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Etienne Tornier

exhibition review of

Clémenceau, le Tigre et l'Asie

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Clémenceau, le Tigre et l'Asie

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Clémenceau, le Tigre et l'Asie.

Contributions by Aurélie Samuel, Matthieu Séguéla, and Amina Taha Hussein-Okada.

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Clémenceau, le Tigre et l'Asie [Clémenceau, the Tiger and Asia] takes place in the Musée Guimet, the French national museum devoted to Asian arts from antiquity to the nineteenth century (fig. 1). Founded in Lyon by the French industrialist Emile Guimet (1836–1918) in 1879, the museum was transferred in 1889 to Paris, Place d'Iena in the sixteenth arrondissement, near the Palais du Trocadéro. Located on the lower level of the museum, the Musée Guimet's temporary exhibitions are typically dedicated to a specific period, production or artist. Georges Clémenceau's relationship to Asia, therefore, proves a unique subject for an exhibition, as stressed by one of the curators of the show, Aurélie Samuel.



Fig. 1, View of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet, Paris.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The exhibition received the *Label centenaire*, which refers to the centennial of the First World War and thus is part of an official commemorative program of events that include several exhibitions, such as the forthcoming *Les désastres de la guerre (1800–2014)* [Disasters of War, 1800–2014] to be held at Louvre Lens (May 28–October 6, 2014). Unlike these other events,

however, the Musée Guimet exhibition deals less with issues related to the First World War than with the complex personality of the statesman and war leader, successively named *Premier flic de France* [France's "top cop"], *Briseur de grèves* [strike breaker], *Tombéur des ministères* [heartbreaker of the government agencies], and *Père la victoire* [the father of victory], the latter referring to his role at the end of the war. *Clémenceau, le Tigre et l'Asie* succeeds in presenting a widely unknown aspect of the turn-of-the-century politician—his passion for Asian arts, cultures and civilizations that guided and infused his entire life as a collector, an intellectual, and also a writer.^[1]

Mathieu Séguéla, professor at Lycée français in Tokyo and author of *Clémenceau ou la tentation du Japon*, was the main organizer of this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue.^[2] In addition, the curatorial team included Aurélie Samuel in charge of the textile department at Musée Guimet and Amina Taha Hussein-Okada, curator-in-chief of the Indian department. The scientific committee was composed of several important scholars including Sylvie Brodziak, Geneviève Lacambre, and Michel Maucuer. The exhibition focuses on four themes: "Le Tigre et l'Asie" [The Tiger and Asia], "Le sens de la collection" [The meaning of the collection], "Le voyage en Asie" [Travel in Asia] and "Cultures croisées" [Crossed cultures]; the catalogue follows the same thematic structure in its four chapters. Each of these chapters is introduced by a short text on the legacy of Clémenceau by Jean-Noël Jeanneney, Professor emeritus, former president of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and honorary president of the exhibition. Catalogue entries are included in the chapters to which they are related, making the whole catalogue clear and easy to consult.

Two spaces in the museum are devoted to the exhibition: the temporary galleries on the lower floor and the rotunda on the second floor. The main temporary exhibition space is divided into six rooms: four enfilade rooms, one large curved corridor, one long room composed of four sections, and a final open space devoted to a chronology of Clémenceau's life and several videos. About 800 objects and pictures are on display, most of them belonging to the Musée Guimet, the Musée Clémenceau (Paris), the Maison Georges Clémenceau (Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard, Vendée), and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

The visitor enters the first room through what has always been the exit of the temporary exhibition space. This was one of the original design concepts that convinced the curators to choose Christophe Martin as the exhibition designer. The first section is devoted to Clémenceau, the man. Who exactly was he? To which extent was he involved in the Japonism circle? What was his role as a promoter of Asian arts in France? As Aurélie Samuel emphasizes, this proved a good opportunity to show objects usually not on display at the Musée Guimet, such as the portrait of Clémenceau by Edouard Manet (1832–1883) as well as a large tableau by Jean-François Rafaelli (1850–1924) showing the statesman giving a speech at an electoral meeting (figs. 2, 3).^[3] In addition to these two paintings, the spotlight fell on the bronze bust of Clémenceau by Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) displayed in the middle of the room (fig. 4). On the back wall behind the bust and paintings, portraying Clémenceau's official image as a politician, was a large photograph showing him at his desk surrounded by Far Eastern objects. All these representations were meant to emphasize the many facets of the politician. In order to revitalize the spirit of the man, a few of his personal objects are displayed in the room close to Manet's portrait, including gloves and a hat.

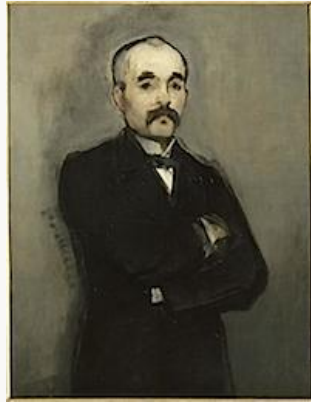


Fig. 2, Edouard Manet, *Georges Clémenceau*, 1879–80.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

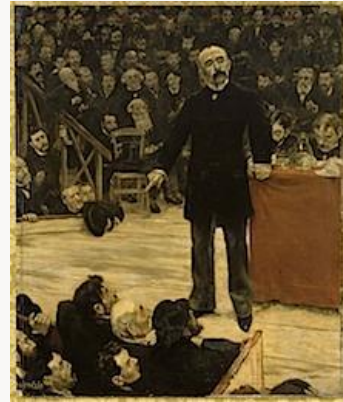


Fig. 3, Jean-François Raffaëlli, *Georges Clémenceau prononçant un discours dans une réunion électorale*, [Georges Clémenceau Giving a Speech at an Electoral Meeting], ca. 1885.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 4, View of room one: foreground: Auguste Rodin, *Georges Clémenceau*, 1911.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The color red dominates the first rooms, recalling Far Eastern lacquerware or Chinese porcelains from Jingdezhen. The color is all the more powerful, given that the walls of this enfilade of rooms are pierced, which enlarges the appearance of the rooms, but could also confuse the visitor. The following two rooms cover several aspects of Clémenceau's role as a politician and his interest in Far Eastern cultures through an impressive range of prints, posters, photographs, books, reproductions, furniture, and newspaper clips. The sheer amount of objects displayed in this small room provides an accurate sense of Clémenceau's diverse relationship to Asia, which began in the late 1860s when he worked as a teacher in Stamford, Connecticut, and as a correspondent for French newspapers; and ended with his last book, *Au soir de la pensée* (1927), published two years before his death.

His earliest interests in Asia can be dated from his travels in the United States in 1865, when he noticed the growing trade relationship between Japan and America. Upon returning to Paris,

he made Japanese friends and became interested in Japanese art. Clémenceau used the term “Asie jaune” (Yellow Asia) to speak about the Far East, which included Japan, South and South-East Asia, China, and Korea. He likely started his collection in the 1870s as he was in contact with Prince Saionji Kinmochi (1849–1940), who arrived in Paris in 1871. His interests were further encouraged by Henri Cernuschi (1821–1896), Théodore Duret (1838–1927), Emile Zola (1840–1902), and Edouard Manet. In his book, Matthieu Séguéla interestingly notices that “the political ascension of Clémenceau increased with the rise of Japanism” in the 1870s and 1880s. [4] In the large display case that divides the second room, the public role of the journalist embodied by the famous article “J'accuse,” published in *L'Aurore* in January 1898, is mixed with Far Eastern objects such as Chinese porcelains. In this room, the visitor can admire a beautiful Japanese screen featuring an embroidered tiger which belonged to Clémenceau and is today in his country house in Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard (fig. 5). Almost like a totem animal, the tiger was soon attached to Clémenceau, referring to his physiognomy: his cheekbones, the color of his skin, and the form of his eyes. This metaphor is highlighted by a print by Gilbert Gautier, *Clémenceau, Le Tigre* (1917, Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Musée d'Histoire Contemporaine), and a drawing by André Astoul, both displayed in this room (fig. 6).



Fig. 5, Japanese screen, 19th c., lacquered wood and embroidered silk.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 6, Gilbert Gautier, *Clémenceau, "Le Tigre"*
[Clémenceau, The Tiger], 1917.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Despite Clémenceau's limited interest in Korea, the exhibition displays an extensive series of Korean celadon porcelains given to the museum in 1888 by Charles Varrat (fig. 7). In this context, it is important to insist on the fact that the politician was not interested equally in every Far Eastern culture, and that the visitor may be confused by the great variety of objects, trying to decipher whether or not they actually belonged to Clémenceau. The same impression is created in the following room where the number of objects and images compared to the size of the room reaches its maximum (fig. 8). Instead of focusing on one topic, such as Clémenceau's role in the promotion of Asian arts in Paris, the curators decided to cover several themes simultaneously. The catalogue offers separate studies on each of the subjects raised in this room.



Fig. 7, View of a display case in the second room showing Korean celadon porcelains.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 8, View of room three.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

In a sense, the rise and fall of the Tiger's collection are here shown together: the invoices of famous Chinese and Japanese antique dealers, such as Siegfried Bing and Antoine de la Barde, as well as the auction sale catalogue of Philippe Burty's collection (1891) where Clémenceau bought several lots, are displayed alongside the two auction catalogues of his collection dated February and December 1894. Through Geneviève Lacambre's careful study "Clémenceau and Asian art's auction sales," we learn how the first years of the 1890s marked a turning point not only in Clémenceau's personal and political life, but also in his manner of collecting (76–87). He stopped purchasing at these auction sales in mid-1891 and turned to antique dealers such as Bing and de la Narde, probably because he had less time to devote to his hobby. His divorce in 1892 and his failure at the 1893 elections, which prevented him from receiving indemnity, put Clémenceau in a difficult financial situation. In 1894, he anonymously sold most of his collection, which contained about 7,000 Far Eastern objects. Lacambre provides a precise list of these two sales, detailing, for example, the number of prints by Hokusai, Outamaro, or Hiroshige owned by the collector. She also provides the names of the dealers and collectors of the time who attended these sales, some of whose collections were later given or sold to the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. In his book, Séguéla also provides additional information on the ways that Clémenceau acquired his collection. For example, he was in direct contact with one of his friends living in Japan, Francis Steenackers (1858–1917), a French diplomat who worked in various consulates in Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama until 1906. In Japan, he was "the eye of the collector," as Séguéla pointed out.^[5]

Another important aspect presented in this room is Clémenceau's role in the creation of museums or departments in Paris devoted to Asian arts. Two articles written by Séguéla are devoted to this question in the catalogue (136–141; 142–149). When Emile Guimet decided to create a museum in Paris devoted to religions in order to move his collection from Lyon, Clémenceau was one of the few deputies who encouraged Auguste Fallières, minister of public instruction and Fine Arts, to find public funds for this project. The famous portrait of Emile Guimet (1898, Musée Guimet, Paris) by Ferdinand Jean Luigini is shown in this room (fig. 9). In 1889, the museum successfully opened, and Clémenceau made his first gifts as early as 1890, including several Chinese teapots and incense boxes shown as a part of the exhibition. The same year, he became a member of the organization committee for the Japanese prints

exhibition to be held from April 25 to May 22, 1890 at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Thanks to Clémenceau, the show took place in the large exhibition room of the school. Bing, who loaned more than a half of the prints, thanked him by dedicating the catalogue of the exhibition to “M. G. Clémenceau, the magician who creates light where obscurity rules.”^[6] In the exhibition, this quotation appears on the wall above the original poster of the Japanese prints exhibition and several Japanese prints.



Fig. 9, View of room three, showing Ferdinand Jean Luigini, *Emile Guimet*, 1898.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

In an article published in Clémenceau's newspaper *La Justice*, the following year, Gustave Geffroy denounced the fact that the Louvre had yet to extend its collection to Far Eastern art.^[7] In reaction to Geffroy's article, Clémenceau encouraged the minister, Léon Bourgeois, to foster the Louvre's purchase of two Japanese priests made of wood and lacquer, supposedly representing Ryôgen and Hôjo Tokiyori. What the exhibition reveals is that these two sculptures, acquired through Bing, constituted the beginnings of the Louvre's Japanese art department, which opened in December 1893. Later given to the Musée Guimet, Aurélie Samuel is proud to show them both in this room, in the light of this discovery (fig. 10).



Fig. 10, Probably Ryôgen, *Japanese priest*, 16th c. Lacquered wood.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The last accomplishment presented in this room is the creation of the Musée d'Ennery. Clemence d'Ennery, Clémenceau's friend and one of the rare women to be part of this Japanesque circle, had originally planned to divide her collection between the Musée du Louvre and the Musée Guimet. Instead, Clémenceau convinced her to bequeath the entire collection to the state, together with the future museum that would display it. The collector added a new wing to her *hôtel particulier* [city home] enhancing her collection with the

contribution of the famous Parisian Chinese-style furniture maker Gabriel Viardot. However, the death of Clemence d'Ennery in 1898, and the attempted modifications of her testament by her husband, precipitated a four-year trial that ended in 1903 with the confirmation of the donation of the collection to the state, thanks to Clémenceau's struggle. The museum eventually opened in May 1906. An enlarged color photo print of the current museum is hung in the alcove of the room together with a Chinese-style bench and a letter box by the late-nineteenth-century furniture maker Gabriel Viardot (fig. 11).



Fig. 11, View of the alcove in the third room showing a photo print of the interior of the Musée d'Ennery, a Chinese-style bench and a letter box (top left), both by Gabriel Viardot.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Unfortunately barely visible due to an absence of light in the gallery, the letter box belongs to a set of furniture ordered by the statesman for his bedroom in 1887, when he moved into a large apartment located 6 rue Clement-Marot. The furniture is signed and dated 1886. Encouraged by his three sons and Henry Selden Bacon, the owner of the building, Clémenceau's apartment was transformed into a museum soon after his death in August 1929. It may have been more effective to focus on this object as a means of presenting Clémenceau's taste for French furniture in the Chinese style. While the catalogue entry does not provide further information on it, Olivier Gabet, director of Musée des Arts Décoratifs and preeminent scholar of nineteenth-century furniture, gave a talk on Clémenceau and Viardot during the symposium mentioned above.

Stepping out of this gallery space, the visitor has no choice but to go back through the first two rooms in order to reach the fourth room. Unlike the previous rooms, this larger space concentrates on two topics: the tea ceremony and the Buddhist ceremony. Greeting visitors at the entrance is Clémenceau's impressive collection of incense boxes (*kôgô*) (figs. 12, 13). Lent to the Musée d'Ennery from 1906 until his death, Clémenceau's collection of 3,000 *kôgô* was sold by his son at his death. The collection was entirely acquired by Joseph-Arthur Simard, who later gifted it to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Shown in two L-shaped display cases, the selection of 500 little stoneware boxes is breathtaking. One can spend hours looking at the various shapes invented by the Japanese potters. A few other objects related to the tea ceremony, such as bowls and various tools, are shown in a separate display case. In the catalogue, Séguéla's article, "Le théisme de Georges Clémenceau" [Georges Clémenceau's *teaism*] provides more information on this theme (152–57). Clémenceau favored teapots made of brown or red stoneware, especially those from Yixing (Kiang-sou) (fig. 14). In 1889, he was invited by the minister Tanaka Fujimaro to attend a *chanoyu*, which is a true tea ceremony.

Guimet also had the opportunity to attend the event, which likely had an important impact on the development of Clémenceau's collection of tools related to the *chanoyu*. Looking at the two 1894 auction sales, it appears that Clémenceau owned 101 teapots and 63 tea bowls. Okakura Kakuzō's *The Book of Tea* was a revelation for the collector at the end of his life. Shown at the exhibition, the translation from English to French by Gabriel Mourey published in 1906 was owned by Clémenceau and permanently remained on his desk. Kakuzō's book embodied his spiritual relation to tea and rituals associated with it:



Fig. 12, View of room four, showing Clémenceau's collection of *kôgô*.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 13, View of room four with the L-shaped display case.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 14, Boccaro teapot, China, 19th c.
Stoneware.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It inculcates purity and harmony, the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order. It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life.^[8]

Before entering the following space, Clémenceau's interest in Buddhism was presented. In a video on the exhibition website, Kevin Kennel, assistant curator in the textile section of Musée Guimet, provides significant information about Clémenceau's fascination with the Buddha and his philosophy. Describing the Buddhist ceremony of 1891 attended by the statesman, Kennel

explained that the objects used were part of the Musée Guimet's collections. A painting by Félix Régamey (1844–1907) represents one of these ceremonies that took place in the rotunda of the museum (fig. 15). Clémenceau appears at the first rank, almost as an actor of the ceremony. About 140 articles reported this event in various newspapers and magazines, describing the objects that were used and sometimes illustrating them: clothing, incense burners, altar, and statues. For this exhibition, some of the furniture including stools and incense burners are shown at the exact same place as in the rotunda located upstairs together with etchings of the ceremony (fig. 16).



Fig. 15, Félix Régamey, *Buddhist Ceremony at the Musée Guimet in 1898*.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 16, Reconstitution of the Buddhist ceremony in the rotunda.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Clémenceau's involvement in Buddhism may appear contradictory for someone who promoted secularism. According to Clémenceau, Buddhism is less a religion than a philosophy. In his various publications from 1893 to 1927, the intellectual opposed the Buddha to the Christ, underlining the fact that the Buddha never affirmed the existence of a god. To Clémenceau, Siddhârta Gautama, who he usually named Shâkyamuni, was at the top of the hierarchy of intellectuals because he promoted a certain form of asceticism and love of one's neighbor. In a conference, Clémenceau presented Shâkyamuni's philosophy as a reform of the individual without divine mediation.^[9] Looking at a photograph by Jean Tournassoud of Clémenceau's desk while he was President of the Counsel and Minister of War, Séguéla noticed four statuettes, one of Venus and three related to Buddhism (two Bodhisattvas and one priest): this Greco-Buddhist ensemble probably contributed to Clémenceau's inner peace. Learning about the Far Eastern cultures through books and publications was not enough to fully grasp the core of these civilizations. Pursuing an intellectual and personal quest, Clémenceau traveled to South and Southeast Asia in 1920–21. The transition between this room and the following large curved corridor made this travel appear as a logical consequence in the man's life as he was turning 79.

The curving passageway served as an apt metaphor for Clémenceau's voyage to India (fig. 17). The number of photographs shown here was rather impressive. Along the corridor, five screens displayed changing black and white images of South Asia. Clémenceau's trip was here wonderfully documented through objects, books, and other ephemera—most of them from the collection of the Musée Clémenceau—that give a good sense of the density of these months abroad (fig. 18). Through this mixing of objects, which includes photographs taken in

various situations and antiquities, the exhibition succeeds in showing visitors the intricate and interrelated aspects of Clémenceau's fascination for Asia (figs. 19, 20).



Fig. 17, View of room five devoted to Clémenceau's travels to India and Southeast Asia, 1920–21.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 18, View of room five devoted to Clémenceau's travel to India and Southeast Asia, 1920–21.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 19, Photograph showing Georges Clémenceau at Gal Vihâra, in Polonnaruwa, 1921.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 20, Photograph showing Clémenceau inaugurating a new avenue bearing his name in Singapore, 1920.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Several important articles in the catalogue analyze the successive steps of Clémenceau's trip in Asia. Among them, Amina Taha-Hussein Okada's first article deals with his stay in India and Ceylon (currently Sri Lanka) in a quest for Buddhism's roots. She articulates the significant number of letters Clémenceau sent from India to his friends with the images he confronted during his travels. Before arriving there, while his health was worsening, he wrote to his doctors: "... as I am about to enter India, you wouldn't want me to go back to France without having visited India. Whether I will die, or I will visit India. Once again, treat me."^[10] Written on the wall, this quote is effective in showing the extent to which the Tiger was bound to India's civilization.

While there, Clémenceau not only was experiencing his fascination for Buddhism but also admiring sculptures made in the ancient kingdom of Gandhara during the first century BCE. He was especially interested in the Gandharan Greco-Buddhist art that started around 75–80 BCE. As Pierre Cambon explains in the article he dedicated to this topic in the catalogue, Clémenceau's knowledge of this period grew from several contemporary French sources, such as Alfred Foucher's *L'Art gréco-bouddique du Gandhâra*.^[11] In the book Clémenceau published before his death, *Au Soir de la Pensée*, he paid homage to Foucher's research and described in a few words what he saw in India: "Every museum in India is full of these works of art where we see Shâkyamuni dressed in Greek costume and with the traits of Apollo."^[12] Gandharan art combines Clémenceau's fascination for Hellenism, seen as the foundation of Western civilization, and his admiration for Buddhism, both as a model of freedom and as a weapon against Catholicism. In 1927, Clémenceau made a gift of four Gandharan sculptures to the Musée Guimet, at a time when the only other known examples were those found by Foucher and exhibited at the Louvre, along with the Noër Collection given to the Louvre in 1870. The exhibition provides the visitor with the opportunity to admire this important gift composed of a seated Buddha, a head of the Buddha and two low reliefs, all dated 1st–3rd century (fig. 21).



Fig. 21, *Seated Buddha*, Gandhara, ca.1st–3rd century.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

While looking at a large photograph depicting Clémenceau surrounded by three tigers that he had just shot, the visitor heard music having nothing to do with India (fig. 22). Attracted by this unexpected sound, the visitor entered the last section of the exhibition: one large room divided into four sections. Surrounded by several Chinese objects formerly belonging to Clémenceau, including bronzes, teapots, and lavish porcelain vases, the visitor faced an enlarged reproduction of a photograph showing comedians on a stage, dressed in the Chinese style in the interior of a palace (figs. 23, 24). In this alcove, the visitor could now perfectly listen to Gabriel Fauré's music, composed for a one-act play entitled *Le voile du Bonheur* [The veil of happiness] written by Georges Clémenceau himself in 1901. As Séguéla notes in his article on this subject, it could have been inspired by another play, *Les Yeux clos* [Closed Eyes] (1896) written by the Japonist Félix Régamey, previously mentioned. Although differences exist, the two texts both concern a blind man who recovers his sight, then discovers the ugliness of the world and eventually returns to blindness to be happy again. A part of the Orientalist movement, the play takes place in China, but unlike *chinoiseries*, it remains faithful to Chinese culture: the names of the authentic and various roles are indebted to the dramas of Yuan dynasty.



Fig. 22, Photograph showing Georges Clémenceau, Maharajah Ganga Singh of Bikaner and Maharajah of Gwalior after tiger hunting in Gwalior, 1921.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 23, Display cases showing Chinese porcelains, some of which belonged to Clémenceau.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 24, *Le Voile du Bonheur* [The Veil of Happiness], Théâtre de la Renaissance, 1901.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Staged fourteen times in 1901, the play was neither a failure nor a success, though it was later shown in Italy (1907–08) and again in Paris at Théâtre de la Porte-Martin (1909). A silent movie by Albert Capellani based on the drama was released in France and the United States in 1910. The following year, the drama was turned into a musical in two acts by Paul Ferrier with music by Charles Pons. The play became popular again after World War I. After being translated into Chinese, a second silent film by Edouard-Emile Violet was released in 1923 under the title *Le Récit du poète aveugle* [The Narrative of the Blind Poet].

The following section was dedicated to what Philippe Burty named "Japonisme," that is to say the fascination for Japanese art and culture. From this point in the show, the visitor could see the last work exhibited, a large painting by Claude Monet, *Le bassin aux Nymphéas* (1917–19, Museum Folkwang, Essen). In a very clever way, this perspective strengthens the triangular relationship between Japanese art, nature, and artists of the time. A text outlines the context of the creation of the term "Japonisme," and describes some of its main manifestations in France. Unlike the preceding areas, the visitor could appreciate the increased size of the gallery, which

was devoted to a generous selection of Japanese lacquer ware, prints, illustrated books and masks (fig. 25). As Aurélie Samuel noted, the preparation of this specific section required almost a “police investigation,” to trace the objects, most of which had belonged to Clémenceau until the sale of his collection in 1894.



Fig. 25, View of the section devoted to Japonism.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Finding many of Clémenceau's Japanese prints in the collection of the Musée Royal des Beaux-arts in Brussels “was probably one of the best surprises during the preparation of the show,” the curator said. Clémenceau collected about 2,800 prints between 1878 and 1893, including more than 600 albums of *ukiyo-e*, with Hiroshige and Hokusai being the most represented artists. The prints were here wonderfully displayed in two long, medium-height display cases in the center of the room. Beside the famous *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* in the collection of Georges Clémenceau's house in Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard, several less known Japanese artists were here represented such as Ōishi Matora (1794–1833), author of an illustrated book *Shinji andon* [The Lanterns of the Festival] published in 1829. Clémenceau's collection was broad enough to give an overview of the evolution of Japanese prints through its major artists and themes, from the beginning of the eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century. Regarding Clémenceau's taste for Japanese prints, Chantal Kozyrell and Nathalie Vandeperre provide historical background in the catalogue necessary to understanding the origin, manufacturing process, and diffusion of these prints.

Another surprise was Clémenceau's collection of Japanese theater masks. A few of them had been acquired at the 1894 auction sale by Charles Cartier-Bresson (1853–1921), grandfather of the famous photographer, and later became part of the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy. Five Nô masks, dating to the seventeenth and eighteenth century, are shown in the exhibition (fig. 26). Clémenceau would hang them on the walls of his apartment, among the Impressionist paintings by Edgar Degas, Raffaëlli, or Camille Pissarro. One was also hung on the main door of his apartment, which was, according to Séguéla, a way to show another facet of Clémenceau, beyond the politician. Although he sold most of his masks in 1894, he did keep those referring to Buddhism until the end of his life.



Fig. 26, Japanese Nô masks, 17th and 18th c.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Walking into the following section with Monet's *Nymphéas* appearing clearly ahead, the visitor discovered Clémenceau's haven of peace, a country house that the retired statesman started renting in 1920 (fig. 27). Located in Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard (Vendée), facing the Atlantic Ocean, the five-room house was soon furnished and decorated with Far Eastern objects, Japanese prints, souvenirs and other diplomatic presents. A large backlit color photograph showed the view from his desk, facing the garden that he had carefully arranged with the help of his old friend, Monet. On an adjacent wall was another large black-and-white photo print showing Clémenceau holding his cane and posing with two bronze foxes; the actual bronze sculptures were displayed immediately in front of the photograph (fig. 27). Lucky objects symbolizing science and wealth, the two animals were ironically called "Pasteur" and "Rothschild" by Clémenceau. Two paintings by Blanche Hoschedé Monet (1865–1947), the painter's daughter-in-law, depict the luxuriant surroundings of the house (fig. 28).



Fig. 27, Section devoted to Clémenceau's house in Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard, Vendée.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 28, Blanche Hoschedé-Monet, *Le Jardin de Clémenceau à Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard* [Clémenceau's garden in Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard], ca. 1927–29.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The house and garden of Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard, where Clémenceau spent most of his time during the last ten years of his life, appears to be a logical transition to an exploration of the

relationship between the politician, Monet, and Japan, shown in the last section. The relationship between the two men is well known. Several books and articles have been published on this topic, including the catalogue of the exhibition mentioned at the beginning of this review, *Clémenceau et les artistes modernes*. Although not focused on the links between the painter and the politician, Laurence Bertrand Dorléac's recent publication *Contre-déclin, Monet et Spengler dans les jardins de l'histoire* offers a new insight on Clémenceau's role in Monet's national recognition, within a specific political and intellectual context, shaped by Oswald Spengler's two-volume book *The Decline of the West*.^[13]

Surprisingly, primary sources such as the correspondence between Clémenceau and Monet starting in 1895 or Clémenceau's book *Claude Monet* published in 1928 do not provide any further illumination on either man's thoughts about Japan and Japanese art, or their personal discussions about the subject. However, the interest of both men for Japanese prints is well-known and several of Monet's own Japanese prints were shown near the paintings they might have inspired (fig. 29).^[14] In the exhibition catalogue, Geneviève Lacambre's article *Clémenceau, Monet et le Japon* provides further information. The politician went often to Giverny to visit the painter and several photographs show them posing on the Japanese bridge in the middle of Monet's Japanese-inspired garden (fig. 30). The painter would give him plants or cuttings of roses so that Clémenceau could replant them in his own garden. The latter saw Monet's garden as a work of art comparable to his paintings:



Fig. 29, Left: Claude Monet, *Le Mont Kolsaas en Norvège* [The Kolsaas Mountain in Norway], 1895.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 30, Photograph of Georges Clémenceau and Claude Monet in Giverny, 1924.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Monet's garden is one of his works, which has the charm of adapting nature to the works of the painter of the light. An outside extension of his workshop, with palettes of colors profusely spread all over, for the gymnastics of the eye, through the appetites of vibrations from which a feverish retina waits for delights that are never appeased.^[15]

Promised as a gift to the state at the end of the First World War, Monet's large water lily panels, which eventually entailed the creation of two oval rooms in the Orangerie of the Tuileries, recall seventeenth-century painted decors made in Kyoto. Lacambre sees this gift as homage to Clémenceau and Monet's mutual fascination for Japan. Monet's admiration for Japanese art began in the 1860s and by the mid-1870s he had already started collecting prints. His library

contained many books on Japan, some which reflect his association with Clémenceau's Japanist friends and colleagues; these included a brochure published by Henri Focillon in 1918 titled *Essai sur le génie japonais*, and a signed copy of Gaston Migeon's book *Au Japon, promenade aux sanctuaires de l'art* (1908); Migeon was the curator of Far-eastern art at the Louvre.

Although most of the paintings shown in the exhibition were Monet's, the visitor also had the opportunity to contemplate three terracotta busts of Clémenceau by Rodin and a portrait by Eugene Carrière (1849–1906) (figs. 31, 32). Florence Rionnet's catalogue essay “Clémenceau face à l'art moderne, . . . dans le cycle immense des soleils” [“Clémenceau facing modern art, . . . in the immense cycle of the suns”] deals with Monet's series of cathedral paintings in comparison with Hokusai's series of views of Mount Fuji and Monet's gift of the *Nymphéas* to the state. While the exhibition showed a Japanese mask (Musée Rodin, Paris) that belonged to Rodin, inviting the visitors to compare it with the busts, the article does not articulate the role played by Japanese art in Clémenceau's interest in these artists. Other artists promoted by Clémenceau in the 1870s and 1880s, such as Manet and Carrière, are however mentioned in this article, providing further information on the influence of Gustave Geffroy (1855–1926), the art critic and friend of the politician, on his position towards the art of his time.



Fig. 31, Auguste Rodin, Three busts of
Georges Clémenceau, 1911.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 32, View of room six, showing on the
right: Eugène Carrière, *Georges Clémenceau*, ca.
1895.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The last room includes other materials and sources, which do not specifically relate to Clémenceau's relationship to Asia (fig. 33). Although the five stools, bright light and small screen did not encourage the visitor to stay more than five minutes in this section, the 32-minute silent movie made by Henri Diamant-Berger, a year and a half before Clémenceau's death, is quite poignant. Shot in Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard, this film interview, which had been lost for decades, was rediscovered by his grandson, Jérôme Diamant-Berger, in 2008. Looking at the large chronology unusually shown at the very end of the exhibition, the visitor can also listen to the correspondence between Monet and Clémenceau.



Fig. 33, View of the last gallery.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Dedicated to a national political icon, the exhibition succeeds in showing another facet about Clémenceau, that being his interest in art, which remained generally unknown to the public. Following this objective, the curators have developed a rich cross-cultural exhibition that not only explores Clémenceau from many vantage points but also provides important frameworks for understanding the artistic context of the time. The complex life and personality of the “Tiger” appears a fruitful means of grasping this moment in time when the Far East offered a fresh perspective to westerners and when it excited the imaginations of many, including those of intellectuals and artists.

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Additional resources:

<http://www.guimet.fr/fr/expositions/expositions-a-venir/la-tentation-de-lorient-georges-clemenceau-et-lasie>

<http://www.guimet.fr/sites/clemenceau-asie/>

Notes

Acknowledgments: The author wants to thank Matthieu Séguéla and Aurélie Samuel, who kindly agreed to be interviewed, and Jason Nguyen for his help.

All translations by the author.

[1] Supposedly related to the exhibition, the symposium entitled *Clémenceau et les arts* that took place at the Musée Guimet on March 20–21, 201 was more closely related to a previous show,

Clémenceau et les artistes modernes at the Historial de la Vendée (Les Lucs-sur-Boulogne, Vendée), which ended on March 2, 2014. With the exception of presentations by Olivier Gabet, Matthieu Séguéla and Valérie Joxe, the symposium dealt with Clémenceau's relationship to western arts.

[2] Mattieu Séguéla has written extensively on Clémenceau, including his book *Clémenceau, ou La tentation du Japon* (Paris: Editions CNRS, 2014), which was based on his Ph. D. dissertation at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris.

[3] Interview with the author, May 28, 2014.

[4] Matthieu Séguéla, *Clémenceau, ou la tentation du Japon* (Paris: Editions CNRS, 2014), 108. ["L'ascension politique de Clémenceau accompagne l'essor du japonisme . . ."].

[5] Matthieu Séguéla, *Clémenceau, ou la tentation du Japon* (Paris: Editions CNRS, 2013), 109.

[6] Siegfried Bing, *Exposition de la gravure japonaise, ouverte à l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts* (Paris: Chauchat, 1890).

[7] Gustave Geffroy, "À propos de la vente Burty," *La Justice*, March 19, 1891.

[8] Okakura-Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1919), 3–4.

[9] M. Ségard, *Sur la démocratie, Neuf conférences par G. Clémenceau* (Paris: Larousse, 1930), 34.

[10] Mordacq, *Clémenceau au soir de sa vie, 1920–1929*, vol. I, (Paris: Plon, 1933) 115. ["... mais vous ne voudriez pas que je sois arrivé à la porte de l'Inde et que je retourne en France sans avoir visité l'Inde. Ou je mourrai ou je visiterai l'Inde. Encore une fois, soignez-moi."]

[11] Alfred Foucher, *L'Art gréco-bouddique du Gandhâra* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, vol. I, 1905 and vol. II, 1918).

[12] Georges Clémenceau, *Au soir de la pensée*, vol. I, (Paris: Plon, 1927), 331.

[13] See Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *Contre-déclin. Monet et Spengler dans les jardins de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012). Also see Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* [The Decline of the West]; the first volume was published in 1918, and the second volume in 1922. The two volumes were translated into English in 1926 and into French in 1948.

[14] Virginia Spate, *Monet and Japan*, exh. cat. (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2001).

[15] Georges Clémenceau, *Claude Monet* (Paris: Perrin, 2000), 56. ["Le jardin de Monet compte parmi ses oeuvres, réalisant le charme d'une adaptation de la nature aux travaux du peintre de la lumière. Un prolongement d'atelier en plein air, avec des palettes de couleurs profusément répandues de toutes parts pour les gymnastiques de l'oeil, au travers des appetites de vibrations dont une rétine fiévreuse attend des joies jamais apaisées."]

Illustrations

All photographs by the author unless otherwise noted, courtesy of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet, Paris.



Fig. 1, View of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Edouard Manet, *Georges Clémenceau*, 1879–80. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photograph courtesy of RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay)/Hervé Lewandowski. [\[return to text\]](#)

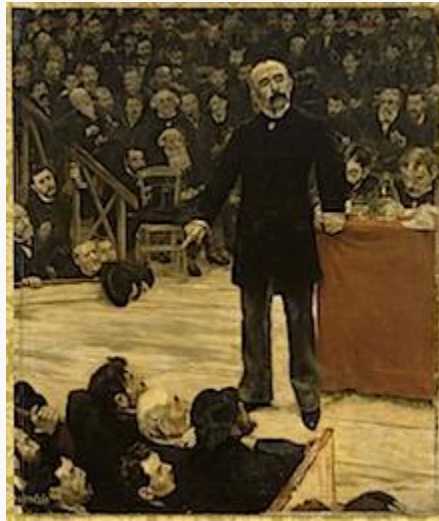


Fig. 3, Jean-François Raffaëlli, *Georges Clémenceau prononçant un discours dans une réunion électorale*, [Georges Clémenceau Giving a Speech at an Electoral Meeting], ca.1885. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, View of room one: foreground: Auguste Rodin, *Georges Clémenceau*, 1911. Bronze. Musée Rodin, Paris; background: photograph showing Clémenceau at his desk, 1925. Musée Clémenceau, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Japanese screen, 19th c., lacquered wood and embroidered silk. Maison de Georges Clémenceau, Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard, Vendée. Photograph courtesy of Centre des Monuments Nationaux/Hervé Lewandowski. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 6, Gilbert Gautier, *Clémenceau, "Le Tigre"* [Clémenceau, The Tiger], 1917. Colored metallography. Musée d'Histoire Contemporaine, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 7, View of a display case in the second room showing Korean celadon porcelains. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 8, View of room three. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 9, View of room three, showing Ferdinand Jean Luigini, *Emile Guimet*, 1898. Oil on canvas. Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 10, Probably Ryôgen, *Japanese priest*, 16th c. Lacquered wood. Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 11, View of the alcove in the third room showing a photo print of the interior of the Musée d'Ennery, a Chinese-style bench and a letter box (top left), both by Gabriel Viardot. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 12, View of room four, showing Clémenceau's collection of *kôgô*. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 13, View of room four with the L-shaped display case. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 14, Boccaro teapot, China, 19th c. Stoneware. Musée Clémenceau, Paris. Photograph by Chipault et Soligny. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 15, Félix Régamey, *Buddhist Ceremony at the Musée Guimet in 1898*. Oil on canvas. Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet, Paris. Photograph courtesy of RMN. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 16, Reconstitution of the Buddhist ceremony in the rotunda. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 17, View of room five devoted to Clémenceau's travels to India and Southeast Asia, 1920–21.
[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 18, View of room five devoted to Clémenceau's travel to India and Southeast Asia, 1920–21.
[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 19, Photograph showing Georges Clémenceau at Gal Vihâra, in Polonnaruwa, 1921. Musée Clémenceau, Paris. Photo courtesy of Collection Musée Clémenceau, Paris/DR. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 20, Photograph showing Clémenceau inaugurating a new avenue bearing his name in Singapore, 1920. Musée Clémenceau, Paris. Photo courtesy of Collection Musée Clémenceau, Paris/DR. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 21, *Seated Buddha*, Gandhara, ca.1st–3rd century. Stone. Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet, Paris, Gift of Clémenceau. Photo courtesy of DR. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 22, Photograph showing Georges Clémenceau, Maharajah Ganga Singh of Bikaner and Maharajah of Gwalior after tiger hunting in Gwalior, 1921. Musée Clémenceau, Paris. Photo courtesy of Collection Musée Clémenceau, Paris/DR. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 23, Display cases showing Chinese porcelains, some of which belonged to Clémenceau. Right: poster of the movie *Le Voile du Bonheur* [The Veil of Happiness] by Albert Capellani, edited by Pathé frères, after Georges Clémenceau's *Le Voile du Bonheur*. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)

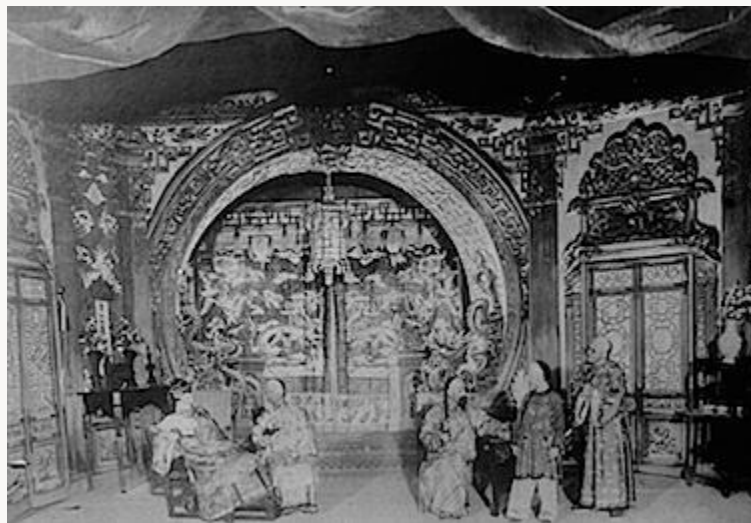


Fig. 24, *Le Voile du Bonheur* [The Veil of Happiness], Théâtre de la Renaissance, 1901. Photograph. Musée Clémenceau, Paris. Photo courtesy of Collection Musée Clémenceau, Paris/DR. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 25, View of the section devoted to Japonism. In the middle were display cases showing various Japanese prints and illustrated books. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 26, Japanese Nô masks, 17th and 18th c. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 27, Section devoted to Clémenceau's house in Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard, Vendée. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 28, Blanche Hoschedé-Monet, *Le Jardin de Clémenceau à Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard* [Clémenceau's garden in Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard], ca. 1927–29. Oil on canvas. Musée Clémenceau, Paris. Photo courtesy of Collection Musée Clémenceau, Paris/DR. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 29, Left: Claude Monet, *Le Mont Kolsaas en Norvège* [The Kolsaas Mountain in Norway], 1895. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Katsushika Hokusai, *Views of Mount Fuji*, ca.1830–32. Woodblock print. Fondation Claude Monet, Giverny. Right: Claude Monet, *Gondoles de Venise* [Gondola in Venice], 1908. Oil on canvas. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Paris, gift of Georges Clémenceau (1930), Nantes; Utagawa Hiroshige, *Famous Places of Edo*, ca.1847–52, Woodblock print. Fondation Claude Monet, Giverny. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 30, Photograph of Georges Clémenceau and Claude Monet in Giverny, 1924. Musée Clémenceau, Paris. Photo courtesy of Collection Musée Clémenceau, Paris/DR. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 31, Auguste Rodin, Three busts of Georges Clémenceau, 1911. Terracotta. Musée Rodin, Paris; Claude Monet, *Pont Japonais* [Japanese bridge], 1924. Oil on canvas. Collection Larock-Granoff, Paris.

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Fig. 32, View of room six, showing on the right: Eugène Carrière, *Georges Clémenceau*, ca.1895. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Art Moderne, Troyes; Claude Monet, *Self-portrait*, 1917. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 33, View of the last gallery. [\[return to text\]](#)