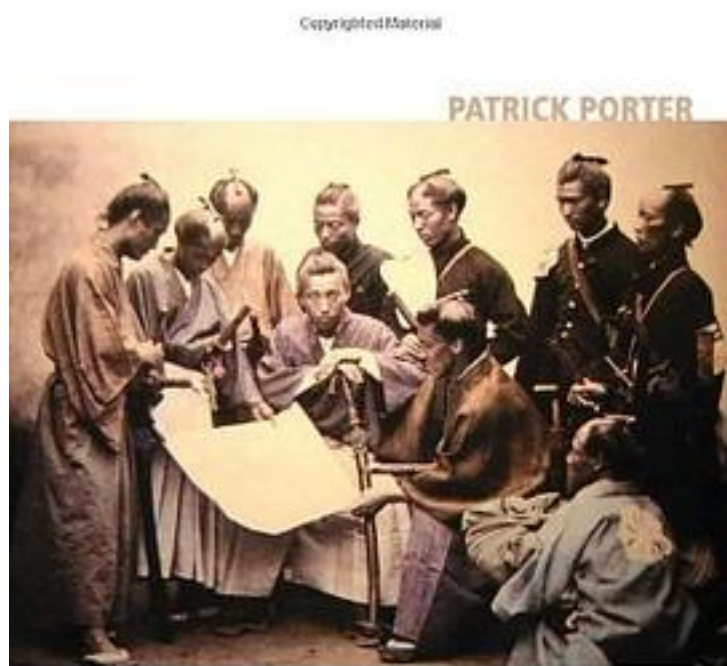


Military Orientalism



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Eastern War Through Western Eyes

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著者:Patrick Porter

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Westerners have long fetishized the idea of "Oriental" warfare, hoping to either emulate the strategies of foreign armies or assimilate members of Eastern and "martial races," such as Sikhs or Gurkhas, into their ranks. Samurai warriors, obedient to an ancient code of chivalry and honor, and the Mongol hordes thundering across the steppe-these exotic visions have thrilled Western imaginations for centuries. Yet, at the same time, today's Eastern warriors, such as the Taliban and Hezbollah, are treated with skepticism, and their success is acknowledged only grudgingly in the West. These contradictory positions throw into question the romantic notion that race, culture, and tradition determines how armies fight. "Military Orientalism" argues against the idea that culture dictates the strategy of war. Culture is powerful, Patrick Porter asserts, but it encompasses an ambiguous repertoire of ideas rather than a clear code of action. To divide the world into Western, Asiatic, or Islamic ways of war is a misconception, one that profoundly impacts our approach to present and future conflicts, especially the "War on Terror." Porter also emphasizes the danger of fetishizing the exotic, which complicates a more accurate understanding of the enemy. Launching a rare investigation into the history of this trend as it has appeared in the work of Herodotus and numerous other fictional and nonfictional narratives, Porter strikes at the heart of the fear, envy, and wonder inspired by the Oriental warrior.

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