by governors-general, governors,
garrison commanders and imperial princes.
In that same month, cities on the
front were falling one after another.
These two things happened in the same
year, in the same month, and inside
the decision-making of one city.

And there was one more thing that
year: the Beiyang Fleet was gone.
The fire came from Korea.
On 4 May 1894, a peasant war broke out
in the south of Korea, raised in
the name of the Donghak movement.
The Korean court could not put it down and
asked the Qing court to send troops.
On 2 June, the Japanese cabinet decided to
send forces. On 7 June, the two sides
exchanged notes. The Qing court said it was sending
troops at Korea's request and would withdraw
once the matter was settled.
Japan said its troops were there to
protect its legation and its nationals.
Over the following month, Qing and Japanese
troops both reached Korea.
The Qing army camped at Asan;
Japanese troops entered Seoul.
On 23 July, Japanese troops occupied the Korean
royal palace. On 25 July, in the waters
off Pungdo, the Japanese Combined Fleet sank
the Gaosheng, a British-flag transport the Qing court
had chartered to carry troops.
More than seven hundred people were aboard.
On 1 August, the Qing court declared war under
pressure; the same day, Emperor Meiji issued

Japan's declaration. Only then, formally, had the
war begun.
Seen from Beijing, the easiest thing to
miss about this war is that things
at sea had already begun before war
was declared. Gaosheng was a British-flag merchant
ship, chartered by the Qing court to carry
troops. What sank it were warships of
the Japanese Combined Fleet.
The ship went down.
Who was aboard, and how many died,
is recorded differently in different accounts.
This film gives no single number.
And that day was still seven days
before the declaration of war.
Once the declarations were issued, the two
armies each took up their positions.
Pyongyang, in the north of Korea,
was where the Qing army concentrated.
Japanese forces advanced on it along four
routes.
On this Korea line there is one
man who, in 1912, will stand at the
centre of another matter.
His name was Yuan Shikai.
He was born in 1859 in Xiangcheng,
Henan. He failed the provincial examination twice,

in 1876 and 1879, and joined the Huai Army under
Wu Changqing. In August 1882, the Imo mutiny
broke out in Korea and Qing troops
entered Seoul; he distinguished himself in that
operation. In 1884, Korean reformers, with Japanese backing,
staged the Gapsin coup and seized the
royal palace; he led troops and put
it down. In 1885, on Li Hongzhang's recommendation,
Yuan Shikai, aged twenty-six, was appointed to
supervise Korean trade and diplomatic affairs.
He spent roughly twelve years in Korea
in all, and returned to China in 1894.
That year, was 1894 — the year of
this war. After returning, Yuan Shikai was
sent to Xiaozhan, near Tianjin, to train
troops. This film sets him down here,
for now.
Now, that fleet. In October 1885, the Qing court
established the Office for the General Administration
of Naval Affairs, usually called the Navy
Office. Its presiding minister was Prince Chun,
Yixuan; its associate ministers were Yikuang and
Li Hongzhang; the man who actually held
the power was Li Hongzhang.
This office had one curious feature:
it had no premises of its own.
After its founding it borrowed the offices

of the Shenjiying guards, and borrowed the
Shenjiying seal for its documents; it did
not receive its own official seal until
three years later. A new building was
planned at Fenzi Hutong near the Xisi
archway, and it was never finished,
not even by the time Prince Chun
died. Its structure followed that of the
Zongli Yamen and the Shenjiying.
Most of its early staff were bannermen,
and almost none of them had any
naval background. Among the talk of the
court and the capital at the time,
the office carried another name — the " Summer
Palace Works Office". Some called it the
"seventh ministry", outside the usual six.
This film will come back to that
name later.
The one large thing the Navy Office
did accomplish was the Beiyang Fleet.
In 1888, the Beiyang Fleet was formally constituted,
and the Beiyang Fleet Regulations were issued.
Its flagship was Dingyuan; her sister ship
was Zhenyuan. Both were among the largest
ironclads then afloat, with main guns of
305 millimetres. At its formation the fleet
had a certain number of ships and

some four thousand officers and men
the counts differ by source, so this
film uses one verifiable formulation: formed in 1888,
and at the outbreak of the war
in 1894 it had twenty-five ships and more
than four thousand officers and men.
There is a phrase that circulates about
this fleet: "the strongest fleet in Asia".
This film does not use it
it appears only in later media writing,
and no scholarly basis for it can
be found. That year, this fleet was
one of the largest projects the Qing court
had put money into.
And its next new ship never arrived.
On 1 June 1891, the Board of Revenue submitted
a memorial, Proposed Measures for Raising Military
Funds. The memorial proposed that the northern
and southern fleets suspend for two years
their purchases of foreign guns, ships and
machinery, and that the silver saved be
sent to the Board to cover military
expenses. The man who put it forward
was the Minister of Revenue, Weng Tonghe,
and his reasoning was eight characters:
"the Board's treasury is empty, and the
coast is quiet. " Li Hongzhang was at

that moment inspecting the Beiyang Fleet.
Back in Tianjin he replied: having weighed
it repeatedly, funds are at present extremely
short, and all major purchases of ships
and weapons should, as proposed, be suspended.
That suspension was never lifted again.
Three years later, in May 1894, Li Hongzhang
inspected the fleet for the third time,
and wrote this in his report: "
" In the Western countries ship design changes
month by month. Even Japan, a small
country, manages to economise and add a
great ship every year.
Since the Beiyang Fleet was established in 1888,
China has not added a single ship,
and I fear it will be hard
to continue. " In March of that same
year, Admiral Ding Ruchang proposed fitting eighteen
modern quick-firing guns to the main ships,
at a cost of six hundred thousand
taels. That money was not approved.
And in those same years, the Japanese
navy was adding ships.
In 1894 the Japanese navy had thirty-one warships
of various sizes and twenty-four torpedo boats.
The other side of the record must
be given here as well, because the

Board of Revenue later had its own answer. The Board argued that "it never proposed a suspension before, nor blocked purchases after", and listed cases in which Xinjiang, Gansu, Fujian, Anhui and Hunan bought foreign arms, saying: "the northern fleet alone bought nothing — which must mean that province had ships and weapons enough, and needed nothing from abroad. " The researcher Jiang Ming has also pointed out: " Li Hongzhang never explained why, after 1893, he stopped asking to buy ships. " Both sides of the record are placed here together.

Now back to the other name of that office. The Summer Palace began as the Garden of Clear Ripples, first built in 1750, the fifteenth year of the Qianlong reign. In 1860, the tenth year of the Xianfeng reign, it was burned by the Anglo-French forces. In 1886, the twelfth year of the Guangxu reign, Prince Chun, Yixuan, petitioned to "repair the Garden of Clear Ripples so that naval drills might be held there", and proposed founding a naval school on Kunming Lake; the Empress Dowager drew on silver in the name of raising naval funds to rebuild the garden.

Specialists put the cost of the works
at roughly five to six million taels.
The works were directed by Lei Tingchang,
the seventh generation of the Lei family
of imperial architects. In 1888, the fourteenth year
of Guangxu, an imperial edict took the
phrase "nurturing harmony" and renamed the garden
the Summer Palace — Yiheyuan.
In 1891, the seventeenth year of Guangxu,
Cixi took up residence there in earnest.
From then until 1908 she lived in the
garden through spring, summer and autumn each
year, and the major affairs of the
court, policy decisions and receptions of foreign
envoys mostly happened there.
In that garden there is one boat,
and it is unusual.
It is called the Marble Boat.
It was built in 1755, the twentieth year
of Qianlong, and its hull is carved
from a single mass of stone.
In 1860 its Chinese-style cabin was burned.
In 1893, the nineteenth year of Guangxu,
at Cixi's wish, that cabin was rebuilt
in Western style, fitted with coloured glass,
and renamed the Boat of Clear Seas
Qingyanfang. It is the only building in

the garden in a Western style.

A boat made of stone.

It will never sail.

So how much money was it?

A very popular sentence says: " Cixi diverted the navy's funds to build the Summer Palace. " That sentence can be taken apart into three layers. First layer: did it happen? It did. That the Navy Office also managed the Summer Palace works, and that the accounts of the two overlapped, can be seen in the archives.

Second layer: how much?

This is the difficult layer — the surviving accounts number at least six, and they differ widely: Some four million taels later research; Some 7.5 million taels Jiang Ming's calculation from surviving Qing palace archives; Close to eight million taels according to surviving archival records;

Some 8.6 million taels — the tally of Qi Qizhang, who also counts a further 4.36 million taels of naval funds diverted to the Three Seas works;

Some ten million taels — another estimate of the total cost of the garden works;

Twenty to thirty million taels, and in

some tellings eighty million — the figure long
in general circulation. This film gives no
single number. All six accounts are placed
here. Third layer: was this the main
cause of the defeat?
Scholars do not agree, and this film
does not judge. One fact belongs here:
linking the garden works to the defeat
at sea is generally traced to Liang
Qichao. The researcher Jiang Ming puts it
directly: the late-Qing reformer Liang Qichao was
the first to connect the palace works
to the failure in the naval war
of 1894, in order to stir hatred
of Cixi. The figure of thirty million
taels also comes from Liang Qichao's Words
on the Partition of China.
And the fact on the other side
must stand beside it: the 2.6 million
taels that Prince Chun raised from the
provinces in the name of the "navy"
were never drawn on as principal;
the sum was deposited in foreign banks
and lent to the Kaiping Mining Bureau
to earn interest, and the interest was
used to repay the one million taels
that had been shifted out of the

naval funds. Jiang Ming also notes that
this money "was in fact entirely the
tribute of provincial governors to Cixi,
and cannot be counted on the navy's
account". A popular sentence tends to press
fact, number and cause into one thing.
Take it apart, and you hold one
more measure than the person who says
the sentence.
In this passage the film does one
thing only: it sets two dates side
by side.1 June 1891: the Board of Revenue
asks that the northern and southern fleets
suspend purchases of foreign guns and ships
for two years.4 June 1891: the Summer Palace
is substantially complete, and Cixi begins her
progress through it. Two dates.
Three days apart. One is in a
memorial in Beijing. One is in a
garden in Beijing. Whether those three days
are one matter or two, this film
does not say. The two dates are
real.
On 15 September 1894, Japanese forces attacked Pyongyang along
four routes. The Qing commander Ye Zhichao's
dispositions were confused; General Zuo Baogui held
the Xuanyuan gate and was killed there,

and the position fell.
That night Ye Zhichao led his troops
in a retreat across the river.
On 17 September, two days after Pyongyang,
the Beiyang Fleet was on its way
home after escorting an army landing.
Crossing the sea off Dadonggou, outside the
mouth of the Yalu, it met the
Japanese Combined Fleet. That day was the
Battle of the Yellow Sea.
How many Beiyang ships fought differs by
account; this film uses a formulation like
"some dozen" and gives no single number.
The number of Japanese ships engaged is
likewise recorded differently. The battle lasted about
five hours. The Beiyang side lost several
ships, and more than a thousand officers
and men were killed or wounded;
every Japanese ship engaged was also damaged.
At about a quarter to six that
afternoon, the Japanese side broke off.
After the battle, the Beiyang Fleet withdrew
into Weihaiwei.
That day a ship went down.
Her name was Zhiyuan, and her captain
was Deng Shichang. Deng Shichang was from
Panyu, Guangdong, born on 17 September 1849, a graduate

of the first class of the Foochow
Dockyard School. The day of the Yellow
Sea battle was his forty-fifth birthday.
Why did Zhiyuan sink?
To this day there are four accounts.
The first is the most widely told:
Deng Shichang drove Zhiyuan at the Japanese
cruiser Yoshino, and she was struck by
a torpedo on the way in and
sank. One result of checking must be
stated here: neither the Chinese nor the
Japanese archival record contains any account of
" Zhiyuan ramming Yoshino. " The naval historian Chen
Yue worked through the formations and movements
of both sides once, on 17 September 2014,
the hundred-and-twentieth anniversary of the battle,
and found that the direction Zhiyuan's bow
was facing was the Japanese flagship Matsushima;
Yoshino at that moment was behind Zhiyuan,
which could not have turned about to
ram her. The second account: water came
in over the bow until it swamped
the boilers and set off a large
explosion — this is Chen Yue's reading.
The third: a large-calibre shell pierced the
hull near the waterline and she took
on a great deal of water.

The fourth: a large-calibre shell struck the
torpedo compartment on her side and detonated
the "black-head" torpedoes stored there.
After a torpedo fuse was found in
the 2016 underwater survey, some specialists consider
this the most likely.
But the archaeologists reserve judgement.
Zhou Chunshui, a research fellow at the
National Centre for Underwater Cultural Heritage,
has said plainly: "on the evidence available,
it is not possible to infer how
the Zhiyuan sank. " The hull below the
waterline is relatively intact, which largely rules
out the torpedo theory; and the fuse
found proves only that torpedoes were carried.
Four accounts, and all are accounts.
Archaeology has not decided, to this day.
Of more than two hundred officers and
men aboard, only a few survived.
Deng Shichang did not leave his ship.
After the battle, the Beiyang Fleet fell
back on Weihaiwei. Ships whose repairs were
unfinished came into harbour still damaged.
Around 20 January 1895, Japanese forces landed at Rongcheng
Bay in Shandong, then took the batteries
behind Weihaiwei, and pressed the fleet from
land and sea together with the Combined

Fleet. On the night of 4 February
other accounts say the small hours of
5 February — Japanese torpedo boats broke into the
harbour, and the flagship Dingyuan was struck
by a torpedo in the stern and
run aground to keep her afloat.
On 9 February, Dingyuan's captain Liu Buchan ordered
the ship filled with explosives and blown
up, then took his own life.
He had once made a promise:
"if the ship is lost, I end
myself. " On 11 February, Admiral Ding Ruchang refused
to surrender and took poison.
About his end there is another account
of foreign advisers and fearful officers pressing
him to surrender, and of a British
adviser signing the surrender in his name
the next day. This film sets both
accounts side by side.
On 14 February, the Weihaiwei surrender agreement was
signed. On 17 February, Japanese forces occupied Liugong
Island. The surviving ships were taken,
and Zhenyuan was among them.
The Beiyang Fleet ends here.
This is as far as the film
takes it: a fleet was gone,
and the harbour was still in place.

In March 1895, Li Hongzhang was appointed plenipotentiary of the first rank and sent to Japan to negotiate peace.

The place was the Shunpanro, at Shimonoseki in Yamaguchi; across the table were Japan's prime minister Ito Hirobumi and foreign minister Mutsu Munemitsu. In the negotiations, the indemnity Japan first demanded was three hundred million taels of silver. In April, Japan presented an ultimatum. Li Hongzhang telegraphed the court, and Guangxu replied: "if truly nothing can be revised, then follow the earlier instruction and conclude the treaty. "

On 17 April 1895, Li Hongzhang signed the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace with Ito Hirobumi and Mutsu Munemitsu — the Treaty of Shimonoseki. It took effect on 8 May 1895.

The text of the treaty reads:

Article I: China recognises the full and complete independence of Korea. Article II: China cedes to Japan in perpetuity the following places one, the southern portion of Fengtian province, with a boundary line annexed; two, the island of Taiwan and all islands appertaining to it; three, the Penghu islands.

Article IV: China will pay Japan two hundred million taels of treasury silver as

war indemnity, in eight instalments.
Article VI: China opens Shashi, Chongqing,
Suzhou and Hangzhou as treaty ports.
Article VIII: Japanese forces will occupy Weihaiwei
temporarily, at an occupation cost of five
hundred thousand taels of treasury silver per
year. One point that is often flattened
in summary should be stated: Article II
of the treaty reads "the southern portion
of Fengtian province", with a boundary line
annexed — not the general phrase "the Liaodong
peninsula", which is how later summaries usually
put it. This film quotes the treaty
as it reads.
Before the signing, something happened that is
rare in international negotiation.
On the afternoon of 24 March 1895, after the
third round of talks, Li Hongzhang rode
in his sedan chair from the Shunpanro
back to his lodging at Injō-ji.
At a street corner the crowd was
thick and the bearers slowed.
A man broke through to the front
of the chair, pressed his left hand
on the bearer's shoulder, and raised a
pistol in his right.
The bullet struck below Li Hongzhang's left

eye and lodged in the cheekbone;
the bleeding would not stop.
He fainted where he was and came
round shortly after; when the chair reached
the gate of Injō-ji, he walked in
on his own feet.
The man who fired was named Koyama
Toyotaro, from Gunma prefecture, unemployed.
The case was tried at the Yamaguchi
district court. After this, the Japanese side
agreed to a ceasefire; Emperor Meiji sent
two surgeon-generals to Shimonoseki to treat Li
Hongzhang. On 17 April, his face bound in
bandages, Li Hongzhang signed the treaty.
The indemnity went from the three hundred
million first demanded to two hundred million.
Whether one caused the other, this film
sets the two side by side and
does not judge.
The news of the treaty reached Beijing
during the metropolitan examination, when candidates from
every province were in the city.
From 1 to 3 May, Kang Youwei,
Liang Qichao and others organised a joint
petition by provincial candidates at Songjun'an in
the southern city — the shrine of Yang
Jiaoshan — opposing the treaty and calling for

rejection of the peace, removal of the
capital, and reform. About this, two records
have to be given.
One is the account of Kang Youwei
and Liang Qichao themselves: more than six
hundred signed, the petition was very large,
and hearing that the treaty had already
been signed, it was not submitted to
the Censorate. The other is later research
and the doubts it raises: the Censorate's
own record of that day's business,
and Weng Tonghe's diary for that day,
contain no record of "over twelve hundred
candidates petitioning at the Censorate. "
A researcher reconstructed the list and found
that Kang Youwei's name is not on
it; and in those days provincial candidates
petitioned on their own account in thirty-one
separate petitions, totalling more than fifteen hundred
signatures. On its scale, and on whether
it was submitted, the accounts differ.
This film gives both, gives no single
number, and does not write that it
was refused.
After the treaty, three more things happened.
The first: on 23 April 1895, Russia, Germany and
France intervened and demanded that Japan return

the Liaodong territory. The second: on 8 November 1895,
China and Japan signed the Treaty for
the Return of Southern Liaoning; Japan returned
the southern portion of Fengtian province,
and the Qing court paid three hundred million
taels of treasury silver to redeem it.
The third: inside the court there was
a discussion of considerable scale.
After receiving Kang Youwei's memorial, Guangxu ordered
a copy made, and on 19 July sent
it out together with eight other memorials
to the generals and governors of the
provinces for discussion. All of this happened
in the same year as the treaty.
The film stops here, and does not
push further.
After 1895, the people went their separate ways.
Weng Tonghe died in 1904.
Li Hongzhang died in 1901.
Yuan Shikai, in 1912, stood at the centre
of another matter. Deng Shichang had no
old age. What the fleet left behind
is still in place.
On Liugong Island at Weihai, the old
site of the Beiyang Fleet headquarters is
today's Chinese Jiawu War Museum.
On the island there is also a

full-size replica of Dingyuan, which visitors can
board. The armour plate stripped from the
original Dingyuan stands today inside Dazaifu Tenmangu
in Fukuoka, Japan, made into a gate
and the gun ports and the rivet
holes in it are still there.
Zhiyuan lies in the waters off Daludao,
in Dandong, Liaoning. The underwater archaeology team
has worked there since 2014; in 2016 the underwater
survey was declared closed.
To this day, raising her whole is
not on the agenda.
The Summer Palace is still there.
In 1998 it was inscribed on UNESCO's World
Heritage List. The Boat of Clear Seas
still sits on the north-west shore of
Kunming Lake — and its hull is made
of stone. From 1894 to now, more than
a hundred and thirty years.
Those halls, that stone boat, that gate,
that seabed — all of them still in
the same place.
This is Shenzhou: China's Living Heritage.
We place the fact, and where it comes
from, in front of you together.

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