

## The Yellow Peril

As an antithesis to the narrative of European superiority, the fear of Japan and China has had a place in the history of Europe since the 1890s, when the term was adapted from North America. Customarily, the term ‘Yellow Peril’ has been analysed as a political and social catchword. In this essay, I argue instead that three media events played a crucial role in its emergence and gradual intensification: the Sino-Japanese War of 1894/95, the Boxer War of 1900/01 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/05. They left a legacy that has cast a long shadow over the twentieth century.

The period from the 1870s to the outbreak of the First World War saw the high water mark of ‘Western’ imperialism. One of the building blocks of imperialism was the idea of a ‘Western’ civilising mission in other parts of the world, grounded in technological progress and moral as well as cultural advancement.<sup>1</sup> But this notion of superiority had a downside to which it was attached in a dialectical relationship: the insecurity of the imperialists and their fear of the subjugated and colonised peoples.<sup>2</sup> One of the guises in which this angst manifested itself was the idea of the ‘Yellow Peril’ (alternatively: ‘yellow menace,’ ‘yellow spectre’). This discursive formation insinuated that Europe and North America were somehow under threat from the peoples of East Asia, which had been contained by means of ‘unequal treaties’ since the 1840s. So far, the ‘Yellow Peril’ has usually been analysed in terms of a catchphrase informing political and social debates.<sup>3</sup> As such, it is viewed as a more or less continuous debate that originated in the United States in the 1870s, spilled over into Europe (where it was prefigured by previous discussions on the ‘Russian’ or the ‘American’ menace) in the 1890s and continued up until the First World War, into the interwar period and beyond. In my essay, I shall build on this research but link the ‘Yellow Peril’ rhetoric with two media events: the Boxer War of 1898-1901 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/1905.

### *The ‘Yellow Peril’ between discourse and media event*

There were several dimensions to the ‘Yellow Peril’ discourse.<sup>4</sup> Prior to 1905, it was mainly about economics and centred on the long-term effects of imperialism. While in the short run the imperialist framework might create profits from overseas markets, it was argued, in the long run it would lead to the industrialisation of Japan and China and thus foster economic competition, to the detriment of ‘Western’ economies. This had practical consequences. In 1896 and 1897, Britain, the United States and the German Reich each

dispatched a commission to East Asia to study economic conditions there; in all three cases, their reports emphasised the tangible benefits rather than the potential dangers of ‘Western’ economic engagement.<sup>5</sup> Related to the fear of economic competition was that of East Asian (in particular Chinese) labour migration, which evoked the spectre of cheap Chinese labourers out-competing those in North America and Europe. It was this fear that first led to the emergence of the catchphrase ‘yellow peril’ in the United States, in particular California. Anti-Chinese resistance forced the US political institutions to react, which they did by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, a law that severely curtailed Chinese labour migration.<sup>6</sup> The notion of Chinese labour competition gained some popularity in Europe as well and was occasionally fuelled by palpable initiatives. For example, local administrators and landowners’ associations in West Prussia repeatedly suggested recruiting Chinese agricultural labourers in the 1890s and 1900s, as the available labour force was scarce. The idea sparked a controversial debate in which social and cultural stereotypes were mustered against the import of Chinese labour.<sup>7</sup> Indeed the German Social Democratic Party had warned against Chinese labour competition and used the catchphrase of the ‘Yellow Peril’ for a more general critique of capitalism. The International Socialist Congresses of the 1900s almost split over the question of whether labour competition from outside Europe should be excluded until this motion was finally rejected in 1907.

Finally, there was the political dimension, which viewed the ‘Yellow Peril’ primarily as a political and military threat to Europe and North America. On the one side of the political spectrum, anti-imperialists such as Johann von Bloch and Hermann von Samsen-Himmelstjerna held imperialism directly responsible for the emergence of the ‘Yellow Peril,’ as it had fostered hatred of the ‘West’; they considered it necessary to come to terms with the peoples of East Asia. On the other end, the popularity of the ‘theory of world empires’ (*Weltreichslehre*) invited speculation about a future realignment of global power in which Europe would lose its position at the helm. In addition to the United States and Russia, East Asia was envisioned as another up-and-coming challenger.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at the ‘Yellow Peril’ discourse in the way outlined above means discussing it in terms of a steady and continuous intellectual trajectory. Viewing it as a media event, as this essay does, requires an altogether different approach. Media events are both “high holidays of mass communication”<sup>9</sup> disrupting the ordinary flow of life and condensations of social discourses or debates;<sup>10</sup> they thrive on their (in the literal sense of the term) extra-ordinary character while bringing deeper concerns to the fore. In this sense, the focus must be not so much on the steady development of the discourse, but at the ruptures created by the three

events that are usually mentioned as catalysts for the development of the ‘Yellow Peril’ discourse: the Sino-Japanese War of 1894/1895, the Boxer War of 1900/1901 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/1905. While the former functioned as a prelude of sorts, the two latter were full-blown global media events sustained by a modern and sophisticated technological apparatus. Coverage of the Boxer War rested on the telegraph network that by 1900 spanned the entire globe and to which China had first been connected as early as the 1870s.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Lionel James’s reports from the Russo-Japanese War to the London *Times* were the first wireless transmissions in the history of journalism.<sup>12</sup> The relationship between media events and ‘real’ events awaits further clarification; suffice it to say here that although both exhibit the “minimum of ‘before’ and ‘after’” providing “the significant unity that makes an event out of incidents”,<sup>13</sup> what is happening ‘on the ground’ and in the media is not congruent. As ‘real’ events, all three wars came to a formal conclusion through agreements—however unilateral—reached in peace negotiations: the treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, the Boxer Protocol of September 1901 and the peace treaty of Portsmouth in 1905. Neither the Boxer Protocol nor the Portsmouth treaty put a stop to the media coverage of the war, however; for the Boxer War in particular, it can be shown that publications continued in the wake of the peace settlement. This was especially true of the book market in the ‘West,’ which was now swamped with eyewitness accounts from participants, be they soldiers or missionaries.<sup>14</sup> Finally, it should be noted that in a sense, both ‘real’ and media events are constructs in that they are carved out of a continuum of human action and communication.

#### *Prelude: The Sino-Japanese War of 1895*

Although as a global media event, the first Sino-Japanese War was dwarfed by the two subsequent wars in 1900/01 and 1904/05 respectively, its catalytic function for the ‘Yellow Peril’ discourse is beyond dispute. Its impact varied, however. While the catchword appeared regularly in the French and Belgian press since the war, it seems to have caused only a short flaring-up in Germany where it resurfaced only in 1900. The Boxer War of 1900/1901 also marked the point at which the ‘Yellow Peril’ made its first public appearance in Britain and the United States.<sup>15</sup>

There can be no doubt that the war between the East Asian island state and its larger continental neighbour marked an important point in what the American historian Robert Eskildsen has called Japan’s “mimetic imperialism”. By this term he refers to Tōkyō’s

strategy of emulating ‘Western’ imperialism, which, he argues, had been part and parcel of the Meiji reforms since their beginning in 1868.<sup>16</sup> Japan began by annexing the Ryūkyū Islands, a tributary state of the Chinese Empire, which it renamed Okinawa prefecture, in 1879; as a result of the 1894/1895 war, it acquired its first colony, the island of Taiwan. Owing to a combination of formal colonialism and informal rights exercised in China, by the 1890s Japan had successfully demonstrated its status as an equal to the European powers and the USA. Ironically, at the time of its war against China, the Japanese Empire was constrained by the same ‘unequal treaties’ that also bound the Imperial government in Beijing. By 1899, however, Japan had negotiated with the European imperialist powers the abrogation of the treaties and as a result regained full sovereignty in 1912.<sup>17</sup>

It was the peace settlement of 1895 that sparked the ‘Yellow Peril’ discourse. Although the British had suggested a diplomatic intervention as early as October 1894, the ‘Western’ powers did not become involved until the peace negotiations in the Japanese city of Shimonoseki had got underway. They were suspicious of Japan’s intent on acquiring not only Taiwan, but also the Liaodong peninsula at the southern tip of Manchuria, viewing cessation of the latter as a threat to stability in East Asia. For this reason, Russia orchestrated a joint diplomatic intervention of some European powers—while Britain stayed aloof, France and Germany participated—, forcing Japan to go back on its claim.<sup>18</sup>

It is against the background of a perceived Japanese threat of the *status quo* that the ‘Yellow Peril’ discourse emerged in Europe, with the German Emperor Wilhelm II assuming a central role—not so much because of his exaggerated claims to have coined the phrase,<sup>19</sup> but because he created one of the most powerful symbols: the painting “Peoples of Europe, protect your most sacred values!” (*Völker Europas, wahrt eure heiligsten Güter*). As the Kaiser himself explained in a letter to the Czar in September 1895, “[i]t shows the powers of Europe represented by their respective Genii called together by the Arch-Angel-Michael,—sent from Heaven,— to unite in resisting the inroad of Buddhism, heathenism and barbarism for the Defence of the Cross.”<sup>20</sup> The painting was drafted by the Kaiser, who proudly asserted his authorship of the painting, and executed by his former painting teacher Hermann Knackfuß (1848-1915). As Philipp Gassert has argued, Wilhelm instrumentalised the idea of the ‘Yellow Peril’ as part of a diplomatic diversion, his aim being to redirect the Russian gaze away from the Reich’s Eastern border and towards East Asia.<sup>21</sup> But the impact of the Kaiser’s intervention went far beyond its immediate context. Despite being almost immediately adapted by satirical magazines critical of the Kaiser and his policies,<sup>22</sup> the ‘Peoples of

Europe' painting and its concomitant rhetoric became a long-term symbol that could be drawn upon by various parties in subsequent debates, beginning with the Boxer War in 1900.

*The Boxer War (1900-1901) and the threat in/from East Asia*

Much more than the Sino-Japanese War, the Boxer War<sup>23</sup> was a media event of global proportions. The intervention of eight states (Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States) in China was driven by a sense of crisis that revealed long-standing anxieties about the role and destiny of the 'Western' presence in East Asia. The emergence of the Boxer movement in 1898-1900 and its subsequent support by the Imperial government of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) seemed to mark a dramatic break with the established treaty system, by which China had been subjected to European commercial and financial imperialism.<sup>24</sup> As Europeans viewed the imperialist order not only in economic terms, but in fact as a civilising mission, it appeared obvious to them to frame the Boxer War in terms of a conflict between civilisation and barbarism.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note, however, that coverage of the war was not simply dominated by the 'Yellow Peril' discourse. As the conflict between China and the European powers (as well as the US and Japan) came to a head in the spring and summer of 1900, European daily newspapers and periodicals focused on a number of topics: the threat to the lives of Europeans residing in China, first at the hands of the Boxers and subsequently during the sieges of the European quarters at Beijing and Tianjin; the breach of international law manifesting itself, above all, in the murder of the German minister Clemens von Ketteler and the Japanese legation secretary Count Sugiyama; and the sluggish process of relief operations that eventually culminated in the relief of Tianjin in mid-July and of Beijing in mid-August 1900.<sup>26</sup> To a considerable extent, such reporting relied on telegraphic dispatches, and, as communication with the besieged European communities in China was cut off, frequently resorted to speculation and rumour-mongering, which culminated in the claim that all Europeans in Beijing had been massacred. It took European journalists and audiences a while to realise they had fallen for a hoax.<sup>27</sup>

After the relief of Beijing, with more correspondents on the ground and more comprehensive information available through detailed letters rather than sparse telegrams, the focus of attention shifted to the conduct of the Allied troops in China. The atrocities committed by them gave rise to a controversial debate about the merits and demerits of the

multinational intervention and, more generally, of the transnational informal empire in China.<sup>28</sup> This controversy spilled over into the political arena and led to impassionate debates in parliament, at least in Germany and to a lesser degree in France. Such political controversies relied directly on news reporting and indirectly on soldiers' letters sent home from the Chinese theatre of war and subsequently published in the press. The German journal *Vorwärts*, the mouthpiece of the Social Democratic Party, systematically gleaned such letters from local papers, as did its French counterpart *L'Aurore*, albeit less thoroughly.<sup>29</sup>

To the extent that the Boxer War was a media event, it was centred on the threat to the imperialist framework in China. This, however, had little to do with the arguments generally associated with the 'Yellow Peril' discourse. The main thrust of media coverage was unrelated to the question of economic or labour competition. What remained was the political and military threat - but the media generally agreed that this took place in China, not in Europe itself. There was, however, considerable sensationalism in the way that some publications conjured up the spectre of a general "upheaval of the yellow world".<sup>30</sup> While the Boxers are today recognized as a merely regional movement limited to the North and Northeast of China, it appeared to contemporary observers that they were also behind unrest in other parts of the Empire. For example, the French journal *La Dépêche* reported in mid-July 1900 that "the [Boxer] uprising extends into all provinces of the [Chinese] empire and that new massacres are to be feared, notably at Wen-Chou, Tai Chow, Che Kiang and Che-Fou".<sup>31</sup>

However tenuously the idea of an all-out war against foreigners in China may have been linked to that of a political-military threat that the 'yellow races' presented to Europe, it shows that the discourse on the 'Yellow Peril' could be fused into the coverage of the Boxer War. For one thing, the former could provide a framework for understanding the latter. In a letter to the editor of the London *Times*, the author argued that "[t]he 'Yellow Peril' seems to have come upon us, not in the external form in which it presented itself to some fervid imaginations, but in China itself."<sup>32</sup> What was threatened by the rebellion of the Boxers, he argued, was not only the lives of every foreigner in China, but also the immense capital investments made in the country—an indirect attack on the British economy. There is also reason to believe that many of the European troops in China interpreted their mission in the same way, and some of these ideas found their way into the press. Note, for example, the description of conversation with French officers by the French war correspondent Gaston Donnet (1867-1908), himself a firm believer that China was to all intents and purposes a petrified society and culture:

“And all these people are of the same opinion: they all recognize the Yellow Peril, they all persuade themselves that in ten years—possibly less—it will be necessary to begin afresh [to make war on China, T.K.]. See for example, they tell me, the progress that the Chinese army has made since its campaign against Japan in 1895. See the fulgurous example of Japan itself. And what is Japan, if not the extension of China? As the Japanese can have the most up-to-date cannon, why shouldn't the Chinese have them too?”<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, politicians sought to infuse ideas about the ‘Yellow Peril’ into discussions on the Boxer War. The most prominent example, once more, was the German Emperor, Wilhelm’s ‘Huns Speech,’ delivered to German troops *en route* to China, has unjustly been referred to as an example of the ‘Yellow Peril’ rhetoric. In fact, the Kaiser exhorted his soldiers to wage a relentless campaign of revenge in China, but his address, hyperbolic as it may have been, was very much in line with the discourse on civilisation and barbarism.<sup>34</sup> Wilhelm did, however, recycle ‘his’ painting *Peoples of Europe*, which he donated to several troop transports, in an obvious attempt to link the campaign in China with the ‘Yellow Peril’.<sup>35</sup> Whereas this rather tenuous connection had more political and military overtones, the French deputy Paul Henri d’Estournelles de Constant (1852-1924) was more explicit in linking the military outcome of the Allied intervention with the economic danger posed by China, although what constituted this danger remained rather vague:

“If this action [of Europe in China] does not succeed in re-establishing order, we will have lost, without benefit, men, money and respect; if, on the contrary, it succeeds in developing China, beware lest the first result of this operation be the increase of our costs and the debasement of our European products, which means social revolution.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally, the events transpiring from China in 1900 and 1901 could serve as a catalyst for more long-term debates on the ‘Yellow Peril’. As a media event, the Boxer War did not end—as did the political and military crisis—with the signing of the Boxer Protocol in September 1901. As the coverage in the daily press and in periodicals gradually petered out, a flood of publications on the Boxer War hit the book market, some of which sought to make sense of the recent calamities in terms of the ‘Yellow Peril’. Other volumes dealt more specifically with the ‘Yellow Peril,’ but the timing of their publication indicates that they were inspired by the Boxer crisis.

An example of the former is Sir Robert Hart’s *These from the Land of Sinim*, written in part during the Boxer crisis and published in the year of its formal conclusion. Hart, the Inspector General of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service and a long-time resident in

Beijing, had himself been in the siege of the Legations Quarter in the summer of 1900. Regarding the Boxers as Chinese patriots, he took them as proof that “the future will have a ‘yellow’ question—perhaps a yellow ‘peril’— to deal with,” which he regarded as nothing less than threatening “the world’s future.”<sup>37</sup> Like many other commentators, he also acknowledged the dangers that an arms build-up in China might entail: “The Boxer patriot of the future will possess the best weapons money can buy, and then the ‘Yellow Peril’ will be beyond ignoring.”<sup>38</sup> Hart differed from many of his fellow commentators, however, in the countermeasures he proposed, arguing that a more tactful and equitable treatment of China was the best way to avert any danger that might emanate from the country.<sup>39</sup> On the whole, however, European reactions to the Boxer crisis were dwarfed by those to the Russo-Japanese War four years later, the course of which seemed to bring home to Europeans more clearly their apparent vulnerability.

*The Russo-Japanese War and the fear of Japan (and, by extension, China)*

As a media event, the Russo-Japanese war of 1904/1905 was of a different calibre compared to the international intervention in China four years previously. While the latter had indeed seen fighting between modern-equipped armies, attention was equally focused on the allegedly ‘primitive’ Boxers. The former war of 1904/1905, on the other hand, pitted two modern military systems against one another and ended with a resounding strategic victory of a non-European over a European power.<sup>40</sup> Besides, in contrast to the Boxer War, sympathies were divided this time. Public opinion in many European states at the time was not well-disposed towards Russia. Even in France, which was officially allied with the Czar and his government, the press seems to have been divided. While some papers and periodicals viewed Russia as Europe’s protector from the (Japanese) ‘yellow peril,’ others conjured up the spectre of a ‘Russo-Mongolian bloc’ poised for world domination.<sup>41</sup>

By contrast, Britain had concluded an alliance with Japan in 1902 and for this reason took a more positive view of the Japanese war effort. This is embodied in the detailed account of *Japan’s Fight for Freedom* by Herbert Wrigley Wilson, which was first published in fortnightly instalments between April 1904 and May 1906.<sup>42</sup> The publication is also an indication of how quickly the media market responded to the war with customised forms of publication; a similar publication was Gaston Donnet’s *Histoire de la guerre Russo-Japonaise*, which appeared weekly.<sup>43</sup> The division of sympathies was due to the fact that this



time, war correspondents and army officers were observing both sides; thus the non-European side—perhaps for the first time—received extensive and sympathetic first-hand coverage. It is true that in offsetting the seeming progress made by Japan against the alleged “half Asian”, autocratic backwardness of Russia, European commentators demonstrated a great deal of complacency. For example, the *Revue hebdomadaire* published a comment to the effect that “Japan had offered to the world the extraordinary spectacle of a people abandoning an 1,200-year-old civilisation in favour of that of another race”.<sup>44</sup> The question, however, remained, to what extent this adaptation of European civilisation could be turned against Europe itself, and this question became the focus of the debate.

As some of the above comments indicate, media coverage of the Russo-Japanese War differed from that of the Boxer War on a number of counts: First, it was more tightly interwoven with the ‘Yellow Peril’ discourse, and also at an earlier stage of the conflict. A second difference concerned the scope of the backlash. Whereas the Boxer War had imperilled Europeans in the Qing Empire and China’s future rise was at best dimly visible on the horizon, the Russo-Japanese War seemed to signal more imminent dangers to Europe itself. Thirdly, it appears that a far larger number of eminent contributors to the ‘Yellow Peril’ debate took their cue from Japan’s victory over the Czarist empire than from the Boxer crisis.

One of these was the German missionary Martin Maier, who by his own account was responding to questions addressed to him upon his return from China. Maier did not distinguish between Japan and China, in part because he attributed the ‘Yellow Peril’ to racial differences as well as hatred of the ‘Western’ foreigners in both countries.<sup>45</sup> He distinguished between a political or military threat, in which he did not believe, and economic competition between East Asians and Europeans. Perhaps owing to his profession, he also warned against the undermining of European ethical achievements through the egotism and materialism of the Chinese and Japanese.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to Maier, the German archivist C. Spielmann brought some experience to the task. His book *Arier und Mongolen* (Aryans and Mongols), which first appeared in 1905 and was republished in 1914, drew on two previous works written after the Sino-Japanese War and on the eve of the Boxer War. Spielmann took a stand against a perceived enthusiasm for Japan in the German public, placing the Russo-Japanese War in the larger context of a perennial conflict between Aryans and Mongols, in which the latter were now poised for supremacy, not through spiritual but technological superiority and the sheer force of the masses.<sup>47</sup> Like other like-minded writers, Spielmann conjured up the idea of a future Chinese military machine under Japanese guidance that might stage a remake of the medieval Mongol

invasion—although this was rather a playing on deep-rooted cultural fears than a sober analysis.<sup>48</sup> But to him peaceful Chinese emigration presented an equally serious threat, a “swamping of the world which must cause great alarm to the white race”.<sup>49</sup>

Like Spielmann, the Englishman Bertram Lennox Simpson (writing under the pseudonym B.L. Putnam Weale), a participant in the siege of the Beijing legations in 1900, was writing against the largely positive attitude towards Japan in his country and elaborated his attitude in various works. Unlike his congenial German colleague, however, he had thoroughly revised his former Japan-friendly attitude by the time he published his monumental *The Coming Struggle in Eastern Asia*. Without actually using the term ‘Yellow Peril’, Simpson polemicized against the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902, which he deemed unable to safeguard British interests in view of increasing commercial competition, e.g. in China.<sup>50</sup>

Superficial as they may have been, these books purported to be analysing the situation. However, the ‘Yellow Peril’ might also be invoked to play on fears of invasion which were a common obsession across Europe in the 1900s. This is achieved in *L’invasion jaune*, published by the then popular French writer Capitaine Danrit (pseudonym of Colonel Emile-Cyprien Driant) in 1909. The last of an entire series on imaginary wars by the same author, *L’invasion jaune* describes a joint Japanese-Chinese invasion of Europe, which culminates in the occupation of the Chamber of Deputies in Paris before it can finally be stopped.<sup>51</sup>

It is doubtful whether Danrit’s horror fantasies or the more ‘serious’ analyses represented the majority or even a significant portion of public opinion. To say the least, a substantial number of authors were convinced that “the ‘Yellow Peril’ was only a speculation”.<sup>52</sup> More importantly, the champions of the ‘Yellow Peril’ rhetoric failed to grasp the real political-military tensions between East Asia and Europe. The ideology of Pan-Asianism, which gained currency in Japan (and to an extent in China) in the early twentieth century, did indeed propagate a defensive front of Asian peoples against white imperialism.<sup>53</sup> Although (or rather because) Japan remained a faithful ally of Britain in the First World War, it demanded concessions after the war. The abortive push for racial equality at the Paris Peace Conference did not aim at imposing a universal principle, but at ending anti-Japanese discrimination, reflecting Japan’s insecurities as a non-white power. To an extent at least, it was also a reaction to the ‘Yellow Peril’ rhetoric.<sup>54</sup> In the 1930s and during the Second World War, Japan increasingly cast itself as the champion of Asian liberation from ‘white’ colonialism. In clinging to Eurocentric fantasies, the ‘Yellow Peril’ literature missed out on what was really (and realistically) at stake.

## *Legacies*

Buzzwords have a long life; they do not die. Instead, they lend themselves to all sorts of adaptations. The ‘Yellow Peril’ is no exception: its use has changed, but has continued without any real interruption until the present day.<sup>55</sup>

Heinz Gollwitzer was probably right in stating that the broad effect of the ‘Yellow Peril’ rhetoric never again reached the dimensions it had assumed between 1895 and 1907 (although he was probably wrong in assuming that it had been almost completely eclipsed by the First World War).<sup>56</sup> This was also the period when the discourse was most openly tied to specific media events. It would appear that this connection was lost in the interwar period, although China’s anti-imperialist movement of the 1920s would have lent itself for making a connection. Perhaps the Japanese expansion from the late 1930s came closest to arousing a response similar to that of the Russo-Japanese War, but even so the context had changed. The ‘Yellow Peril’ now had a past as well as a present. Commenting in January 1938 on a speech by the Japanese Minister of the Interior, Admiral Suetsugu, *Le Temps* warned against his “veritable war cry against the white peoples” and continued:

“If such concepts should indeed prevail in certain governing circles in Tokyo, one cannot have any illusions about the evolution of Japanese politics, which are completely directed by the most active military and naval elements. The Yellow Peril, of which the German ex-emperor once spoke, would then become a reality, and the entire white world would have the duty to face it in full awareness of the solidarity of the peoples attached to civilisation, which has created present-day human society.”<sup>57</sup>

On the one hand, anti-Japanese sentiment was running high in the United States during the Pacific War, but it was not directed against a ‘yellow race’ in general. Indeed, this would have made little sense, as China had become a sufficiently important ally of the US and Americans had been sympathetic if patronising observers of its war against Japan.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, the term ‘Yellow Peril’ underwent a degree of trivialisation, as it could be adapted to other areas of European-East Asian competition, for example in sports.<sup>59</sup> As early as the interwar period, race horses were named after what had once been perceived as an all-out menace to European civilisation.<sup>60</sup> But the entry of the discourse into popular culture was not always so harmless. A good example is the figure of the Chinese master criminal Fu Manchu, the hero-villain of a book series created by the British author Sax Rohmer (pseudonym of Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward, 1883-1959) between 1912 and the late 1950s.

The novels were quickly adapted into films, thirteen of which were released between 1921 and 1968.<sup>61</sup> In all versions, Fu is depicted as a superhuman criminal combining a brilliant intellect with extraordinary physical prowess. Commanding the ‘yellow’ underworld, he carries the Asian threat into the heart of the ‘Western’ metropolises, London in particular.<sup>62</sup> The Fu Manchu stories can be read as the depoliticised, but still politically relevant, offshoot of a political discourse.

However, the idea of the ‘Yellow Peril’ retained its importance in political and economic debates. After the successful Communist takeover in 1949, it blended with the red scare of the emerging Cold War.<sup>63</sup> In subsequent decades, it has underpinned apprehensions about the economic rise of Japan and—yet more recently—of China. Yet since the interwar period, the ‘Yellow Peril’ rhetoric has been more of a steady discourse and not associated with strictly circumscribed media events.

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<sup>1</sup> See Barth / Osterhammel, *Zivilisierungsmissionen* 2005.

<sup>2</sup> See Reinkowski / Thum, *Helpless Imperialists* 2013, in particular pp. 11-13.

<sup>3</sup> See the classical studies by Gollwitzer, *Die Gelbe Gefahr* 1962 and Mehnert, *Deutschland, Amerika und die "Gelbe Gefahr"* 1995, in particular pp. 28-33; cf. also Trampedach, "Yellow Peril" 2002.

<sup>4</sup> This sections follows the outline in Mehnert, *Deutschland, Amerika und die "Gelbe Gefahr"* 1995, p. 35-58, although I have partly rearranged the order of her main points.

<sup>5</sup> Conrad, *Globalization* 2010, p. 224; Mehnert, *Deutschland, Amerika und die "Gelbe Gefahr"* 1995, pp. 38-40.

<sup>6</sup> Gollwitzer, *Die Gelbe Gefahr* 1962, pp. 68-93, focuses mainly on intellectual debates and less on the more effective popular agitation.

<sup>7</sup> Conrad, *Globalization* 2010, pp. 203-208; for the following see *ibid.*, pp. 221 f.; Mehnert, *Deutschland, Amerika und die "Gelbe Gefahr"* 1995, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Mehnert *Deutschland, Amerika und die "Gelbe Gefahr"* 1995, pp. 35-37, 43-49; Trampedach, "Yellow Peril" 2002.

<sup>9</sup> The quotation is from Dayan / Katz, *Media Events* 1992, 1.

<sup>10</sup> For media events as condensations of social discourses cf. Bösch, *Europäische Medienereignisse* 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Winseck / Pike, *Communication and Empire* 2007, for the incorporation of China see *ibid.*, pp. 113-141.

<sup>12</sup> Slattery, *Reporting* 2004, p. xii.

<sup>13</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past* 2004, p. 106. It should be noted that media do not always merely react to external circumstances; on the contrary, they possess the capacity of creating events themselves; see Fahlenbrach, *Körper-Revoluten* 2010, p. 230. But this is outside the remit of this essay.

<sup>14</sup> See the extensive bibliography of titles in English, German, French and Italian compiled by R. G. Tiedemann in Su / Liu, *Yihetuan* 2000, pp. 623-775.

<sup>15</sup> Gollwitzer, *Die Gelbe Gefahr* 1962, pp. 43-46.

<sup>16</sup> Eskildsen, *Of Civilization* 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Tipton, *Modern Japan* 2008, pp. 76 f.

<sup>18</sup> Iikura, *The "Yellow Peril"* 2006, pp. 81 ff.

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<sup>19</sup> The discussion in the literature seems to rely on the testimony of Wilhelm's American dentist: Davis, *The Kaiser* 1918, p. 110. For the wider context see Gollwitzer, *Die Gelbe Gefahr* 1962, p. 42 f.

<sup>20</sup> See Wilhelm's letter to Czar Nicholas II., Jagdhaus Rominten 26 September 1895, in: Grant, *The Kaiser's Letters* 1920, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Gassert, "Völker Europas" 2007, pp. 284 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Wilhelm's authorship is emphasized *ibid.*, p. 17 f. and in Wilhelm's letter to the Czar, Berlin 6 June 1904, in: *ibid.*, p. 118. For the context see Iikura, *The "Yellow Peril"* 2006, pp. 81-88. For a good reproduction of the painting see <http://www.collectie.legermuseum.nl/str.hoefer/strategion/i001934.html>.

<sup>23</sup> This designation is not universally accepted, but increasingly replacing the traditional term 'Boxer Uprising,' which reflects a colonial perspective.

<sup>24</sup> For lack of space, I am unable to provide a detailed discussion of research on the Boxer movement and the international intervention it triggered. The most studies most relevant to this essay are Xiang, *The Origins of the Boxer War* 2003, Hevia, *English Lessons*, 2003, Cohen, *History in Three Keys* 1997 and Esherick, *The Origins* 1987.

<sup>25</sup> Hevia, *Leaving a Brand* 1992, p. 307.

<sup>26</sup> There is as yet no comprehensive analysis of news reporting on the Boxer War. For preliminary studies see Klein, *Propaganda und Kritik* 2007; French, *Through the Looking Glass* 2009.

<sup>27</sup> French, *Through the Looking Glass* 2009, pp. 66-75; cf. also Elliott, *Some Did It for Civilization* 2002, pp. 1-50.

<sup>28</sup> Klein, *Propaganda und Kritik* 2007, pp. 176 ff.; Hevia, *English Lessons* 2003, pp. 231-240.

<sup>29</sup> Mollenhauer, *Parliaments as/and Media* 2009; Klein, *Criticizing* 2013, especially pp. 831-33.

<sup>30</sup> "Chronique de la semaine," *Annales catholiques* 115 (1900), 702. Interestingly, the article included the subheading "The Yellow Peril" (*Le péril jaune*) without picking up the concomitant rhetoric.

<sup>31</sup> "La Chine en flammes", *La Dépêche*, 18 July 1900, p. 1. Che Kiang [= Zhejiang] is actually a province, Wenzhou and Taizhou are cities within that province, Che-Fou [= Zhifu or Yantai] is a port city in Shandong province.

<sup>32</sup> Navalís (pseudonym), "The peril in the Far East," *The Times*, 12 June 1900, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Gaston Donnet, "En Chine," *Le Temps*, 14 November 1900, p. 2.

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<sup>34</sup> For a recent analysis of the speech see Klein, *Die Hunnenrede* 2013, pp. 167-171. Cf., however, Trampedach, “Yellow Peril” 2002, who in my view wrongly conflates the ‘Yellow Peril’ discourse with that on civilization and barbarism.

<sup>35</sup> See Corbach, *Von Kiel bis Peking* 1926, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> D’Estournelles de Constant, “Le péril jaune,” *Le Temps*, 28 May 1901, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Hart; *These from the Land of Sinim* 1901, pp. 50, 54.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 111-13.

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed overview of the conduct of the war, see Connaughton 1991; all relevant aspects of the war are covered by the two magisterial volumes: John W. Steinberg, *The Russo-Japanese War* 2005 and David Wolff et al., *The Russo-Japanese War* 2006.

<sup>41</sup> “The Powers and Neutrality,” *The Times*, 18 February 1904, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, *Japan’s Fight 1904-06*; cf. Sharf / Ulak, *A Well-Watched War* 2000, p. 6 f.

<sup>43</sup> Donnet, *Histoire 1904-05*. The complete series consisted of 65 issues.

<sup>44</sup> Moulin, *Le péril jaune*, 1904, p. 129. Cf. Gassert, “Völker Europas” 2007, p. 288.

<sup>45</sup> Maier, *Die gelbe Gefahr* 1905, pp. 106 ff.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113, 122-23.

<sup>47</sup> Spielmann, *Arier und Mongolen* 1914, pp. iii-v. Gollwitzer 1962, pp. 177 f., only analyses Spielmann’s first book, *Der neue Mongolensturm*, published in 1895. According to Gollwitzer, Spielmann actually was a pacifist. On the basis of *Arier und Mongolen*, Kaminski, *Der Boxeraufstand* 2000, p. 213, dismisses Spielmann as a racist.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 315-319.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 318.

<sup>50</sup> Putnam Weale, *The Coming Struggle* 1908, pp. 625-640.

<sup>51</sup> Danrit, *L’invasion jaune* n.d., especially pp. 816 ff.; for the background see Brown, *A Critical History* 2008, pp. 145 f., for a detailed analysis cf. Porra 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Dyer, *Dai Nippon* 1904, p. 393.

<sup>53</sup> Aydin, *The Politics* 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and Equality* 1998, pp. 164-188.

<sup>55</sup> This is demonstrated in an impressive manner in Tchen and Yeats, *Yellow Peril* 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Gollwitzer, *Die Gelbe Gefahr* 1962, pp. 219 ff.

<sup>57</sup> “Jaunes et blancs,” *Le Temps*, 4 January 1938, 1. The past of the phrase is also evoked in obituaries on Kaiser Wilhelm II. in 1941.

<sup>58</sup> Jespersen, *American Images* 1996, especially pp. 46 ff.

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, “Triumph für Nippon: Fünf von sieben Tischtennis-Welttiteln gewonnen,” *Passauer Neue Presse*, 18 March 1957, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Horses named “Yellow Peril” are mentioned in “Racing,” *The Times*, 3 September 1924, 5; “Kempton Park Results,” *The Times*, 8 May 1933, 4; “Racing,” *The Times*, 13 March 1946, 2. Clearly these were three different animals.

<sup>61</sup> For the films see Clegg, *Fu Manchu* 1994, 3.

<sup>62</sup> The interest in Fu Manchu, especially of literary critics, has grown around the time of his 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. See Mayer, *Serial Fu Manchu* 2013 and Baker / Clayton, *Lord of the Strange Deaths* 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Echoes of this can be found in van Blättjen, *Die gelbe Gefahr* 1963, 163.